Worldwide protests against US invasion of Iraq: millions take to the streets

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Reports that the United States has begun bombing and invading Iraq touched off demonstrations, strikes, civil disobedience and other forms of protest around the world, involving millions of people in hundreds of cities and towns on every continent. The actions were the most widespread show of popular opposition in history to the beginning of a major war.

The biggest demonstrations were in Greece, with over 100,000 people, the bulk of them high school and university students, marching on the US Embassy in Athens, and tens of thousands more engaged in protests in Thessaloniki, Patras and other cities. The demonstrations were organized by the Greek trade unions and student and teachers unions.

The Greek government has officially deplored the war, but allows the United States to use Greek airspace and a navy base at Souda Bay, Crete as part of its military operations in the Middle East.

In Italy, 45,000 march in Milan, 20,000 in Turin, and thousands more in Rome, in many cases blocking railroad tracks and highways. Several trade union confederations called a two-hour nationwide general strike against the decision of the government of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi to allow US warplanes to use Italian airspace. Other protests were reported in Florence, Padua, Venice, Bologna, Trieste, Bergamo and Genoa.

Hundreds of thousands of students demonstrated in Germany, including 100,000 in Berlin, with protests in every sizeable city and university town throughout the country. Large demonstrations took place in the Netherlands, France and Britain, where there was extensive civil disobedience in response to the decision of the Blair government to serve as Bush's junior partner in aggression against Iraq.

The passionate opposition to the war among the masses of the Arab countries found expression despite the efforts of pro-US dictatorships to quash any public protests. In Egypt, riot police used water cannon to keep students from reaching the US Embassy.

In Asia, there were significant protests in Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, India and Bangladesh. The largest demonstrations were in Australia, which is contributing 2,000 soldiers to the US war effort. Some 20,000 protesters paralyzed the city center of Melbourne, and other protests took place in Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and many regional towns.

Particularly significant were the demonstrations that erupted throughout the United States, as tens of thousands sought to show the world that the American people do not stand behind the warmongering of the Bush administration. More than 500 people were arrested in confrontations with police in San Francisco, and other large protests took place in Pittsburgh, New York City, Washington, Chicago, Boston and in college towns throughout the country.

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