

Police Riot: A Letter from Turkey

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Izmir, Turkey is a city known for its temperate climate and long history as a vacation spot during the Greek, Roman and Byzantine empires. Today, the tourists still find Izmir a lovely destination. However, recently many found themselves smack in the middle of street protests against the Prime Minister Erdogan and his governing party. Protesters fill the jails. After three days of demonstrations, tear gas, water cannon and fires, Izmir like all major cities in Turkey was tense. At night to show solidarity with the protests, people in their apartments flicked their lights on and off. It was amazing to go out on my balcony and see a mass of twinkling lights all as far as I could see.

Graffiti is on almost every building you see, including on the street pavement.

People targeted the Starbucks because they supposedly didn't support the protesters and closed their stores in Istanbul, but let the police enter for shelter and drinks. So once the word got out people went for Starbucks.

A friend of mine was injured in a demonstration. She won't be walking for a month due to a broken hip. It was late at night and I didn't want another friend to go home by herself, so I offered to see her home. I dropped her off and on the way back to my apartment I walked to the subway station. I noticed a fellow who appeared to be following me. I walked faster. He walked faster. I got scared. There was teargas in the air and fires all over Izmir. But the main street approach to the subway was deserted — just me and the man.

I started jogging. He started jogging. I began running for my life. He was running, too but couldn't catch me. Soon men dressed in regular clothes converged behind him. They all had big batons in their hands. I ran faster than I ever sprinted in college track, as I'm running I'm yelling "tourist." Someone came out of a side street and tackled me, but I struggled and got away.

Soon I saw a police car and ran for it, throwing open the door, jumping in and quickly slamming the door. Then to my surprise, the men who had been following me grabbed me out of the police car, threw me on the ground and handcuffed me. As the others began to catch up to me, they yelled and began to beat me with the batons. I was taken to jail --- jammed packed with protesters. I couldn't understand anything anybody was saying because everybody was screaming, the protesters and the police.

The police took my phone and my passport and then over and over asked, "Money, money." I had no money, just my subway card. After 30 minutes or so, my phone began ringing incessantly. One officer answered and began talking in Turkish to the caller. He put the phone to my ear. It was my friend who was worried since I hadn't called her when I got home. She asked if I was alright and said she'd be at the police station as soon as possible. Not long after, an officer came by the cell, pointed at me and shouted, "Get out, get out!" I did. He uncuffed me and I was allowed to sit outside of the cell as my friend came and talked with the police.

Who were the men who chased and beat me? My friends tell me they are secret paramilitary police called out to break up the demonstrations, but actually beating anybody they come across.

An American student in Turkey

P.S.

* http://www.solidarity-us.org/site/today_we_all_are_someone_new#comment-3259