

TURKEY, ISIS AND KURDISTAN

Erdogan's war and US myopia

STRANGER THAN FICTION



TAJ HASHMI

TURKISH air force's latest bombing of ISIS positions in Syria, and its simultaneous bombing of Kurdish positions in northern Iraq, and its asking for a no-fly zone for Syrian air force in the border region between Turkey and Syria are both enigmatic and counterproductive for a durable peace in the sub region. As these attacks and their specious justifications are unwarranted, so are they neither surprising nor unexplainable.

However, the Obama Administration, which defied the hawkish opposition at home and abroad and signed the historic Nuclear Deal with Iran, seems to have condoned President Erdogan's military operation in Iraq. His bombing of the Kurdish forces – who have been fighting the ISIS terrorists in northern Iraq – amounts to supporting the terrorists. The US support for Erdogan's policy is astounding. As one analyst has argued, "Turkey's opportunistic decision to conflate the risks posed by the Islamic State with its three-decade conflict with Kurdish separatists could set back the broader efforts of the American-led coalition."

One may justify Erdogan's decision to bomb ISIS positions seemingly in retaliation against the apparently confirmed, recent "ISIS attacks" in Turkey. However, it is difficult to rule out the purported "ISIS attacks" as a false flag operation by the Turkish government. ISIS seems to have no compelling reasons to attack Turkey, which was a safe haven for foreign Islamist fighters who freely moved into Syria through its territory since the beginning of the Syrian civil war until the recent past.

The answer to the question as to why Turkey bombed Kurdish positions in northern Iraq is not that simple. If Turkey is genuinely interested in crushing the ISIS, it has no reasons to attack the Kurdish militias who have been the main bulwark against the ISIS in northern Iraq. However, there are convincing answers to all the above questions, and also to the question as to why Turkey wants to enforce a no-fly zone for Syrian air force across the Syria-Turkey border.

There are different versions of the stories. They are very different from what the Turkish Government is trying to tell the world since it started bombing Syria and northern Iraq last Friday, July 24th. Erdogan simply wants a safe haven for the Islamist rebels in Syria. His preference for



PHOTO: AFP

A Kurdish fighter with the People's Protection Units (YPG) looks on at an airstrike in the distance. Turkey carried out airstrikes against Islamic State in Syria, but also hit Kurdish forces it considers "terrorists" in northern Iraq.

the ISIS to the Kurdish State, as espoused by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), is not unknown.

More than 40,000 people died in the thirty-year long PKK-led rebellion (1984-2013) against the Turkish state, which denied the Kurds – between 10 and 25 percent of the population – equal rights and opportunities. The PKK is in peace with Turkey, after the PKK and the Turkish Government signed a ceasefire agreement in 2013.

After signing the agreement, the PKK slowly withdrew its fighters to the Kurdish districts of northern Iraq with a view to ending the long-drawn war with Turkey. The arrest of Abdullah Ocalan, the charismatic PKK leader in 1999, had already demoralised many PKK fighters. Although PKK has renounced violence and does not want to carve out a Kurdish state out of Turkey, Erdogan seems to be worried about the emergence of independent Kurdistan out of Kurdish territories in Iraq and Syria. The PKK has its Syrian offshoot called the People's Protection Units or YPG, which is friendly to the US and fighting against the

Assad regime, but is also striving for a Kurdish homeland, free from Syrian occupation.

Erdogan seems to have allowed the US to use Turkish air bases to bomb ISIS strongholds in the region, on the condition that Washington would not restrain Turkey from attacking Kurdish forces within and beyond Turkey. *The New York Times* (July 27, 2015) has aptly illustrated the equation: "Having sought Turkey's greater involvement in Syria for a long time, American officials appear reluctant to criticize Turkey's bombing of the P.K.K. the United States played no role in the air strikes against the Kurdish group, but recognized Turkey's 'right to self-defense'."

Nevertheless, Erdogan's military operations might eventually become a costly undertaking for Turkey. While Washington and the NATO have favoured the Turkish bombing of ISIS positions in Syria, and Kurdish positions in Iraq, analysts across the board are wary about the outcome of the Turkish attacks on

Kurdish territories in Iraq. If Turkey does not stop attacking the Kurds right now, the dormant Kurdish fighters are most likely to retaliate against Turkey. Ominously, both the Turkish Government and the Kurdish authorities in Turkey and Iraq declared in the wake of the Turkish attacks of Kurdish positions in Iraq that the truce was over.

As Erdogan wants to contain the PKK, so is he eager to destroy the base of the fast-rising pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) in Turkey. The HDP has a wider base beyond the Kurdish minority, among ethnic Turks as well. On the one hand, by breaking the truce with the PKK, Erdogan aims at crushing the PKK once and for all. By neutralising the PKK, it seems, he hopes to counterbalance the HDP support among ethnic Turks and Kurds in Turkey. While analysts considered the HDP as Erdogan's "nightmare" before the Parliamentary elections in June this year, in the wake of the elections, the Party emerged as a "menace" to the President's policies.

Erdogan's military ventures against the Kurds – if not stopped immediately – may prove problematic; and Turkey is likely to face terrorist attacks for an indefinite period. Instead of turning a blind eye to Turkey's attack on Kurdish territories in Iraq, the Obama administration must restrain the Turkish regime for the sake of a durable and just peace.

Washington should realise that Erdogan's attacks on Kurdish forces in Iraq and Turkey are likely to benefit the ISIS and other obscurantist forces in the region.

The US has a responsibility and the capability to stabilise the entire region, which, thanks to its invasions and regime-change dictum since long, is one of the most turbulent regions in the world. Instead of trying to overthrow Bashar al-Assad to make another fractured entity like Iraq or Libya out of Syria, it is time to engage Saudi, Iranian, Turkish and other regional governments to destroy the ISIS, al Qaeda and other menacing threats to peace.

The US allocated millions to train up 3,000 "secular fighters" in Syria to topple the Assad regime by the end of this year, but it has managed to train up only 60 Syrians to date at a cost of \$500 million. The US has already spent a staggering \$3.2 billion in its bombing campaign in Iraq and Syria – spending around \$9.4 million a day – to overthrow the elusive Islamic State. Money and military hardware alone have failed to resolve any major problem in the region.

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MOBILE OPERATORS TO BE FINANCIAL SERVICE PROVIDERS

A SMART POLICY MOVE?

In such healthy, competitive market of specialised services, the provision of entry of mobile operators and strong interest of majority shareholders of the dominant mobile operator raise serious concerns.

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MOBILE networks have now become common information infrastructure that support the delivery of diverse services such as voice, financial, commerce, health, insurance, news, etc. Due to the growing ease of delivery – caused by high subscription, growth of network and availability of affordable, feature-rich handsets – consumers are expected to consume diverse services from these specialised service providers over common communication networks offered by mobile operators.

To take advantage of high mobile penetration – as of today above 75 percent – and countrywide coverage of mobile operators' network, the Bangladesh Bank has issued the license of mobile financial services to 28 banks to extend banking services to the unbanked and banked population, especially to expedite faster delivery of remittances across the country. Due to risky investments, entrepreneurial drive and intense competition, registered customers of 20 operating mobile financial service (MFS) providers – with the support of 538,170 agents, have jumped to 28.65 million in just four years since the launch of the first mobile financial service products in 2011.

From legal and regulatory perspectives, Bangladesh Bank has pursued only the bank-led model for MFS, which has shown spectacular

success to date. Intense competition among these 20 MFS providers, drove the growth of agents from 60,000 to 543,000, the number of registered clients from 5 million to 25.87 million, the number of transactions from 10 million to 76.99 million, and transaction value from USD 301 million to USD 1,423 million between Jan 2013 and Feb 2015, according to a study by USAID. In reference to the history of many other services, such growth appears to be a spectacular success of BB's bank-led competitive model of mobile financial services. In such healthy, competitive market of specialised services, the provision of entry of mobile operators and strong interest of majority shareholders of the dominant mobile operator raise serious concerns.

To reduce the monopolistic behaviour gained from vertical foreclosure strategy, the telecom industry has been vertically segmented. Until there is a strong case of economy of scope or scale benefit, an operator is not allowed to operate in more than one segment. For this reason, NTTN operators are not allowed to operate in access networks; similarly mobile operators are not allowed to be transmission service providers, although MNOs have significant technical specialisation and physical assets. The entry of MNOs, having no relevant specialisation, in financial service delivery simply violates such basic principles of market based reforms of the telecom industry. The entry of MNOs in financial service

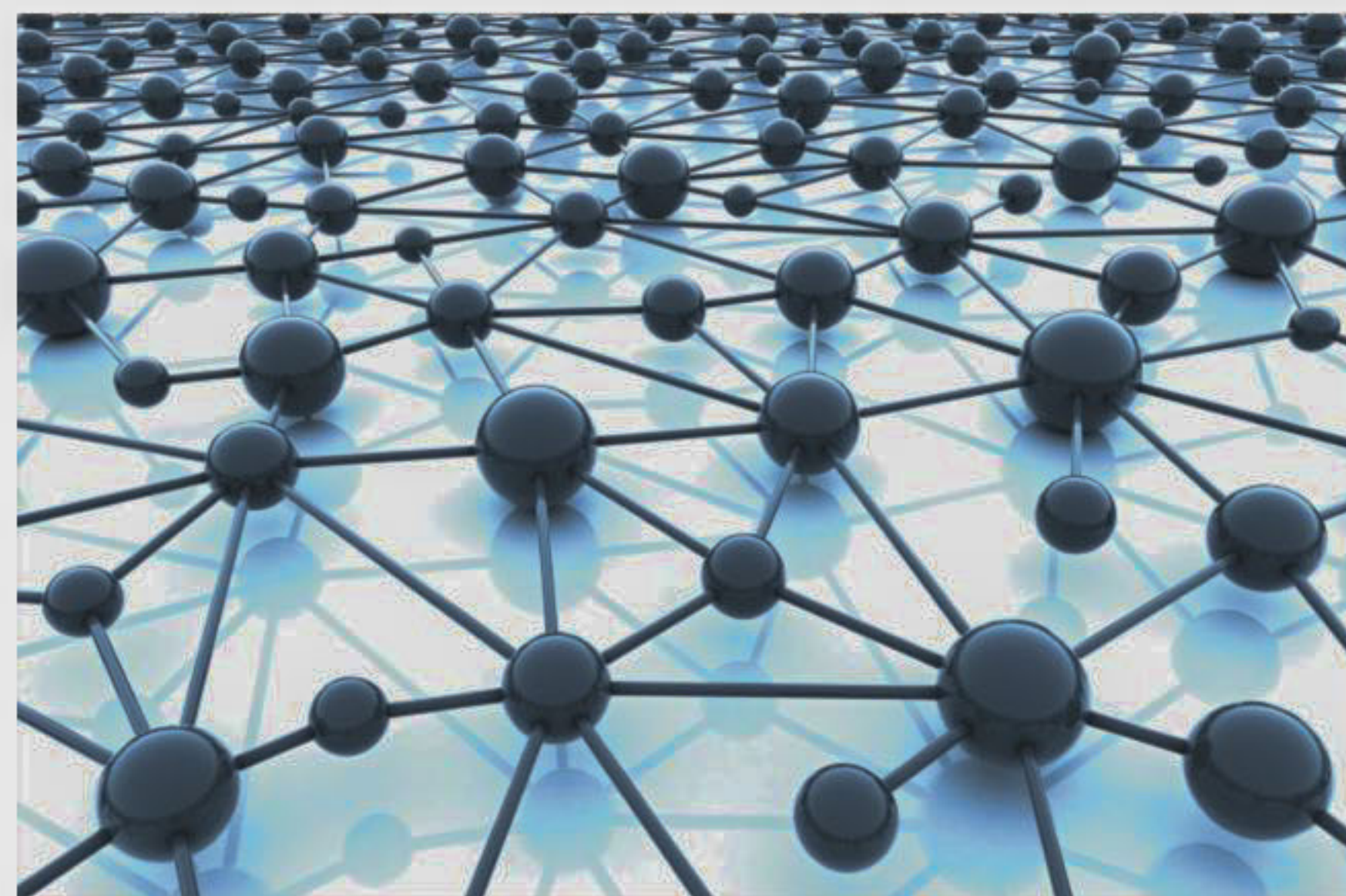
delivery will not only enable the dominant operator to gain further market to marginalise smaller telecom operators, but will also open the door of exercising this market power to reduce competition in the highly successful mobile financial service market.

The second concern is net neutrality – the principle that all electronic communications passing through mobile networks are treated equally – in the context of an environment where traffic management, in varying forms and in varying degrees, is ubiquitous. There is a fine line between correctly applying traffic management to ensure a high quality of services and wrongly interfering with data traffic to limit applications that affects the operators' own lines of business. By allowing MNOs in MFS, the door of anti-competitive strategies – such as throttling rivals' mobile financial services so that the MFS services in which MNOs have ownership is more attractive – exercised through measures such as non-uniform access time and security features, will be opened up. Due to asymmetric information, it's more or less impossible to address such anticompetitive practices through regulation. It has been found that the policy of minimising vested interests to ensure non-discriminatory behaviour works much better than regulation.

Within a socio-economic situation, both the cost and coverage of mobile data services are yet to make

substantial improvements to deliver envisioned digital dividends to the grassroots. Instead of investing capital in some other services, MNOs should rather use their limited capital to expand high speed mobile data services, particularly 3G and 4G, and subsidise the take-off at the early

vertical foreclosure strategy to gain economic profits from competitors resulting in weakening competition in both MFS and Telco. Lack of specialisation of MNOs in MFS does not provide the scope to benefit from either economy of scale or scope. Net neutrality should be addressed through



stage, to profit from economy of scale at a later stage. It's to be noted that due to a lack of responsiveness of MNOs, the BTRC is failing to expedite the roll out of 4G services.

Therefore, due to four strong reasons, the policy option of allowing MNOs in MFS does not appear to be a smart move. It opens the door of gaining market power through a

policies by minimising business interests of MNOs in service segments. MNOs should be encouraged to invest their limited capital to increase the coverage and reduce the cost of mobile data services.

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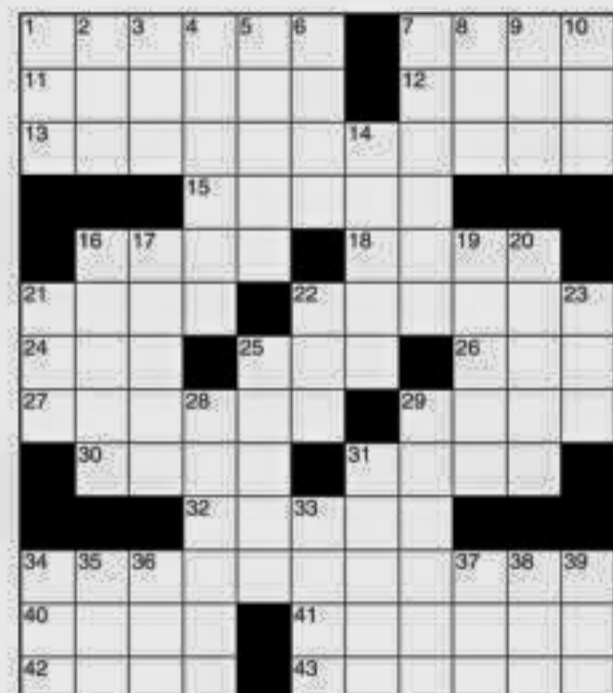
BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott



CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS		27	Old-time Japanese governor	2	Memorable time	21	Director Anderson
1	Start a journey			3	File folder feature	22	Convent resident
7	Lord's wife	29	Lose traction	4	Stretched square	23	Tie the knot
11	Middle East peninsula	30	Constellation part	5	Despicable person	25	Liquefy
12	Buffalo's lake	31	Ready for business	6	Speedy	28	Collect
13	Betting limit	32	Arm's length	7	Go for with gusto	29	Bubble shape
15	Like draft beer	34	Prized cuts	8	Noah's creation	31	Quartet doubled
16	Back	40	Staff member	9	Game cube	33	Inquires
18	Final	41	Friend of Fozzie	19	Word of assent	34	Play ground game
21	Plane part	42	Attendee	14	Eagle's claw	35	Book jacket bit
22	Later, perhaps	43	Like a Turkish bath	16	Weather data	36	Lyrical poem
24	Nest item			17	Silver bar	37	"I- Rock"
25	Play on words			19	Asp or adder	38	Singer Carnes
26	Tin Man's tool	DOWN	Was inactive	20	Poison	39	Hog holder



Yesterday's answer

H	A	N	D	S	A	B	A	C	K
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Farah Ghuznavi

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