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**Government intrusion alleged
Rally surveillance blasted
War protesters object to being tracked, recorded**

By Sandra M. Klepach
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Two hundred protesters marked the war in Iraq with a march and rally on March 19, 2005.

Across the street, a man and woman, who appeared to be in uniform, marked it, too -- one with a 35mm camera, the other with a video camera.

Speculation ran rampant Monday night among about 125 who attended a public hearing about the previous rally that similar federal officials were undetected in their midst.

This time, the group gathered at the Akron-Summit County Public Library in downtown Akron to hear testimony about the U.S. military's "civilian spying."

"If anybody from the FBI or Department of Defense is here, this is my good side," said Akron resident Mickey Stefanik.

He then encouraged any spies to take a picture of the message on his T-shirt: Protect the Bill of Rights.

The standing-room-only crowd joined representatives from the American Civil Liberties Union and U.S. Rep. Sherrod Brown's office to hear about a dozen residents and group members demand government accountability for its secret eavesdropping program.

The hearing was called after the Northeast Ohio American Friends Service Committee caught wind of a federal document that listed its March 19 event as a "threat," committee Director Greg Coleridge said.

Eight pages acquired by NBC from a 400-page Department of Defense database called for government response "only if something significant happens."

One column, its purpose unidentified on the document, includes the words "Information Not Credible."

But another classifies the event as still "Open/Unresolved."

Two cars shadowed the group on March 19 during its entire trek in Akron from a military recruitment center to the local FBI office and Federal Building, Coleridge said. The occupants watched protesters read the names of 1,521 fatalities, spill red-dyed water from a 55-gallon drum and hear speeches from religious leaders.

Akron attorney Farhad Sethna also read from his pocket-sized copy of the Constitution.

Sethna also spoke on Monday.

“As I reach into my coat pocket slowly, let me show you my weapon of mass destruction,” he said, raising the small book into the air to applause. “And it may be the greatest document ever written.”

From a table beside the lectern, Frank Kunstel of the ACLU asked several speakers if they had expected violence at the event. All said they had not.

The ACLU has filed a Freedom of Information Act request for details of any surveillance of the event -- which he said could include the violation of four amendments, including rights to free speech and assembly.

The government has about a month from the filing date in late January to respond.

Scott Wilson, a spokesman for the Cleveland division of the FBI, said Monday night that requested files will be provided through the Freedom of Information Act but added that he had no knowledge of surveillance at the March 19 protest.

With 43 “incidents” listed on the eight pages from the database, Joe Mosyjowski of Hartville said he fears 400 pages could list as many as 2,150 peaceful events.

“Threats to whom? The American people? We are the American people!” he said. “I feel violated -- first as a citizen, but also as a taxpayer who sees his funds being focused on Joe Citizen rather than Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda.”

Cuyahoga Falls resident Liz Raines said the rally and march were attended by a wide variety of people concerned about the Iraqi war.

“Well, all I can say is, if that's (who) they're afraid of,” she said, “I'm afraid of our government.” Sandra M. Klepach can be reached at 330-996-3746 or sklepach@thebeaconjournal.com