

Heavy military presence at G20 summit in Australia

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Residents of Brisbane faced military-police checkpoints for the first time on Monday, as a massive security operation commenced for the G20 leaders' summit in the Queensland state capital on November 15–16.

Together with two major military exercises conducted in the city over the past few days, the checkpoints, manned by soldiers, are the first visible signs of the police-state conditions that will be imposed on Brisbane next week.

Those attending the summit will include presidents Obama from the US, Xi from China and Putin from Russia. On the pretext of protecting the gathering from terrorist threats, more than 2,000 military personnel and 6,000 police will be mobilised, primarily to shield the government leaders from protests.

The summit is being used, very consciously, to rehearse martial law-style measures and condition public opinion to the deployment of heavily-armed SAS commandos, helicopters, fighter jets and other military detachments within Australia's main cities.

Soldiers and police officers have begun stopping and searching all vehicles entering G20 restricted zones at two designated checkpoints in inner Brisbane, purportedly checking for explosives and weapons.

Australian Defence Force (ADF) operation commander, Major General Stuart Smith, told the media: "You've got soldiers here that have got experience in Afghanistan doing high-profile search techniques and they've done specific rehearsals to build them up in cooperation with the police over the last few months."

Smith also warned residents to be prepared for further dramatic training exercises following a Sunday midnight operation at the city's Eagle Street Pier that included Black Hawk helicopters, military speedboats

and about 50 commandos in full battle gear firing blanks.

During the exercise, which lasted several hours, pedestrians reported seeing personnel handling semi-automatic weapons and dressed in olive-coloured military style clothing, complete with body armour and helmets. The troops wore no apparent badges identifying themselves or their agency.

"There'll be a variety of searches and rehearsals," Smith announced, covering "the range of counter-terrorist, search and airspace safety surveillance," while refusing to give any details "for operational reasons."

A similar exercise was staged last week at the Port of Brisbane, involving hundreds of ADF members. Special forces troops from the military's 2nd Commando Regiment rehearsed a hostage recovery operation at the port, using what the ADF described as "tactical equipment, simulation ammunition and hand-held pyrotechnics."

The air force said the public would notice increased activity in the skies over south-east Queensland in the lead-up to the summit. It said fighter jets, Black Hawk helicopters and surveillance planes would increase patrols, and conduct training exercises.

While officially, the military is simply assisting the police, preparations are clearly being made for potential frontline engagement. In a media statement, General Smith stated: "While Defence is playing only a supporting role in G20, we need to be ready to respond to a wide range of possible scenarios."

About 4,500 Queensland police, 1,500 interstate and New Zealand officers, plus Australian Federal Police will be on duty. Barricades and fencing will begin appearing around Brisbane this week, Queensland Assistant Police Commissioner Katarina Carroll told reporters last week.

Entire areas of the inner city will be cordoned off, including some residential neighbourhoods, as well as the South Bank precinct, which incorporates the state library and art galleries. The police will have far-reaching powers that overturn basic legal and democratic rights.

Backed by the opposition Labor Party, the state's Liberal National Party government last year pushed the G20 (Safety and Security) Act through parliament. It declares special security areas, gives police wide strip-search and detention powers, allows police to ban "prohibited persons," and creates offences such as interfering with G20 events and refusing to comply with police directions.

The laws are clearly directed against anticipated demonstrations. The "prohibited items" within "declared areas" include banners, placards, loud hailer and other "communication devices." Assemblies can be banned if they could "disrupt" a G20 event, even by making noise that could be heard during a summit activity.

According to the police, more than 20 groups have been granted permission to conduct demonstrations during the summit, but only in prescribed areas away from the meeting venue itself.

Mass detentions are planned for. Magistrates are to be rostered around-the-clock to run a special G20 court. People can be detained in a "processing facility" for any "time reasonably necessary" to decide whether to charge them with an offence. If charged, they can be refused bail for the duration of the summit.

Coming just weeks after Prime Minister Tony Abbott's government lifted the terrorist alert level, claiming that an attack was "likely," and entered the renewed US-led war in the Middle East, the G20 gathering could provide a setting for the first large-scale use of troops in Australia since 1978.

In that year, a so-called act of terrorism—a still unsolved bomb blast outside the Sydney Hilton Hotel—was exploited to deploy nearly 2,000 soldiers in and around Sydney. That bombing had all the hallmarks of a provocation staged by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) and the police. It was used to boost ASIO's powers, establish the Australian Federal Police, set up the SAS and create para-military police squads.

Military call-out legislation was passed in 2000 and

2006, on the pretext of protecting major sporting events from potential, unspecified terrorist attacks. These laws gave the federal government formal powers to mobilise the armed forces to deal with "domestic violence," overturning the centuries-old legal principle against the use of the military to deal with social or political unrest. Military personnel were handed draconian powers, including to kill people to protect "critical infrastructure," shoot down aircraft, sink ships, interrogate civilians and seize documents.

Until now, those powers have never been invoked. However, international political and sporting events—from the 2000 Sydney Olympics to the 2007 Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Sydney and the 2011 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Perth—have been accompanied by displays of military might, accompanied by huge police mobilisations.

During the 2007 APEC meeting, the last big gathering of government leaders in Australia, air force FA-18 jets flew overhead, naval ships patrolled the harbour, army units searched premises, transport tunnels and vehicles, and heavily-armed SAS troops were placed on standby. This display had nothing to do with stopping terrorists, as was exposed when satirists from "The Chaser" television program staged a fake motorcade through several police checkpoints before giving themselves up near US President George Bush's hotel.

The G20 summit—an assembly of government leaders responsible for wars, invasions, mass surveillance and worsening social inequality—has become another test site for methods of military and police repression that will be directed against mounting social and political discontent.



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