

Violent crackdown on protests marks G8 summit

Hundreds arrested at French-Swiss border

Bill Vann
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Police used tear gas, rubber bullets, water cannon and baton charges for the second day in a row Sunday to suppress protesters who turned out in opposition to the Group of Eight (G8) summit. Clashes erupted on both sides of the Swiss-French border as President Bush arrived for his first face-to-face meeting with European heads of state since the illegal war in Iraq that divided the major imperialist powers.

An estimated 120,000 people—50,000 on the Swiss side and 70,000 on the French—took part in a mass demonstration Sunday that converged on the border between the two countries. As the demonstrators crossed the unmanned border, they chanted, “No Frontiers, Freedom of Movement.” The ranks of demonstrators who have turned out repeatedly to denounce economic injustice at meetings of the G8, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank were swelled by those protesting the US war of aggression and the occupation of Iraq.

Earlier in the day in Lausanne, one man was seriously injured and several others wounded in clashes between protesters and police. The security forces unleashed an immense barrage of teargas as well as using water cannon and clubs. As protesters retreated from the city, police fired three teargas canisters into the city’s botanical garden, sending families and their children fleeing from the area.

Martin Shaw, a British citizen, was hospitalized and underwent surgery after falling more than 60 feet from a bridge to a stony river bank after police intervened to break up a road blockade. Shaw, a professional climber, had helped stretch a rope across the bridge, suspending himself from one end, with another protester hanging onto the other. When police arrived to clear the traffic jam, they attacked those on the bridge and then cut the rope,

sending Shaw plunging into the river. He suffered multiple fractures.

Following the clashes, police followed protesters back to a camp where they are staying near the University of Lausanne, arresting hundreds. Authorities in the town announced the revocation of a permit granted earlier for a peaceful protest.

Riot-equipped police carried out similar teargas and water cannon attacks against demonstrations in central Geneva on Sunday.

In Annemasse, on the French side of the border, thousands of demonstrators attempted to march on Evian. They were met by massed police at the village of Saint-Cergues and forced back with teargas, rubber bullets and concussion grenades.

Other attempts were made to blockade routes leading into Evian. Heads of state and other leading participants in the summit were flown over the protests in helicopters.

As in all recent summits of the G8—US, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Russia—the gathering was marked by a massive deployment of military and police power.

The last such gathering was held in a remote mountain resort in the Canadian wilderness. The French government, which is hosting the current summit, chose Evian because the narrow roads through the Alps are relatively easy to secure.

On the French side of the border, some 18,000 police and army troops backed by fighter planes, armored vehicles, anti-aircraft missiles, helicopters, naval patrol boats, special forces frogmen and even air force surveillance drones have been mobilized.

In Evian itself, residents of the French resort town have been issued special identity tags that they have been forced to wear for a week beginning May 28 and ending

only after the summit on June 3. All others, outside of officials and accredited press, are barred.

The French and Swiss police—backed by a reserve force of German police as well—appeared to be enforcing a security zone with a radius of at least 10 miles surrounding the summit's site. All boat traffic on Lake Geneva, aside from ferries used by the summit itself, have been barred as have aircraft within the vicinity of the meeting.

While the pretext given for these extraordinary security measures is the fear of terrorist attack, their principal objective is to prevent those opposed to the policies of the US and the other major powers from getting anywhere near the site.

There are scant expectations that the summit will resolve any of the deepening economic and geopolitical tensions between the US and Western Europe. On the eve of the G8 meeting, both Bush and the European leaders who initially refused to sanction Washington's unilateral invasion of Iraq declared that their differences are in the past.

A spokeswoman for French President Jacques Chirac said that while he and Bush would probably discuss Iraq, "If they do it, it will not be to return to the past—that would hardly be useful—but to look to the future."

The American president, however, expressed his contempt for the gathering, turning it into a one-day stopover—sandwiched between meetings in Poland and Russia before and the Middle East afterwards—on what is a six-country, seven-day junket.

While Bush sounded what could be interpreted as a conciliatory tone—calling for "unity" in the "global war on terrorism," and declaring that "this is no time to stir up divisions in a great alliance"—a "senior US official" issued a statement to members of the press traveling to the summit on Air Force One making it clear that "unity" would be possible only on Washington's terms.

He warned that any attempt by European governments to restrain US power would only be aiding terrorism. "The forces out there that want to destabilize, that want to engage in terrorism (and) build weapons of mass destruction would like nothing better than to have the Western alliance ... in an internecine battle about whose power needs to be checked," the official said.

The remarks were similar in tone to those made by Bush's national security advisor Condoleezza Rice in an interview with foreign reporters released by the White House Friday. Scolding France, Canada and other countries for failing to fall into line behind the US

aggression in Iraq, Rice declared, "There were times that it appeared that American power was seen to be more dangerous than, perhaps, Saddam Hussein. I'll just put it very bluntly: We simply didn't understand it."

The US agenda at the summit includes the legitimization of future acts of aggression based on the same pretexts given for the war against Iraq. It is urging unity to fight terrorism and suppress the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Its immediate target is Iran, against which leading members of the administration have advocated a policy of "regime change" backed by a covert destabilization campaign or even military intervention. Russia, Germany and France all have economic interests in Iran. Likewise, Washington is seeking support for its escalation of pressure against North Korea.

The Bush administration is also seeking international sanction for carrying out the seizure of supposedly illegal weapons shipments on the high seas. Administration officials have indicated that this proposal stemmed directly from an incident at the end of last year in which US and Spanish forces seized a North Korean vessel bound for Yemen with a shipment of Scud missiles. They had to release the ship after Yemen protested that it had legally purchased the missiles for defensive purposes.

While European officials indicated that they were waiting to hear under what authority the US proposed to carry out what would otherwise be classified as unprovoked acts of war, it seems clear that Washington is demanding the unfettered right to seize ships and weapons of sovereign nations as it sees fit.

Behind the talks of unity and letting bygones be bygones, the tensions between Europe and America combined with Washington's continued campaign of militarism and diplomatic bullying appear all the more likely to dominate the summit under conditions in which there is no prospect of reaching any common agreement on confronting the deepening global economic crisis.



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