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Failed Crackdowns: Istanbul Sees Biggest Riots in Years

By Jason Ditz

June 16, 2013

Four days after Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan promised to end all of Turkey's public protests in 24 hours, the site of the biggest crackdowns, Istanbul, has erupted into enormous street riots, with protests centered on Gezi Park and Taksim Square now felt in every corner of the nation's largest city.

Police remain in force at the Taksim Square area, firing off tear gas every once in awhile to replenish the clouds of it that are seemingly constantly looming in the area. Protesters who fled the site into a nearby hotel noted that the lobby of that too was filled with tear gas, sparking panic for those within.

The big protest areas are simply "no-go" zones without gas masks at this point, and even then the police are attacking protesters seemingly out of lack of any better ideas. Prime Minister Erdogan insists that ordering the protests to be crushed was his "duty" while his government continues to accuse the foreign media of starting the whole thing.

Violent crackdowns have left at least five people dead and several thousand wounded nationwide, while Turkish police continue to arrest protesters for attending rallies as Twitter "dissidents" for tweeting about the crackdowns in some cities. The strategy has clearly been a disastrous failure, just sparking more unrest, but officials seem determined to keep going with it.