



PHOTO: AFP
Palestinian children hold torches during a vigil in support of Iraq at the Unknown Soldier's Garden in Gaza City March 29. Some 200 children took part in the demonstration against the US-led war against Iraq which began March 20.

Protests sweep globe

AFP, Jakarta

A fresh wave of demonstrations against the US-led war on Iraq kicked off in Asia on Sunday, with the Muslims and Christians of Jakarta marching side by side to oppose the continuing conflict.

As hundreds of thousands rallied in Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation, China gingerly allowed its first anti-war protests and Europe geared up for another day of pacifist action.

About 200,000 people, many of them women with children, marched through Jakarta in the country's biggest protest to date against the 11-day-old war to topple Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

The protestors, many of them Muslims in white dress, gathered in a sprawling city square facing the US embassy, guarded by police wielding batons and shields.

Several Christian youth groups added their weight to the protes, and their presence was acknowledged by the main speakers.

Crowd estimates varied. Police put the number of participants at around 200,000, while the organisers said more than three million people showed up.

One group of protestors held up a strip of green cloth the length of a

football pitch, inscribed with "Stop the massacre in Iraq". Other people crowded round to write their names on the banner.

The organisers -- a coalition of Muslim groups including some of the country's most influential religious bodies -- dubbed the gathering a rally of "one million believers".

Jakarta is a vocal critic of the war on Iraq and has appealed for an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council to call a halt to the invasion.

China on Sunday allowed its first open protests against the war in Iraq. For a few moments the Beijing authorities wound up with more spontaneity than they could handle and responded with arrests.

While two small-scale, carefully controlled protests early in the day went ahead calmly, a third in the afternoon came close to spinning out of control.

Several arrests were made when dozens of protesters, mostly students, left the capital's Chaoyang Park, where the authorities had confined them to a small demonstration far from public view.

One student repeatedly defied police orders to stop unfolding a green and red banner reading "Give Peace a Chance" in front of rolling TV cameras.

Earlier, about 100 students had

gathered at Beijing's University campus, under a red banner reading "Respect life, oppose war", while about 200 foreigners rallied in a park in Beijing's embassy district, later marching past the US ambassador's residence.

China is the only major country in the world where the government has publicly declared its opposition to the war but where no mass demonstrations have been allowed to take place.

In Seoul, some 20,000 union activists carrying anti-US and anti-war placards rallied near the National Assembly to oppose the dispatch of 700 non-combatant South Korean troops to Iraq.

A day earlier, groups of protestors had burned the US flag and scuffled with riot police after marching on the US embassy in Seoul to protest at their government's support for Washington.

Spain's first peace marches of the day kicked off in the capital, where some 2,000 people turned out despite pouring rain to voice their tireless opposition to the government's support for the US-led war.

The protestors were set to march on a military base some 10 kilometres (six miles) away, made available to the United States to use during the war on Iraq. Similar actions were planned at least five other Spanish air bases.

The big gun takes a big shot at peace

NOAM CHOMSKY

If anything is obvious from the history of warfare, it's that very little can be predicted.

In Iraq, the most awesome military force in human history has attacked a much weaker country, an enormous disparity of force.

It will be some time before even preliminary assessments of the consequences can be made. Every effort must be dedicated to minimising the harm, and to providing the Iraqi people with the huge resources required for them to rebuild their society, post-Saddam - in their own way - not as dictated by foreign rulers.

There is no reason to doubt the near-universal judgement the war in Iraq will only increase the threat of terrorism and the development and use of weapons of mass destruction, for revenge or deterrence.

In Iraq, the Bush Administration is pursuing an "imperial ambition" that is, rightly, frightening the world and turning the United States into an international pariah.

The avowed intent of current US policy is to assert a military power that is supreme in the world and beyond challenge. US preventative wars may be fought at will; preven-

tative, not pre-emptive. Whatever the justifications for pre-emptive war might sometimes be, they do not hold for the very different category of preventative war; the use of force to eliminate a contrived threat.

That policy opens the way to protracted struggle between the United States and its enemies, some of them created by violence and aggression and not just in the Middle East. In that regard, the US attack on Iraq is an answer to Osama bin Laden's prayers.

For the world the stakes of the war and its aftermath almost couldn't be higher. To select just one of many possibilities, destabilisation in Pakistan could lead to a turnover of "loose nukes" to the global network of terrorist groups, which may well be invigorated by the invasion and military occupation of Iraq. Other possibilities, no less grim, are easy to conjure up.

Yet the outlook for more benign outcomes isn't hopeless, starting with the world's support for the victims of war and murderous sanctions in Iraq.

A promising sign is that opposition to the invasion has been entirely without precedent.

By contrast, 41 years ago this month, when the Kennedy administration announced that US pilots were bombing and strafing in

Vietnam, protest was almost nonexistent. It did not reach any meaningful level for several years.

Today there is large-scale, anti-war protest all over the world. The peace movement acted forcefully even before the new Iraq war started.

That reflects a steady increase over these years in unwillingness to tolerate aggression and atrocities, one of many such changes worldwide. The activist movements of the past 40 years have had a civilising effect.

By now, the only way for the United States to attack a much weaker enemy is to construct a huge propaganda offensive depicting it as the ultimate evil, or even as a threat to our very survival. That was Washington's scenario for Iraq.

A large part of the opposition to Bush's war is based on recognition that Iraq is only a special case of the "imperial ambition" declared forcefully in last September's National Security Strategy.

For perspective on our current situation, it may be useful to attend to very recent history. Last October the nature of threats to peace was dramatically underscored at the summit meeting in Havana on the 40th anniversary of the Cuban missile crisis, attended by key participants from Cuba, Russia and

the US.

US terrorist attacks against Cuba began shortly after Castro took power, and were sharply escalated by Kennedy, right up to the missile crisis and beyond.

The new discoveries demonstrate with brilliant clarity the terrible and unanticipated risks of attacks on a "much weaker enemy" aimed at "regime change", risks that could doom us all.

The US is forging new and dangerous paths over near-unanimous world opposition.

There are two ways for Washington to respond to the threats that are, in part, engendered by its actions and startling proclamations.

One way is to try to alleviate the threats by paying some attention to legitimate grievances, and by agreeing to become a civilised member of a world community, with some respect for world order and its institutions.

The other way is to construct even more awesome engines of destruction and domination, so any perceived challenge, however remote, can be crushed, provoking new and greater challenges.

Noam Chomsky is a political activist and professor of linguistics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and author.

'Ground attack not likely to begin until mid-April'

AFP, London

The battle to take Baghdad will require sizeable reinforcements of US and British troops and will not begin until mid-April, a top British expert in war studies told AFP this week.

Sir Timothy Garden, of London's King's College, predicted that British and US forces would probably now reduce their speed of advance and would need a minimum extra 100,000 troops before any ground attack on Baghdad could be launched.

"It seems to me now that (the reinforcement of troops) is going to be quite slow and it's going to be mid-April before it arrives. And they're probably going to have to wait until then before they think about doing whatever they think to do in Baghdad," he said.

"It seems to me your only way of (taking Baghdad) is by progressively taking the city bit by bit and securing it, using infantry... that is a very intensive process with a high casualty rate on both sides. I don't see any other way."

Garden said the military strategy in the US-led war so far had

been "a bit suspect" and it "would have been better to start with a larger force".

"Many people in the military expressed surprise at the small ground forces that were being sent over (to Iraq)," Garden said.

"The bold move, the fast advance of the combat forces, far faster than we've ever seen before... has left them with this problem of thin supply lines along the roads."

"You've got the problem of defending the roads. You can't rely on the fact that they'll be safe," Garden said.

"The military progress has been astonishing in the short time we are talking about but that does not necessarily mean that is wise."

The war strategy of US President George W. Bush's administration has come in for growing criticism in the media.

Some critics have charged that war planners simply did not deploy troops in numbers adequate to fulfill the mission from the start, even as the military brass prepares to more than double the current 90,000-strong US ground force to 210,000 soldiers.

Rumsfeld ignored Pentagon advice: Report

REUTERS, Washington

Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld repeatedly rejected advice from Pentagon planners that substantially more troops and armour would be needed to fight a war in Iraq, New Yorker Magazine reported.

In an article for its April 7 edition, which goes on sale on Monday, the weekly said Rumsfeld insisted at least six times in the run-up to the conflict that the proposed number of ground troops be sharply reduced and got his way.

"He thought he knew better. He was the decision-maker at every turn," the article quoted an unidentified senior Pentagon planner as saying. "This is the mess Rummy put himself in because he didn't want a heavy footprint on the ground."

It also said Rumsfeld had overruled advice from war commander Gen. Tommy Franks to delay the invasion until troops denied access through Turkey could be brought in by another route and miscalculated the level of Iraqi resistance.

"They've got no resources. He was so focused on proving his point



PHOTO: AFP

Rumsfeld under fire

-- that the Iraqis were going to fall apart," the article, by veteran journalist Seymour Hersh, cited an unnamed former high-level intelligence official as saying.

A spokesman at the Pentagon declined to comment on the article.

Rumsfeld is known to have a difficult relationship with the Army's upper echelons while he commands strong loyalty from US special operations forces, a key component in the war.

US reinforces with heavy armour, infantry

AFP, As-Saliyah

The United States is deploying its heaviest and most hi-tech divisions to Iraq amid mounting criticism that the initial attack lacked the shock and power to bring a quick end to the war.

Deployment orders dating back to January, but as recently as early March, should see another 120,000 US troops pour into Iraq in the weeks ahead, in addition to the 90,000 who opened the battle 10 days ago.

The first to arrive in Kuwait will be the 4th Infantry Division (4ID), the US Army's first fully digitised division with the latest versions of Abrams tanks, Bradley Fighting Vehicles and Apache Longbow attack helicopters.

The 4ID will be followed by the 1st Armoured Division, the 1st Cavalry Division and the 2nd and 3rd Armoured Cavalry Regiments - heavy tank formations which could strike against the Soviet-built tanks of Iraq's Republican Guard defending Baghdad.

The deployments -- which the White House insists were ordered before the conflict began -- come as senior commanders concede the war is not going according to plan and may be longer than expected.

"The enemy we're fighting is different from the one we'd war-gamed against," the army's senior ground commander in Iraq, Lieutenant General William Wallace, told The Washington Post.

Diehard guerrillas and soldiers

disguised as civilians have harassed US supply lines and slowed the advance to Baghdad, and there have been no mass surrenders or popular uprisings as the Pentagon had hoped.

"The Bush administration misread the Iraqis," the New York Times said last week, criticizing what it described as a war plan that counted on the Iraqi defence collapsing everywhere except Baghdad.

The 4ID may not be ready to enter the battle for more than a week, but despite the ominous news from the front the troops said they were eager to prove the combat effectiveness of their new technology.

"The morale here remains quite high. We've been watching events unfold on the news like everybody else and we're eager to get over there and help out our brothers in arms," said Captain Russell Corwin, an artillery officer.

"There are no warmongers here, but if it's going to happen, we want to be there because we are confident in ourselves, in our equipment, and in our leadership."

The division's task force -- amounting to some 30,000 personnel -- was due to invade Iraq from Turkey in the north, but those plans have been shelved by Turkey's anti-war parliament.

A map of northern Iraq, complete with arrows marking proposed lines of advance, hung in the division headquarters at Fort Hood back in the United States only two weeks ago.



PHOTO: AFP

An A-10 Warthog receives a salute from a ground crew member as it lands at a forward air base in the southern Iraqi desert. US Air Force special operations Tanker, Air Lift Control Element (TALCE) flights began landing late 27 March to begin the process of re-activating the base for allied forces and will be a major logistical and combat base for the entire war theater.