Polish government puts Warsaw under effective martial law for NATO summit

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The decision to host the NATO Summit in Warsaw has turned Poland's largest metropolitan area into a military camp and a nightmare for the visitors and residents. Utilizing the unconstitutional anti-terrorist law that went into effect on July 1, the government has put Warsaw under terrorist alert, allowing for implementation of the harsh security measures previously possible only under martial law.

On July 6, Prime Minister Beata Szyd?o signed the order to impose the ALFA terrorist alert in Warsaw from midnight on July 7 to 23:59 on July 10, i.e. throughout the NATO Summit. The anti-terrorist law allows for an introduction of one of the four emergency levels: ALFA, BRAVO, CHARLIE and DELTA. The highest alert at the Delta level is introduced during a terrorist attack. After introduction of the first level alarm, authorities are allowed to carry out security checks of places and people. Unattended luggage, "wrongly" parked cars, "suspicious" packages, vehicles, flying objects and people are to be eliminated.

From July 4 to August 2, the EU internal Schengen area along Poland's borders has been suspended and the temporary border control restored. Visa-free traffic between Russia's Kaliningrad exclave and Ukraine has been halted. These moves have angered people who travel through these borders daily for work, tourism and shopping, and also hurt commercial truck transit.

Persons considered to be a potential threat to security are not allowed to enter Polish territory. Scans and searches of travelers, their luggage and cars drastically slow border crossings.

Changes to public transportation, parking restrictions and removal of parked cars have caused havoc in the already congested and densely populated Warsaw urban area. From July 7, large sections of the city's central districts have been closed to traffic, including pedestrians. Transit has been prohibited on the city's main arteries leading to the National football stadium where the summit is being held.

The consumption of alcohol is also prohibited. Unauthorized public gatherings are banned. Public bicycle stations have been closed, airplane routes modified. The public is advised to avoid the popular downtown area for the weekend and use the subway system.

During the passage of the VIP columns with the summit delegates from the army terminal at Chopin Airport to the downtown Marriott hotel, streets are to be temporarily closed to traffic. Garbage cans, vases and pots with plants and flowerbeds along the approximately nine-kilometer route have been removed from the sidewalks. Businesses, shops and cafés in the stadium area are prohibited to operate.

People living near the stadium and along the route have been subject to countless police searches, as officers look for potential threats and illegal weapons. They go from door to door and conduct in-depth surveys on the number and nationality of the premises' residents. They also question if anybody is in the possession of weapons.

Those who fail to provide the authorities with their IDs, contact number and requested information can expect their houses and apartments to be forcefully broken into by the military squads.

During the passage of the delegates' cars and limos, residents are not even allowed to open their windows or enter balconies. If they fail to obey these orders, they can be “neutralized,” as the military police has authorization to shoot to kill.

Some 6,000 police troops, special forces and Interpol experts, integrated under the Internal Security Agency (ABW), have been deployed to the streets of Warsaw.

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A 2.5-meter high and three-kilometer long cement-metal fence has been erected around the National Stadium hosting the summit, blocking popular bike and jogging paths across the Vistula river. The stadium itself has been additionally fortified with metal barriers, wall panels of mesh, netting tightened with black tape, to create the so-called special access zero-zone.

The 2,000-strong delegation of the heads of the 28 NATO member states and 26 of the Alliance's partnership countries, the EU, the UN and the World Bank—including NATO General Secretary Jens Stoltenberg, US President Barack Obama, US Secretary of State John Kerry, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, British Prime Minister David Cameron and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko—will be tightly guarded by the Government Protection Bureau (BOR) units, police and military gendarmerie.

The 100-kilometer wide "stadium area" reaching far beyond the city limits (affecting cities such as Radom and P?ock) has been declared a no fly-zone. Any unauthorized flying object, including small aircraft, drones, kites, gliders or balloons, will be shot down. Their owners face penalties of five years in prison.

Military air shows with the use of Mig-29 and F-16 aircraft and helicopters are to brighten the city skies at night during the army parade. NATO family picnics have been organized in several cities. Transmission from the NATO summit sessions will be aired live on public TV. The total price tag is some 40 million euros.

The organization of the NATO summit in Poland is a significant expense, but it also spells profits. Some 4,558 hotel accommodations in 41 city hotels have been reserved. "The increase in prestige and good image of Poland is important for economic investments", emphasized Ma?gorzata Starczewska-Krzysztoszek, macroeconomics expert for the Lewiatan Confederation, a big business association.

Despite all the promotion of the event, the NATO summit is not broadly popular. One of the readers of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, while commenting on the fuss around the NATO summit, wrote: "Who are they afraid of? Their own electorate?" Another commented: “A videoconference would suffice.”

To protest the controversial meeting of the powers responsible for bloody imperialist wars and to defy the anti-gathering restrictions at the time of the NATO summit, several anti -war demonstrations and protests have been called.

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