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HEADLINE: A cry for peace joins crowds in Washington, across U.S. and around the world

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DATELINE: WASHINGTON

BODY:

From Bahrain to Brazil and at a national rally in Washington, protesters worldwide are shouting "No" to U.S. war plans for Iraq.

Buses rolled into Washington from many parts of the country, delivering thousands for a weekend of dissent that organizers promised would be peaceful, and nature conspired to make cold.

A rally outside the Capitol on Saturday, followed by a march to a naval yard, anchored demonstrations from coast to coast and abroad. President Bush was at Camp David, Md., for the weekend. Demonstrators hoped the protest blitz and more ahead would win over an American public that is unsettled by the prospect of an Iraq war yet supportive of Bush's leadership.

"Bush has said that he intends to launch a pre-emptive war and now he's facing the most formidable obstacle, which is a pre-emptive anti-war movement," Mara Verheyden-Hilliard, from Partnership for Civil Justice, said Friday.

Few of the nuances in U.S. public opinion were on display among protest organizers.

"I hardly see a threat from Iraq," said Rev. Graylan Hagler, pastor of Washington's Plymouth Congregational Church. "The threat is the United States being a bully, the bully on the playground."

Similar sentiments were expressed in many languages in a series of worldwide protests Friday, some tied to the Saturday rallies in U.S. cities and other foreign capitals.

In Bahrain, a U.S. ally in the Arab world and home to the Fifth Fleet, more than 2,000 people marched in the capital, yelling "**No**" to war with Iraq.

More than 3,000 Palestinians marched in support of Saddam Hussein in Gaza City, filling the narrow streets with fluttering Iraqi flags and pictures of the Iraqi leader. Some chanted, "Our beloved Saddam, strike Tel Aviv," reviving a slogan from the 1991 Gulf War.

In Sao Paulo, Brazil, several hundred demonstrators chanted slogans in front of the American consulate and burned a U.S. flag painted with a swastika. Leftists and student

groups also burned a flag outside the U.S. Embassy in Buenos Aires.

In London, the group Voices in the Wilderness auctioned off postcards, wallets, clothes and other goods illegally exported out of Iraq to highlight the "disastrous results" sanctions have had on that country.

German demonstrators planned to gather Saturday in Heidelberg, in front of the European headquarters of the U.S. Army, as well as in Hamburg and Cologne. A protest was also planned in Brussels, headquarters to NATO.

In the United States, a major demonstration was organized in San Francisco as well as Washington, and activists were gathering in many other states for vigils, marches and rallies of varying sizes.

But with war perhaps close, thousands from far away made an unusual effort to come to Washington. In Minnesota, protesters in three cities boarded buses for a 24-hour ride to the capital.

Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak saw off nearly 200 people leaving on five buses. "True patriotism is really what you're all about," Rybak told them. "Thank you for doing this and peace to all of you."

The group International Answer organized the national rally, probably the largest in Washington since crowds in the high tens of thousands demonstrated against an Iraq war in October.

"We will have hundreds of thousands in Washington, San Francisco and elsewhere," predicted spokesman Brian Becker.

But with forecast temperatures in the mid-20s, organizers told speakers to limit remarks to two minutes each so people wouldn't be left stomping their feet in the cold too long.

Police said they were ready to keep order and had been assured that the main rally and march, from the Mall, around the Capitol, past Marine barracks and to the Washington Navy Yard, would be peaceful.

Police issued several permits to the demonstrators, the largest for 30,000 people. On Sunday, a small group planned to march to the White House and promised nonviolent civil disobedience - meaning some expected to get arrested.

While Bush isn't around for the protests, spokesman Ari Fleischer said the president is untroubled by them.

"I think the president welcomes the fact that we are a democracy and people in the United States, unlike Iraq, are free to protest and to make their case known," Fleischer said.

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