

Turkish minister threatens to mobilize the army against protests

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In a further escalation of the state repression of ongoing protests, the Turkish government threatened on Monday to mobilize the army against demonstrators.

The Turkish police “will use all their powers” to end social unrest, Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc declared in a televised interview. “If this is not enough we can even utilize the Turkish armed forces in cities,” he added.

Arinc's threat was made as police used tear gas and water cannons to disperse demonstrators Monday morning from re-entering Taksim Square in central Istanbul.

In response to a huge riot police mobilization that drove demonstrators out of Taksim Square on Sunday, five trade unions announced on Sunday they would stage a one-day nationwide strike on Monday.

The Confederation of Public Workers' Unions (KESK), which has some 240,000 members in 11 unions, the Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions (DİSK), the Turkish Doctors' Union (TTB) and the Turkish Union of Engineers and Architects' Chambers (TMMOB) announced the strike in a joint statement.

In the event, only an estimated 5,000 took part in the trade union demonstration in Istanbul. Turkey's unions are largely discredited, due to their numerous overtures to the ruling class. Representatives from both KESK and DISK were members of the Taksim Solidarity Committee, which met with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan late last Thursday.

Following the meeting, leaders of the solidarity committee indicated that the government was prepared to back down and declared that Erdogan would accept a plebiscite to decide the fate of Gezi Park.

Instead of backing down, however, Erdogan went on the offensive. Just two days later, thousands of police

were mobilized to forcibly clear Taksim Square and nearby Gezi Park following instructions from Erdogan. Mothers with children mingling with peaceful protesters were violently swept out of the square. Police detained 441 people in connection with clashes in Istanbul on Sunday, and 56 in the capital Ankara.

Since the protests began three weeks ago, five people have been killed and around 5,000 injured, with ten having lost an eye due to rubber bullets, according to the Turkish Medical Association. On Saturday, one pregnant woman taking part in the protests lost her child due to the police violence.

As police moved against demonstrators on Sunday Turkey's minister for European affairs, Egemen Bagis, said any civilians entering Taksim Square would be treated as terrorists. Istanbul's governor, Huseyin Avni Mutlu, warned that no one would be allowed to return to the park to protest.

The government also declared that it would treat Monday's strike as illegal. Interior Minister Muammer Guler told reporters in Ankara. “I want to state that it will not be permitted.”

In a further act of intimidation, the Turkish health ministry has issued threats to prosecute any doctors who treated protesters hurt in the Gezi Park protests. Press photos show police arresting doctors working at the Ramada Hotel who had assisted victims of the police brutality.

In parliament Prime Minister Erdogan condemned peaceful protesters as “terrorists” working on behalf of “outsiders” who are seeking to wreck the Turkish economy. He compared protesters to the heads of military which have conducted a number of putsches against the Turkish government in the past. He also denounced and threatened to close down social networks such as Twitter, which he claims have been

used to slander his government.

In the name of “the defense of democracy and human rights,” the US and its imperialist allies are currently preparing military action for regime change in Syria and Iran but turn a blind eye to Erdogan’s bloody repression of peaceful protests that could interfere with their war plans.

The Obama administration is backing the repression of the protests by the Turkish regime, which it views as a key ally in its war in Syria.

At the daily US State Department briefing yesterday, spokeswoman Jen Psaki explained: “The Secretary [of State John Kerry] spoke with [Turkish] Foreign Minister Davutoglu on Saturday. As you all know, they speak regularly. Often the thrust of their conversations is about Syria and their close cooperation, our close coordination on that issue. That was the same with this call as well.”

Asked if she was “disappointed with the reaction of the Turkish government” to the protests, Psaki declined to comment on the question, but added: “We remain a close ally of Turkey, of course.”

European officials, for their part, made mild, pro forma criticisms of the crackdown in Turkey. European Union Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Fuele expressed his concern about developments in Turkey, pleading for “de-escalation and dialogue.”

German Chancellor Angela Merkel made no reference to Erdogan, only declaring, “What’s happening in Turkey at the moment is not in line with our idea of the freedom to demonstrate or freedom of speech.”

Washington’s support for Erdogan’s crackdown exposes the ruthlessness and hypocrisy with which the United States government and its European allies pursue their imperialist interests in the Middle East. Washington has portrayed its proxy war in Syria as a humanitarian war to stop an armed crackdown against US-backed protesters in Syria. However, when it is a pro-US regime that is threatening to mobilize the army against protesters, there are no complaints from Washington.

Meanwhile, shocked at the extent of popular opposition to the Erdogan government, investors are pulling out of the Turkish lira. The currency has hit a three-year low.

The Turkish Central Bank has already announced that

it plans to intervene directly in the currency markets to stabilize the lira and calm the markets.



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