

Turkish police attack demonstrators attempting to enter Gezi Park

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Turkish riot police fired tear gas and rubber bullets Monday to block protesters from entering Gezi Park, the scene of repeated conflicts between police and demonstrators last month. Two days earlier, police had also clashed violently with protesters attempting to gain access to the park.

In June, four protesters were killed and around 8,000 injured, while the police made hundreds of arrests when protests against the redevelopment of the small park in Istanbul rapidly developed into a series of nationwide demonstrations against the Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) government headed by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

The police action on Monday took place after the authorities in Istanbul reopened Gezi Park for the first time to the public since a massive police action cleared the park on June 15.

Following the clashes on Saturday, the Turkish authorities made clear that no further protests would be tolerated at the site of the park. Early Monday, Istanbul governor Huseyin Avni Mutlu warned on Twitter, “Gezi Park has been reopened to public but there are many calls for unauthorised protests aimed at turning the park into an occupation zone.”

In anticipation of new protests, the police sealed off access to Taksim Square, which adjoins the park, and began expelling protesters from nearby streets. When protesters managed to enter the park, they were confronted by police who used their shields to forcibly expel them from the site.

According to Turkish press reports, a 17-year-old boy was severely injured in the head by a canister when police began firing tear gas and rubber bullets at protesters in nearby streets.

Police then arrested many of the demonstrators, including leaders of the Taksim Solidarity Platform and

the Turkish Doctors Association. The Istanbul Medical Association reported that several people were injured.

As Turkish riot police once again resorted to brutal measures to suppress protests in Istanbul, the Turkish prime minister used a rally in Germany to condemn those taking part in the demonstrations.

A few weeks ago, 10,000 members of the Turkish community demonstrated in Cologne against the Erdogan government, and one central purpose of Sunday’s rally in the German city of Düsseldorf was to mobilise supporters of the Turkish regime in Germany. In a direct attack on his critics in Turkey and Germany, Erdoğan used the rally to lash out at those who, he claimed, could not accept election results and sought instead to change things by “occupying the streets, plundering or insulting people.”

Since the start of the Gezi protests, it is Erdoğan himself who has been in the forefront of denouncing and insulting those taking part in demonstrations. Prior to the clearing of the park in the middle of June, Erdoğan claimed the protests were being organised by terrorists in the pay of foreign powers. All methods of repression were justified in order to suppress the protests, he warned: “We have not responded to punches with punches. From now on security forces will respond differently. This issue will be over in 24 hours.”

In fact, the extent of the protests last month made clear that discontent with the Turkish authorities is not limited to the fate of one of the capital’s central parks. What was evident in the demonstrations was growing anger in the country at soaring levels of inequality and the increasingly repressive nature of the Erdoğan regime, as well as widespread discontent with its pro-American foreign policy.

In May, Erdoğan had stood alongside US president

Barack Obama, who praised his Turkish colleague for “being such a strong ally and partner in the region and around the world.” It is precisely the readiness of the Turkish government to deal forcefully with popular opposition, plus Erdoğan’s subservience to US foreign policy that makes him such a favoured partner in Washington.

For the past year, Erdoğan has been in the forefront of the campaign for Western military action to topple the government of Syria’s Bashar al-Assad. Now, following the military toppling of the regime of President Mohamed Morsi, he is banging the drum loudest for Western military intervention in Egypt.

At the rally in Düsseldorf, Erdoğan accused the European Union and Western countries of giving support to the military coup in Egypt by refusing to intervene themselves.

Once again, Erdoğan is playing the role of chief warmonger in the region. In reality, the Turkish prime minister has few scruples about the actions undertaken by the Egyptian army—in May, his own government granted Egypt a US\$250 million loan to finance Turkish-Egyptian joint defence projects. His main concern is that the protests in his own country could assume a similar mass character to those in Egypt that preceded the military coup against Morsi, drawing in broad layers of the Turkish working class. This is the fear that lies behind Erdoğan’s vehement attacks on the Gezi Park protesters.



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