

Protesters deflate NZ spy base dome

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WELLINGTON, NZ: Peace activists yesterday attacked and deflated a large inflatable globe housing a satellite dish at a top secret New Zealand spy base in protest at US military actions.



The group, calling itself ANZAC Ploughshares, said it cut through fences and razor wire and avoided electronic sensors to slash one of two 30m white globes with a sickle at the Waihopai base near Blenheim at the top of the South Island.

The base is described as a satellite communications monitoring facility, but peace campaigners have said it is part of a global signals interception network called Echelon.

"The Echelon spy network including Waihopai, is an important part of the US government's global spy network and we have come in the name of the Prince of Peace to close it down," said Ploughshares in a statement.

It said the attackers built a shrine and prayed "to remember the people killed by US military activity".

Three men, one of whom was a Dominican priest, were arrested at the site. Prime Minister Helen Clark, who is also in charge of the security services, condemned the attack. "It's a senseless act of vandalism, but it will now be dealt with by police," a spokeswoman said. Ploughshares said Clark and the New Zealand government were privately supporting the war in Iraq while publicly condemning it.

The protesters were later remanded in custody when they appeared in court, news reports said. The Blenheim court judge said the trio, which included 67-year-old Dominican Friar Peter Murnane, had to be held in prison because of the risk they would attack other military installations, Radio New Zealand said.

Murnane, Adrian Leason, 42, and Samuel Land, 24, who shouted "Pray for Iraq" in court, will appear again next Monday.

They were charged with criminal damage to the installation which is operated by New Zealand's Government Communications Security Bureau. Bureau director Bruce Ferguson admitted to Radio New Zealand that the trio had cut through three security fences, including an electrified one, to get to the dome before guards apprehended them. He said they had succeeded because a heavy fog blanketed the base. - Reuters

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