

Thousands join renewed antiwar protests around the world

Mike Head**29 September 2003**

Hundreds of thousands of people in more than 20 countries and 60 cities spanning five continents joined demonstrations last weekend demanding an end to the ongoing US-led occupation of Iraq. While the protests were smaller than the millions-strong demonstrations before the war, the internationally-coordinated day of action marked a re-emergence of global opposition to the militarism of the Bush administration and its allies.

Despite a virtual blackout in the mass media on any news of the planned protests, marches and rallies were held from Korea and Japan in East Asia, to Europe and the United States. Most media outlets also buried coverage of what are the first major antiwar demonstrations since President Bush proclaimed an end to the war on May 1.

The protests occurred amid the collapse of all the lies told to provide a pretext for the invasion. Banners and chants pointedly noted that no “weapons of mass destruction” had been found in Iraq, no evidence of Iraqi links to terrorism had been unearthed, and the Iraqi people had not welcomed the coalition troops as liberators.

Significantly, the marches were largest in Britain and Italy, where the Blair and Berlusconi governments were among Washington’s staunchest backers, in defiance of massive popular opposition at the time. Some 100,000 people participated in Rome, while estimates of the London rally ranged from 20,000 to 400,000.

Demonstrators in many countries opposed plans for their governments to send troops to shore up the beleaguered US and British forces in Iraq. Another recurring theme was denunciation of the Bush administration’s green light for the Israeli regime’s violent repression of the Palestinian people.

In South Korea, about 2,000 people marched in Seoul to oppose a US request that South Korea send combat

troops to Iraq. Protesters chanted “No war!” and held banners and signs that said: “We oppose the dispatch of troops,” “End the occupation of Iraq” and “Don’t make young Koreans perpetrators of massacre in Iraq.”

Warm applause greeted an American exchange student who took the microphone to denounce Bush and the Iraq war as “immoral, illegal and racist.” “Please do not confuse Bush with the American people,” he said. “President Bush is a very rich and powerful American, but do not be fooled. George Bush is a terrorist and must be stopped, and we can stop him together.”

Many South Koreans fear the spread of Washington’s methods to North Korea, provoking a possible nuclear confrontation. Similar concerns were voiced at a rally in Tokyo.

Demonstrators in Lebanon and Egypt linked the plight of Iraq and Palestine. Thousands of Lebanese and Palestinian protesters in Beirut demanded that US forces leave Iraq and that Israel stop its attacks in the Palestinian territories. Palestine Authority chairman Yasser Arafat addressed the crowd by phone from his headquarters in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

In Cairo, about 50 political activists and journalists staged a peaceful protest against the occupation of Iraq and Israeli attacks on Palestinians.

Some 4,000 protesters in the Turkish capital, Ankara, unfurled banners against sending troops to neighbouring Iraq. They shouted slogans in support of the Palestinian cause and to demand an end to the US takeover of Iraq. Hundreds more gathered at a similar rally in Istanbul and burned American and Israeli flags.

Outside the US Embassy in the Greek capital Athens, demonstrators hurled bottles and yoghurt at riot police during a rally to protest the occupation of Iraq and the Palestinian territories. About 3,000 protesters chanted

“Occupiers Out” and “Freedom for Palestine”.

Protests were also staged in other parts of Greece and on the island of Crete, outside an American naval base at Souda Bay, which hosts the US 6th Fleet and spy planes.

In Rome, the turnout appears to have been boosted by Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi’s declaration last week that Italy had a duty to support US efforts to disarm Iraq. Speakers referred to opinion polls showing that almost 70 percent of Italians are against the idea of going to war with Iraq. Many marchers carried red flags and chanted antiwar slogans.

Some 3,000 people marched in Paris, where a wide banner read, “American Imperialism: Take your bloody hands off the Middle East.” Others held posters that read “Wanted: George W. Bush—War Criminal”. They also condemned Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, shouting: “Bush, Sharon—Assassins”.

Several thousand demonstrators in the French Mediterranean port of Marseille marked the second anniversary of the Palestinian intifada, condemning Israel’s “apartheid” policy.

An estimated 1,200 demonstrated in Brussels, Belgium, while about 400 people marched to the Reichstag parliament building in Berlin, Germany. “Iraq and Afghanistan are all part of a big game. It is all about oil,” one demonstrator told reporters.

In Stockholm, Sweden, police said about 250 people staged a demonstration. Vienna, the Austrian capital, saw about 200 protesters gather in a central square.

In Warsaw, Poland, 100 young people protested the Polish military presence in Iraq, marching with banners saying: “Down with the global US terrorism” and “We don’t want to occupy with Bush.”

Across Spain, thousands of people carrying antiwar banners, banging drums and wearing white smocks marched through the streets of Madrid, Barcelona, Seville and Malaga. “Oil kills,” read a banner in Madrid, where more than 7,000 protesters condemned Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar’s support for the war. Marching behind a banner calling for the withdrawal of 1,300 Spanish soldiers sent to bolster US troops in postwar Iraq, the crowd chanted: “No to war” and “Bush, Aznar out of Iraq.”

A rally in Belfast, Ireland, was told that the millions who marched against the war earlier this year had been “proven right that the war was unjust, unjustified and

illegal”.

Little-reported rallies were held in many US cities to demand the withdrawal of troops from Iraq. Some 3,000 people took to the streets of Hollywood on Sunday. “George Bush, Uncle Sam, Iraq will be your Vietnam,” demonstrators chanted while walking down Sunset Boulevard. The march drew a wide group from war veterans to parents with children in strollers. Some demonstrators carried signs saying, “Lying Son of a Bush,” “Recall Bush” and “Iraq Equals Quagmire.” After the march, the rally chanted: “Bring them home now!”

Smaller demonstrations were held in Boston, New York, San Francisco and other cities large and small. In some places, the rallies marked the anniversary of the initial protests against the war. They included Santa Barbara, Minneapolis-St Paul and Fairbanks, Alaska, where signs read: “If you love America, demand the truth” and “WMD = weapons of mass deception”. Protests also occurred in several Canadian cities.



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