

Is Kemalism on its way out in Turkey?

STRANGER THAN FICTION
TAJ HASHMI

THE enigmatic coup-attempt in Turkey on the night of July 15 and 16 signals something ominous about the future of Turkey, NATO, and the entire region. There's more to read into the event than what appears on the surface. We don't know much about the nature of the coup, but it has definitely tarnished the "Turkish Model" of success, which its Arab neighbours envied, and European ones admired for the co-existence of liberal Islam, secularism, and democracy. The "abortive coup" seems to have further consolidated Erdogan's power, at least for the time being. Seemingly, Erdogan and his followers are marching together toward "illiberal democracy", if not toward the utopia of Islamist totalitarianism. Kemalism turned Turkey too secular too soon to sustain for generations. Thus, the resurgence of political Islam in Turkey indicates the country is preparing itself for a departure from Kemalism. One's not sure as to how this seesaw is going to affect Turkish society and politics in the future. I think the following are Turkey's nemeses, which we need to understand as to what might happen to the country now: Kemalism; the Kurdish problem; Turkey's neighbours; and Turkey's relationship with America. Turkey is very unique from its European and Muslim neighbours. Being straddled on two continents, this Muslim-majority country is officially secular in the strictest sense. It's not just another postcolonial country in the Muslim World, it's rather a former colonial power, the centre of the mighty Ottoman Empire, which once ruled parts of Eastern Europe, West Asia, and North Africa for several centuries up to the end of World War I. Turkey's Ottoman legacy of ruthless subjugation of European nations – including forcible conversions of Christians into Muslims, and the infamous Armenian Genocide – is still a factor behind its exclusion from the EU by European nations. Turkey isn't a nation state. Fifteen million of its 80 million people are ethnically and linguistically non-Turkish Kurdish Muslims, in the process of being fully integrated into the main stream of population. Turkey has a checkered history of military rule and

democracy; and many Turks aren't sure if they are primarily Asian, Muslim, or European. Now, to look at the enigmatic "abortive coup", one may agree with an analyst that: "Erdogan is using this failed coup to get rid of the last vestiges of secular Turkey." Some people question the coup and whether it was staged to further consolidate his power, and to turn Turkey into an Islamist autocracy. The amateurish and excessive brutal behaviour of the soldiers on the street, who didn't even close down all electronic media outlets, including cell phones, and TV stations, raises questions among people whether it was really a coup-attempt, or a false flag operation!

terrorist, although there's no Turkish court decision to charge Gulen with any terrorist activity. The day after 9/11 attacks, he wrote an article in the Washington Post and stated: "A Muslim cannot be a terrorist, nor can a terrorist be a true Muslim." Contrary to Erdogan's allegations, Gulen believes in interfaith dialogue, multi-party democracy, and asserts: "Studying physics, mathematics, and chemistry is worshipping God". The end of the Ottoman Empire in 1922 and the Kemalist Revolution of 1923 transformed Turkey into a modern, ultra-secular country, where the military and urban classes became the main custodians of

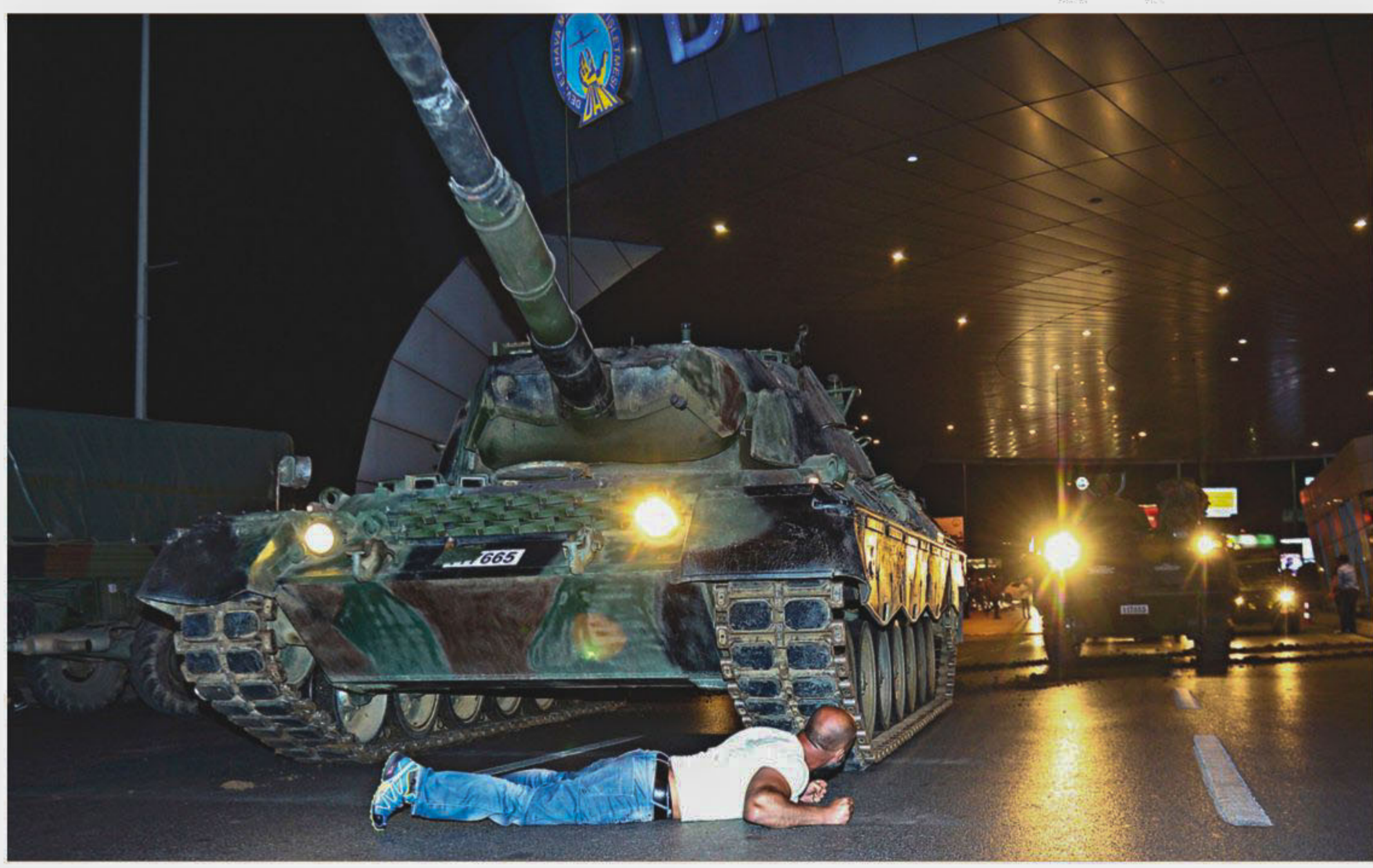
became one of the bold advocates of political Islam. He is not only an Islamist but also an admirer of "authoritarian democracy" – a euphemism for dictatorship, a la "Mahathirism" in Malaysia. As Erdogan's support for Islamist rebels in Syria has contributed to the instability in Turkey and, so is his tacit support for the ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Turkey is accused of having bought cheap oil from the ISIS controlled Iraqi oilfields, and it didn't stop foreign nationals at its border from entering ISIS-occupied territories in Syria to join the terror outfit, till the recent past. Why so? One assumes to topple the pro-Iranian Assad

speaking their language or sing any Kurdish song. Turkey didn't even recognise them as Kurds, but as "Mountain Turks". After the US-led Iraq invasion of 2003, Iraqi Kurdistan has become an autonomous entity. The Turkish government is very uncomfortable with this development. Erdogan tried his best to make Turkey a EU member. The EU has been unwilling to accept Turkey as a member so far. European and North American NATO members have had no problem in having Turkey as a member of this military alliance. However, as *The New York Times* has pointed out ["The Countercoup in Turkey", July 18, 2016]: Erdogan's use of Islamist language and harsh retaliatory measures against his secular opponents might "compromise Turkey's democracy and its ability to be a stabilising influence in NATO and the region".

In view of Erdogan's position vis-à-vis the democratic and secular values of the EU and the West, it's strange that till the other day Turkey was insisting its main strategic relationships remained with the NATO and the EU, and that it had "zero-problem" with European neighbours. But now it seems like Erdogan and his party may be laying the ground for the creation of a Muslim bloc. Both the EU and US seem to have emerged as the biggest nemeses for Turkey.

To conclude, one is least likely to be enamoured by Erdogan's authoritarian Islamism; his attitude towards the Kurds; mass arrests of journalists, opposition supporters, and alleged coup makers; his promotion of Islamist rebels in Syria; and last but not least, his alleged links with the ISIS at least in the earlier stages. However, one can't solely blame Turkey or Erdogan for the drift in Turkey's domestic and foreign policies, which are deviations from Kemalist principles of secular democracy. Western obduracy, racism, and Islamophobia are also responsible for the messy situation in Turkey. This doesn't bode well for regional and global security in the long run.

Turkey, its European and Asian neighbours, and America must find out a durable solution to the problems dogging Turkey and the entire Middle East and North Africa, and their mutual relationship with each other.



A man lies in front of a Turkish army tank at Ataturk airport in Istanbul

PHOTO: AP

Interestingly, while Erdogan blames his former ally and present adversary, Hanafi Sufi Master Fethullah Selah – self-exiled in the US – for the "coup-attempt", Gulen points fingers at the President for staging the whole thing for further consolidation of power. To Erdogan, Gulen is corrupt and a

secular democracy. With the end of the Cold War and the acceleration of the globalisation process, and the IT Revolution in early 1990s, Muslims across the world became more Islamised than before. Henceforth, Turkish Muslims started questioning the utility of Kemalist "Godless" secularism. Erdogan

regime, and to stop secular nationalist Syrian Kurds from gaining any foothold in Syria. The Kurds are in Turkey by default since 1919. The League of Nations arbitrarily divided Kurdistan into four parts, giving each to Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran. Up to 2009, Kurds in Turkey couldn't publicly

The writer teaches security studies at Austin Peay State University in the US. He is the author of several books, including his latest, *Global Jihad and America: The Hundred-Year War Beyond Iraq and Afghanistan* (Sage, 2014). Email: tajhashmi@gmail.com

Shedding our prejudices

MOZAMMEL H. KHAN

IF you are in a drawing room and any other gathering of your friends or acquaintances, naturally the talk of the day would lurk around what is going on around the world. By all probability, if the attendees are Muslims, they will make the foregone conclusion that the policies of the West, particularly its pro-Israeli policy vis-à-vis its conflict with Palestine, are responsible for inducing this deadly hatred towards the West in the brains of Muslim youngsters. And it is this repugnance that is inducing Muslim youngsters into committing the heinous crimes, either on Western soils or towards Western people in Eastern soil. This type of drawing room bashing of the West is rampant both at home and abroad, by the people, especially of Muslim origin. At home, one will not be considered an intellectual if he/she does not express despising words against the West. Sometimes children either in schools or homes in Muslim countries are given the feeling that America is solely responsible for the miseries of the Muslim world, although almost many parents may have the dream of sending their children to that 'despised' land. So the Muslim children's mindset are, in general, infected with the general notion that America is the villain of the Muslim world. In the same

token, many Muslim homes are the primary breeding ground of anti-West sentiments. But in reality, is the West or the US really that evil? Is the Western value system so depraved? I often tell my students who were not born in Canada that you (or your parents) chose to make this country your home, knowing very well its value system. While those who were born in this country, did not have the option to make the choice. In every society, there are both good and bad people, and the US and the West are no exception. However, in my own experience, as someone who lived in the West longer than he lived in his motherland, there are more tolerant, compassionate people in the West than most other countries. Let me share a few personal experiences. In 1974, when Bangladesh was inundated by a devastating flood, I was in a university campus town of the States, with around hundred thousand people. Many Christian philanthropic organisations of the town invited me to their churches to enlighten them on the devastating situation of Bangladesh. After listening to my stories of the miseries of the Bangladeshi people, the devotees in the church came forward with open hearts and wallets to donate generously, knowing very well that the majority of Bangladesh were not fellow Christians. A year later, a club by the name of

Cosmopolitan Club of the town, associated with the university run by Christian philanthropists took ten of us, incidentally all of them Muslims, including a young Tunisian couple, to a rural town of Illinois of some five thousand people and put each of us for the weekend with a local family to familiarise ourselves with the American way of life. I was assigned to an old couple; the man was a World War II veteran who fought in Asia. During two days of my stay, they tried to do everything to make my stay as pleasant as possible and showed their great interest in Bangladesh and its people. On Sunday morning, they took all of us to the local Church, not to teach us Christianity, but to share their happiness that resulted from our stay. At the end of the sermon (where we were collectively mentioned by the priest), each of our host families was asked if they have any happiness (or sorrows) for that week to share. When my host family's turn came, she said, "It is with great pleasure I am sharing our happiness that Mozammel, a young man from Bangladesh, is staying with us. He is a lovely young man who came from a wonderful country". Before I left, they asked for my parent's mailing address in Bangladesh and asked my permission to write to them. Later on, I came to know from my parents that they indeed wrote to them, where the most important sentence was, "You have every

reason to be proud of your son, who is working hard in America". The US and the rest of the West are representative democracies. Their policies towards other countries are formulated by politicians. These policies vary from time to time, depending on the political party in power. For instance, due to a brewing conspiracy to carry out a 9/11 type attack by 18 youngsters, known as Toronto-18 belonging to Muslim faith, on Canadian establishments, which was foiled by the RCMP (counterpart of American FBI) through a pre-emptive operation ten years ago, and a suicidal bomb attack by a Muslim youth on Canadian Parliament two years ago, the previous Conservative government passed Bill C-24 to subtly denigrate and vilify Muslims. It came into effect May last year. This allowed the government to revoke Canadian citizenship from dual citizens who are convicted of terrorism, high treason and several other serious offences. This draconian law was applicable even if one was born in Canada. However, the current liberal government headed by Justin Trudeau campaigned on the promise of abolishing the bill, and kept its promise as the bill is now history. Aside from the conservative government's action as mentioned above, there were not much visible backlash in Canada against Muslims following the bomb

attack on the Parliament by a Muslim gunman or similar heinous attacks elsewhere by Muslim miscreants. Over the years, hundreds of Muslim students came to the US for study and many of them went back to their parent countries. But many also stayed back. The fact that they stayed back in the US assured them better careers and comfort, and benefited them. A handful of them who returned to their parents' countries or went elsewhere, did not do so because they don't cherish the American way of life or despise their value systems. The other night, when the news of the Nice massacre came over my car radio, I told my wife sitting beside me, "Let us hold our breath and hope that he is not a Muslim". The same thing happened when we got the news of the Orlando massacre. A lot can and needs to be said about the reactions of the general public in the West even after several instances of mass killings by Muslims there. Yes, there were a few instances of recriminatory attacks, but by and large the reaction of the general public in the US, France, Belgium and other European countries has been one of understanding and acceptance. The writer is currently the Deputy Speaker of the Senate of the Sheridan Institute of Technology and is the Convener of the Canadian Committee for Human Rights and Democracy in Bangladesh.

QUOTABLE Quote

ÉDOUARD GLISSANT
Writer, poet, philosopher

Each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Have a novel experience?
- 5 Youngsters
- 9 "Manhattan" director
- 11 Bright parrot
- 12 Stately
- 13 Singer Cara
- 14 Clumsy fellow
- 15 "Ben-Hur" writer Lew
- 17 Pat's kin
- 19 Acquire
- 20 Play setting
- 21 Garden section
- 22 Highway sign
- 24 They hold power
- 26 Pulses
- 29 Before today
- 30 Light sailing ship
- 32 Source of heat
- 34 Cleveland player, for short
- 35 Circus star
- 36 Orchestra instrument
- 38 Make law
- 39 Ready for war

DOWN

- 1 Charged
- 2 Weds in secret
- 3 Writer Camus
- 4 Penna. neighbor
- 5 Automaker Benz
- 6 Glacial period
- 7 Cut a rug
- 8 Adorable
- 10 Soothing music style
- 11 Odometer unit
- 16 Biting
- 18 Los Angeles team
- 21 Noggin
- 23 City on the Rhone
- 24 Scaly pet
- 25 Golfer Greg
- 27 Puget Sound city
- 28 Justice symbol
- 29 Following
- 30 Component
- 31 Dodge
- 33 Bottle part
- 37 Anger

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

AMPERE LASS
MOSAIC OHIO
SWITCHBOARD
SHOES
BLUE LEFT
SLAP CONRAD
PEPPER YAW USE
FEEDER KITE
PLEA CITY
CREAM
SPRINGBOARD
ARID GINGER
DOME SNOOPY

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott