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## February 15, 2003: The World Says No to War

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### **A Historic Day of Worldwide Antiwar Action**

On February 15, 2003, various slogans—“Not in my name!” “No war on Iraq!” “Don’t attack Iraq!” “No blood for oil!” “The world says no to war!”—were the unifying mantras that echoed on the streets of more than six hundred cities throughout the world, on the marching cadence of ten to fifteen million protesters. Diehard activists shared the streets with citizens of all kinds: students, teenagers, young couples with children, but also housewives, doctors, university professors and senior citizens (Simonson 2003). February 15 was the day the world stood up against an imminent United States-led invasion of Iraq in a simultaneous flood of protest demonstrations. Taken together, these were the largest and most momentous transnational antiwar protests in human history (Epstein 2003, 109), and that on one single day. Some of the protests were small and only local marches, in which a few neighbors sided with each other; others were national protest demonstrations of exceptional size and showing unparalleled internal diversity. But in all of them, the participants showed their aversion of the possibility of war. In the United States, the February 15 protests were the largest antiwar demonstrations since those against the war in Vietnam; in Europe they largely surpassed the 1991 Gulf War protests. In many countries, they even outshone the early 1980s demonstrations against the deployment of NATO cruise and Pershing II missiles in Europe, which were then considered to have “dwarfed all previous protest movements in Western Europe in the post-war period” and were believed to have engendered a “wave of political protest unprecedented” (Rochon 1988, xvi, 3). Apart from the West, protests were organized in

countries across all other continents (e.g., Lebanon, Syria, and Israel; Japan, Malaysia, Thailand, South Korea; South Africa, Tunisia, and many more), though in most cases turnouts were not half as spectacular. The largest non-Western demonstration was probably the one in Syria, where some hundred thousand people hit the streets; probably the smallest one took place in Antarctica, where a group of scientists held a rally at their observation station. The only region in the world where peace voices were silent was mainland China. Altogether, friend and foe, especially in the Western world, were surprised by the number of protests and protesters and by the diversity of the people at these demonstrations. Social movement scholars and other observers were startled by the transnational coordination: at first sight the different protesters were driven by the same ideological beliefs, in a surge of demonstrations that was alike concerning protest trigger, issue, and target. And the protests' timing and action repertoire were similar, as well and, with only a single exception—in Athens and Thessaloniki in Greece—peaceful. A few days after the demonstrations, many commentators, following the *New York Times's* Patrick Tyler (2003), referred to them as the expression of a new “superpower.” Since February 15 there was talk of “two superpowers on the planet: the United States and World public opinion” (Cortright 2004, xi).

This chapter describes the history, the political context, the setup and coordination as well as the mobilization levels of the February 15 protest day. The worldwide coordinated character of the protest makes scrutinizing the organizational backbone most relevant: it's natural to ask how so many people at a time were mobilized in these protests when the international peace movements appeared to have reached a low since the mobilizations against the Gulf War in 1991? How did their transnational coordination take place? The chapter also accounts for the size of the protest by detailing how many protests took place in how many countries.

### **War Talk: September 11, the Axis of Evil, and the Bombing of Baghdad**

The Gulf region has a turbulent history, and the roots of the 2003 Iraq conflict can be traced back for many years (see Figure 1.1 for a summary timeline). The Iran-Iraq war had swept the region between 1973 and 1988. After a mere two years' breathing space, the Iraqi regime invaded the Emirate of Kuwait for annexation, claiming that this oil-rich region was a former Iraqi province. By mid January 1991, the international community, led by the United States and backed by the United Nations, launched the military operation “Desert Storm” to set Kuwait free. This military confrontation would last no longer than forty days. The Iraqi oil export was put under a severe embargo and restricted by the “oil for food” programs; Iraq also had to allow

UN inspectors to search for weapons of mass destruction. For the next ten years, a U.S.-led military base kept control over the region and of the Iraqi no-fly zones in which it would sporadically carry out bombardments.

On November 31, 1998, U.S. president Clinton signed the Iraq Liberation Act. Because of several military maneuvers by the Iraqi army, and because the Iraqi regime had ceased all cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency and UN weapon inspectors, U.S. Congress wrote the act to “support a transition to democracy in Iraq” through and after the “replacement of the Saddam Hussein regime” (Congress 1998). The act was made concrete through “Operation Desert Fox,” led by then-president Clinton in mid-December 1998, which was intended to “decrease the Iraqi capacity to manufacture massive weapons of mass destruction” and essentially to “overthrow the Iraqi regime.” The plans to get rid of Saddam Hussein were thus not intrinsically linked to the Bush administration, as would later be regularly assumed, but can be traced to actions years earlier.

On September 11, 2001, several airplanes crashed into the New York World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon, resulting in the death of thousands of U.S. civilians. Although these attacks were attributed to (and later claimed by) Osama bin Laden, the American government also connected them to Saddam Hussein and his Iraqi regime. On October 7, 2001, a U.S.-led coalition army invaded Afghanistan for the search for Osama Bin Laden and to bring down the Taliban oppression. This war officially ended by mid-November 2001. In his State of the Union address of January 29, 2002, U.S. president George W. Bush used the expression “Axis of Evil.” He pointed to three other countries that were presumed to be sponsoring terrorist development and activities and needed to be monitored with the utmost vigilance: North Korea, Iran and Iraq. The threat they posed was depicted as imminent and immediate: “Time is not on our side,” Bush said. “I will not wait on events, while dangers gather. I will not stand by as perils draw closer and closer” (Bush 2002). The day after the one-year September 11 commemoration events, in a dossier titled “A Decade of Lies and Deceit,” Bush addressed a request to the UN Security Council for the authorization of the removal of Iraq’s president Saddam Hussein. Barely two weeks after that, UK prime minister Tony Blair presented a report—then suspected and later proven to be exaggerated—on the Iraqi arsenal of chemical and biological weapons and Saddam Hussein’s ability to launch such weapons within forty-five minutes. By the end of September 2002, the U.S. and British forces had resumed the first bombing of the Iraqi no-fly zones.

In October 2002, U.S. Congress adopted a resolution authorizing an attack on Iraq. The war preparations went full-speed ahead. Meanwhile, the

Date	Politics timeline	Protest timeline
December 1998	Operation Desert Fox, led by U.S. president Clinton.	
September 11, 2001	Terrorist attacks on World Trade Center and Pentagon.	
October 7, 2001	Invasion of Afghanistan.	
January 29, 2002	U.S. president Bush launches expression "Axis of Evil," pointing at North Korea, Iran, and Iraq as threats to world peace.	
September 12, 2002	U.S. address "A Decade of Lies and Deceit" to United Nations for removal of Saddam Hussein.	
September 24, 2002	UK prime minister Tony Blair presents report on Iraqi weapon arsenal.	
September 26, 2002	First bombings in Iraq no-fly zone. Condemned by Russia.	
October 2, 2002	U.S. Congress adopts resolution authorizing attack on Iraq.	
October 5–6, 2002		European Social Forum preparatory meeting in Barcelona.
October 16, 2002	Saddam Hussein reelected with 100 percent majority.	
October 17, 2002	Start of UN Security Council debate on Iraq.	
October 25, 2002		United for Peace and Justice Umbrella Organization is founded.
October 26, 2002		First antiwar protests with transnational traits, in United States and Europe. Set up by ANSWER Coalition.
November 7–10, 2002		European Social Forum in Florence. Official antiwar call issued. First major European antiwar demonstration.
November 8, 2002	UN Security Council unanimously approves Resolution 1441.	
November 16, 2002	First armed skirmishes between U.S. and UK and Iraqi troops. First civilian casualties.	
December 7, 2002	Iraq delivers 13,000-page document on weapon arsenal.	

Date	Politics timeline	Protest timeline
December 15, 2002		European Social Forum interim meeting in Copenhagen. Antiwar call reissued. Foundation of Platform against War on Iraq.
January 18, 2003		Second ANSWER Coalition U.S. protests coincide with small protests in Europe.
January 23–27, 2003		World Social Forum in Porto Allegre. Special workshop for planning February 15 protests.
January 27, 2003	Chief UN inspector Blix demands more Iraqi cooperation.	
January 30, 2003	Joint statement by eight European country leaders to support war.	
February 5, 2003	U.S. minister of foreign affairs Powell presents evidence of Iraqi arsenal of weapons of mass destruction to UN Security Council.	
February 10, 2003	Belgium, France, and Germany make firm NATO stance against war.	
February 14, 2003	Blix mentions positive attitude by Iraq and says Iraq can be disarmed within months.	
February 15, 2003		Ten to fifteen million take to the streets against an imminent war in Iraq, in the largest worldwide coordinated protest event in history.
February 24, 2003	United States and United Kingdom apply for new UN resolution to justify attack of Iraq.	
March 5, 2003	Antiwar statement by Germany and Russia.	
March 7, 2003	United States, United Kingdom, and Spain give Iraq ultimatum: March 17.	
March 18, 2003	Iraq rejects ultimatum.	
March 20, 2003	Start of United States-led invasion of Iraq.	

*Figure 1.1. Political and protest timeline leading to February 15 and the Iraq War*

UN Security Council started debating a new Iraqi resolution. They agreed on the fact that Iraq had undertaken “obvious,” “severe,” “flagrant” and “unacceptable” violations of the previous Gulf War ending resolution on the national disarmament of weapons of mass destruction (Wouters and Naert 2003). The UN Security Council demanded the Iraqi government give the UN weapon inspectors free reign so they could provide an “actual, accurate and exhaustive” list of all available weapons of mass destruction, and to immediately remove all of these from Iraq. If Iraq did not acquiesce, it would have to face “serious consequences resulting from its ongoing violations” (ibid.). At the explicit request of China, Russia, and France, three permanent members of the UN Security Council, this phrase “serious consequences” replaced the provision the United States had proposed earlier, United States in which the nation proclaimed that it would use military force if Iraq violated any of the UN demands. Still concerned that this more moderate expression could clear the way for unilateral American invasion of Iraq, the three countries were very explicit: the resolution was by no means an authorization to use violence in any cases of new violations; rather, in such cases, the UN Security Council would immediately assemble to discuss further measures. After eleven days of deliberation, UN Resolution 1441 was unanimously approved on November 8, 2002. Iraq accepted it within five days, and five days later the first inspectors set foot on Iraqi soil. In the shadow of these official measures, the first armed skirmishes were already taking place between the U.S.-UK and Iraqi troops.

On December 7, 2002, in response to the UN resolution deadline, the Iraqi government delivered a thirteen-thousand-page document on its weapons arsenal. Late in January 2003, chief UN weapon inspector Hans Blix declared before the Security Council that the Iraqi cooperation could be augmented. On January 30, the leaders of eight European countries issued a war-supporting statement to newspapers around the world:

The Iraqi regime and its weapons of mass destruction represent a clear threat to world security. This danger has been explicitly recognised by the U.N. All of us are bound by Security Council Resolution 1441, which was adopted unanimously. . . . In doing so, we sent a clear, firm and unequivocal message that we would rid the world of the danger posed by Saddam Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction. We must remain united in insisting that his regime be disarmed. . . . The combination of weapons of mass destruction and terrorism is a threat of incalculable consequences. It is one at which all of us should feel concerned. Resolution 1441 is Saddam Hussein’s last chance to disarm using peaceful means.

The eight countries justified their cooperation and urged others to join them, referring to shared values proper to all countries in the Western world; shared fears and threats, based on the September 11 terrorist attacks; an historic debt toward the United States that has liberated the world from communism and Nazism; the fear for weapons of mass destruction, and the international justification of an attack on Iraq through the UN Security Council.

Six days later, on February 5, 2003, U.S. minister of foreign affairs Colin Powell presented new alleged evidence to the UN Security Council about Iraq's disposal of weapons of mass destruction and of the link between Iraq and al-Qaeda. Five days after this speech, France and Belgium, with Germany's support, ratified their antiwar stance by using their NATO veto against what they considered the premature protection of Turkey. The alliance expected that Turkey would become involved in the war if Iraq was attacked and wanted to start preparing for this. France and Belgium, though believed a diplomatic solution was still possible for the Iraq crisis and, according to Belgian minister of foreign affairs Louis Michel, complying with a NATO decision to prepare for war in Turkey would make them "get stuck in war logic and the message will be given that it is too late for diplomatic initiatives" (Beirlant 2003). France, Belgium, and Germany wanted to at least await the new weapon inspectors' report to be presented in the UN Security Council on Friday, February 14. This day, on the eve of the February 15 protests, Hans Blix presented a much more mixed evaluation than he had previously, stating that Iraq had undertaken several positive cooperative steps and that a total disarmament of weapons of mass destruction would be possible within a few months.

In spite of the increasing Iraqi cooperation and in the face of the immense popular protest around the globe on February 15, governments from the United States, United Kingdom, and Spain handed in a new motion for resolution in the UN Security Council on February 24, arguing that Iraq had not seized its final opportunity for disarmament and that military confrontation was needed and justified. However, China, France, and Russia did not support the new resolution, and the latter two countries were even prepared to veto it. The resolution could not get approval without a two-third majority, for which none of the five permanent members could have used its veto. But the war machinery was already in motion. The United States set up a search for a "moral majority": when nine of the fifteen Security Council members supported the proposal, it would be backed by a broad consensus within the Council, thus morally justifying war. Once again, the United States and its allies were turned down, leading the United States to abandon the path of a new UN resolution. On March 17, the United States,

Spain, and the United Kingdom agreed that Resolution 1441 provided sufficient justification for an armed intervention. On March 20, 2003, supported by the “Coalition of the Willing” the United States gave the starting shot for the attack on Iraq.<sup>1</sup>

### **Peace Talk: Organizing against War in Iraq**

By the time war was becoming unavoidable, peace activists and organizations started joining their forces to set up large, worldwide mobilizations. The enormous success of these actions would surprise not only commentators and politicians but, in no small amount, the activists and organizers themselves:

It was clear by this time [late January 2003] that our movement had steadily gained momentum. Despite our successes however, of which we were all extremely proud, not even the most optimistic activists were prepared for what we saw on February 15. It was a day that we will never forget. In a worldwide show of unity and solidarity with the Iraqi people, we took to the streets in the millions, demanding an end to the Bush administration's war plans . . . that this administration is hell-bent for a war. The build-up in the Gulf during these days of demonstrations has been unceasing. I still expect that war to come, and soon. Nonetheless, I find myself amazed by the variegated mass of humanity that turned out yesterday. It felt wonderful. A mass truly, but each part of it, each individually made sign and human gesture of it, spoke to its deeply spontaneous nature. (Engelhardt 2003)

The gradual buildup toward an Iraq war was paralleled by growing antiwar sentiments in all parts of the world and by a gradual organization of and mobilization for protest against the idea of an upcoming war. Throughout the entire inception of war, dissident voices were heard. One might ask how these protests fit in the war race. Bearing in mind the astonishment of politicians, commentators, and organizers about the scale of the protests, the key question is: Where did these protests come from, and how were they set up?

Following an initial agreement made in a preparatory meeting in Barcelona in early October 2002, the idea to set up an international day of demonstrations against an impending war was first publicly voiced at the first European Social Forum in Florence, Italy, in November 2002. As this was a European meeting, the idea originally remained confined to Europe. In Florence, approximately forty thousand individuals and some six hundred organizations were present: trade unions as well as environmental, global justice, and peace organizations, among others. The forum was a four-day event set up for the “democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences, and planning of effective action among entities and



movements of civil society that are engaged in building a planetary society centered on the human being” (Simonson 2003). The Florence European Social Forum issued a joint antiwar call to “all citizens of Europe” to “start organizing enormous anti-war demonstrations in every capital on February 15.”

#### Anti-war call

To all citizens of Europe

Together we can stop this war! We, the European social movements are fighting for social rights and social justice, for democracy and against all forms of oppression.

We stand for a world of diversity, freedom and mutual respect.

We believe this war, whether it has UN backing or not, will be a catastrophe for the people of Iraq—already suffering because of the embargo and the Saddam Hussein regime—and for people across the Middle East. It should be opposed by everyone who believes in democratic, political solutions to international conflicts because it will be a war with the potential to lead to global disaster.

There is a massive opposition to war in every country of Europe. Hundreds of thousands have already mobilized for peace.

We call on the movements and citizens of Europe to start continent-wide resistance to war, and to

1. organising massive opposition to an attack on Iraq starting now
2. if war starts, to protest and organise actions immediately and call for national demonstrations the next Saturday
3. to start organising enormous anti-war demonstrations in every capital on February 15.

We can stop this war (European Social Forum 2002a)

The forum not only launched a call for future demonstrations, it also staged one of the first large antiwar demonstrations. On November 9, 2002, in the heart of Florence, between five hundred thousand and 1 million people (according to police estimates) took to the streets to oppose war (Simonson 2003). This was the first large European protest against war on Iraq and a significant precursor of what would follow. Chris Nineham from the UK Stop the War Coalition said of the European Social Forum and its antiwar position:

At the last preparatory meeting in Barcelona, we agreed that the main slogan of the demonstration in Florence would be “Don’t Attack Iraq” and that the meeting would issue a call for cross-continent anti-war action. These were controversial decisions. They risked putting the forum on collision

course with governments and social democrat organizations across Europe. But they were decisively correct. When word got out that the demonstration at Florence would focus on stopping the war, the European Social Forum became a magnet to activists. 1,300 people signed up to come from Barcelona alone in the three weeks before the forum. People were deeply relieved that such a mainstream project conceived on such a grand scale was to take a principle stand on the big issue. It was a stand that had eluded most politicians, and it showed that the European Social Forum was going to be something different, something honest, something that would make a difference. (Nineham 2002)

But the European Social Forum was not the first to set up internationally coordinated protest against war: between the Barcelona preparatory meeting and the Florence Social Forum, on October 26, 2002, the first internationally coinciding protests against an eventual war took place. These were the initial signs of the transnational efforts made by the antiwar campaign. Large manifestations in the United States with some two hundred thousand people hitting the streets were paralleled by more modest protests in Europe: twenty thousand in Berlin, ten thousand in Amsterdam, thirty thousand in Madrid. This first protest wave was coordinated by the U.S.-based International ANSWER (Act Now to Stop War and End Racism) Coalition, rooted in the left-wing Workers World Party (Corrigh 2004, 5). ANSWER unites a broad spectrum of players in civil society, “including traditional peace groups, students, global justice and anti-racist activists, and mainstream labor, environmental, civil rights and women’s organizations” (Simonson 2003, 7). Meanwhile, other organizations in the United States had also started discussing the coordination of future events. A new umbrella organization, “United for Peace and Justice,” was formed to take up the coordination role. It was established before the October 26, 2002, protests and consisted of more than fifty organizations: traditional peace organizations; new, Internet-based peace groups (e.g., MoveOn.org); global justice groups (e.g., Global Exchange) and major constituency organizations (e.g., National Organization for Women) (Corrigh 2004, 14). This new umbrella organization would become the moderate pillar of the U.S. peace movement, and the catalyst for the February 15 protests on U.S. soil.

In Europe, one month after the European Social Forum in Florence, an interim preparatory meeting took place in Copenhagen in December 2002. Present were delegates from peace movements from all over Europe: Denmark, Greece, Macedonia, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Belgium, Italy, and Switzerland. These were joined by a delegation

from the Philippine peace movement and one from the U.S. network United for Peace and Justice. In retrospect, it's clear that this is where the first steps toward the future transatlantic cooperation were made (Brabander 2004). Here, the original antiwar call was further elaborated, and a platform against war on Iraq was founded.

#### Platform against war on Iraq

##### Statement of the meeting to coordinate European-wide action against war on Iraq

As agreed at the assembly of the social movements in Florence in November, activists from 11 European countries, the USA and the Philippines have come together in Copenhagen to coordinate European-wide action against war on Iraq.

We endorse the anti-war call launched at the assembly in Florence. We believe that a war on Iraq, with or without UN support, would be a disaster for the people of the Middle East and beyond.

It is clear there is majority opposition to war in almost every country in Europe and across the world. That is why this war cannot be fought in our name. This is also why we believe it is vital to build the broadest possible anti-war alliances everywhere around the demand No War on Iraq.

Our meeting showed that the movement against the war is gaining strength.

All the countries represented have called action on the 15 February.

We reinforce the decision to protest in every country immediately after war starts, to hold national protests the following Saturday and to organize coordinated mass national demonstrations in capital cities on February 15.

To this end we have decided to continue our coordination at a European level, to set up a European-wide anti-war website, and to have a common banner on each of our demonstrations demanding No War on Iraq. We are committed to spreading anti-war coordination both inside and beyond Europe, and to holding another enlarged meeting after the February 15 demo. We will continue to campaign until this war is stopped.

We urge the movements in countries not represented at our meeting to join in our initiatives. We urge every organization that opposes this war to work for a massive mobilization on February 15. Together we can stop the war. (European Social Forum 2002b)

Subsequent to the Copenhagen meeting, an intensive e-mail network was set up, connecting all European peace movements. The Europe-wide

antiwar Web site that the Copenhagen text refers to did not get off the ground; instead all national umbrella organizations and coalitions set up their own sites but they linked to one another and to one of the above-mentioned U.S. organizations listing all worldwide demonstrations, and/or to the UK Stop the War Coalition. The idea of a common banner was a success: all over Europe as well as the rest of the world, the same “Stop the War” logo would be used (albeit in different colors and different styles) on movements’ communication outlets, websites, demonstration leaflets, and banners.

On January 18, 2003, a second wave of transnational protests took place, its center again in the United States. These demonstrations were for the second time set up by the ANSWER Coalition, and they coincided with the birthday of Martin Luther King Jr., who had been murdered thirty-five years earlier. In Washington, D.C., half a million protesters marched; in San Francisco a hundred and fifty thousand took the streets. Smaller protests were organized in Belgium, the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, and many other countries around the world (Simonson 2003).

Between January 23 and 27, 2003, the European Social Forum antiwar call was further disseminated on the third World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil. The World Social Forum Secretariat had set up a workshop exclusively devoted to planning the February 15 international day of protest. With some five thousand organizations present from every corner of the globe, the call was spread throughout the world. The ANSWER Coalition was present as well. It, along with two other U.S. antiwar coalitions—Win without War and Not in My Name—would strongly support the February 15 event but would leave the role of main U.S. organizer to United for Peace and Justice, as the latter group had attended the Copenhagen meeting. This was not surprising, since organizing the February 15 actions did not begin until mid-January, and turnout still was unpredictable.

February 15, 2003, was the first time in peace movement history that so many organizations from all corners of the world joined forces on a single action day. Earlier attempts by the peace movement to merge in a transatlantic effort, more specifically in the struggle for nuclear disarmament in the 1980s and 1990s, had failed, “partly because of the external constraints and opportunities defined by different national political debates and contexts, . . . and important differences between the U.S. and European peace groups” (Cortright and Pagnucco 1997, 159).

The February 15 mobilizations benefited from two relatively new and entwined mechanisms, the dynamics of the social fora and the use of worldwide electronic communication technologies. The European and World Social Forums and the different respective preparatory meetings were the main

driving forces of the transnational coordination and mobilization. Worldwide, national peace organizations, increasingly alarmed by both the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the aggressive reaction on part of the U.S. government, had since early 2002 all been active on a national level against the invasion of Afghanistan and the idea of war with Iraq. These national organizations now had the opportunity to meet each other at the different social forums intrinsically linked with the transnational global justice movement. These forums served as the operating base for the setup of February 15. Various organizations belonging to the global justice movements started their own (trans)national mobilizing campaigns and used these different occasions to update each other on their national efforts as well as strengthen bonds with their colleagues from other countries.

These important face-to-face meetings were complemented by a second major mechanism favoring the massiveness of the February 15 protests, namely the intensive use of the Internet and e-mail circuits. All national peace movements and coalitions were linked to each other by joint mailing lists and cross-referencing each other on the Web. On an international scale, the exact same thing took place, allowing the different movements to act very fast. In some countries, like the United States and Belgium, the effective mobilization efforts actually got off the ground only by mid-January and reached full force only after February 5, when Colin Powell presented the alleged U.S. evidence of Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction (Brabander 2004). Through these new channels, established lines of movement interactions, diffusion, were supplemented with new ties, such as brokerage (Tarrow and McAdam 2003). The mechanisms of diffusion and brokerage made it possible to agree on one international day of protest, using the same slogans and banners and thus uniting all the people in the different streets into one global protest. That the transnational character of the protests was clear *before* the protests took place might have been appealing for the mobilizing campaign and might have functioned as a self-fulfilling prophecy, mobilizing people who wanted to take part in this global day of peace action.

### **Action: February 15, 2003, the World Moving for Peace**

As you watch the TV pictures of the march, ponder this: if there are 500,000 on that march, that is still less than the number of people whose death Saddam has been responsible for. If there are one million, that is still less than the number of people who died in the wars he started.

The February 15 protests were remarkable for their size. Although many observers, scholars, and politicians intuitively regarded them as an isolated event, coming out of the blue, we can now state that this was not the case

at all. In the months preceding February 15, many other events were staged to challenge the prospect of war, and many efforts were undertaken to prepare this impressive transnational manifestation. Beside their overall magnitude, the February 15 mobilizations varied across countries. Several cities were flooded by an unseen mass of protesters, whereas other protests were rather modest and not exceptional at all. Let us take a look at the mobilization levels in different countries and, in particular, at the turnout in the eight countries under study here.

Table 1.1 shows February 15 mobilizations in different countries; listed are the national organizing organizations and coalitions, turnouts, and the national mobilization levels as compared to the national populations. The list is far from complete: some accounts claim that mobilizations took place in six hundred cities, from the Danish city of Aalborg to the Spanish Zaragoza. This is only a non-exhaustive list of the largest demonstrations in some selected countries, to put the protests in the eight countries studied in this book into perspective. Many smaller and more local marches are not represented in the table, which could pose a problem in the interpretation of the U.S. turnout number, since there were activities in almost all U.S. states.<sup>2</sup>

Taking a close look at the turnout numbers, one is immediately struck by the differences. In Italy, for example, an incredible one in twenty citizens took to the streets; ten times more than in the Netherlands. Here are but a few examples of variation in turnouts.

The highest mobilization levels were found in Spain and Italy, where one in seventeen and one in twenty inhabitants joined the February 15 protests, setting participation records. In fact, the demonstration in Barcelona has been chronicled in the Guinness Book of World Records as the largest antiwar rally in human history (Guinness Book of World Records, 2003). These countries' governments were the most conspicuously in favor of the war in continental Europe.

Italy and Spain are followed by Australia and Ireland: in both of these countries, about one in forty people took to the streets. In Australia, the protest could be considered an event against the official national support for war. In Dublin, this was not at all the case: since the Irish government did not endorse war without UN backing, the Irish protest can be seen as an expression of disapproval of the position of the British government as well as a statement of support of Ireland's government. Closing the top five ranking is the United Kingdom, where 1.7 percent of the population was displaying its disapproval of war. Other massive protests occurred in Greece (1.2 percent), which did not officially support war and even had organized a summit to reconcile the differences of opinion among the European states. Portugal,

which officially supported the war and Norway, which opposed it, attained mobilization levels of 1 percent and 1.3 percent.

In many countries, the February 15 protests reached unprecedented proportions when compared to previous protests. Yet in others, previous record levels were not met. In Belgium, for example, seventy thousand took to the streets, versus the roughly three hundred thousand in 1983 that had protested the placing of the cruise and Pershing II missiles. In the Netherlands, the difference was even larger: on February 15, about 0.4 percent of the population took to the streets; the number had been ten times greater in 1983. In Germany, half a million protesters showed up, where there had been twice as many, in several protests combined, in 1983 (Rochon 1988, 5–7). The relatively low turnouts in Belgium and Germany, is not surprising, since the government opposed an imminent war and, thus, the stakes involved were lower. In the Netherlands, the official government position was pro-war, but the government was resigning at the time of the protests. The overall relatively small numbers in the United States are probably mainly due to the rally-around-the-flag effect. Many troops were already encamped in the Gulf, which lead many Americans to place support for their own troops above their disapproval of war. Also, several marches in the United States, like the one in New York City, did not have approval of city officials, rendering them less legitimate than others and possibly dangerous.

The February protests will also be remembered for their truly transnational character. In spite of all the differences among them on the national level, it is beyond doubt that, taken altogether, they were exceptional: never before had such a large-scale, global, carefully planned and coordinated day of action taken place. It is this worldwide coordination that truly shows the uniqueness of the event and distinguishes it from other worldwide simultaneous mobilizations around one unanimous theme—for example, the annually recurring worldwide May 1 demonstrations and the International Women's Day events (March 8).

To conclude, the February 15 protests were unquestionably unique. They were exceptional for their size, shared themes and shared timing, and similar action repertoires.<sup>3</sup> They were, in the eyes of many, the foretelling of a new superpower. Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida (2003) declared that the February 15 demonstrations would “go into history books as a signal for the birth of a European Public.” But what about their participants? Were they the same protesters in different countries? Or did country-specific opportunity structures, societal contexts and/or historical strengths, and peace-movement development cause national differences regarding who took to which streets? In other words: did these protests that shared so many

**Table 1.1. February 15 Protests: Country, city, organizers, turnouts and mobilization level**

Country	City	Organizers <sup>c</sup>	Turnout numbers	Country population (millions)	Turnout (percentage of population)
Australia	Five state capitals Sidney		300,000 200,000	19.7	2.5
Austria	Vienna		25,000	8.2	0.3
Belgium	Brussels	Anti Oorlogsplatform Irak and Stop USA	75,000	10.3	0.7
Canada	Toronto Montreal		<sup>b</sup> ±50,000 100,000	32.2	0.4
Denmark	Copenhagen		45,000	5.4	0.8
Finland	Helsinki		15,000	5.2	0.2
France	Paris		±350,000	60.2	0.5
Germany	Berlin Stuttgart	Netzwerk Friedenskooperation	500,000 50,000	82.4	0.7
Greece	Athens		200,000	10.6	1.2
Hungary	Budapest		20,000	10.1	0.2
Ireland	Dublin		100,000	3.9	2.6
Italy	Rome	Fermiamo la Guerra all'Iraq	3,000,000	58.0	5
Japan	Tokyo		25,000	127.2	0.02
Netherlands	Amsterdam	Platform tegen de Nieuwe Oorlog	70,000	16.2	0.4
Norway	Oslo		60,000	4.6	1.3
Poland	Warsaw		10,000	38.6	0.03



**Table 1.1. (continued)**

Country	City	Organizers <sup>a</sup>	Turnout numbers	Country population (millions)	Turnout (percentage of population)
Portugal	Lisbon		100,000	10.5	1.0
Spain	Madrid	No a la Guerra	800,000	40.2	5.7
	Barcelona	No a la Guerra	1,300,000		
	Seville	No a la Guerra	200,000		
Sweden	Stockholm		±40,000	9.0	0.7
	Gothenburg		25,000		
Switzerland	Bern	Pas en Notre Nom	45,000	7.4	0.6
United Kingdom	London	Stop the War Coalition	1,000,000	60.1	1.7
	Glasgow	Scottish Coalition for Justice not War	50,000		
United States	Seattle	United for Peace and Justice	50,000	290.4	0.8
	New York	United for Peace and Justice	500,000		
	Los Angeles	United for Peace and Justice	200,000		
	San Francisco	United for Peace and Justice	250,000		
	Rest of United States		1,500,000		

*Notes:* <sup>a</sup>Organizers given for eight covered countries only.

<sup>b</sup>Numbers with a “±” symbol are average estimates between strongly diverging measurements.

characteristics mobilize the same people in all countries? These are the core questions of this entire volume.

### Notes

1. This “coalition of the willing,” whose members were willing to actively or passively support the forcible removal of the Iraqi regime, included Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Czech Republic, Denmark, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Georgia, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Latvia, Lithuania, the Republic of Macedonia, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Mongolia, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Palau, Panama, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Rwanda, Singapore, Slovakia, the Solomon Islands, South Korea, Spain, Tonga, Turkey, Uganda, the Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Uzbekistan. According to a White House press release of March 21, 2003, “contributions from Coalition member nations range from: direct military participation, logistical and intelligence support, specialized chemical/biological response teams, over-flight rights, humanitarian and reconstruction aid, to political support.” To further support its case, the White House also stated: “The population of Coalition countries is approximately 1.23 billion people; Coalition countries have a combined GDP of approximately \$22 trillion; Every major race, religion, ethnicity in the world is represented; The Coalition includes nations from every continent on the globe” (White House, 2003).

2. For a comprehensive list of participating cities, see Chrisafis et al. 2003, Simonson 2003, Cortright 2004, and many newspaper accounts. In cases where different numbers are ascribed to the same demonstration, the most recurring, the most official, or the median number is taken.

3. Since 2003, antiwar protests have been organized worldwide each year around March 20, the date of the invasion of Iraq. Yet, as of this publication, turnout numbers have only been a fraction of those recorded on February 15, 2003.

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