Doubts cast upon Rio games as peaceful protests turn violent

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Almost 300,000 protesters gathered in front of the Maracanã Olympic Stadium on Tuesday in order to protest against corruption and the continuously declining social situation in Rio de Janeiro. The group was turned away from the Olympic venue by security forces and continued along the President Vargas Avenue into the Central District. The peaceful protest turned violent, when several incidents in the eastern Central district prompted a violent crackdown by the Brazilian military. Unconfirmed reports indicate that several foreign embassies in the area may have come under fire during the exchange.

The widespread dissatisfaction with government policies and the deteriorating social situation in the city, especially the poorer neighborhoods, manifested itself in a peaceful protest last night. After a local radio show aired a leaked recording allegedly implicating acting President Temer in the ongoing *Lava Jato* scandal, Brazilian social media lit up with outrage. By 6:00 PM local time, several smaller groups of people had converged on the Maracanã Olympic Stadium. The crowd held up signs denouncing corruption and demanding justice: »Brasília keeps telling us that housing funds are in short supply – but there is always enough money to crack down on another *favela* with the pretense of Olympic development. When are the Brazilian people going to see any of the benefits,« said Eduardo Silva, a student at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.

The Maracanã Olympic Stadium has been protected by a small detachment of police and military forces, sent by the Federal Government after the municipality of Rio de Janeiro was no longer able to provide adequate security due to budgetary shortcomings. The security personnel present at the stadium barred the crowd from entering the Olympic venue, which prompted the protesters to turn eastward. Several hours later, the Central district of the city was in disarray, when numerous allegedly armed gangs turned to robbery and vandalism. According to unconfirmed reports, several foreign embassies in the area were assaulted, which prompted an overwhelming response by the Brazilian military stationed in Rio. Several armed altercations between the alleged protesters and government forces took place, resulting in 11 deaths. Additionally, over 70 civilians and armed forces personnel were wounded in the clashes.

Just the latest episode in a long string of unfortunate events in Rio running up to the summer spectacle, yesterday's incident has prompted several experts to voice concerns about the ability of the federal government to provide adequate security for the world-class event. Others yet warn, that if the cycle of violence in Brazil continues, the consequences may be much more far-reaching when the underlying frustrations of Brazilian society erupt in radical movements and extremist sentiment.

The atmosphere in Rio de Janeiro has been highly charged for the better part of the year, as the preparations for the Summer Olympic Games demanded an ever increasing toll on the city's finances. The mayor of Rio, Eduardo Paes issued a statement two days ago, in which he expressed his regret that Brazil was not making the most of the upcoming event: »The constant crises we have been seeing are doing enormous damage to the potential

boost our city could be enjoying because of the Games. Much of the fault lies with the sensationalist media, who continuously fan the flames and present Rio as some kind of post-apocalyptic wasteland. Our city is a vibrant metropolis with much to offer the world and the Olympics are a chance to truly put Rio on the map. But the federal government has squandered much of this opportunity by not successfully addressing the misinformation that has prevailed in the public conversation.«