Millions join in worldwide protests against US war with Iraq

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In a second round of massive international protests against the impending American military assault on Iraq, millions of people marched Saturday, March 15 in Australia, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and throughout the western hemisphere. The demonstrations came four weeks after the first day of globally coordinated antiwar protests, held February 15, which mobilized more than 10 million people.

The March 15 protests were even more widespread than those a month earlier, with more countries and cities involved. Although the total participating was apparently smaller than on February 15, that only means that Saturday's protests were the second largest in history.

As in the month before, some of the largest demonstrations took place in those countries which are participating in or supporting the US military mobilization in the Persian Gulf, including Spain, Australia and the United States itself. There were also large turnouts in Germany, Canada, France, Greece and Turkey.

The biggest mobilization of antiwar sentiment came in Spain, where a million gathered in the capital city, Madrid, and another half million in Barcelona, capital of Catalonia. Other demonstrations took place in a dozen other cities in Spain, from Bilbao in the northern Basque country to the southern port city of Cadiz.

Portuguese writer and Nobel laureate José Saramago told the Madrid demonstration, "We are marching against the law of the jungle that the United States and its acolytes old and new want to impose on the world." Marchers carried placards showing a seagull—the emblem of the ruling right-wing Popular Party of Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar—dropping bombs on a white dove.

One man carried a print of Picasso's anti-fascist painting "Guernica," which depicts the bombing of the Basque town during the Spanish Civil War, with the caption, "Aznar, do you remember?"

With more than three quarters of Spaniards opposing war with Iraq, the Popular Party is expected to suffer heavily in local and regional elections scheduled for May 25. Aznar has already announced that he will not seek a third term as prime minister in the general elections set for next year.

Other demonstrations in Europe included 100,000 in **Berlin**, 50,000 in Paris, 15,000 in Athens, 50,000 in **Brussels**, 5,000 in Marseille, Stockholm and Copenhagen, as well as smaller protests in Thessaloniki, Greece, Bucharest, Rumania and Moscow.

In Milan, thousands participated in an antiwar protest organized by Italy's largest trade union confederation, the CGIL. The union body sent a message to Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, a supporter of the Bush war plan, threatening strike action at the outbreak of war. The declaration followed a series of 15-minute protest strikes March 14 by transport workers seeking to disrupt the movement of American war materiel through Italy.

Other direct action took place at the US Rhein-Main airbase near **Frankfurt**, Germany, where hundreds of demonstrators staged a sit-in protest at what an organizer called "this central hub for the deployment of troops to the Gulf."

Unlike last month, when more than a million demonstrators flooded London, there was no central demonstration organized in Britain. Antiwar groups said they had postponed action until the actual outbreak of war, but regional demonstrations were held in Leeds, Sheffield and York, all cities in Yorkshire, with more than 20,000 attending.

Demonstrations in Asia were smaller than in Europe, except in the Middle East, where protests were for the first time coordinated with similar actions around the world.

Ten thousand marched through central Tokyo, only one day after the government of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi reaffirmed its full support for an American war against Iraq, although war is opposed by 80 percent of the Japanese people. In Seoul, South Korea, 3,000 demonstrators stage a candlelight protest.

Other demonstrations took place in Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin, New Zealand; in Melbourne and a dozen other Australian cities; in Hong Kong, Bangkok, India and Vietnam.

Tens of thousands of Yemenis turned out for government-backed antiwar rallies in the capital, San'a, and other cities. Huge protests also took place in Iraq, with thousands of demonstrators carrying weapons to show their determination to fight in the event of a US invasion.

Nearly 10,000 marched through the Turkish port city of Iskenderum where American military personnel are unloading equipment for transport to the war zone in Iraq. Turkish riot police blocked roads leading to the port to prevent any confrontation between demonstrations and American soldiers.

Smaller protests were held in Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus; in Cairo; and in the Gaza Strip, where 2,000 Palestinians set fire to effigies of Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, and burned US, British and Israeli flags.

The three main demonstrations in the United States were in **Washington DC** and **San Francisco** drawing well over 50,000 each. Another 30,000 marched in Portland, Oregon, and smaller protests took place in dozens of cities and towns, including **Cambridge**, Massachusetts and Lansing, Michigan.

Canada was a major focus of protest, with 250,000 marching in **Montreal**, in one of the biggest demonstrations in the history of the country, and thousands more in **Toronto**.

The largest protest in Latin America came in Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina, where 10,000 people marched on the US Embassy, which was heavily guarded. A recent Gallup poll found greater opposition to war in Argentina than in any of 40 other countries studied.