

# Foreign Boycotts over Iraq War: A Factor in US Economic Downturn

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One of the many contributing factors driving the U.S. economy's sharp downturn is the anger of foreign consumers boycotting American brands over the Iraq war.

It's not just many of the 1.5 billion Muslim consumers, either, that have quit buying Made in America. It's people from France to Brazil to Canada to India, and it is a trend that began even before Bush invaded Iraq—remember those angry millions the world over that took to the streets urging him not to start it?

When foreigners, who once valued American craftsmanship, stop buying U.S. products, it's got to worsen the balance of trade. And that can translate into layoffs, into closed factories, into reduced consumer spending. The Census Bureau is reporting the trade deficit in goods and services was a whopping \$63 billion in October— and that's a factor in the current meltdown.

Last July Reuters reported foreigners still have "a ferocious appetite for American goods and services" and noted U.S. multinationals were posting record earnings. Those profits might have been better, though, if not for the anti-war mood.

Lester Brown of the Earth Policy Institute noted as early as Oct., 2004, that Pew Global Attitude Project polls showed "the war in Iraq has undermined America's credibility abroad" and "Anti-American sentiment is spreading around the world."

A Pew follow-up poll last June, "documented wide anti-American sentiment since the survey was launched in 2002 and found those attitudes deepening this year," *Reuters* reported. "The United States' favorable ratings declined in 26 of 33 countries for which a comparison was available, with negative views particularly strong in the Middle East." Reuters quoted Joseph Quinlan, chief market strategist at Bank of America Corp. saying: "Anti-Americanism has rarely been as prevalent and widespread as in the past five years. These circumstances have led many, ourselves included, to worry about a possible boycott or backlash against U.S. goods and services."

That "possible boycott" actually got underway even *before* the first U.S. bomb fell on Iraq on March 18, 2003. As BBC reported from Thiruvananthapuram, India, earlier that month, social activists planned to boycott in "a last bid to prevent the unjust aggression on millions of innocent people." And in Brazil, federal deputy Chico Alencar said if the U.S. made a unilateral attack on Iraq "we will boycott."

Once Bush invaded, a rash of anti-U.S. product protests broke out that covered the globe:

- # Protesters staged a die-in at a display of Coca-Cola products in Anglet, France.
- # Ten restaurants in Hamburg, Germany, banned Cokes, Marlboro cigarettes, and American Express cards, *USA Today* reported.
- # Leo Burnett ad agency poll of the Asia-Pacific region found one in four have avoided buying American brands.
- # Right after the attack, members of the Indian Parliament "immediately demanded a countrywide boycott of American goods, particularly ubiquitous American brands like Coca-

Cola, Pepsi and McDonald's, as well as British-owned Lever soap...and in several Pakistani cities...religious groups issued regular boycott calls," *The Nation* magazine reported.

# On March 25th, 2003, Reuters reported "Consumer fury seems to be on the rise. Demonstrators in Paris smashed windows of a McDonald's restaurant last week, forcing police in riot gear to move in to protect staff and customers... The attackers sprayed obscenities and 'boycott' on the windows."

# By December, 2004, Jim Lobe could write on AntiWar.Com, a survey by Seattle-based Global Market Insite found "brands closely identified with the U.S., such as Marlboro cigarettes, American Online, McDonald's, American Airlines, and Exxon-Mobil, are particularly at risk." And 20 percent of respondents in Europe and Canada said they consciously avoided buying U.S. products as a protest against those policies.

# And [About.com](#): advertising, a part of The New York Times company, reported, "Fliers are being circulated in places like Egypt, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria, all calling for a full ban on anything U.S.-related." In Ecuador, a protester burned a Ronald McDonald figurine and in Korea a demonstrator wearing a George Bush mask and armed with a gun climbed McDonald's golden arches.

At Harvard, international marketing authority John Quelch said, "Never before have global concerns about American foreign policy so threatened to change consumer behavior." He added, according to an article in the July 17th, 2003, British *Independent*, "We are not speaking here of the frivolous grandstanding associated with temporary boycotts by a student minority. We are witnessing the emergence of a consumer lifestyle with broad international appeal that is grounded in a rejection of American capitalism, American foreign policy and Brand America."

When will those in the executive suites recognize that, apart from the firms pigging out at the Pentagon trough, making a stupid war of aggression is bad for the rest of Corporate America, not only for humans?

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