

**WORLD:** I suppose we have all been concerned post GFC that our leaders are failing to properly address both the old fundamental problems and weaknesses in our global economic and financial systems and structures, but also the new challenges, transitions and reforms required. There is even more inequality. Most leaders seem to be floundering on most fronts, especially in countries confronted with the many millions of displaced people at present on the move, and overwhelming Europe on a scale unseen in the life times of many. While most, especially Syrians, are refugees, aren't we all free to move and strive for a better, safer life? How will Europe absorb all these people - like the 1.5 million people expected in Germany? Angela Merkel is now in serious political trouble in Germany for her generous initial response. Turkey, (where President Erdogan is being described by some as a would-be dictator who wants to introduce sharia law), is being given \$4.6 billion by the EU to "stem the flow" of the over two million refugees in Turkey, many hoping to cross into Europe. Apparently the majority of Syrians would return if Assad was removed.

I will never forget the images of people walking great distances: parents carrying children, young children carrying heavy bags, friends carrying their disabled or old friends or family members. These people now have to contend with winter.

We are unused to seeing countries like Iraq and Syria disintegrating - reverting back to tribal and religious origins. We are also witnessing the establishment of a new country - the ISIS Caliphate. Unfortunately, unlike most other leaders grappling with the problems in the Middle East, the 40 something year old leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi who seems to have survived a recent attempt on his life, sounds extremely clever and strategic.

Baghdadi was radicalised by the 2003 invasion of Iraq. I still don't think Bush, Blair and our John Howard have been held accountable for what they unleashed on the world. Hillary Clinton's emails have recently revealed that Tony Blair had agreed to the invasion of Iraq with George Bush one year before he has admitted, and he volunteered to be the "spin doctor" for the lie of Saddam possessing "Weapons of Mass Destruction". Blair just has no credibility left as far as I am concerned.

Baghdadi is a Koranic scholar. He is actually descended from the family of Mohammed, which feeds into apocalyptic prophecies for the emergence of someone just like him, from this exact region. IS runs very effective promotional campaigns through social media and online, and young recruits are pouring in. The tone of IS is less shocking and grisly these days. A few young Australians have joined ISIS, or been prevented from leaving Australia, but many recruits are from our neighbour Indonesia.

In Syria, I find it is impossible to follow all the agendas and proxies at play, and the air space must be very crowded and dangerous. Australians are bombing in Syria and we wonder why some of our young Muslim population are getting "radicalised"? I think we should only contribute humanitarian aid.

Following his destabilisation of the Ukraine, Putin is playing a much more active and duplicitous role in Syria. Russia is insisting that Assad remain, the man who killed 250,000 of his own people and made refugees of millions of others. Obama seems rather helpless in the Middle East, and the Taliban are making a come-back in Afghanistan.

China is also being territorially provocative by continuing to build on the disputed islands in the South China Sea. Let's hope we don't have a major confrontation between the US and

China in our region. China is our major trading partner, and the USA is our major ally, although in my life time they seem to just draw us into disastrous wars. – like in Vietnam and Iraq. The US have established a base in Darwin, Northern Australia, and we have just leased the port of Darwin to the Chinese!

Pope Francis was refreshing in his recent travels with his support for social justice, more equitable income distribution and action on climate change. But he now has a “civil war” in The Vatican where a letter to the Pope signed by 11 cardinals (yes of course including our rather heart-less George Pell) warns of the “collapse” of the Roman Catholic church by the “abandonment of key elements of Christian belief and practice in the name of personal adaption”.

I hope Hillary Clinton is prepared to take on the USA’s National Rifle Association. An exasperated Obama described recent shootings as depressingly “routine”. I wonder why Americans can’t compare their appalling shooting statistics with neighbouring Canada and ask which country is handling this issue most effectively? If guns are meant to protect you, why are so many Americans dying?

Saudi Arabia, despite a shocking record of their own, has been elected to the Chair of the UN Human Rights Committee. This does nothing for our confidence in the United Nations. Violence is spiralling in Israel and Palestine. Netanyahu made it obvious during his election campaign that he had no intention of enabling a Palestinian State. How could Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and the blockade with Egypt of the Gaza Strip NOT be the cause of Palestinian violence? A new generation of fearless young Palestinians seem to have despaired of their hopeless situation and their own leadership, and are resorting to violence. I don’t think anyone – Israeli or Palestinian - should have to live under the present threats or conditions. Other existential threats for Israel include their proximity to the war in Syria and ISIS, and Iran now possesses a new precision-guided ballistic missile which can reach Israel.