



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on June 11, 2013

Anti-Government Protests Continue Across Turkey

As anti-government protests that began on May 28 continued in Istanbul on June 11, hundreds of riot police breached barricades set up by protesters in the Turkish city's Taksim Square, using non-lethal weapons such as tear gas, rubber bullets, and water cannons to control the area. The protests started as a demonstration against the replacement of Istanbul's Taksim Gezi Park with a reconstruction of the historic Taksim Military Barracks, then morphed into larger protests and riots across Turkey against what many regard as the authoritarian rule of Islamist Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his elected government.



In the aftermath of the brief police occupation of the square, it appeared that their actions toward the protesters occupying the park were moderate. Police left the park after about 10 minutes and made no attempt to dismantle the tents or makeshift shelters set up by the demonstrators, although they did remove protesters' banners from a building overlooking the square.

An AP report stated that Erdogan asserted that the protests were part of a conspiracy against his government. The protesters, he said, "are being used by some financial institutions, the interest rate lobby and media groups to [harm] Turkey's economy and [scare away] investments."

Erdogan gave a televised speech condemning the protesters and vowing that "where they gather 20, I will get up and gather 200,000 people. Where they gather 100,000, I will bring together one million from my party."

A [report from Reuters](#) also quoted Erdogan's reaction to the protests:

They say the prime minister is rough. So what was going to happen? Were we going to kneel down in front of these [people]? If you call this roughness, I'm sorry, but this Tayyip Erdogan won't change.

The Reuters report cited Erdogan's statement that the protests are being engineered by vandals, terrorist elements, and unnamed foreign forces.

"A comprehensive attack against Turkey has been carried out," Erdogan said at a parliamentary group meeting of his AK Party. He added, "The increase in interest rates, the fall in the stock markets, the deterioration in the investment environment, the intimidation of investors — the efforts to distort Turkey's image have been put in place as a systematic project."

Protesters have accused Erdogan of an authoritarian rule and — notes the Reuters reporter — some Turks suspect that he seeks to replace the secular republic with an Islamic order, though Erdogan denies these claims.

The report also quoted a 19-year-old student identified as Seyyit Cikmen, who said: "This movement won't end here. We've started something much bigger than this park.... After this, I don't think people



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will go back to being afraid of this government or any government.... Every place is Taksim, every place resistance.”

An AP report published online by [Canadian-based CTV News](#) speculated that the protests and government responses to them could strain the close ties between President Obama and Prime Minister Erdogan, noting that Turkey is “a strategically important U.S. ally in a tumultuous region.”

The report referred to the role President Obama played in brokering a diplomatic dispute between Turkey and Israel after Israel attacked a Turkish aid flotilla bound for Gaza.

The article quoted Bulent Aliriza, a Turkey analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, who said that Obama’s success in restarting diplomatic relations between Turkey and Israel underscores the influence the American president could have now in shaping the prime minister’s response to the protests.

“There is only one man in this world that Erdogan listens to, and that’s Barack Obama,” said Aliriza.

During a [White House press briefing](#) conducted by Press Secretary Jay Carney on June 4, a reporter asked, “Do you think the unrest in Turkey will affect the long-term political, economic relation between U.S. and Turkey? Or is this just a minor bump in the road?”

Carney replied,

Well, we’ve made clear our concern about the reports of the use of excessive force, and we welcome the comments by the Deputy Prime Minister ... that apologized for that excessive force. We call on all parties to refrain from provoking violence, and we continue to make known our opinion that these events should be investigated.

We have a very important relationship with Turkey. Turkey is a NATO ally. We are working with Turkey on a range of regional issues that are obviously of great importance to U.S. national security and to regional security, and we will continue to do that.

However, there may be much more to the current protests in Turkey than the grievances of environmentalists protesting the razing of a park, or even charges that Erdogan has become excessively authoritarian and wants to transform the secular Turkish republic into an Islamic state. As *The New American* noted June 3:

“There are those attending these events organized by extremists. This is not about Gezi Park anymore. These are organized events with affiliations both within Turkey and abroad,” said the prime minister, whose Islamist-oriented Justice and Development Party (AKP) continues to enjoy support among voters. “The main opposition party CHP [Republican People’s Party] has provoked my innocent citizens. Those who make news [and] call these events the Turkish Spring do not know Turkey.”...

More than a few analysts within Turkey, while conceding that the police crackdown has been brutal and should be investigated, largely agreed with the sentiments expressed by the prime minister. Writing in the *Jewish Press*, for example, Istanbul-based political and religious commentator Sinem Tezyapar, an executive producer on Turkish Television, highlighted the Communist Party of Turkey’s less-than-hidden role in the unrest.

As Tezyapar continued in the [Jewish Press](#):

Some Communist groups began vandalizing the streets and buildings and spreading false rumors in



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order to whip people up into a frenzy. It was definitely not about parks or green spaces, though the protest action started off that way; it was hijacked by chronic malcontents.

Some on the left in Turkey love to create an uproar and clash with the police whenever they can. They try to manipulate and exploit every peaceful protest — which is a democratic right in Turkey — and turn them into violent attacks that ruin the social order. What they did was an unnecessary provocation and even after the police withdrew, Communist protestors continued to destroy shop windows, cars and police buses with sledgehammers. One can easily see the flags of Communist and illegal factions being openly displayed.

Tezyapar demonstrated how the protesters in Istanbul were following the classic model laid down by Soviet leader Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, and her quote of Lenin's words alone makes her [entire commentary](#) worth reading.

In Istanbul, as in most conflicts around the globe, finding the forces operating behind the scenes often takes some digging.

Photo of protesters in Taksim Square: AP Images

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