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Turkey: Epicenter of Police State Violence

By Stephen Lendman

June 13, 2013

For over two weeks, daily anti-government protests rocked Turkey. Police attacked peaceful demonstrators intermittently. They've done so brutally. Turkey's notorious for police state viciousness.

It's a democracy in name only. Prime Minister Erdogan is authoritarian and hardline

Turkey's one of 28 NATO countries. Erdogan partners with Washington's imperial wars. He's unapologetic about neoliberal harshness. More on that below.

He's been prime minister for over 10 years. Why Turks put up with him they'll have to explain. Growing opposition demands he resign. New elections are wanted. Erdogan refuses to call them. If protests continue and grow, parliament may overrule him.

On June 11, Russia Today headlined "Turkish police oust Taksim protesters with tear gas as Erdogan cheers removal of 'rags,' " saying:

"Hundreds of Turkish police clashed with protesters in Istanbul." Doing so followed removal of barricades and banners. Erdogan's tactics are polarizing. He called peaceful demonstrators thugs, looters, revolutionaries, marauders and extremists.

RT correspondent Ashraf El Sabbagh said "(t)here are serious clashes in the small streets surrounding (Taksim). They are running after each other tossing stones, bottles and smoke grenades. It's a meat grinder in there."

On June 12, RT headlined "Istanbul warzone: Thousands of protesters try to reclaim Taksim Square," saying:

Riot police attacked protesters viciously. Clashes were fierce. “Thick smoke blankets the square. Turkish police are driving thousands into narrow side streets.”

Bystanders are attacked. Tear gas, rubber bullets, pepper spray, and water cannons target indiscriminately. A man in a wheelchair was struck. British journalist Neil Clark said “(i)f you’re in NATO, you can get away with murder.”

America, Britain, France, and most other NATO countries operate like Turkey. Dissent is verboten. Democracy exists in name only. Some NATO members are worse than others. America’s by far the worst.

Turkish protests appear to have legs. The more brutality Erdogan orders, the larger crowds grow. Growing popular sentiment opposes him. On June 11, dozens of Turkish lawyers joined protesters. They came to defend those arrested.

Police attacked them viciously. They did so in front of Caglayan Courthouse. Witnesses called what happened brutal. Lawyer Fatma Elif Koru explained, saying:

“We were just gathering to make a press statement about Gezi Park and then the police attacked. It was very brutal. Now 49 lawyer friends are in custody and many are injured.”

“They even kicked their heads. The lawyers were on the ground. They were hitting us they were pushing. They built a circle around us and then they attacked.”

On June 11, hundreds of police encircled Taksim Square. They fired rubber bullets and tear gas. They ripped down banners calling for Erdogan’s resignation.

Later on Tuesday, dozens more lawyers were arrested. Since protests began, thousands were arrested. Thousands more were injured.

On June 12, brutal attacks continued. More arrests followed. Erdogan’s uncompromising. He announced an “end to tolerance.” None existed before his pronouncement.

He dismissively ignores criticism. He governs by what he says goes. “If you call this roughness,” he said, “I’m sorry, but this Tayyip Erdogan will not change.”

His comment replicated Margaret Thatcher once saying “The lady’s not for turning.” Saying it defined her ideological harshness.

She was unapologetic. She was unforgiving. She was unprincipled. She was despised for good reason. Millions of Brits suffered from the neoliberal flimflam she endorsed.

Erdogan matches her and more. He’s way over-the-top. He reflects power politics’ dark side. He doesn’t know when to quit. He called peaceful demonstrators “a handful of plunderers.”

They’re “manipulated” to protest, he claims. He won’t let them dictate policy, he said. They’re the “greatest threat to the society.”

“For those who want to continue with the incidents,” he said, (i)t’s over. As of now, we have no tolerance for them. Not only will we end the actions, we will be at the necks of the provocateurs and terrorists and no one will get away with it. I am sorry, but Gezi Park is for taking promenades, not for occupation.”

A previous article called Turkey more police state than democracy. Press freedom is compromised. Censorship is standard practice. Dissent is verboten. Challenging government authority is called terrorism.

No country imprisons more journalists than Turkey. Television channels largely ignored protests. A bureau chief was arrested for airing what authorities wanted suppressed.

On June 11, TV channels broadcast a staged incident. Viewers saw half a dozen “demonstrators” throw molotov cocktails at police. They advanced on police lines provocatively.

They held a flag of a fringe left-wing party. It was a thinly veiled stunt. It’s commonly used during protests. America and other Western countries feature them. Doing so lets authorities claim peaceful demonstrators are violent.

So-called protesters were undercover cops. Their mock attack was staged. Expect more like it if protests continue. Expect greater violence ahead. It’s already brutal and increasing.

Instead of engaging protesters responsibly, Erdogan wants them crushed. Thousands have been arrested and/or injured. Despots operate this way.

Can Oz is an Istanbul publisher. His London Guardian op-ed headlined “I can never trust the Turkish police and government again.” Why before he’ll have to explain.

Longstanding Turkish policy is brutal. Now it’s more public, widespread and visible.

“For years I did not speak up enough, but no more,” said Oz. “I could lose everything, but I cannot live a dishonorable life any longer.”

“I am scared. With every speech that prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan gives, I feel the hatred and disgust against me and young people of my generation increase.”

“All we are after is a bit of freedom, a bit of space to live and a few trees.”

“(O)ver the past few days, I have witnessed so many lies from the police and government that I don’t think I can ever trust them again. I have spent days with the protesters – withstanding another gas attack, cheering, singing chants and sharing food in the park – and I haven’t encountered any signs of weapons or violence on their behalf.”

Oz said he received hate mail and death threats. Participating in “passive resistance” leaves him vulnerable.

For years he feared expressing his views publicly. He failed to criticize political wrongdoing he witnessed.

He’ll no longer stay silent, he said. He listed five demands he and other protesters want:

- (1) They want Gezi Park left unchanged.
- (2) They want arrested protesters released.
- (3) They want police brutality ended. They want responsible officials prosecuted.
- (4) They want the right to protest publicly.

(5) They want Erdogan-ordered violence stopped. They want him held accountable for his actions.

Oz is a large Turkish publisher. He's unaffected by neoliberal harshness. Most Turks want relief. Erdogan spurns popular interests. He's beholden solely to wealth, power and privilege.

Turkish workers and youths demand social justice. Young ones are especially outraged. Their living standards significantly eroded.

They've tasted neoliberal harshness far too long. They know nothing else. Their ability to make ends meet troubles them. Their futures are seriously compromised. They want something better. They deserve it. Perhaps now's their chance for change.

Turkey's economic model features capitalism's dark side. It includes economic freedom as a be-all-and-end-all, unrestrained profit-making, privatizations, cheap labor, deregulation, corporate-friendly tax cuts, marginalized worker rights, and speculative capital inflows.

Economic conditions are inherently unstable. Turkey suffers rolling recessions, crisis conditions, and fragile largely jobless recoveries. It's increasingly dependent on imports of resources and capital goods.

Youth unemployment tops 22%. It's rising. It's socially and economically unstable. It's untenable. It's fuel for public rage.

When well-connected private debtors are troubled or go bankrupt, their losses are socialized. Turkey's next crisis is certain. It's only a matter of when.

Ordinary people are hardest hit. Youths most of all. Growing numbers have no viable futures. Profits matter more than public needs. Insecurity haunts an entire generation.

Turkish neoliberalism replicates what's ongoing throughout Europe, America, Israel and elsewhere. Anger swells up and explodes.

The common thread is democracy in name only, inequality, political corruption, unemployment, growing poverty, insecurity, and corporate priorities over social justice.

Turkey has a long history of rebellion. Turks know what's going on in troubled EU countries. They've seen it throughout the Middle East.

People only take so much before reacting. Protesting is fashionable to do. It's unifying and energizing. It remains to be seen where things go.

Ban Ki-moon reacted as expected. He urged "calm" and "dialogue." He ignored police brutality. It didn't surprise. He fronts for power. He's mindless of public needs.

He turns a blind eye to horrendous imperial crimes. He's secretary-general because Washington installed him. White House spokesman Jay Carney also urged both sides to show restraint.

Washington supports its ally. Police brutality is commonplace in America. Thuggish cops attack peaceful protesters violently. It's common practice. It replicates what's ongoing in Turkey.

America's a democracy in name only. Imperial and corporate priorities alone matter. It's true throughout Europe, Israel and Turkey.

Unchallenged power matters most. Erdogan matches the worst of a bad lot. Turks see him for what he is. Tinpot despots can't hide.

Turkey's military remains a wild card. Maybe it'll intervene. It's done it before. It may again. If not generals, perhaps party leaders or political opposition.

Erdogan remains defiant. He looks like damaged goods. He's vulnerable if internal interests react. He heads Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP). It may decide to cut its losses and replace him.