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HEADLINE: Protesters against Iraq war to hold demonstrations worldwide

BODY:

Groups opposed to a looming US-led war on Iraq have called for protests around the world at the weekend.

Marches are expected in the United States and Latin America, western Europe, Russia, Japan and Egypt, among other venues.

In Japan, some 10,000 people were expected to march through central Tokyo on Saturday at the urging of a coalition of 30 groups called Peace Boat. Peace Boat said that while Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's regime was dictatorial, "it does not justify the American government staging a military attack on the country and its people."

In the United States, anti-war protests were due in Washington and San Francisco on Saturday, with organizers expressing hopes for a big turn-out.

Europe will also see demonstrations, notably in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and Spain on the weekend.

Russia's Communist Party has organised a rally in front of the US embassy in Moscow on Saturday, and ultranationalist deputy Vladimir Zhirinovskiy is to lead another similar protest on Sunday in Pushkin Square.

In the Egyptian capital Cairo, several dozen women protestors held a sit-in outside the US embassy on Friday to voice their opposition to any war against Iraq.

Outside the US embassy in Manila, angry Filipinos denounced Washington for what they call its "war of aggression".

They were held back by several rows of riot police, but the protest remained peaceful.

Carrying signs reading "no blood for oil", the protestors say innocent people will suffer if a war breaks out.

They say America's real motive behind attacking Iraq would be to gain access to oil.

Anti-American sentiment rang loud and clear on the streets of Gaza City as Palestinians gathered to show their support for Iraq.

Hundreds turned out to protest the US-led threat of military action.

Many there believe a strike on Iraq would be a strike on all Arab nations.

"The whole of Arab nations are one unit and they are willing to defend themselves against

any American attack against Iraq. We will defend ourselves. We will defend our culture," said Ismail Abu Shanab, a Hamas leader.

In Bahrain, anti-American feelings were evident as 2,000 Bahraini's marched through their capital calling for all US forces to be expelled from the kingdom.

Bahrain is home to the US Fifth fleet and hosts about a thousand American military personnel.

Under the banner "**No War** for Oil", the protestors gathered outside a United Nations building and called on the UN not to allow an attack on Iraq.

Demonstrations are planned in other countries in the coming weeks, including one on February 15 in Britain and another on February 23 in Malaysia.

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