

Police threats against Washington anti-war protesters

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Federal and local authorities have mobilized a massive contingent of police, with National Guard troops on standby, in advance of demonstrations to be held in Washington DC today to protest US and Israeli military aggression and the Bush administration's assault on democratic rights. Tens of thousands of young people, students, Arab immigrants and others are expected to turn out for the first national anti-war demonstration since September 11 and the launching of Bush's so-called "war on terrorism."

In an effort to intimidate protesters and create an atmosphere of fear, the media have given widespread coverage to police preparations and official warnings about possible violence. Both the police and the press have linked the demonstration to possible terrorist attacks on the US capital.

At a press conference earlier this week, DC Police Chief Charles Ramsey said, "We have concern that a large protest like this could become the cover to conduct terrorist-related or some other criminal activities." Ramsey then made the absurd claim that the huge police presence was designed to "protect" protesters from a possible terrorist attack.

The police chief placed the onus for any violence on the protesters, saying, "We hope they are here just to exercise their First Amendment rights. But if people change their minds, we're ready for it." He singled out pro-Palestinian demonstrators who were coming to protest Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's upcoming Washington visit. "The Middle East right now is a hotbed of emotion and passion. When you start getting into all those emotional-type issues, you have to be concerned," he said.

In April 2000, the DC police arrested 1,200 anti-capitalist demonstrators outside the annual meeting of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

Police have reportedly put in place a "mass arrest" plan in preparation for today's protests.

A *Washington Post* article, entitled, "Police Prepare for Worst in Days of Protest," noted, "In sessions last month, officers had to contend with and contain hollering and fist-swinging police recruits pretending to be rowdy protesters—who were then attacked by terrorists. A bomb went off. Phone lines and police radios went dead. Cell phones stopped working. 'A protest in 2002 is a whole new world compared to a protest in 2000,' DC Police Chief Charles H. Ramsey said last week."

The police department has activated its Civil Disturbance Units—1,800 officers wearing riot helmets and black armor—cancelled leave and instituted 12-hour shifts for the demonstration. In addition to the 3,600-member city force, 500 officers from nearby counties, the US Park Police, US Capitol Police, Maryland and Virginia State Police, US Mint Police and the Secret Service Uniformed Division will be on hand. Two hundred National Guardsmen are also being put on alert.

The \$9 million operation is being coordinated from a Joint Operations Command Center at the Metropolitan Police Department headquarters. In addition to live television feeds from more than 18 video cameras located throughout the city, the facility provides computerized images of buildings, trees, streets and other details. Police helicopters will feed airborne video to commanders.

Police are also shutting down traffic in several streets of a "secured protest area" in downtown Washington and urging area businesses to allow only those employees with IDs into offices. The city's department of public works—along with the Secret Service and police—began removing newspaper boxes, mail boxes,

litter cans, benches, bike racks and outdoor tables and chairs along the march route. Police said they were “sanitizing” the protest area to remove anything that could be used in a “dangerous fashion.” Inspectors also visited construction sites in the protest area to instruct owners to secure building materials.

On Thursday, the police department was forced to retreat from its initial attempt to deny permits to anti-globalization activists planning to hold protests in front of several corporate headquarters.

Mark Rickling of the Mobilization for Global Justice told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “We are having a peaceful rally and march and are asking the police to restrain themselves. The corporate media presents us as violent thugs who just want to smash things and fight the cops. September 11 hasn’t stopped protests and people are going to challenge authority, protest what’s going on and assert our free speech rights.”

Shelly Delos, a student from City College in New York City who is attending her first anti-war demonstration, told the WSWS, “We are concerned about the war abroad and in the US. This is not just about Afghanistan, Colombia and Iraq, it’s about the attack on youth and the working class here—the erosion of civil liberties and the worsening economic situation. At colleges in New York, Seattle and Chicago school officials are telling students to accept tuition hikes because everybody has to make sacrifices after September 11. The Patriot Act and other things are attacking our civil liberties and encouraging censorship in schools.”



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