

Mass unrest continues in Peru following police massacres

Don Knowland
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Mass unrest continued in Peru this week following the massacre of 17 persons on Monday by Peruvian police in the southeastern Andean city of Juliaca. Police opened fire in response to demonstrators attempting to take over the Juliaca international airport.

An informal nationwide strike originally broke out in mid-December, when former president Pedro Castillo was deposed and jailed, and his vice president Dina Boluarte installed in his stead.

In response, the government declared a nationwide “state of emergency,” deploying 140,000 soldiers to the streets, in an attempt to crush the protests. The death toll now stands at upwards of 50.

Many protests have been centered in the Puno region, which borders on Lake Titicaca, and has a largely indigenous population. Repression from security forces in Puno city, the most important commercial city of the Southern Andes, has been the most violent.

Reportedly, 25,000 indigenous Aymaras have arrived at Puno city to protest. On Wednesday, a three-day curfew was ordered in Puno city.

In an effort to defuse the protests, the regional government of Puno has declared Boluarte and her prime minister Alberto Otárola “personas non grata,” as well as the ministers of the Interior, Víctor Rojas; Defense, Jose Luis Chavez; the general of the Puno National Police, Pablo Villanueva Yana; and the general of the Army brigade in Puno, Manuel Alarcón.

The Cusco daily newspaper *El Sol* reported this week that a mobilization of 20,000 Quechua-speaking locals is expected to take over this Andean city in the province to the north of Puno, which is a major tourism center. Protesters from the provinces of Canchis, Canas, Acompayo and Quispicanchi also have gathered in Cusco to demand the resignation of Boluarte.

Overall, mobilizations intensified in 31 provinces of

12 regions in response to the Juliaca massacre and prior repression. Protests and highway blockades against Boluarte and in support of Castillo have now extended to 41 provinces.

Thousands also protested in the capital Lima on Wednesday, resulting in dozens of arrests. There have been widespread calls among many groups leading protests to stage a mass march on the capital.

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On Wednesday, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner in Peru called upon security forces “to comply with human rights standards and guarantee that force is only used when strictly necessary and, in such case, fully respecting the principles of legality, precaution and proportionality.” The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) announced that it will visit Peru this week to investigate the military and police violence.

Also on Wednesday, Peru’s Attorney General Patricia Benavides opened an investigation against Boluarte and her closest circle of power: Prime Minister Otárola, Minister of the Interior Rojas, Defense Minister Chavez, and Minister of Justice and Human Rights, José Tello, for “the alleged crimes of genocide, qualified homicide and serious injuries” in relation to the 46 deaths and hundreds of injuries suffered thus far in the December and January protests.

Brushing this off, late at night on Wednesday, the plenary session of the Congress, dominated by the far right, approved Boluarte’s cabinet chaired by Otárola. This can only fuel the indignation of the population.

Foreign investors, including the giant mining enterprises that dominate the Peruvian economy, are increasingly nervous that the protests can get out of hand and shut down production. On Wednesday, *The*

Guardian warned that “Peru’s broken political system will inevitably drive down foreign investment—which the economy is heavily reliant on—and the situation could get even worse.”



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