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A Memorial to Nigel Hugh Monteith PhD 1928 - 2019

Forward

Dr Nigel Monteith was a much respected member of the Glen Osmond Probus Club. He joined the Club in 2011, was the secretary for five years from 2013 and membership officer for three years from 2017. For his outstanding contribution to the Club, Nigel was made a life member in June 2018.

Nigel died, aged 91 years, at Gaynes Park Manor, Joslin, South Australia on 21st August 2019.

Past President Dr Bob Brummitt saved the copy of this insightful paper, titled, 'The Middle East – A Complex and Dangerous Web', written by Nigel in January 2017.

It is obvious from reading the paper, that Nigel had extensive experience in the Middle East, where he worked on a catchment stabilisation project in 1972 and 1973. He was also an Agricultural Specialist with the World Bank in Washington DC from 1975 to 1980, and in this role he visited Tunisia, Turkey, Syria, Egypt, and Jordon, where he got to know the geography and the people, and developed his considerable insight into the turmoil that is constantly happening in this part of the World.

The opinions expressed in this paper were the sole views of Nigel Hugh Monteith and as such do not represent the Glen Osmond Probus Club or the Probus Organisation. The paper is presented exactly as written, purely as a memorial to a very talented and gifted man.

Brian W. Rice
Immediate Past President Glen Osmond Probus Club Inc. 2019
PS The requests for feedback and comment made in the last paragraph are no longer relevant.

The Middle East – A Complex and Dangerous Web

by

Nigel Hugh Monteith PhD

Adelaide, South Australia

30th January 2017

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Introduction

During my lifetime, the Middle East has always been in the news and generally for all the wrong reasons. During that time we have seen (among other actions) the terrorism associated with the settlement of the Jews in Palestine, the Suez crisis, the Israeli wars, Intifada, the Iranian revolution, the Iraq Iran war, the Lebanon crises, the 'desert war ' and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the Iraqi conflict, the 'Arab Spring' and the associated disturbances in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, the Kurdish conflicts in Turkey and Iraq and more recently, the ousting of the Muslim Brotherhood from Egyptian government, the clashes in the Gaza strip, the conflict in Yemen, the Shiite/Sunni conflict within Iraq, the Syrian revolutionary war, the rise of ISIL, the battle for Mosul and the failed coup in Turkey.

Why has this area been in constant strife and what of the future? Is there any solution? I am not a specialist in the area and I do not pretend to supply the answers. But I thought I should put some musings down on paper to get my thoughts in order as much as anything else. As I say, I am no expert on the Middle East, however I have been taking an interest in the area since I managed a catchment stabilisation project in Iran in 1972 and 1973. Also, I was an Agricultural Specialist with the World Bank based in Washington DC from 1975 to 1980. In that role, I was part of in-country missions for a cereal project in Tunisia, an irrigation project in Turkey, a livestock, a horticultural and an irrigation project in Syria and an extension project, a rural development project and a drainage project in Egypt and an irrigation project in Jordan. I certainly got to know the geography and to some extent, the people. Politically, all these countries appeared stable when I had to deal with their officials. Some intense skirmishes were occurring between Syria and Israel on the Golan Heights and between Lebanon and Israel but governments (or dictatorships) were not being seriously challenged at that time. I had only a very rough idea of the factors that make this area a powder keg.

I have tried to read as much as I can on the history and present day events. However I find the story highly complex and difficult to get a grasp of the facts and interactions. Of course the situation which exists in the Middle East at the moment is highly complex. My reading has included:

Books

'Destiny Disrupted: A History of the World Through Islamic Eyes' by Tamin Ansary
'Islamic Exceptionalism: How the Struggle Over Islam is Reshaping the World' by Shadi Hamid
'The Islamist Phoenix' by Loretta Napolioni
'The History of Saudi Arabia' by Alexei Vassiliev.
'ISIS: A History' by Fawaz Gerges.
'The Hadith' Translated by Muhammad al-Bukari.

Short articles:

'A Brief Survey of the History of the Kurds' by Kendal Nezan
'Iran Profile - A Chronology of Key Events' BBC
'Salafism' - Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Religion
'Al-Qaeda' - Council for Foreign Relations

Various news and background articles in the press and on-line.

In my understanding, the conflicts could be thought of in several categories. The classification below is not an intellectual masterpiece but I think it helps me clarify the complexities. I have tried to give a little historical background to each country's origins to help in understanding. This is very difficult in the Middle East since many countries only exist as nations quite recently - i.e. Saudi in the 1930s and Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Israel after WWII. Before that they were either part of the loosely knit Ottoman empire or groups of warring tribes. Islam is the common denominator but

because most of these countries were occupied by multiple conquerors over the centuries (millennia!) they have ended up with inhabitants with mixed cultural backgrounds and diverse versions of Islam.

Islamic Organisations versus Secular Groups

Two examples under this heading can be the Muslim Brotherhood versus the secular population (including the army) in Egypt, Tunisia and Syria and the followers of the Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan (who are somewhat akin to the Muslim Brotherhood) versus the secular movement established by Ataturk after World War I.

The Muslim Brotherhood

While the Muslim Brotherhood follow a somewhat fundamentalist Islam including Sharia law, they vary somewhat in their outlook. They are generally not considered extremists (although labelled terrorists by some) and have shown flexibility in Political outlook if it suits them. A point worth noting about the Muslim Brotherhood is that 'true' followers of Islam do not consider it as religion, where you think about it and go to church now and then, but rather, as way of life with rules overseen by clerics and followed by the entire community. The community rather than the individual is the focus of Islam. Politics cannot be divorced from Islam because a Muslim politician must still apply the rules of Islam in political dealings and policy making. Saudi Arabia is an example where the leaders rule through Islamic thought and are advised to a certain extent by clerics who are specialists in the interpretation of the Quran, the Hadiths (the sayings of Mohammed) and Islamic or Sharia law which is derived from the Hadiths. Governance in Iran is also guided by Islamic principles although in this case by way of the Shiite branch of Islam.

Egypt

The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt was formed in 1928 as a Sunni religious organisation following the fundamentals of Islam and with political and social objectives as well. The Brotherhood became popular in Egypt and spread to other Muslim countries, especially Tunisia and Turkey. In the early years, they were active in trying to get rid of the British and, perhaps with some justification, were accused of several assassinations. They formed a political party but it was not until 'the Arab Spring' in 2011 that they had an opportunity to govern. Not that they instigated the massive demonstrations in Egypt but they did take advantage of the first free elections for Egypt which followed the ousting of Mubarak, and were successful. Their leader, Mohammed Mori, was elected President. Within a year things turned sour. Rather than including freedom of speech and religion when revising the Constitution or consulting with other groups such as the Coptic Christians, Mori was leaning towards matters such as Sharia Law. The secularists, including the Army, became worried. The Army took over and Abdel Fattah el Sisi who was in command of the Army and the Defence Minister under Mori, became President. The new regime was brutal in suppressing the Brotherhood with some estimates of 800 killed in raids on their camps. Not much is known about Sisi but he has visited President Trump in New York and was persuaded by Trump to not vote against Israel in the recent condemnation of Israeli settlements by the UN. The chances of uprisings by the Egyptian population are probably remote but conditions in Egypt are extremely poor and the population is starting to complain, so you never know.

Under the influence of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, a similar organisation was formed in Tunisia in the 80's. Called 'Ennanda', it took advantage of the 'Arab Spring' upheavals and gained seats in the following elections. The Brotherhood formed a coalition government which created a new constitution. Like Egypt and Turkey, secularists thought that Ennanda would be governing by strict Islamists principles and protests began. As a result, Ennanda pulled out of government and recently decided to formally split religion from politics in their policies. While Tunisia is not in the Middle

East, I am using this example to show the marked differences between Muslim organisations. Ennanda is considered a non-militant group and the 'mildest' of all Islamic organisations and is unlikely to disturb the peace in the future.

Syria

The influence of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood spread to Syria where, after WWII, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood participated in several governments. This was a time when Syria had just been released from the shackles of the French mandate. The Brotherhood was considered a moderate organisation at that time. However, in 1963 the Baath Party took over government. The Baath party was and is a strongly secular group and was seriously at odds with the Islamist Brotherhood. The Brotherhood began a deadly terrorist campaign against the party which then banned the organisation. In 1970 a military coup established Hafez al-Assad as head of the Baathist government and he not only continued to ban the party but issued a death sentence to anyone who was a member. Although Assad ran a secular government (dictatorship?) he was also an Alawite (Shiite) and established an Alawite clique. This made matters worse for the Sunni Brotherhood and its terrorist campaign escalated. In 1982 Assad slaughtered thousands of the Brotherhood and other dissenters at Hama. The Brotherhood then disappeared from Syria but became active in revolutionary councils outside Syria. They made an appearance recently when a small number of members are thought to have participated in the 2011 uprising. The Syrian Brotherhood has now changed its stance (like the Tunisian Ennhada), advocating freedom of religion, human rights and so on. They have obviously learnt their lesson. Interestingly enough Turkey, which itself is moving towards a Brotherhood regime, is actively cooperating with the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood by providing them with facilities in Turkey.

Turkey

Turkey has been the prime example of a Muslim dominated country which had become a secular and westernised country largely by the efforts of Mustafa Kamel (Ataturk) and his followers after WWI. Prior to this, the Ottoman regime, which was in existence for centuries, was dominated by Islamism throughout government. Such was the action by Ataturk and his followers that by 1936 there was no reference to Islam in the constitution or the regulations, the head scarf was forbidden, dancing was permitted, the language was standardised and the Arabic script was changed to the Latin script. However, this could not last and the Justice and Development party (AKP) with a brotherhood format was formed in 2001 and has dominated Turkish politics ever since. Recep Erdogan was one of the founders and is now Turkey's President. The AKP was similar to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt but modified its Islamist policies in order to enter government.

True to form, Erdogan, in recent years, has brought in legislation which has a hint of Sharia Law. As in the case of Egypt, secularists and particularly segments of the army started to get worried for the future of secularism and attempted a coup last year which failed (unlike Egypt). As a result, Erdogan sacked or jailed many members of the Police, the Justice system, the Army and Education sectors and is now short-handed to deal with recent terrorist attacks. Erdogan is also at odds with a one-time colleague, the cleric Fethullah Gulen. Gulen has a large following who are attracted by a so called moderate form of Islam similar to the Sufi form of Islam (Islam with a dash of mysticism) practiced by Turks in the early formation of Turkey. Erdogan has accused Gulen of instigating the coup. He lives in the US to escape arrest and has denied any involvement. By encouraging the Brotherhood brand of Islamism, Erdogan may have bitten off more than he can chew - as shown by the recent assassination of the Russian Ambassador by a man who is supposed to be a Gulen supporter, according to Erdogan, but who may have been inspired by Erdogan's movement towards a more fundamental Islam. With Erdogan occupied by this event and terrorist attacks from ISIL and the Kurdish PKK, there should be another opportunity for a coup, but in any case Turkey is divided and is now suffering and will no doubt undergo further suffering. Turkey relies heavily on tourism

and especially the cruise ships, most of which have made Istanbul a terminal. This has now all but dried up as has the rest of the tourist industry.

The Brotherhood will probably survive in Egypt. An organisation with strong roots and with an appeal to the population is unlikely to disappear. It certainly will survive in Tunisia but it is by no means certain that Erdogan and his version of the Brotherhood will last in the longer term against significant opposition and terrorist attacks. The fate of the Syrian Brotherhood depends on the fate of Syria and that is anybody's guess.

The Baath Party

I have included a discussion of the Baath Party here, although it is not an Islamist party with the aim of replacing secular government. It was formed in 1943 in Damascus with socialist, Arab nationalist and anti-colonial aims. It took various forms including pro-Nazi, communist leanings and eventually gained control of both Syria and Iraq in 1963. The Party successfully pushed for a cooperative Arab organisation between Syria and Egypt. The Union dissolved for typical Arab reasons: each thought the other was too dominant. Under Assad, the Party still 'governs' in Syria but disappeared in Iraq with the defeat of Saddam Hussein. Some commentators believe the present Sunni Shiite conflicts in Iraq are carrying on where the Baath Party left off.

Israel versus Islam

The basic beliefs of the two religions are very similar and they are both considered Semitic religions with Abraham as the father of both religions and Moses a common prophet to both. In the early days of Islam, Jews and other non-Muslims were allowed freedom of religion. In fact Mohammed himself spoke of freedom of religion. In the intervening years Muslim communities placed various restrictions on Jews but it wasn't until Israel was formed in 1948 that a serious hatred developed between the two groups and hostilities between them have never ceased. The lead up to the Jewish self-declaration of the Israel State was marked by some of the earliest terrorist bomb attacks. The Zionists blew up the King David Hotel killing over 80 people. Egypt, Syria and Jordan moved to put a stop to Jewish occupation of Arab land (creating 700,000 displaced people) and went to war against the Jews but were soundly defeated. Israel was also victorious in the 6-day war and the Yom Kippur war, due to a timely shipment of US armaments in the case of the latter.

However Israel's relationship with Muslim countries in the Middle East has varied. Both Egypt and Jordan, except in the early days after the formation of Israel and the Israeli wars, have managed to maintain semi-normal contact whereas Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Iran have not. Saudi does not seem to have been openly hostile.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has publicly condemned the Israeli incursions into Palestine West Bank territory but at the same time has sent delegations to Israel. Saudi previously was against the 'peace treaty' between Egypt and Israel but in recent times has shown support for the treaty. It is almost as if Saudi would rather concentrate on Iran as its major enemy and does not consider Israel as a major problem, especially when Israel's major enemy is also Iran. It is interesting to note that the US strongly supports both Saudi and Israel. This could be a reason why Saudi-Israeli relations are reasonable compared with other Muslim countries and their relationship with Israel.

Hamas

Hamas, a spin off from the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood movement and dedicated to reclaiming Israel territory, governs the internal affairs of the Gaza Strip. They were freely elected by the Gaza Strip population. The Gaza Strip is an area within the Palestine Authority, but operating semi independently. Hamas has been at odds with the Palestinian Authority but recently formed a pact

with the PA in the form of a Unity Government. Strangely though, Hamas are not members of the new government. If they were, the PA would cease receiving aid funds from the UN. Hamas members are frequently firing rockets into neighbouring Israel which brings severe armed retaliation from Israel. Hamas have been declared a terrorist organisation by Israel and other countries including Australia. Military equipment for Hamas has been sourced from Iran which may well have been providing funds even though Hamas is Sunni. Since the Syrian uprising, Hamas and Iran have found themselves on different sides which has probably forced Hamas to seek funds from Saudi. The Gulf state of Qatar with its sympathies towards the Muslim Brotherhood, supports Hamas in a substantial way. The UN supplies aid funds by way of various projects designed to improve the lot of the people. Hamas does not recognise Israel which makes any negotiations impossible and conflict will continue.

Iraq

Iraq under Saddam Hussein, openly funded the recovery of Palestinians whose homes had been demolished by the Israelis as punishment for acts against Israel. In fact, the substantial Iraqi support of the Palestinians and rocket attacks on Israel by Iraq during the Gulf War may be the main reasons for the US and the coalition attacking Iraq. A Jewish lobby of so-called neoconservatives is supposed to have had considerable influence on President Bush's decision to go to war with Iraq. Certainly the main reason for the attack (weapons of mass destruction) proved to be false. Given the present state of Iraq, any threat to Israel will be a long time coming from that direction.

Hezbollah

Iran funds Hezbollah, an armed group operating in Lebanon and now Syria and dedicated to actively confronting Israel. Hezbollah was formed during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon with the purpose of freeing Lebanon of the Israeli and US presence. Although declared a terrorist organisation by many countries, Hezbollah is well respected in Lebanon and has a social benefit arm catering for the Shiite population as well as seats in the Lebanese parliament and ministry. The military wing of Hezbollah is at least as powerful as the Lebanese army and supported Muslims in Bosnia during the Serbian conflict and the Shiite movement in Iraq after the Iraq war.

Iran

According to Israel, Iran poses the major threat. Relationships between Iran and Israel were relatively cordial during the reign of the Pahlavi dynasty but deteriorated after the revolution and the installation of the Imam Ayatollah Khomeini. Both Israel and the US have been the target of Iran's venom, as illustrated by the reaction to the failed US helicopter incursion in the late 1970s and the imprisonment of US embassy staff. Both Iran and Israel have carried out undercover acts against each other. Amongst many other undercover operations, Israel assassinated several Iranian nuclear energy specialists and Iran blew up a bus of Israeli tourists in Bulgaria. While Iran is not supposed to have reached the capacity to build an atom bomb, and has signed a treaty with the US and European nations to halt work on its advanced nuclear capability, it is well armed with a Ballistic Missile arsenal. The US Jewish lobby and President Trump are naturally against the treaty and may take steps to annul the agreement although obviously, the US cannot annul the European Union's signature to the agreement. If this occurs, Iran will resume the enrichment program and aim to produce a bomb. Israel will no doubt attack Iran's facilities by air as it did in Syria against their atomic energy facility. One can only guess the consequences.

Turkey

Turkey seems to have had friendly relationships until a ship from Turkey tried to penetrate the naval cordon on the approach to the Gaza Strip resulting in the death of Turkish citizens. However Turkey and Israel signed a 'peace' agreement in 2016 and all seems to be well.

Palestine and Israel

The only solution to the main problem (the relationship between Palestine and the Israelis) seems to be the recognition of Palestine and Israel as two nations - which, in spite of many Israelis agreeing to the concept, the Government under Netanyahu will never agree to. In the eyes of many, Palestinians only occupy the West Bank and do not constitute a nation. In fact Israel is slowly occupying Palestine (the West Bank) through the construction and occupation of settlements, an act which the UN has recently condemned as has the US Secretary of State. President Elect Trump however has signalled that he will be supporting Israel. With Trump's support, the US funding Israeli armed forces and the influence of many powerful US Jewish citizens, it is unlikely Israel will heed any UN or world influence to create two countries. If ever groups with the fanatic fervour, smart organisation and the funding of ISIL decide to turn their attention to Israel, it may be a different story. Iran and its subsidiary of Hezbollah will no doubt be active against Israel but the US will always come to the aid of Israel if it looks seriously threatened. Russia, with its strong military presence in the area now, could support Syria against Israel if ever Syrian President Assad recovers from his present predicament, which is unlikely. The Muslim world is preoccupied with other matters at the moment but will undoubtedly return to concentrate on Israel in the future. In my opinion, any attempt at reconciliation will have no success whatsoever while 'hawks' such as Netanyahu and the Republican Party in the US remain in power.

Sunnis versus Shiites

The antagonism between these two groups of Muslims has lasted about 1,400 years and will never cease. The origin of the antagonism goes back to the years following the death of Mohammed when his cause was led and guided in turn by his close friends; Abu Bakr, followed by Omar, followed by Othman, followed by Ali. Mohammed taught that he was only a carrier of the message from God (not at all akin to Jesus who was labelled the son of God). Followers of Ali however, thought Ali had some mystic presence about him and he may have similar powers to Mohammed and, in any case, he was Mohammed's son-in law being married to his daughter Fatima. They believed his descendants would also have these powers and therefore his descendants would be always their leader. These Muslims became known as Shiites.

Most Muslims took Mohammed at his word which was that he was the one and only prophet carrying the word of God and there will be no one else. They are known as Sunnis who are by far the majority of Muslims. These grounds were enough for major differences and antagonism but the crunch came when Ali's son Hussain became leader and was challenged by the powerful Yazid. Yazid had taken the title 'Caliph' in opposition to Hussain and thus breaking the sequence of leaders elected by a council. In the one-sided battle of Karbala, Hussain deliberately sacrificed himself. This battle and the death of Hussain is remembered every year by the Shiite community as the key event in the history of the Shia version of Islam. Due to this background, many Muslims believe Shiites do not practice true Islam and, according to the revelations, are apostate or deserters with all the consequences of that label (including death).

Islam was born in Saudi Arabia and although both the Shia and Sunni 'branches' emanated from there, Saudi royalty, and most of its population today, is strictly Sunni. In fact, many, including the rulers, adhere to the extremist Wahhabi code which also originated in Saudi in the 18th Century (more of Wahhabism later). Saudi has received criticism from the International clerical hierarchy for harbouring the Wahhabi version of Islam. Saudi considers itself the guardian of the Sunni version and has certainly funded and even interfered militarily against any incursion by Shiites into what it considers as Sunni territory or a Sunni issue. There are many examples. Bahrain's population is about 70% Shiites but is ruled by Sunni royalty. In 2012, the Shiites rose in protest

against their discriminatory treatment. The protests resulted in some deaths. It was Saudi forces which marched in and quelled the riots. In Yemen, a religious group of Shiites (called Houthis after their founder) established their presence in the North of Yemen and actively protested against government policies with considerable support from the population. After negotiations with government failed, the Houthis forced President Hadi to flee to Saudi. This prompted Saudi, Bahrain and the Arab Emirates to send troops and air attacks against the Houthi rebels causing considerable loss of civilian life and without any resolution so far. Unfortunately the US is indirectly involved in the conflict by way of supplying Saudi with arms and by way of being a major ally of Saudi. The US has openly agreed with Saudi's action. Over the years, Shiites who are resident in Saudi have been victimised, murdered and their Mosques and graves destroyed. Shia Pilgrims on the Hadj recently have been killed, resulting in Iran temporarily cancelling the Hadj for Iranian citizens. Strangely enough, the Eastern Province of Saudi has a large Shiite population. During the 'Arab Spring' of 2011 they demonstrated against discrimination by Saudi authorities. The Eastern Province abuts Bahrain so there could be a connection with the Bahrain demonstrations. Saudi accused Iran of influencing the demonstrations (which could be true) and were concerned (and still are) with Iran's influence in Iraq, Lebanon and Syria and the fact that Iran may support an uprising. As a deterrent, Saudi executed Sheik Nimr al-Nimr, a long-time critic of Saudi policies, and four others. The Sheik actively supported Shiites who were involved in the demonstrations. Naturally, Iran was livid.

Iran

Present day Iran was formed from a number of tribes about 550BC and developed into the huge empire of Persia stretching from Libya to the Indus valley under Darius 1. Persia was ruled by a number of dynasties (including Alexander the Great) until 636AD when the Arabs invaded and established the dominance of Islam from then on. After the decline of Arab rule, Persia was overrun by the Mongols and eventually was ruled by the Safavid dynasty with the help of Shia tribes. By the way, Iranians are not Arabs even though they use a version of the Arabic script. The Shia brand of Islam was declared the state religion in 1501 - Shiites represent over 90% of the population today. The Safavids were replaced in the mid- 18th Century by the Qajar dynasty. The military seized power in 1926 and established Reza Khan as ruler and crowned him Reza Shah Pahlavi and thus began the short Pahlavi dynasty. A 'puppet' type parliament existed. In the early 1950s, the then Prime Minister was assassinated and replaced by Mohammed Mossadeq, an active nationalist who was intent on nationalising the oil fields. In the resulting upheaval, the then Shah fled Iran but was brought back when the British and Americans engineered the downfall of Mossadeq. The Shah's secular policies were against all the principles of the Shia clerics so in 1979 Ayatollah Khomeini, by way of an uprising against the Shah, returned from exile to take over the country and declare Iran the 'Islamic Republic of Iran'. The Shah was exiled and died some 10 years later. Under the Clerics, parliament elections have been held but freedom of speech and any opposition have been soundly suppressed. The major events since that time have been the imprisonment of US Embassy staff and the serious breakdown in US relations and the on-again off-again attempts at Uranium enrichment against the directives of the UN, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the EU, the US and of course, Israel, which saw the enrichment as a direct threat. Israel could have atomic bomb capability but not Iran. Perhaps the major event however, was the 8 year war between Iraq and Iran. Both countries had a long history of border disputes and skirmishes, especially around the waterway Shatt el-Arab in the oil-rich area at the top of the Gulf. In the Shah's time the Iranian forces were much stronger than those of Iraq and generally won the disputes. When the Iranian revolution occurred, Saddam Hussein feared Iran may try and influence the large Shia population in the SE of Iraq to revolt and therefore thought he would take advantage of the disruption due to the revolution and attacked Iran with a large military force. The US supported the move (in fact any move which would restore the Shah) and supplied arms. Iraq's population is about 60% Shia but the ruling party at that time under Saddam Hussein (the Baathists)

were Sunni. The numerous serious battles lasted for eight years with the use of modern weaponry including tanks and jet fighters by both sides and the use of chemical agents by Iraq. Foreign interests were involved when oil tankers were systematically attacked in an attempt to damage Iran's economy. A US destroyer protecting tankers, was attacked by Iraqi aircraft and 37 naval crew killed. The final result of the conflict was a stalemate. Several sources estimate about one million Iranian military personnel dead, about three to five hundred thousand Iraqis and a similar number of civilians. The UN brokered a treaty in 1988.

Syria

What is now Syria was originally the site of the oldest civilisations occupying the so-called 'fertile crescent'. Damascus and Aleppo are supposed to be cities which have had the longest period of occupation. A bewildering number of powers ruled the country in the following centuries including the Canaanites, Phoenicians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks Seleucids, Romans (the beginning of the Christian religion) and the Byzantines. Muslim Arabs overran the area in 635AD and extended their empire using Damascus as their headquarters for about a century. The Crusaders occupied some coastal areas during the 11th and 12th centuries until they were driven out by the Muslim Kurd, Saladin. The area came under Ottoman rule in 1516 and remained so until after WWI when the allies carved up the empire and placed Syria and Lebanon under a French protectorate or 'mandate' and Iraq under a British protectorate. The French, who were loyal to the Vichy French and fought against Australians in WWII, did not leave until 1946. I have described some of the events after this in the section on the Muslim Brotherhood but the main issue in this section is Sunni Shiite relationships. Hafiz al-Assad, a military officer, took control of Syria under the Baathist party in 1970 and remained so until he died in 2000. He was a member of the Alawite sect of the Shia branch of Islam and as such gave preference to its followers, especially in the Army and Secret Service.

The Alawites constitute only 12% of Syria's religious groups and their beliefs differ from 'standard' Shia. They follow Ali like the Shiites (that is where their name comes from) but believe that he, like Jesus, is from God. They also break away from traditional Islam and recognise non-Islamic holidays, they do not use mosques, they use wine in ceremonies and so on. In other words, they are considered non-Muslims by Sunnis and even Iranian Shiites treat them as odd. In the past, they supposedly had little or no relations with Iran. On the other hand, there is no doubt that Iran and Hezbollah are supporting Syria in the present conflict and I can only imagine it is because they consider Assad to be Shia.

Hafiz al-Assad died in 2000 and was replaced by his son Bashar al-Assad who carried out some reforms but, like his father, would not tolerate any dissent. My impression of Syria was a well-run country which was also my impression of Iran under the Shah, but I was not in a position to witness any crackdown on dissenters. Democracy is rarely successful in the Middle East so far where each country harbours groups with serious cultural and religious differences and entrenched rivalries. Elections are often held in these countries but most are suspect and democratic processes are not followed after elections. The Army normally has a major influence in the running of these countries. Such is the case with Syria. Assad stationed troops in Lebanon for a number of years and withdrew when it was suspected they assassinated the President. He fought a war with Israel on the Golan Heights and lost. Like his father, any sign of dissent was met with a quick and brutal response. All this culminated in the present dreadful civil war which has lasted about six years with half a million casualties and millions displaced. The conflict started in the enthusiasm of the 'Arab Spring ' when demonstrations in the southern town of Deraa protesting against the harsh treatment of some young people, were fired upon. This incident lead to a full scale uprising and when some of the military defected to the rebels, it became a serious civil war. Assad did negotiate with the rebels and agreed to alter some aspects of the constitution but, as he says himself, they didn't

really want to negotiate, they wanted control of the country. The make-up of the rebels is difficult to fathom. They are not a uniform bunch and battles do occur between the rebel factions. In addition, an offshoot of Al Qaeda (al Nusra) has joined in and ISIL is taking advantage of the chaos. Turkey and the Kurds lend support to the rebels while Russia and Iran have got behind Assad. Funding and arms for Assad has come from Russia and Iran while funding for the 'rebels' has come from the US, France, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and countries like Qatar, a Muslim Brotherhood supporter. By the way, the journalists from the news agency who were incarcerated by the Egyptian government work for Al Jazeera, a news organisation based in Qatar. Because they were responsible to a Qatari organisation, Egypt treated them as Brotherhood sympathisers. Both the rebels and Assad's forces have committed war crimes, especially using the civilian population as human shields. The world press however generally only reports the suffering of civilians due to attacks by the government side, probably because they do not have access to the government side. Some commentators believe this war is not a Sunni Shia conflict but an out and out political fight with the participation of multiple groups anxious to get some part in controlling Syria post-war. The Russian and US participants have hidden agendas. Russia has been friends with Syria for years and has supplied arms when nobody else would. Her aim is to have a naval base in the Mediterranean. The US is concentrating on ISIL in Syria but also the Jewish Lobby would be pleased to have Assad removed as a thorn in the side of Israel. As far as the Middle Eastern countries involved in the war are concerned, I would suggest a major component is the age old Sunni Shia conflict. How can it not be with Iran, the guardian of the Shiites, funding one side and Saudi Arabia, the champion of the Sunnis, funding the other. Assad is presently making signs that he is open to negotiations. If he steps down, governing Syria will be a nightmare. A coalition government of rebels will not succeed due to internal fighting between factions and if any one group gets to govern they will eventually ousted by rivals. ISIL will still be on the side-lines pursuing their Caliphate ambitions. Russia would not be pleased if Assad steps down since all its efforts would have been in vain. Of course the country could be divided with Assad in control of the Alawite coastal region down to Damascus.

Iraq

Now to Iraq. Iraq has a similar ancient history to Syria except perhaps the Crusades did not get as far as what is now Iraq. It came under Ottoman control together with Syria but the area was subject to multiple conflicts between tribes of Sunnis, Shiites, Kurds, Armenians and others. In 1747, Mamluks (from Georgia) gained control of the territory and of the tribal disputes. This lasted about 90 years until the Ottomans took control again until 1920 after the Turks were defeated in WWI. The boundaries of present day Iraq were drawn up by the British who established a Kingdom under Hashemite rule and a British mandate. The Hashemites, who are Sunnis, were rewarded by the British for their help in the Mesopotamia campaign. Iraq became independent of Britain in 1932 and was soon subject to protests and mini uprisings by Shiites, Yazidis and others objecting to Sunni rule. Numerous coups overthrowing the government occurred until Royalty was replaced by a coup directed by army officers in 1958. In 1963 the Baath party took control at the same time as it did in Syria and in 1979 Saddam Hussein became the party's President. Saddam was aggressive and ruthless. He conducted the 1st War and the 2nd War against the Kurds where tens of thousands lost their lives without a result. The disastrous Iran-Iraq war (which I have mentioned elsewhere) followed with the same outcome. Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990 resulting in the 'Desert Storm' war where the US led coalition defeated Iraq and drove its troops out of Kuwait. The Iraqi Kurds and Shiites tried to take advantage of Iraq's defeat but were brutally suppressed by Saddam. This action led to a no-fly zone being imposed over these areas to prevent Iraqi air attacks on the Kurds and Shiites. Iraq, however, continued skirmishes with the coalition and refused to allow inspection of its armaments. The US gave Saddam an ultimatum to step down, which he refused to do, and thus began the Iraq war. As we know, Saddam was defeated and killed.

While Saddam and the Sunni dominated Baath party were in power, true to the Baathist nationalist policy, they did create a national identity, albeit by force. Once they were gone Iraq was left with a bunch of warring tribes (Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds in the main). The fundamentalist Sunnis were quick off the mark, forming a group led by Zarqawi. This was an offshoot of Al Qaeda and they immediately began suicide bombings of Shia markets, mosques and holy places as well as US troops with a massive loss of life. Sunnis also bombed the villages of a minor Islamic brand called Yazidi and killed 500. The situation was not helped by the first prime minister after the war, Maliki, being a Shiite. Sunnis felt badly done by and even Shia groups objected to his weak efforts to get US troops to leave the country.

The situation was ripe for the formation of an extremist Sunni organisation which called itself ISIL. ISIL was joined by ex-Baathist Army officers and Police and some very smart organisers (more later). Suffice it to say here that that the defeat of Saddam lead to the lid being taken off the Sunni/Shia conflict. In a strange twist, it started by the Sunnis feeling downtrodden rather than the Shiites. (War between groups who had been kept under control is often the case when dictators are removed. Yugoslavia and the catastrophe that followed when Tito was no longer in control, is an example). Such is the rift that with the recent attack on ISIL held Mosul, the Iraqi army and the Shia militia are given separate areas to lay siege to Mosul. Each group is concerned that one may get control of Mosul before the other. Apart from this phenomenon, the Mosul campaign against ISIL also includes Turkish forces and Peshmerga, the army of Iraqi Kurds. The Turks have labelled the Kurds terrorists so how the Mosul campaign will end up will be interesting, to say the least.

I think the point of this section is made. The Sunnis and the Shiites are in never ending conflict. While no doubt other factors such as straight out rivalry and power contribute to the conflicts in Syria and Iraq, the Sunni Shia question is the underlying problem.

Extremists versus the Rest of Islam.

Although Islamists say there is only one Islam, in fact there is a surprising variation ever since the time of the communities guided by the comrades of Mohammed after his death. At that time, Muslims were supposed to be pious and follow the 'pure' form of Islam as dictated by the Quran and the Hadith writings. It was during this period that Muslims began to conquer vast areas - from what is now Iran through to what is now Spain and North Africa. Much of the success was put down to the idea that God must be pleased with them and their adherence to Islamic rules and values. Thus began the Islamic 'Golden Age' from the 7th to about the 13th century when Muslims led the world in science, philosophy and mathematics. However, this civilization had already started to decline well towards the end of this period. The invasion by the Mongols and their destruction of the Caliphate headquarters of Baghdad in 1258 put paid to this era. The Ottoman Empire began soon after, in the 15th century, and lasted for almost 600 years but it too declined through the latter half of this period. Several Clerics during the period of decline put the decline down to a lack of strict adherence to the 'true' Islam. According to them, the success of the conquests of the 7th century was due to God's favour and now they lacked God's favour because of the failure to adhere to 'true' Islam. Some Sunni Muslim groups therefore went back to practicing Islam as it was practiced by the three generations after Mohammed's death. These groups were practicing Salafism. The name is derived from al-Saf-al-Salih which means the 'pious predecessors'. Such a movement did not seem to have any recognised overall effect until the emergence of Wahhabism, a form of Salafism (some consider the names interchangeable).

Wahhabism

What is now Saudi Arabia was under very loose control of the Ottomans during their reign. The central desert area was occupied by a number of small villages and tribes. The tribes were

continually warring to gain income through the spoils of war and often practiced a form of Islam where they worshipped objects and 'saints'. In 1703, Muhammed al Wahhab was born in one of these villages. After studying at Basra and Mecca he considered this form of religion went completely against the Quran and had to be eliminated. He travelled widely preaching the 'pure' form of Islam and the adoption of Sharia Law many aspects of which could now be regarded as an abuse of human rights. He teamed up with a leader of a nearby village, Muhammad bin Saud. Saud supplied the force and organisation and Wahhab supplied the persuasive powers to convert the tribal groups to Wahhabism and some semblance of order. Those who did not convert were considered non-Muslims and in later times they were killed. The partnership lasts to this day. Descendants of the Saud family rule Saudi Arabia and descendants of the Wahhab family are always the Ministers of Religion. Wahhabism is the official religion and the rulers are advised by the Ulama (council) of Wahhabi clerical scholars. The Wahhabi version has had some opposition which has been put down brutally by the Saudi regime. In recent times, the Saudi rulers have made some attempts to adapt Wahhabism to the modern world, although in a very limited way. Since gaining considerable funds from the discovery of oil, Saudi has been on a mission to spread Sunni Wahhabism/Salafism further beyond its borders. One could argue that this move has been successful given the appearance of a multitude of Salafist (Wahhabi) groups outside of Saudi's borders.

In very general terms, there appear to be three different forms of Salafism; the 'quiet' version where practitioners look inward and study and practice in isolation; the 'political' version where practitioners bring the teachings to the political scene but in a peaceful manner and; the Jihadist version which is a militaristic aggressive form where practitioners do battle with non-believers and attempt to create a Salafi world. In some forms the members are known to kill their opponents (including fellow Muslims) and those they consider non-Muslims. There seems to be an incredible number of jihadi-Salafis groups have sprung up, especially in Iraq and Syria. Only a few have the strength/force to be recognised internationally through their terrorist acts which generally result in death and destruction. One of the first to receive notoriety in recent times was Al Qaeda.

Al-Qaeda

Al-Qaeda (`The Base' in Arabic) was formed in 1988 by several Jihadi-Salafists who had been involved in ousting the Russians from Afghanistan. The leader was Osama bin Laden. Bin Laden came from a wealthy Saudi family. After studying at University, he actively supported groups who were fighting the Russians in Afghanistan using his own funds and funds from the US to train thousands of foreign fighters. After the defeat of the Russians, Al Qaeda and bin Laden continued the training in Afghanistan with the aim of establishing fundamentalist Islamic governments in Muslim countries and eliminating the influence of foreign governments, particularly the US. Al Qaeda operated in and out of Afghanistan and on the Pakistani borders and at one stage moved to Sudan. They carried out a number of terrorist acts, the most significant of which were the 9/11 destruction of the World Trade Centre and the bombing of the US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. In 2011 a US 'Navy Seal' unit located bin Laden in Pakistan and killed him. Al Qaeda remained active under their new leader Ayman al Zawahiri but central control has become weak partly because intense rivalry with ISIL (see later). Almost from the beginning, Al Qaeda began to operate on what could be called a franchise, by associating with like Jihadist-Salafist groups and giving them the authority to act as an Al Qaeda organisation. In addition they established a number of small 'cells' all over the world. Some of the larger affiliated groups were Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and Al Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQM).

Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)

AQI was run by a Jordanian 'thug' called Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Zarqawi was a petty criminal from Jordan who became a fundamentalist, joined the opposition to Russia in Afghanistan, gained some notoriety and later moved to Iraq after the US invaded Afghanistan. He took advantage of the lack of strong government in Iraq after the US led invasion, to form a militant group to take up the Sunni cause. If you remember, the tables were turned after the defeat of Saddam Hussein when the Shiites were in control of government and the Sunnis felt persecuted. Such was Zaqawi's hatred of Shiites that he carried out suicide bombings of Shia markets, Mosques and festivals killing thousands of Shiites. He also turned on Sunni groups who were not in agreement with his extreme fundamentalist views, treating them as non-Muslims and killing them. Because of his cruel streak, many Sunni tribes turned against him and joined the US forces in suppressing his activities. He was killed in a US airstrike in 2006. While still having contact with Al Qaeda, the new leadership dissolved AQI and formed the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI).

Islamic State of Iraq (ISI)

Abu Bakr al- Baghdadi eventually became the leader if ISI. Baghdadi came from a pious Iraqi family and supposedly graduated from Saddam University with a Masters and PhD in Koranic studies. He soon became a Jihadist Salafist of the strictest kind. He helped form a Sunni resistance group but was arrested by US forces and jailed for 10 months. When released, he set about rebuilding ISI and formed an offshoot in Syria (al-Nusra) and renamed the ISI group, the 'Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant' (ISIL- also called ISIS).

ISIL/ISIS

Al-Nusra collaborated with the Syrian rebels and went against Baghdadi's views which were to form an independent state without the presence of the Syrian Rebels. In this matter he also clashed with Al Qaeda Central resulting in the expulsion of ISIL from Al Qaeda. Baghdadi increased the capability and aggression of ISIL, fought with Al Nusra with the loss of thousands of lives and established territory in both Syria (eg: Raqqa) and Iraq (eg: Mosul). At their peak they occupied an area the size of Britain populated by about five million inhabitants. Shortly after the capture of Mosul in 2014, he declared himself the Caliph of the 'Islamic State'. With funds from oil and foreign donations, hostage money, loot from captured territory, and the influx of foreign fighters, ISIL has become a formidable organisation with a ruthless treatment of non-Muslims and non-Salafists alike. ISIL has deliberately slaughtered thousands to literally put the fear of God into their opponents and, in keeping with their Wahhabi/Salafist views, have destroyed countless antique items which could be considered objects of worship by non salafists. They are well organised into departments or ministries and use the expertise of some ex Baathist military leaders and urban officials who are quite capable of running water and power supplies, garbage collection, transportation, local Police and so on. In fact, some citizens of these areas under ISIL apparently can feel far more settled under ISIL than under their country's governments, provided they behave themselves, have a clean slate and adhere to Salafist rules and strict Sharia law. Because of their ambition to overthrow corrupt Muslim governments and Shiites and rid the Muslim world of foreign interference, they are not without the support of the Sunni 'man in the street' in the Middle East and radicalised young men and women in the Western world. Their foreign terrorist attacks have caused havoc and have even raised the ire of Russia by downing a Russian tourist plane over Sinai. While US and coalition air strikes have weakened their forces, they have not weakened their resolve. Their fighters are fanatic and willing (if not anxious) to die. They will not go away in a hurry.

Al Nusra

In Syria, the opposition at the start of the Civil war were mainly dozens of Sunni armed tribal and community groups and defectors from the army. Later, Salafists took advantage of the situation and appeared on the scene quite often in conflict with one another as well as with Assad's forces. As I mentioned elsewhere, while still an Al Qaeda affiliate, Baghdadi took advantage of the Syrian conflict and formed the Jihadi Salafist Al Nusra from local jihadists. Due to differing objectives and Al Qaeda Central taking sides with Al Nusra, the two groups, ISIL and Al-Nusra split up and fought some deadly battles with each other. Because Al Nusra is composed of local Salafists it has moderated its stance in order to be able to cooperate with other local Sunni Rebel groups and to attract funds from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. Al Nusra is not the only local Jihadist Salafist group in Syria but it is the largest and most effective. Most of the Rebel opposition is composed of non-extremists but they vary widely in their Islamist form of Islam. ISIS is out on a limb and is not considered local by Syrian rebels. As I mentioned, the aim of ISIS is to take over and run Syria (and all Muslim countries) as part of the Caliphate and independent of any other group which makes them bitter rivals of the Rebels. ISIL is therefore not taking part in any peace talks or any ceasefire agreements.

Compared to what extremist Muslim groups are doing to each other and to fellow Muslims, the Islamist terrorist attacks in the West are 'minor'. From the extremist's point of view, the attacks are in revenge for military action by the West. Their first and foremost objective and focus is on the territory and the hearts and minds of the Muslim world. Of course if they ever reach their objective then their thoughts may well focus on the West. Perhaps an exception could be Al Qaeda which seems to have more interest in eliminating the West from the Middle East and punishing the US, than other jihadi Salafists. As I mentioned, it seems clear that since the death of bin Laden, Al Qaeda has weakened and no longer has a strong central organisation and therefore leaves a partial vacuum for ISIL to fill.

The Kurds

Something should be said about the Kurds. They are not akin to Jihadi Salfidists nor Muslim Brotherhood (at least not in a religious sense). They are a very independent race of people who for many years governed their own Province —Kurdistan, but were always prevented from forming a sovereign nation. They originated in the lands between the Iranian plateau and the Euphrates and existed under the various conquerors of that region. They took up Islam under the Arab invaders. In the 11th century they were given their own Province (Kurdistan) by the Caliph Sandjar, the last of the Seljuk monarchs. Soon after, the famous Saladin (a Kurd and the nemesis of the Crusaders) ruled a much expanded area (of which the Kurds were only a small part) for about a century when the Mongols arrived. The Kurds survived the Moguls but were split into a series of Principalities although still culturally Kurdish. This area became the punching bag between the Persian and Ottoman empires in the 16th century when the Ottomans did a deal to give the Kurds an autonomous entity in return for guarding the Ottoman border against the Persians. The result was about three centuries of self- government and peace for the Kurds. At the beginning of the 19th century the Ottomans began a move to cancel the autonomy of the Kurds resulting in a series of uprisings which were dealt with severely by the Ottomans. The treaty of Sevres as a result of the defeat of the Ottomans in WWI recommended the creation of a Kurdish State. This was not to be. After a series of broken promises, France annexed part to Syria, Britain annexed part (Mosul) to Iraq and the rest went to the new Turkey and Iran. So now they are scattered between SE Turkey, NE Syria, Northern Iraq and NW Iran with a small number in SW Armenia. They constitute about 15-20% of the population in Turkey, about 7-10% in Syria, about 15-20% in Iraq and about 9% in Iran

(nearly 7 million). The total population, including immigrants in various countries, is about 30 million.

They have an overarching parliament, various dialects, and a number of different religions although most are Sunni Muslims. Kurds in each country generally have a political arm and a military arm. In Syria, the Popular Protection Units (YPG) is the military wing of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Unity Party (PYD). The YPG is affiliated with the PKK the militant (terrorist) group of the Turkish Kurds. In Iraq several parties were formed. The Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), which at a later stage took up arms against Saddam Hussein and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The Iraqi Kurdish military arm is called Peshmerga, a well- trained effective army originating from the guards of the Ottoman borders of the early 1800s. Peshmerga was created after WWI as the Kurdish nationalist army. With the support of Iranian forces (a most unusual combination), they moved to claim the NW parts of Iraq for the Kurds in the 1980s. Peshmerga had to pull back due to the withdrawal of Iran and the brutal attacks by Saddam Hussein including the bombing of the Kurdish town of Halabja in 1988 using poison gas. Peshmerga assisted the US during the 2003 attack on Iraq and even today is helping the US and themselves in the fight against ISIL. Similarly the US and the Kurds are cooperating in the Syrian fight against Assad by way of the Kurdish YPG army.

As I have pointed out, in the 19th century the Ottomans turned on the Kurds and restricted the use of their language ,their culture and their education. This continued into the present day. In protest, the Kurds undertook several serious uprisings in the 1920s and 30s which were suppressed with a heavy hand by the Turks. In 1978 the Kurdish armed group the PKK was formed with the aim of creating a separate Kurdish State by all means available. After a period when the casualties were in the tens of thousands, a truce was called in 2012. It didn't last long and in 2015 hostilities resumed. PKK uses terrorist tactics including suicide bombing and Turkey uses air and ground attacks on PKK camps. This is where the situation becomes complicated. PKK cooperates with YPG in their battle with ISIL (they are affiliated). The US cooperates with the YPG. The US cooperates with Turkey against ISIL and Assad's forces. Turkey and PKK (and by default the YPG) are sworn enemies. Somehow diplomacy has at least allowed the Turks to work loosely with the non PKK Kurdish groups as illustrated by the present attack on Mosul where both Turkish forces and Peshmerga are involved. I cannot see the Kurds are any closer to having an independent state unfortunately, although in my opinion they deserve it. I worked with them on two occasions in Iran (Kermanshah) and found them a fine race of people (not that my contact represents a significant sample). However,they are by no means always peaceful with each other. They wouldn't be a Middle Eastern race if there were not internal clashes between tribal groups.

Epilogue

I had thought in delving into the conflicts within the Middle East, the light might shine on some clear reasons for the problems. Certainly the main issues I have mentioned here such as the Shia/Sunni, Israel/Palestinian/Iran issues and extremism, have been most important but other issues are interwoven between them. Tribal rivalry and power struggles, the desire of most local people to rid the Middle East of foreign interference, the desire to experience the 'Golden Years' of Islam again,the disillusionment of the population with the corruption and incompetence of their governments and the presence of widespread poverty in all the countries of the Middle East, cannot be ignored. The "Arab Spring" uprising of 2011 was due to the average citizen being fed up with their autocratic governments which ignored the desires of their people. The uprising had nothing to do with religion until Islamists decided to get on the bandwagon. However, democracy as we know it may not be suitable for some countries with strong tribal groups and perhaps the Western World should broaden its thinking in this respect. A paper by a US think tank discusses

which Syrian rebel group the US should support. They stated they should only support those groups which are willing to adopt democratic rule of Syria. That may mean there are no candidates.

At some stage I hope the boundaries in Syria and Iraq will be redrawn and ethnic and tribal peoples can live among their own kind in peace. The Western World versus the Muslim World is a global issue and each tend to look upon each other as the enemy. Our religions, philosophies and cultural habits are vastly different - to the extent that one will not change the other. We can only hope we both will accept and respect each other in the future, otherwise our children are in for a torrid time. The Middle East is the cauldron where conflicts will continue to boil. Interference by the West may put the West in danger of 'backing the wrong horse', an activity it is certainly used to as witnessed by US assistance to Saddam Hussein and the Shah of Iran in the past.

I haven't solved any problems but I now have a better understanding of the issues as opposed to trying to make sense of the daily biased 'grabs' of news through the media. If anybody gets around to reading this, please let me know of the many mistakes which must be embedded in this tome. Equally let me know if you do not agree with some of the thoughts expressed. You may need to join the queue.

Nigel Monteith 30th January 2017