

Reports on international protests against Iraq war

Our correspondents
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Below are several reports sent by correspondents on the demonstrations taking place worldwide since the outbreak of war against Iraq.

Istanbul, Turkey

Antiwar protesters rushed onto streets in Turkey on Thursday, March 20. Various demonstrations took place in Istanbul a few hours after the US started bombing Iraq.

The first demonstration took place at Istanbul University. A group of leftist students occupied the historic Beyazit Tower at the university. Six students, who broke down the door of the tower to enter, hung banners with the slogans “Damn US, comprador AKP” and “This country, this public is not for sale”. They also shouted slogans such as “Damn US imperialism” and “No to war”. The action of students lasted two hours and they gave themselves up to the police.

Another demonstration at Istanbul University took place in the Faculty of Chemistry and Literature. Some 40 Islamist students shouted slogans against the US in front of the faculty. They also burned an American flag during the demonstration.

At the same time a group of lawyers, artists and Greenpeace members (mainly Kemalists), who gathered in front of Galatasaray High School, marched to Taksim Square. They protested the US with whistles and clapping and laid a wreath at the Taksim Republic Monument with Ataturk’s message “Peace at home, peace in the world”.

Jena, Germany

One thousand to two thousand people gathered in Jena, Germany on the night of Thursday, March 20 to protest the commencement of the US-led war against Iraq. Jena is one of the few cities in the former East Germany to enjoy a significant measure of economic progress since German reunification in 1990, although

it still suffers from high unemployment and other problems.

The protestors ranged from students, who make up a significant portion of the population, to older people who had lived much of their lives under the former Stalinist regime. The demonstration was held in front of the Saint Michael Church and was triggered by the start of war. The primary focus of the event was to advertise an even larger rally that is to take place on Saturday and is intended to attract people from across the German state of Thuringia.

Flags and signs dotted the crowd and drumming on empty oil barrels charged the air. A few speakers took the microphone before a march was led, although from what I could comprehend (in German) nothing particularly in depth was said about the reasons for the war, nor was a strategy outlined to oppose it. Bush was denounced and a call was made for students not to go to school on Monday (I imagine it will be strikingly successful).

Some of the speakers cited the German government’s stance against the war, although no one bothered to ask what a man such like Edmund Stoiber, leader of the conservative opposition party, would do were he in power and in control of the world’s most powerful military. The fact that the German government paid for a significant portion of the first Gulf War was also not examined. It was still heartening to be around so many other people who don’t believe the lies about the war.

Rock music from the 1960s was played as the organizers then led the people in a peaceful march through the main streets of the city, effectively stopping all traffic. The police presence was surprisingly mild. In other demonstrations that I’ve stumbled upon an army of riot police has outnumbered the demonstrators. At one point the march streamed past a man in a

wheelchair who had been sitting in protest all day with mock air raid sirens blaring. Overall it was a peaceful event in response to the gruesome crimes that were being committed two time zones away.

Leiden, The Netherlands

On Thursday, March 20, the Leiden Coalition against War, in Leiden, The Netherlands, held a demonstration against George W. Bush's war on Iraq, which started that day. Simultaneously, there were peace demonstrations at Rotterdam City Hall, and in many other cities and towns in The Netherlands.

A crowd gathered at the Leiden Stadhuisplein, the square near the sixteenth century town hall. Reporters from the local media were present.

The first speaker was Ms. Salwa de Vree, who had been in Iraq. She said that Bush disregarded the pleas for peace by famous peace activists like Nelson Mandela. Ms. De Vree called on everyone to join the national demonstration for peace for the people of Iraq on Saturday, March 22, at 1 p.m. on the Dam, Amsterdam.

The next speaker was Mr. Nang Arsala, representative of an organization of Afghan refugees in The Netherlands. He said that if one hears George W. Bush on "democracy for Iraq" now, one should be sceptical, and remember what Bush used to say on Afghanistan, and how things turned out there in practice. As Bush attacked Afghanistan, after the attack in New York by non-Afghans, he spoke about a better position for women in Afghanistan. However, the war is still going on in Afghanistan, and conditions for Afghan women are terrible.

Mr. Arsala said that he, a Muslim himself, stood for people of different religions coming and acting together; contrary to the policy of George W. Bush, which set people of different religions against one another.

There followed a spirited march down the Breestraat, the main shopping street of Leiden. Slogans resounded against its ancient buildings: "Stop the war, peace now!" "War for oil is stupid! (in Dutch: Oorlog oliedom!)" Bush, Blair, Balkenende [the Dutch prime minister], keep your hands off Iraq!" "Bush, Blair, Balkenende, war only brings misery!" "Give Bush a cold shower (rhymes in Dutch)!" Signs read, "Down with Bush, down with Saddam". Bush and Blair were criticized in Arabic on their "Axis of Evil" rhetoric. I

looked before me and did not see the beginning of the march; and looked behind me, and did not see the end. So there were certainly many more than 500 protesters.

The demonstrators arrived at the Leiden monument to the anti-Nazi resistance fighters of World War Two. Jeff, a US opponent of George W. Bush, spoke there to loud applause. After that, the marchers continued on the Langegracht, to loud approving honking of motorists. The march finished at the Koppenhinksteeg, with a meeting on upcoming actions.



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