New American

Written by **Veronika Kyrylenko** on August 1, 2021

Sydney Bulks Up Police Presence, Deploys Military to Enforce COVID Lockdowns and Prevent Protests

The army has been called into Sydney, Australia, to help police enforce compliance with the city's most recent COVID lockdown rules.

In response to the latest rise in COVID-19 cases, Sydney last Wednesday extended its lockdown for another four weeks, since the previous five-week lockdown had little effect on the spread of the virus. The authorities had said they wanted a number of COVID-19 cases to come to "as close to zero" before lifting the restrictive measures.

To ensure people obey the lockdown rules, the police have been granted much more power to shut down businesses and any public premises that are deemed to pose risk to the public health.

Nearly five million residents of Greater Sydney and some other city areas are subject to strict rules that drastically restrict people's freedom of movement to five km (3.1 miles) from one's home in most cases. Only essential shopping, healthcare, and caregiving grant residents a chance to go up to 10 km (6.2 miles) from home. Only authorized workers are allowed to move outside their Local Government Areas (LGAs).

AP Images
Sydney, Australia

The fines for the violators have been more than doubled. The police department of New South Wales (the Australian state of which Sydney is the capital) notified the residents that police posts will be stationed across the transport network and at major transport hubs "to ensure the community are complying with the current Public Health Order."

NSW Police Commissioner Mick Fuller said there will be a "zero-tolerance" approach to businesses and members of the public breaching public health orders. "There is no reasonable excuse that members of the wider community are not adhering to current health orders and using the QR check in and wearing face masks," he said, while pointing out that supermarkets and large retail stores are a "known source of concern" when it comes to spreading the virus. Businesses not complying with the QR check-in system will be slapped with a $5,000 fine. Members of the public who fail to check in using the QR code will be fined a total of $1,000. Anyone caught without a face mask will also receive a $500 fine.

The recent wave of lockdowns in Australia was imposed over 176 positive COVID-19 cases and affected 25 million people. Thousands of people were outraged by such an arguably disproportionate response as to send half of the country into stay-at-home mode, and massive protests have erupted across Australian cities.

The most massive rallies took place in Sydney, considered "ground zero" of the "Delta" spread. The NSW police said while they "recognized and supported" the rights of free speech and peaceful assembly, the protest was a breach of public-health orders.

NSW Police Minister David Elliott said the protest was a "super spreader event." He called the participants "selfish boofheads" and "halfwits" and called on them to get immediately tested for COVID-19.

To make sure "super spreaders" and "boofheads" who decide the "laws don't apply" to them, the military deployment is viewed by the local authorities as a necessary step to ensure "everyone's safety."

On Saturday, Australia used helicopters and the army to enforce the lockdown measures, as thousands of police flooded Sydney's city center, the *Daily Mail* reports.

Sirens blared across the city and a message to "obey the rules" was broadcast from the skies, as millions were told, "This is public health order — do not break rules — you will be found and fines issued."

Starting Monday, some 300 army personnel will help police go door to door to ensure people who have tested positive are isolating. NSW Health Minister Brad Hazzard explained that the military engagement is needed because of an unacceptably long time that it took people to get tested after developing symptoms, and thus endangering infecting others. "We are seeing more families coming in with a family member who is presenting not alive, but dead," Hazzard said, implying the army will prevent it from happening.

"The Army's unique skills and training have combined many times with those of our police officers to serve the people of NSW in times of crisis, such as the floods and severe bushfires we've experienced in recent years. This will be a functional, effective and dynamic team to fight this pandemic," Commissioner Fuller said during the formal request to the federal government for help from the army. It remained unclear how the army helping extinguish flames, evacuating people from their homes, and saving children from burning rooftops is comparable to forcing a civilian population viewed as a biohazard to stay at home, put a mask on, and not even think about protesting against government orders.

Meanwhile, up to 1,300 police officers swarmed Sydney on Sunday and, as promised, set up a network of roadblocks around the city "in a massive show of force to avoid a repeat of last week's violent anti-lockdown protest," per the *Mail*.

The state's deputy commissioner Mal Lanyon stated: "Quite simply, the message is to stay at home. The intent of the public health order is very clear, and that is to restrict movement and gathering to stop the spread of this virus." "If you wish to come into town for the purpose of a protest, we will take appropriate action. Whether that's by infringement notice or you may be arrested and charged, don't come into town for that purpose," he added.

The only way out of the restrictions and a "ticket to freedom," as NSW Prime Minister Gladys Berejiklian put it, is to get vaccinated against COVID-19.

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On Friday, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison revealed that Australia will reopen its borders and end lockdowns, and also allow its citizens to travel to "safe" countries, when 80 percent of the population is fully vaccinated, as he set out a series of targets for the gradual easing of restrictions. Slightly more than 18 percent of Australians aged 16 years and over are now fully vaccinated.

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