

Extraordinary security measures for Bush visit to Germany

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21 February 2005

In advance of Wednesday, February 23, a virtual state of emergency is being imposed in the Rhine-Main area, one of the most heavily populated regions of Germany.

Four motorways are being completely closed, rail travel restricted, navigation of the rivers Rhine and Main halted, schools and local offices closed down. The historical centre of the city of Mainz will be totally blocked off. Helicopters will fly overhead, while the city is besieged by police units and snipers.

The rerouting of traffic and closure of the main routes between Frankfurt airport and Mainz will force tens of thousands of employees in the region, including workers at the huge Opel auto works at Rüsselsheim, to change shifts or take a day's holiday.

Air space over Frankfurt airport is to be closed for nearly an hour. All private airplanes within a radius of 60 kilometres from Mainz are to be grounded for the entire day. For the first time ever, fighter planes of the German Air Force will be on standby to take off and attack in the event of any disturbance of air space.

US snipers will be posted on balconies and roofs along the route from the airport to Mainz and its city centre—this in a country that normally forbids foreign security forces, even bodyguards, from carrying weapons in public. Days in advance, US Secret Service agents have been surveying the region, and huge armoured cars, helicopters and hundreds of American “specialists” have been flown in.

A high security wall has been erected in the Mainz city centre around the historic cathedral, the castle, the regional parliament, the state chancellery and the world famous Gutenberg Museum. The city centre has been criss-crossed with barricades and placed under the control of armed policemen. Thousands of residents and those working in the city centre can leave or gain access only on foot, after showing their IDs. The

central link over the Rhine to Wiesbaden, the Theodor Heuss bridge, is to be totally closed, even for pedestrians.

Some 1,300 gully and manhole covers have been welded shut, while free-standing mail boxes, garbage cans, electrical connection boxes, and even bicycles have been removed. City residents have been expressly forbidden from going onto their balconies or looking out an open window. They have been banned from parking their cars either in the street or in their own garages. Many garages have been sealed. The police have warned that they will break into and tow away all vehicles found in the restricted area beginning early Tuesday morning.

Garbage disposal and road cleaning will be halted on Wednesday. The university hospital, including its emergency ward, has been vacated and is being kept free for possible emergency use. Other hospitals have organised onsite overnight accommodation to make sure physicians, anaesthetists and nursing staff can be available for work.

What could have warranted such extreme measures? Is Mainz targeted on this day for a terrorist attack, comparable to September 11? Is war or civil war brewing?

Not at all. It's just that US President George W. Bush is making a stopover in Germany, and will be welcomed at the castle in Mainz by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (SPD—Social Democratic Party) and Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer (Green Party).

The security precautions accompanying the Bush visit are extraordinary in every sense. They cannot be explained by reference to mere technical security considerations. Mainz is not Baghdad. No civil war is raging in Germany, which for decades has been allied with the US. The murder rate in the country is low, and

there have been no political assassination attempts since the smashing of the Red Army Faction in the 1980s.

No other American president has required comparable measures. In 1963, when John F. Kennedy spoke in front of the Schöneberg City Hall in West Berlin, he was cheered by an enthusiastic audience and then openly mixed with the crowd. During his last official visit to Berlin, decades later, then-President Bill Clinton made a surprise stop at a Berlin restaurant in the company of Chancellor Schröder and a few bodyguards.

The hysteria accompanying the current presidential visit has far more to do with the way Bush and his security advisors view the German population than with any rational estimation of danger. They know that Bush and his policies are deeply hated, and respond by treating the German population as if it were a fertile breeding ground for Al Qaida. Their attitude borders on paranoia.

If illusions remain that Bush's foreign policy has to do with the fight against "tyranny" and the spread of "democracy" and "freedom," the circumstances surrounding his visit to Germany should provide the antidote. Such security measures have always been associated with autocrats who are profoundly aware of the depth of the popular hatred they arouse.

Many east Berliners can still recall the days of the Stalinist regime, when all traffic lights jumped to red and chaos ensued as the car of a Politburo member crossed the city or Brezhnev arrived for a state visit. Compared to the current security precautions in Mainz, even the best efforts of the Stalinist *Stasi* secret police seem almost benign.

The local population has reacted with a mixture of speechlessness, disbelief and anger. Here are some brief excerpts from readers' letters to the *Frankfurter Rundschau*:

"Who actually asked us citizens whether we wanted to endure such a day, with all its announced impositions? At our own expense we are expected to take a holiday to ensure that for at least a day our region is made insecure (open everywhere to attack) from a certain warlord."

"In view of 5 million unemployed persons, the question arises: Can the government at all afford...such a completely unnecessary visit, and all the measures

associated with it? By what right is such a situation being imposed on tens of thousands of commuters and working people here? Who is responsible for the enormous economic repercussions?"

"One cannot turn the country's population into prisoners merely because of the visit of another president."

"And has anyone considered at all that, for example, the approach roads to hospitals, as well as routes for rescue vehicles, must remain free? Or are deaths to be regarded as a necessary consequence of the attendance of a state guest?"

A demonstration planned for Wednesday under the slogan "Not Welcome, Mr. Bush" is to be hermetically sealed in the Mainz city centre in such a way as to ensure that the state visitor will hear or see nothing of it. The city administration has even insisted that it be given the names of all demonstration stewards, and that no banners exceed a width of two-and-half metres—stipulations that are being challenged in court by the organisers of the demonstration.

The fact that Bush must surround himself with such police-state security speaks volumes of the fear felt by the "world's most powerful man" for the broad masses of the population. The bizarre precautions for Wednesday have made one thing absolutely clear: the so-called "freedom" being pursued by the US president all over the world can be attained only by means of police-military lockdowns and the trampling of democratic rights.



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