

Hundreds of thousands join in international protests against Iraq war

Demonstrations in more than 45 countries

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The anniversary of the Iraq war witnessed a global outpouring of opposition to the invasion and occupation of the Persian Gulf country by the US and its allies. The single largest protest marking the first anniversary of the war took place in Rome, but altogether many hundreds of thousand of people took part in hundreds of demonstrations in cities and towns on every continent.

Demonstrations were held in more than 45 countries. According to Reuters, "More than a million anti-war protesters poured into the streets of cities around the globe on Saturday's anniversary of the invasion of Iraq to demand the withdrawal of US-led troops." (*See on-the-spot reports from* New York, the West Coast and Michigan, Canada, Rome, Spain, London, Germany and Australia.)

According to US peace activists, there were more than 575 protests around the world against the war and occupation. Expressing the full depth of hostility to the Bush administration, more than 300 events took place in the United States, including a rally in New York City that drew an estimated 100,000 participants.

Supporters of the *World Socialist Web Site* and Socialist Equality Party distributed thousands of copies of the statement "One year since the US invasion of Iraq" at rallies in many cities in North America, Europe and Australia.

In Rome, at least 1 million (organisers say 2 million) marchers gathered to oppose Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's support for the war. A truck pulled a giant caricature of Berlusconi, portraying him as the lap dog of President Bush. Over 1,500 coaches and 12 chartered trains brought demonstrators from across Italy, who marched under a banner reading "Together for peace."

The Italian demonstrators had drawn strength from the actions of the Spanish people in voting the pro-war Peoples Party government out of office on March 14—in large part due to the swell of anger produced by the deaths of 202 people in the March 11 bombings in Madrid, believed to have been carried out by Islamic terrorists.

In Madrid, 100,000 gathered for an evening rally demanding the removal of Spain's 1,300 troops from Iraq. In Barcelona, up to 200,000 marched. Earlier, Spaniards protested across the country against the Iraq occupation. Demonstrations began in about a dozen towns at noon and continued throughout the day. Commemorations were also held in remembrance of the Madrid victims.

In London, upwards of 25,000 people protested against the war. Two Greenpeace activists climbed the Big Ben clock tower near the Houses of Parliament, unfurling a banner reading "Time for Truth."

Leaving from Hyde Park, the marchers rallied in Trafalgar Square, shouting slogans such as "Anti-Bush, Anti-Blair, Anti-war

everywhere." Thousands of balloons were released in memory of those killed in the Iraq conflict and the Madrid bombing atrocities. Campaigners inflated a model of a Trident missile, accompanied by activists dressed up as weapons inspectors.

In Scotland, hundreds of anti-war demonstrators marched in Glasgow from George Square to St Enoch's Square.

In Germany, thousands demonstrated in about 70 cities and towns, with 3,000 attending a rally in Berlin and thousands more gathering outside a US airbase in Ramstein.

In France, anti-war rallies took place in Paris, Marseille, Lyon, Toulouse and elsewhere. About 1,000 people took part to the Paris demonstration.

In Greece, some 10,000 protesters marched on the US embassy in Athens, where they were confronted by hundreds of riot police.

In Ireland, a protest took place in Dublin's Parnell Square, marching on to the Department of Foreign Affairs.

In the Netherlands, thousands protested in Amsterdam's Dam Square. It was a semi-official day of mourning because of the death of Queen Mother Juliana.

In Switzerland, 3,000 demonstrated in the capital city of Berne.

In Denmark, hundreds demonstrated, holding placards that read "Do like Spain, pull out the troops."

In Ankara, Turkey, around a thousand protesters marched to the US embassy and handed over a giant symbolic ticket for Bush to take a trip into outer space. Banners read "Down with American imperialism," "US, get lost from the Middle East" and "End the occupation." In Istanbul, a thousand protesters demonstrated against the occupation of Iraq and their city's hosting of a NATO summit in June.

In Hungary, protesters holding blazing torches formed a human peace sign in Budapest's Heroes' Square.

In Sofia, Bulgaria, protesters gathered in front of the National Palace of Culture and marched to the National Theatre.

In the Czech Republic, some 300 people demonstrated in the capital city of Prague. Representatives of the American, Arab and Czech communities started a protest march towards the US embassy under heavy police guard. On Charles Bridge, they created a human chain from black-clad figures to pay homage to all victims of the war. A number of smaller demonstrations were also held in the country.

In Ljubljana, Slovenia, there were anti-war demonstrations in front of the US embassy. The marchers rallied under the slogan "It's Your War, The Victims Are Ours."

In Russia, thousands took to the streets in 11 cities to protest the US

invasion. Protesters gathered outside the US embassy in Moscow.

The demonstration in New York City exceeded the expectations of the march organisers. Around 100,000 people joined in a march that stretched for 45 blocks. The demonstrators were so numerous that the front of the march almost merged with the back of the march, and the procession had to come to a 15-minute stop as it returned to the rally site.

There were other major demonstrations, including 50,000 in San Francisco, 20,000 in Los Angeles and 10,000 in Chicago.

Latin American countries including Chile, Venezuela and Brazil also held protests.

The day's worldwide protests began in Australia and New Zealand, and other demonstrations followed across Asia.

In Australia, an estimated 5,000 rallied in Sydney's Hyde Park and marched through the city's central business district. Two thousand rallied in Melbourne, with smaller protests taking place in other major centres such as Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide and Canberra.

The main demand of the Sydney and Melbourne rallies was for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Iraq, including the 850 Australian troops still in the country, and an end to the occupation.

In Sydney, protesters carried a five-foot-high effigy of Prime Minister John Howard in a cage, to represent Australian suspects detained at the US military prison camp in Guantanamo Bay.

Terry Hicks, the father of Guantanamo Bay detainee David Hicks, spoke in Melbourne.

In New Zealand, there were marches and rallies in the main centres of Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch involving around 2,000 people. In the New Zealand capital, Wellington, 300-400 people marched through the central business district to the Cenotaph, near the parliament buildings, accompanied by drumming and a brass band. The lead banner read "Keep NZ out of George Bush's wars."

In Japan, an estimated 120,000 took part in protests, including two rallies in Tokyo that drew 30,000 people each and two in Osaka that each attracted 10,000. In Tokyo, some participants wore masks painted to look like skulls, and waved placards reading "Drop Bush, Not Bombs!" Others chanted "Get the Japanese Self-Defence Forces out of Iraq!" Japan has 250 ground troops in southern Iraq on a mission that could eventually involve up to 1,000 personnel.

In Hong Kong, about 100 demonstrators marched to the US Consulate General, chanting slogans such as "Just peace, not war" and "Stop the war in the Middle East, for justice for peace."

In the Philippines, around 500 protesters clashed with riot police as they tried to push their way to the US embassy. The demonstrators, opposing what they called "The Coalition of Liars," hurled stones at security personnel, who responded with water cannon. The previous day, a rally urging the government to withdraw forces from Iraq was held by the Bayan Muna (Nation First) party at the Quezon City Memorial Circle in Manila.

In South Korea, thousands took part in rallies across the nation that combined opposition to the war in Iraq with opposition to the impeachment of President Roh Moo-hyun. In Seoul, the rallies mobilised tens of thousands, while smaller rallies took place in Taegu, Busan and Kwangju.

In Pakistan, anti-war demonstrators staged rallies in 20 cities, demanding the immediate withdrawal of US and foreign troops from Iraq. About 2,000 protestors gathered in the eastern city of Lahore, chanting "Americans get out of Iraq and Afghanistan" and "Foreign troops leave Iraq."

In India, activists attacked a US bank. About 10 people barged into

Citibank in Cochin in the southern Indian state of Kerala, damaging computers and windows with iron rods wrapped in newspaper. They shouted slogans such as "Down with US imperialism!" before running away.

In Kashmir, about 700 people marched through Srinagar, chanting "Americans, quit Iraq."

In Dhaka, 100 activists staged rallies demanding that the Bangladeshi government not hold talks with US Ambassador Harry Thomas.

Hundreds of demonstrators took to the streets of Middle Eastern capitals to denounce the war, although in Iraq itself there were no public demonstrations for or against the war. The previous evening, however, Iraqi Sunnis and Shiites staged joint anti-US protests calling for an end to the US occupation of their country. Up to 3,000 took part in a peaceful march after weekly midday prayers, saying they were opposed to the US military presence in Iraq as well as to the deposed regime of Saddam Hussein.

"No to Saddam. No to the Americans. Yes to Islam," the worshippers chanted before leaving the Kazimiya mosque, which is home to the mausoleum of Imam Mussa al-Kazem and is the holiest Shiite shrine in Baghdad. They headed for the neighborhood of Azamiya across the Tigris River to link up with Sunni protesters gathered outside one of their mosques. They united together, holding up placards in Arabic and English denouncing "American terrorism," calling for an "end to destruction" in Iraq and condemning the indiscriminate firing of US troops on Iraqis.

On the Occupied West Bank, five Palestinians were injured on Friday after Israeli Defence Forces fired rubber bullets at them during demonstrations against the West Bank separation fence near Modi'in. Israeli and foreign protesters took part in the demonstration near the village of Hirbata, and some 500 people protested along the fence route.

Between 2,000 and 3,000 people gathered in Egypt's capital, Cairo. Protestors at the Tahrir Square carried banners ridiculing the US and Britain for failing to find weapons of mass destruction. One banner in English read "No WMD, but 20,000 Iraqi civilians killed...this is Bush's democracy." Another read "Inshallah, Mr. Bush and Mr. Blair will follow Mr. Aznar." Some chanted in Arabic "Baghdad stand strong, make America miserable."

At least 5,000 riot police surrounded the protest, which denounced the Arab regimes for failing to oppose the war. Protesters carried a coffin draped in black cloth with the inscription "Here lie the Arab governments."

The demonstration, organised by a group calling itself "The International Campaign Against the Zio-American Occupation," urged support for the Palestinian struggle against the Israeli occupation.



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