

*Rain and protests dampen Macy's
annual Thanksgiving Day parade
in New York City*

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New York, November 29 (RHC)-- Pelting rain dampened the 98th annual Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade in the United States, as it cut across New York City on Thursday.

But for a second year in a row, the giant balloons and party floats had to navigate another obstacle: protesters.

As the procession made its way down West 55th Street, a group of pro-Palestinian demonstrators entered the parade route, briefly blocking a gigantic balloon representing McDonald's restaurant mascot, the red-headed clown Ronald McDonald.

They sought to remind parade-goers of the human toll of Israel's ongoing war in Gaza, which has killed at least 44,330 Palestinians, many of them women and children.

In the middle of the street, the protesters unfurled a banner that read, "Don't celebrate genocide! Arms embargo now. Free Palestine!" Several sat cross-legged on the wet pavement, holding up small Palestinian flags.

McDonald's, the fast-food chain whose balloon they blocked, has been the subject of an ongoing boycott after a subsidiary in Israel announced free meals for Israeli military members after the start of the war.

The chain, however, has distanced itself from that effort, pointing out that the decision was made by a local franchise, not by the company's global leadership.

Police quickly arrested 21 of the protesters on Thursday, dragging some out of the street in order to let the parade pass.

Last year, a similar demonstration occurred, resulting in the detention of 34 protesters, many of whom were clad in white jumpsuits splattered with fake blood.

As then, the protesters this year called for the U.S. to stop supplying Israel with arms. Media reports have indicated the U.S. is planning to greenlight a new \$680 million arms sale to its Middle East ally, on top of its existing military aid.

The parade contained 22 big balloons and 34 floats, according to organisers. It is televised live across the United States. Last year, the broadcast raked in 28.5 million viewers, a record for the event, according to the publication The Hollywood Reporter.

That made it one of the most watched non-sporting events of the year.

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