

Thousands protest war in New York City

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Thousands packed the streets around New York City's Times Square Thursday night to protest the Bush administration's launching of the invasion of Iraq. Demonstrators gathered in a drenching rain under the neon news ticker that carried reports of the latest bombings and troop movements.

The protest drew large numbers of workers leaving their offices in midtown Manhattan as well as students who marched to the site in groups from universities and high schools in different parts of the city.

The protesters chanted "Peace now," and "George Bush, hey hey; how many kids did you kill today?"

The New York City Police Department, which had already announced the implementation of "Operation Atlas" deploying heavily armed paramilitary units in the streets of the city, blanketed the area with helmeted riot cops as well as mounted police. There were minor clashes with demonstrators, and at least 21 people were arrested.

In an effort to limit the size of the rally, the NYPD began sealing off streets leading into Times Square, the center of the city's theater district. Police put up barricades and crime-scene tape across entire streets, sending crowds of young people walking blocks out of their way to reach other demonstrators.

Many of those joining the rally carried hand-lettered signs expressing their outrage over the slaughter unleashed against Iraq. "9/11 New York, 3/20 Baghdad—No more killing" read one. "Earth to Bush, we don't want war," said another.

Demonstrators had gathered in smaller numbers earlier in Union Square. Before streaming north to the Times Square rally, a number of high school students staged a "die-in" there, lying down in black garbage bags to symbolize the death of Iraqi civilians. After the Times Square rally, many of those present walked more than 30 blocks south for a candlelight vigil in Washington Square Park.

A far larger demonstration is scheduled for Saturday. After having denied demonstrators a march permit on February 15, the city administration of billionaire Republican Mayor Michael Bloomberg has agreed to allow demonstrators to march from Times Square to Washington Square Park. In part, the decision was motivated by the city's desire to avoid the chaos that resulted last month, when hundreds of thousands of demonstrators unable to reach the rally site jammed the streets and clashed with police, paralyzing Manhattan's East Side.

Meanwhile, the September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows, representing relatives of those killed in the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, issued a statement Thursday denouncing the US war against Iraq as "illegal, immoral and unjustified."

"While we also condemn the brutality of Saddam Hussein's regime, it does not justify the brutality, death and destruction being visited upon Iraq and its citizens by our own government," the statement said. "This war will not make America safer. On the contrary, it has already resulted in heightened anti-American sentiment around the world, and is likely to promote further terrorist attacks.... It will not protect Americans families from another September 11th."



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