

With skates on, Turkey could slip into Syrian quagmire

SAEED NAQVI

HAKAN Fidan, Chief of Turkish Intelligence, did not give much credence to warnings by Russian agencies that a coup to oust President Tayyip Erdogan was in the works. But he shared the information with others on a "need-to-know" basis. In a manner of speaking, he closed the door, a sort of general precaution. He did not send out an alert.

The Russians persisted. A helicopter gunship would target Erdogan at his Mediterranean holiday resort.

Subsequent stories remain unverified – that Erdogan could not land at Istanbul, Germany, Azerbaijan. That is when the Americans gave him refuge at the Incirlik air base which, ironically, happens to be in Turkey. Then Fethullah Gulen surfaced as the master plotter, in cahoots with "some" American Generals.

Obviously the Russians had their ears close to the ground when they picked up the earliest signals of the impending coup. When Erdogan called out the people to thwart the plotters, Tehran was the first capital to openly support the embattled Turkish president. Suddenly, Moscow, Tehran, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Iraq – particularly Najaf, because Prime Minister Haider al Abadi in Baghdad is seen as something of an American puppet – all of them had broad smiles on their faces.

With athletic agility, Erdogan turned up at St. Petersburg, apologised for the Russian pilot being shot down over Turkey in November, 2015, and locked Vladimir Putin in a tight embrace.

And, lo and behold, Turkish forces are now in Syria, tanks and all. Is the theory of unintended consequences catching up with everybody after the failed coup of July 15? I mention this because I have been witness to another botched up coup which changed the world – The Saur (April) 1978 revolution which brought the Afghan Communist Parties, Khalq and Parcham to power. This paved the way

for the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1980. I remember a panic stricken Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter's National Security Adviser on the Pakistan-Afghan border, discussing strategies.

Let me first explain how it was a "botched" up coup.

Having suffered reverses in Vietnam, Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Nicaragua at the hands of

the Afghan Armed Forces, drove out tanks from Pul e Charkhi. They slaughtered Daoud and his entourage.

The Left, unprepared for power, persuaded Nur Mohammad Taraki of Khalq to take over as Prime Minister. Within two years, the Soviets were in Afghanistan.

The US, Saudis, Pakistan, for their own reasons, got into a scrum. Thus, began the training of Mujahideen in

like melting ice cream.

Two comparisons with the situation in Turkey and Afghanistan are possible. It was a botched up coup in Afghanistan in 1978 which changed the world. The consequences plague us to this day. Witness the ghastly attack on the American University in Kabul this week. Likewise, the botched up coup in Turkey has brought about strategically new power equations globally as well

been supporting either "moderates" opposed to Bashar al Assad or extremists like Jumal al Nussra in pursuit of the same end. Each side has other game plans which are played out as subsidiary side shows. These are too many to be listed.

Americans occupied Iraq for a decade, dismantled all its institutions and left in 2011, more or less empty handed. Which is why they had to remove Premier Nouri al Maliki, who had dedicated himself exclusively to the expansion of his Shia base. The Saudis next door were throwing fits. Americans needed influence in Baghdad. Little wonder Prime Minister Haider al Abadi is their man.

With such experience in Iraq, how did the Americans (and their cohorts) imagine that mere cross border terrorism – albeit, lethally armed – would topple Assad? After all the Baathist structure in Syria is the mirror image of the one in Iraq. Assad is a non practicing Alawi just as Saddam Hussain was only a notional Sunni. Except for public rituals, both must be listed as devout atheists.

The impression now being put out is that Erdogan's primary aim for entering Syria is to prevent Syrian Kurds carving out territory along the Turkish border. That would feed Turkish Kurd party, the PKK's quest for separation. Erdogan's purpose last year was different: he was facilitating ISIS's oil trade across the border. In brief, everybody in the Syrian war was everybody else's proxy. Erdogan was a major player in this game of surreptitious intent.

Will the terms of endearment now change totally just because Erdogan kissed Putin on both his cheeks in St. Petersburg?

A new pirouette has begun in Syria. Only after the US elections will it become clear who is on the dance floor and who is sinking in a quagmire.

The writer is a senior Indian journalist, television commentator and interviewer.

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PHOTO: AFP

local communist movements, the Americans pressured the Shah of Iran's Savak Secret Service to oust the Left in Kabul which was getting powerful around President Daoud Khan.

When the coup plan was still in its nascent stages, Mir Akbar Khybar, a trade union leader, affiliated to Parcham, was killed in an intelligence-counter intelligence mix up. The coup plot had leaked. Abdul Qadir and Aslam Watanjar, Communist moles in

hundreds of Madrasas along the border with Afghanistan. The strategy was to play on Islamic aversion to "Godless" communism. The trick, bolstered by stinger missiles, worked.

After 1981, President Reagan had raised the cost of the Cold War for the Soviet Union everywhere, including Afghanistan. By 1989, the new Secretary General of CPSU, Mikhail Gorbachev, began withdrawing Soviet troops. Then, the Berlin wall fell. By 1991, the Soviet Union had come down

as regionally.

The other comparison, to which Syrians are subscribing, is plausible: Soviet Union hurtled headlong into Afghanistan and came out irreparably broken. Might Erdogan likewise be leading Turkey inextricably into the Syrian quagmire?

The omens are not good. For the past five years, every country in the Syrian theatre – the US, France, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, Jordan – has

"The audacity of hope"



MILIA ALI

SHIFTING IMAGES

WE live in a world of instant news and communication, with its enormous benefits and opportunities. But, at the same time, the daily diet of negative and gloomy stories churned by the media make us virtually numb to the violence and brutality perpetrated around the world. The collateral damage from senseless bombings, the slaughter of innocent men and women by terrorists, the racially driven police brutality: nothing seems to affect us anymore. We may shed a tear or two when our TV screens flash the limp body of the boy washed ashore while his family was trying to flee Syria in a rickety, overloaded boat. We may also spend a sleepless night shocked and outraged at the bloodied image of five-year-old Omran rescued from the rubble of his bombed house in Aleppo. But, soon the images fade and we revert to business-as-usual. The sense of resignation is engendered by the pervasive belief that "life is not fair" and we, the ordinary citizens, are utterly helpless. The net outcome is a gradual shift in values from

cares, sharing and empathy to indifference, materialism and egocentrism.

Fortunately, once in a while, the compassionate acts of a few men and women reinstate our belief in the innate goodness of human beings. Recently, I had two seemingly mundane experiences that gave me cause for optimism. Last Sunday, while I was sipping coffee at a neighbourhood restaurant, I noticed an elderly woman come in with a large dish of cookies, which she gave to the receptionist. She proceeded to sit in a corner with her cup of coffee, exchanging an occasional greeting with the servers who seemed to know her well. My curiosity being sufficiently aroused, I asked our waitress if the lady was the proprietor of the café. She told me that the woman brought home-baked cookies for the restaurant staff, each Sunday. In addition, she interacted with the staff offering her advice or help, if needed – in the process, she infused a sense of bonhomie and camaraderie, adding a human touch to the ambience of the restaurant. This story may not sound noteworthy in the face of the larger problems that we encounter in our daily existence. But noticing the upbeat reaction of the restaurant workers, I was convinced that the simple act of kindness had made a significant dent in the lives of these "invisible" men and women, who too crave for kindness and

appreciation.

The other incident was a chance meeting with the owner of a fast food joint, during a visit to Charleston, South Carolina. As a group of Bangladeshi tourists, we caught the attention of this rather ebullient gentleman, who warmly welcomed us and engaged in a conversation. When he discovered that we were from Bangladesh, he revealed that he had adopted ten children from China, India and the Middle East. His childhood and adolescent years in Lebanon, where his father was posted, had helped him develop a deep love and understanding of diverse cultures. He went on to claim that a secure home and a nurturing environment enable children from less privileged families transit into a better life and become more accepting of people of different colour, faith and race. Watching him proudly display a photograph of his multicultural family, I was convinced that he had made a small but important contribution toward making our world more inclusive and tolerant.

The two experiences triggered an interesting chain of thought in my mind -- about the clash between people who believe in an extreme individualistic ideology and those who think that the best outcome in life is produced by the synergy from human beings with different skills and capacities. I wondered if this conflict could

be explained by Darwin's theory of 'natural selection', or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life. While there have been several interpretations of the Darwinian theory, the one that most appeals to me is that of Russian activist, scientist and philosopher Peter Kropotkin. Kropotkin viewed the concept of "survival of the fittest" as supporting cooperation rather than competition. He argued that the fittest was not necessarily the best at competing individually, but often the community made up of those best at working together. Applying this concept to human society, he concluded: "We can affirm that in the ethical progress of man, mutual support not mutual struggle – has had the leading part."

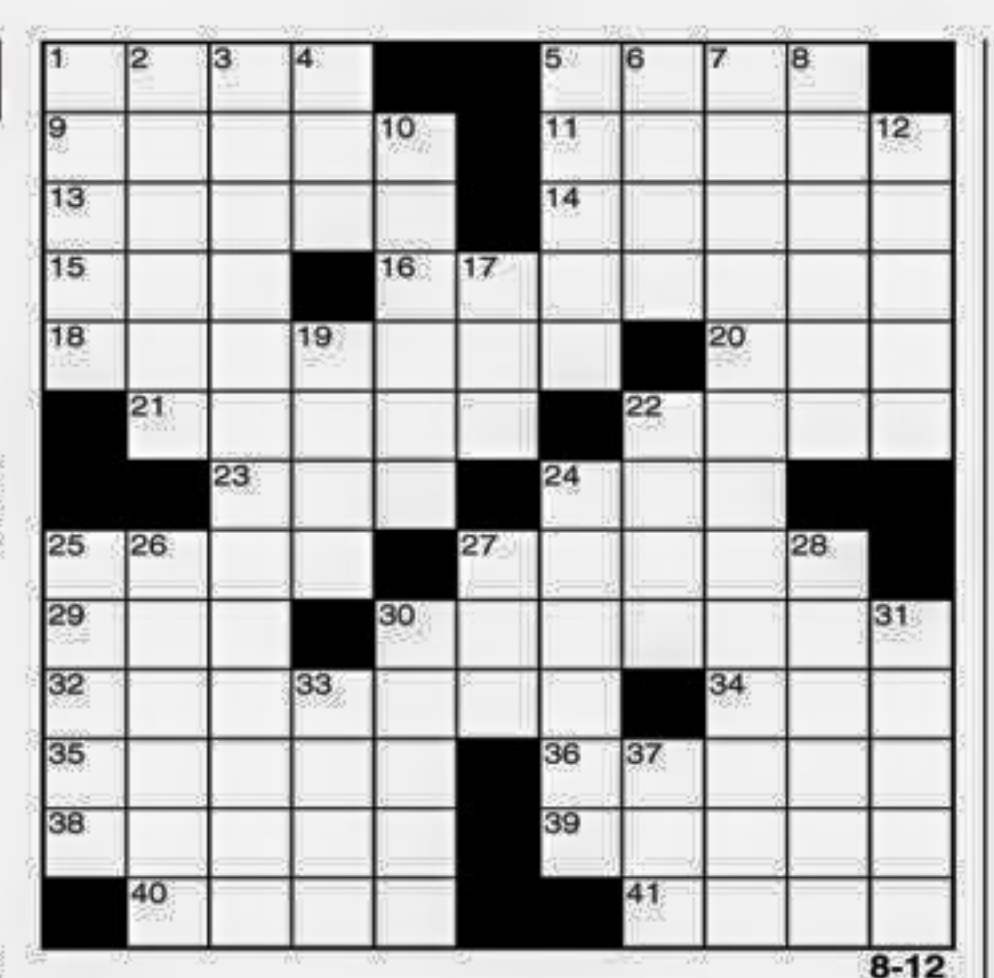
Today, as I witness unbridled individualism at the cost of collective good, I wonder – will we see a better world where Kropotkin's interpretation of Darwin will hold true? Will the most compassionate and caring survive and help mankind transit into a spiritually and emotionally developed species, and those who create chaos and discord through a callous disregard for others, will gradually become extinct? Will altruism ultimately prevail over selfishness? Or is it just my wishful thinking?

The writer is a renowned Rabindra Sangeet exponent and a former employee of the World Bank.

Will the most compassionate and caring survive and help mankind transit into a spiritually and emotionally developed species?

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Massage target
 - 5 Malevolent
 - 9 Dear, in Dijon
 - 11 Clark's partner
 - 13 European fashion center
 - 14 Head out
 - 15 Wing
 - 16 Snood
 - 18 Campaign phrases
 - 20 Long of "Soul Food"
 - 21 Foolish
 - 22 Talk crazily
 - 23 "Crooklyn" director
 - 24 Salon stuff
 - 25 Pump, for one
 - 27 Camp craft
 - 29 "Mazel --!"
 - 30 Expunged
 - 32 Eight furilongs
 - 34 Storm center
 - 35 Kansas
 - 36 City player
 - 37 Cellulose fiber
 - 38 Crumble
 - 39 Horse sound
- 40 Takes to court**
- 41 Club cost**
- DOWN**
- 1 High points
 - 2 Puts in the fridge
 - 3 Hit for the Doors
 - 4 Hurler's stat
 - 5 Mystery writer
 - 6 Turn suddenly
 - 7 Hit for Akon
 - 8 Like some maids
 - 9 Take drag
 - 10 Take
 - 12 Assil
 - 17 One or more
 - 19 Merriment
 - 22 Nevada resort
 - 24 Casino fans
 - 25 Put away
 - 26 Graduate's distinction
 - 27 Animation frame
 - 28 Pal of Pooh
 - 30 Irritates
 - 31 Car's scars
 - 33 Put together
 - 37 Linking word



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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