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Saturday, 8 February 2003

Search


[Home](#) > [the News](#) > [Newsdesk](#) > Women bare all in Australian anti-war pr ...

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08 Feb 2003 07:49

Women bare all in Australian anti-war protest

SYDNEY, Feb 8 (Reuters) - More than 700 women posed nude on Saturday to protest against Australia's likely involvement in a potential war against Iraq.

Lying naked end to end on a grassy knoll in the Australian beach town of Byron Bay, they formed a heart around the words "No War" for an aerial photograph.

Australia has sent troops and approved fighter jet deployments to join U.S. and British forces in the Gulf preparing for a possible war in Iraq, but has yet to publicly commit itself to joining any military action in Iraq, whether U.N.-approved or U.S.-led.

The women, ranging in age from about 20 to 60, gathered on a hillside in the beachside artists' haven in the far north of New South Wales state.

One middle-aged woman had the words "Bare it all for the boys Down Under" written down her back.

"I really realise now when I look up here and see all these women, they're desperate to let our prime minister hear how very very angry they are at what he's doing and how much they disagree with what's happening," organiser Grace Knight told Australian Broadcasting Corp Radio.

"If you just look over there, that's a lot of women who don't agree with what's going on," she said.

A local police spokesman said the protest was on private property and not visible to the public.

Knight said aerial photos would be distributed to garner publicity for the women's stance that Prime Minister John Howard should recall Australian troops already deployed in the Middle East.

The pre-deployment of troops has opened a sharp political divide. On Wednesday, the opposition-controlled Senate passed a symbolic vote of no confidence in Howard.

The Australian protest echoed a similar one in New York where nude women formed the words "No Bush" to demonstrate against U.S. President George Bush's hardline stance against Iraq.

There were smaller anti-war protests elsewhere on Saturday in New South Wales and adjoining Queensland state.

Howard left Sydney on Saturday on a week-long trip in which he plans to meet with Bush as well as U.N., British and Indonesian leaders.

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Training

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