

Worldwide protests against US bombing of Afghanistan

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Anger at the US bombing raids on Afghanistan has unleashed protests in many countries, sometimes leading to violent clashes.

In Pakistan, crowds of about 15,000 fought for more than three hours with police in Quetta, in western Pakistan near the Afghanistan border. A police station was attacked and the headquarters of the UN children's fund was badly burnt, along with several shops and cinemas. Police opened fire on the crowd, killing one and injuring several others. Approximately 75 people were arrested.

Three people were killed in the nearby town of Kuchlak, including a 12-year old boy, when police opened fire on a crowd of some 1,500, mainly Afghan refugees, protesting the US air strikes.

Police also fired into crowds in Peshawar, injuring at least 10 people. Effigies of Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair were burned. In a series of running battles with protestors in the Khyber bazaar, riot police, backed by soldiers with machine guns, fired tear-gas canisters and mounted baton charges. Armoured personnel carriers were used to block roads around the US Consulate to prevent demonstrators approaching. Following a smaller demonstration led by students, all the city's students were ordered home indefinitely and all government schools in the northwest province closed for week.

At Landi Kotal further north, at least three people were wounded when a local militia fired upon some 5,000 tribesmen who had gathered to burn effigies of US President George W. Bush. Sporadic violence was also reported in the southern city of Karachi. In the tightly guarded capital of Islamabad, several hundred protestors demonstrated near the UN headquarters building and the American Cultural Centre. The city's American and British Embassies have been placed under heavy guard.

Pakistan's President General Musharraf, whose support for the air raids has been crucial to the US war drive, dismissed the protests as the work of extremists and said

they were "very, very controllable". On Monday, Pakistani authorities had arrested three leading Islamists allied to the pro-Taliban Afghanistan and Pakistan Defence Council, a coalition of 35 parties pledged to oppose the US attacks. Azam Tariq, Fazlur Rehman and Samiul Haq were all placed under house arrest.

Violent protests also erupted in Srinagar, the capital of Indian-administered Kashmir, causing large parts of the city to be closed down. At the Kashmir University campus hundreds of students demonstrated against the attacks, throwing stones and chanting anti-US slogans. Thirty people were injured when police fired tear gas at the protestors, many of whom denounced Musharraf for supporting the US.

In Calcutta, 1,000 anti-war protestors from the Socialist Unity Centre of India (SUCI) demonstrated near the American Centre, and burnt an effigy of President Bush. SUCI leader Prabash Ghosh said that the US had not offered proof that Osama bin Laden was responsible for the terror attacks. A joint statement by the country's four Stalinist and Maoist communist parties warned India's ruling coalition, led by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, not to aid the US-led war drive.

In Bangladesh, the third largest Muslim country in the world, Islamic organisations protested in the capital, Dhaka. Chanting slogans such as "Bangladesh soil is not for America" and "Laden is the defender of Islam", several hundred protestors listened to Fazlul Haq Amini of the Islamic Oikya Jote, a partner in the Bangladesh Nationalist Party-led four-party alliance, which assumes office today, threaten war against the US. Bangladesh had offered the US use of its airspace and other key facilities to conduct its military strikes, but Amini warned that more than three million students in the country could be called upon to support a holy war against the US.

In Egypt, more than 20,000 students from nine universities in Cairo and the north protested the air

strikes, and condemned the government's support for the US attack. President Hosni Mubarak has been America's most stalwart ally amongst the Arab countries, but has not issued a statement since the bombing began. Security forces stood guard outside the campuses as 4,000 students protested at the Islamic University of Al-Azhar, 3,000 at the Alexandria University and a further 2,500 at Zagazig University to the north.

In Jordan, security forces carried out a major clampdown against potential protestors as soon as the US raids began, arresting at least 10 Islamic students from the University of Jordan.

In the Sultanate of Oman, where British forces are engaged in a major military exercise, police broke up a small anti-war protest, mainly involving students.

Elsewhere in Asia, there have been violent clashes in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim nation. In the second day of protests by fundamentalist Muslim groups some 500 demonstrated near the US embassy in the capital Jakarta. Indonesian police fired warning shots, tear gas and water cannon to try and disperse the crowd. At least four people were reported injured in the clashes. The US embassy has been closed, and sealed off with barbed wire barricades. A small group of protestors managed briefly to gather outside the British Embassy. A separate group of 200 members of the Indonesian Muslim Student Action Unity also protested outside the United Nations building in the capital, chanting "America, the real terrorist".

US and British officials called on all foreign nationals to remain indoors after the Association of Indonesian Ulemas (clerics) issued a joint statement on behalf of 40 Islamic organisations, criticising the Indonesian government's support for the US and demanding that it "suspend diplomatic relations with America and its allies until the attacks stop".

There were reports of protests in Makassar, Sulawesi Island and in the Javanese city of Bandung where 2,000 people marched.

In Japan, there were small anti-war demonstrations outside the US Embassy in Tokyo, whilst the country's 370,000-strong Teachers Union condemned the US bombing raid and called for an immediate end to the attacks.

In Europe, there have also been small demonstrations in all the major capitals.

A total of 15,000 people participated in anti-war demonstrations in Geneva, Amsterdam and Barcelona at the weekend. Following the US air strikes, protests have

also been held in Stockholm and Helsinki, whilst in Rome, several hundred demonstrated outside the United Nations. Sit-down protests were held in Turin and Milan.

In Greece, more than 2,000 marched on the US Embassy in Athens, which was sealed off by hundreds of riot police.

In Dublin, a group of anti-war protestors demonstrated outside the US Embassy to condemn the air strikes and protest the Irish government's offer of assistance to the Bush administration. And in France, a few hundred protestors gathered in Paris and Strasbourg.

There have also been a series of protests across Britain. In London, a small group of 100 demonstrators gathered outside Downing Street as the bombing raids began on Sunday evening, chanting, "Stop the war, feed the poor". In Birmingham, hundreds demonstrated under the auspices of the "Stop the War" coalition the same evening. Both incidents passed off peacefully. However in Glasgow, six people were arrested following a protest outside a Ministry of Defence building. Three men and three women were taken into custody after scaling the first floor ledge of the building to unfurl a banner saying asking, "What do the dead eat?"—a reference to the US bombing raids being followed up by so-called humanitarian food drops. Another two people were also arrested during the same protest. A spokesman for the Faslane Peace Camp, which organised the protest, said, "Bush and Blair are nothing short of murderers themselves. If they have proof against Osama bin Laden they should bring him to trial through the international law courts."

Some 400 people also gathered at a two-hour vigil in the city's Glasgow Square, whilst in the Scottish capital, Edinburgh, 200 rallied in Parliament Square, chanting slogans such as, "Terror is no antidote to Terror".



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