

A Brief History of the Gaza Strip

Roy Thurley



Copyright © Roy Thurley 2023

The right of Roy Thurley to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright Design and Patents Act, 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form, by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the author.

Acknowledgements:

All the maps and images have been obtained from the internet, and are believed to be free of copyright except where shown. If this is not the case, please accept my apologies.

Author

Roy Thurley was Director of Christian Friends of Israel (UK) from 2000-2007, having served previously as a member of the Board of CFI Charitable Trust. He is the creator of the 'KESHER' course exploring the connection between Christianity and Judaism, Israel and the Church.

keshher@talktalk.net

INTRODUCTION

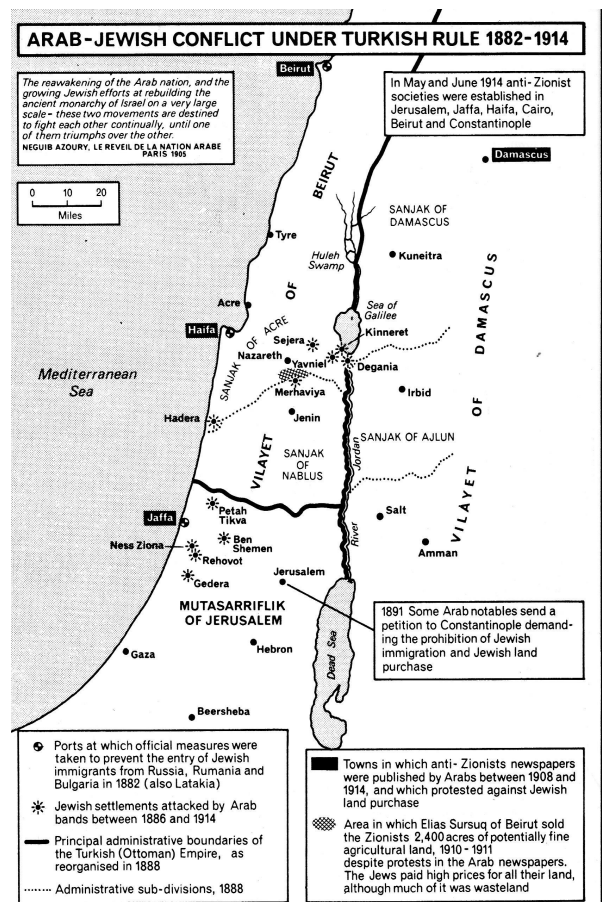
Although Gaza is mentioned in the Bible, both in the Tanakh and in the Newer Testament, we are going to start this booklet with the Ottoman Empire, the period from 1517 to 1917. However, before we get to Gaza we need to make a brief reference to Palestine.

The word 'Palestine' does not occur in the scriptures, despite some publishers putting the names on maps of the area. Using the term 'Palestine' is totally misleading as Palestine did not exist during the lifetime of Jesus, or indeed at any time recorded in the scriptures.

The name first appears on the scene after the Jewish revolt led by Sh'mon Bar Kochva, from 132-135AD. The Jews lost that battle and most were expelled from the land. The Roman Emperor Hadrian renamed the province of Judea as Syria-Palæstina, a deliberate reminder to the Jews of their traditional enemies, the Philistines. Today's Palestinians have no ethnic link to the ancient Philistines, as the name derives from the Romans.

If you look at a map of the area during the Ottoman period you will see that it was not governed as Palestine, or even Syria-Palestine, but was split between the Vilayet of Beirut in the northern coastal region, the Mutasarriflik of Jerusalem in the southern coastal region, which includes the city of Gaza, and the Vilayet of Damascus to the east of the Jordan River.

According to references on the internet, a vilayet was a major administrative district or province with its own governor. A mutasarriflik, or sanjak, was a similar administrative



district, where the governor was appointed directly by the Sultan.

The important thing to note was that the inhabitants of the area at the time - Jews, Arabs and anyone else - did not have any form of self-government but were ruled from Constantinople, today's Istanbul. So, up to 1917 there had been no Arab state anywhere in the Syria-Palestine region.

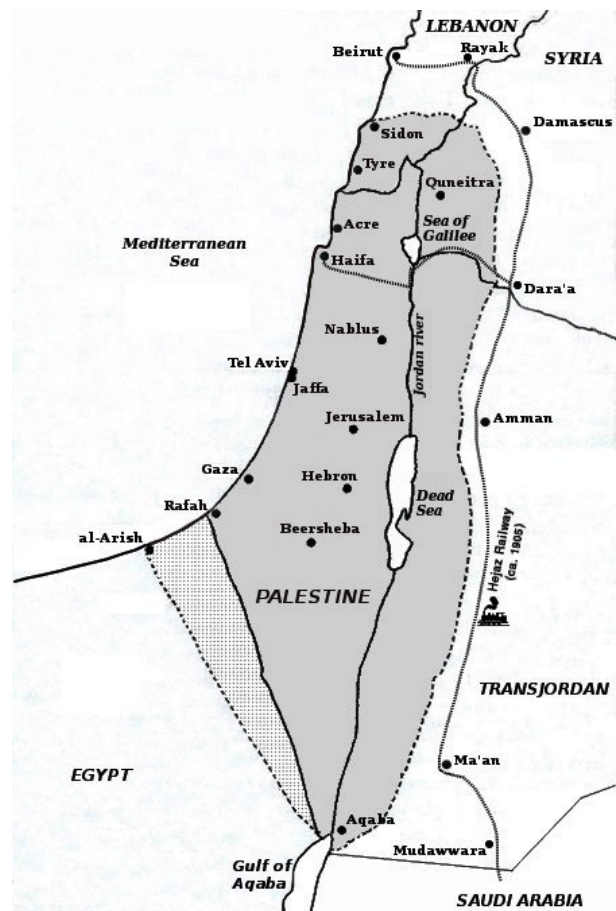
Before World War 1 came to an end, Britain had conquered the whole of Palestine, as well as Syria and Mesopotamia (now Iraq). After the end of the Great War a Peace Conference was announced to decide what to do with the territories that formerly belonged to the defeated nations of Germany and Turkey. This included the area known as Palestine, of interest to both Jews and Muslims.

Paris Peace Conference

Both sides were able to present their plans at the Peace Conference, held in Paris in 1919.

This map shows the division of the land proposed by the Jews. Note that Gaza is named as a city in the area claimed by the Jewish people.

Eventually the Paris Peace Conference had no time to consider the disposition of the former Ottoman Empire, as all the time had been taken up with the re-arrangement of Europe. So, the conference was adjourned until 1920, when it met at the Villa Devachan in San Remo, Italy.



San Remo Conference

The San Remo Conference was an international meeting of the post-World War I Allied Supreme Council, from 19th to 26th April 1920. It was attended by the four Principal Allied Powers of World War 1, with the USA also present with observer status.



This Conference got to work on deciding the future of the Middle East following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The parties recognised that most of the territories of the former Ottoman Empire were not in such a well-developed condition as to be awarded statehood immediately, so instead a Mandate system was introduced whereby one of the Principal Allied Powers was granted a Mandate to administer a territory with a view to it becoming an independent country when suitably developed. Britain received the Mandates for Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Palestine.

The Mandate for Palestine

The Mandate for Palestine was different from the others, as this was to become a homeland for the Jewish people, and the vast majority of them were not yet living in the Land. This Mandate therefore set out how the Land was to be settled by Jews in preparation for when they could form a viable nation there.

There are a number of points which must be noted concerning this Mandate:

1. For the first time in history, Palestine became a legal entity. Before this it had been just a geographical area.
2. All prior agreements before the San Remo conference were terminated.

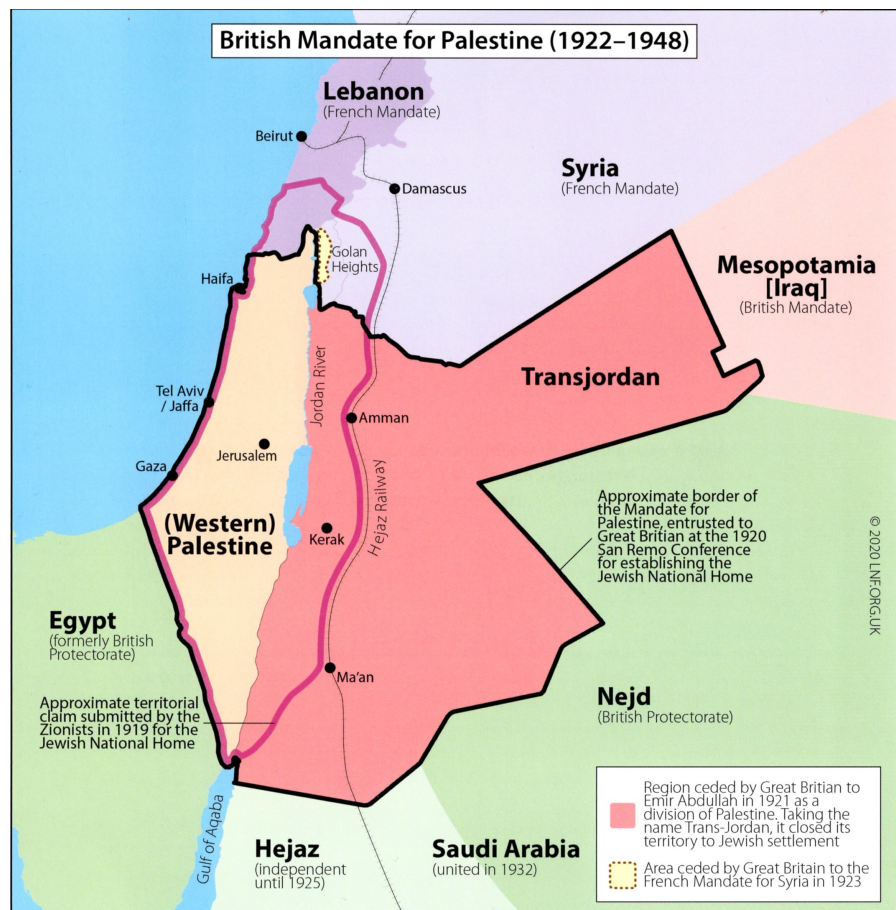
3. The Balfour Declaration was recognised and incorporated into international law.
4. Sovereignty over Palestine was vested in the Jewish people. This had been transferred from the previous Ottoman Empire to the League of Nations one year earlier.
5. The San Remo Agreement was included in the Treaty of Sèvres, confirmed by the Council of the League of Nations on 24th July 1922 and finally agreed when Turkey accepted the terms of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne.

All 51 nations of the League of Nations voted in favour of this Agreement.

The exact boundaries of the Land covered by the Mandate for Palestine were not defined at San Remo. Neither were the boundaries for the other Mandate territories.

Eventually the borders looked like this.

Western Palestine was to be developed as a Jewish state and Eastern Palestine, later called Trans-Jordan, as an Arab state, both initially administered by Britain under their Mandate. In 1946 Eastern Palestine was granted its independence as the Emirate of Transjordan.



The End of the Mandate

In April 1946 the League of Nations ended and the newly-formed United Nations inherited all the agreements made by its predecessor, including the Mandate for Palestine. In 1947 Britain decided to terminate her stewardship of the Mandate and notified the United Nations accordingly. It should be noted that the Mandate itself was not terminated, but only Britain's stewardship of it.

The UN proposed a Partition Plan for what remained of Palestine after Transjordan was granted its independence. It recommended the setting up of an Arab state, a Jewish state and an international zone to include Jerusalem.

This is the first time that what we know as the Gaza Strip is shown, being connected to Egypt in the south-west and what is usually called the 'West Bank' by a narrow crossing.

This Resolution (181) was only a recommendation to consider partition. It was not an injunction that must be obeyed. The

recommendation was accepted by the Jewish leadership, but rejected by the Arabs. It had no legal validity once rejected.

When the State of Israel was declared at the end of the British Mandate period, 14th May 1948, it became the fulfilment of the Mandate for Palestine, which had been created in order to bring about this outcome in due course. Although the manner by which the fulfilment came about left much to be desired, the Jewish State of Israel was what was envisaged by the writers of the San Remo Agreement nearly thirty years earlier.



There is a principle in international law known as “uti possidetis juris”, a Latin phrase which means that a newly formed sovereign state retains the borders that their predecessor had before they gained independence. Thus the new state of Israel inherited the entire area of Western Palestine, including the so-called 'West Bank' and the Gaza Strip, when its declaration of independence came in to force at midnight on 14th May 1948.

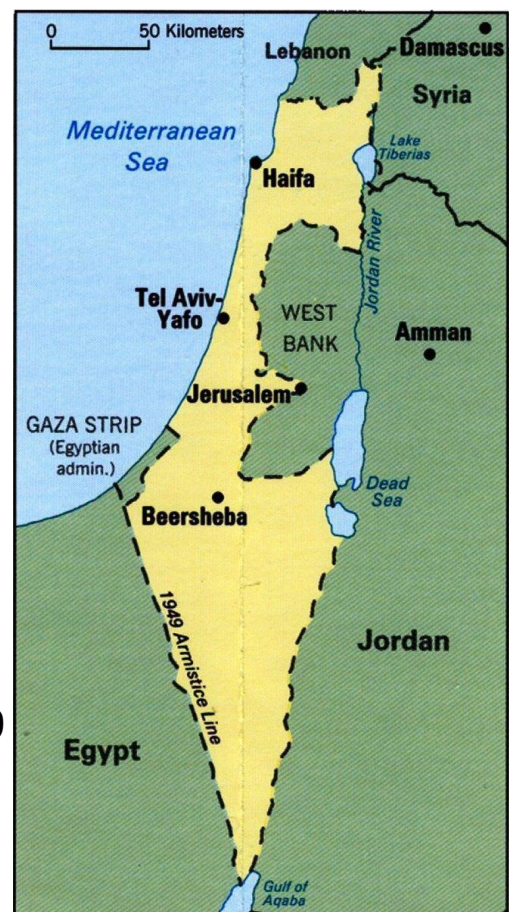
Israel's War of Independence

Immediately after Israel's declaration of independence the fledgling state was attacked by Egypt in the south, Trans-Jordan in the east and Syria in the north, with forces from Iraq also joining in. This map shows what the area looked like at the end of that war. Transjordan had captured territory west of the Jordan River, so renamed itself as the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Syria had taken the Golan Heights.

Israeli forces had first taken the Gaza strip in the War of Independence and then ceded the area to Egypt as part of the 1949 armistice agreement. That same year, Palestinian terrorist groups (*Fedayeen*) with Egyptian military support began systematic raids against Israeli civilians, killing over 400 between 1951 and 1956.

Israel retook Gaza as part of its broader operation against Egypt in the 1956 Suez Crisis, before withdrawing and being replaced by Egyptian forces in early 1957.

We then come to the Six Day War of 1967.



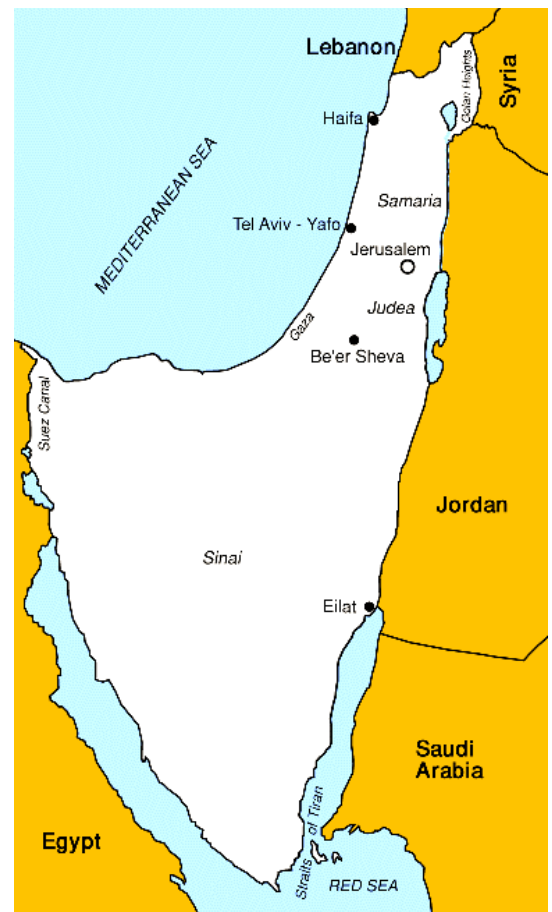
The Six Day War

This map shows the land under Israeli control at the end of the Six Day War of 1967. From Israel's perspective this was a defensive war, as Egypt, for example, had already declared war by blocking the Straits of Tiran in the Gulf of Aqaba. Similarly, shortly after the war began, Jordan also declared war on Israel.

Israel took control of the Gaza Strip again during the War, and began opening a portion of the area to Israeli settlement. Jewish settlement of the region actually began with Abraham and Isaac living in Gerar, back in *Genesis 20*. There was a Jewish presence there throughout the centuries until 1929, when they were forced to leave because of the Arab uprising.

In 1946, under the British Mandate, Kibbutz Kfar Dorom was founded towards the southern end of the Gaza strip. This was abandoned in 1948 but reformed in 1970 after the Six Day War, along with twenty other Jewish settlements.

After 1967, the territory under Israeli control was almost identical to that which comprised the Mandate for Palestine, as shown on this map.



The 1978 Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt did not include Gaza in the land transferred back to Egypt. That agreement anticipated a future autonomy deal under Palestinian auspices.

Significant terrorist attacks on Israel from Gaza, including suicide bombings and abductions of IDF soldiers, resumed with the outbreak of the first Intifada and the founding of HAMAS as the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1987. HAMAS is the acronym for Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya, usually translated as the Islamic Resistance Movement. 'Hamis' is actually a word meaning 'violence' in Hebrew, which seems quite appropriate.

After six years of conflict, the IDF withdrew from the 80% of Gaza without Israeli settlements as part of the 1993 Oslo agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO).

Attacks from Gaza on Israel, now including rocket attacks, resumed during the Second Intifada (2000-5), immediately after which Israel dismantled settlements, including forcibly removing around 8,000 Israeli citizens, and withdrew unilaterally from the entirety of Gaza.

Shortly after its victory in the January 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections, HAMAS increased the frequency of rocket attacks on Israel and abducted Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit in a cross-border raid via a tunnel. Since then there have been a number of military confrontations. Operation Summer Rains occurred from June to November 2006. A ceasefire was finally agreed in June 2008, only to be broken when HAMAS resumed rocket launches in response to an IDF attack on a tunnel it believed HAMAS would use again to abduct Israeli soldiers.

Israel launched another partial ground invasion of Gaza in December 2008 (Operation Cast Lead) to degrade HAMAS's operational capabilities. During the subsequent ceasefire (2009-12), HAMAS acquired mortar capabilities and rebuilt and improved its rocket arsenal with Iranian and other foreign support. As a result, rocket and mortar attacks on Israel from Gaza escalated abruptly by November 2012, prompting Israel to carry out eight days of airstrikes against

launch sites, weapons depots, smuggling tunnels and HAMAS's senior operational leadership in Gaza. This was known as Operation Pillar of Defense.

The ensuing ceasefire mostly held until June 2014, when HAMAS operatives in the West Bank kidnapped and murdered three Israeli teenagers, leading to Operation Protective Edge. This pattern of violence, extending back decades, is inseparable from HAMAS's categorical hostility to Israel's existence.

The group's founding charter holds that no true Muslim "can abandon [Palestine] or part of it," and that there is "no escape for raising the banner of Jihad" to remove Israel from it. HAMAS condones any tactics necessary to contribute to its ultimate goal, including both indiscriminate attacks on Israeli citizens and using Palestinian citizens as martyrs in its self-proclaimed struggle.

UNRWA

UNRWA is the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, established as a result of Israel's War of Independence. At that time it was responsible for around 750,000 Arab refugees who had formerly been resident in Israel. Unlike the United National High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which deals with refugees in the rest of the world, UNRWA does not aim to re-settle the refugees outside of Israel and includes in their numbers all descendants of those original refugees. Today these number around five million.



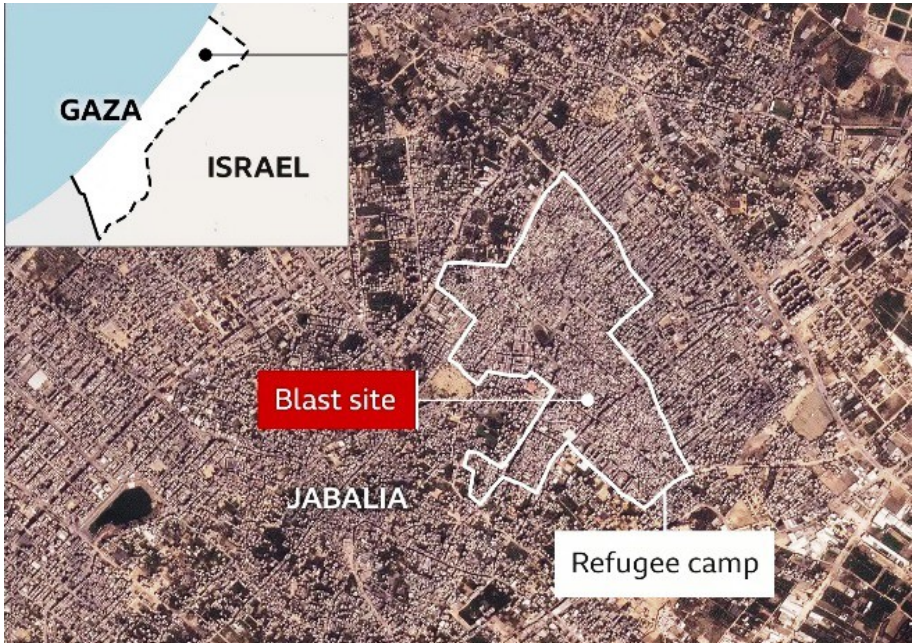
The former US Secretary of State recently stated that the number of refugees from Israel's War of Independence still alive today is thought to be under 200,000, or 4% of those under UNRWA's care.

So-called 'Palestinian refugees' are located in 61 refugee camps, of which eight are in the Gaza strip, which does beg the question as to why there are refugee camps for Palestinians in a Palestinian area.

Our image of a refugee camp is probably rows of tents. This photo shows Jabalia Camp, the largest camp in the Gaza strip. It looks little different from any other part of Gaza. As with other towns, Jabalia is quite densely packed.



However, as can be seen in this aerial view, it is embedded totally within non-UNRWA territory, the white line showing the boundary. In theory the area is controlled by UNRWA, but in practice they just provide services for the 116,000 refugees registered there.



UNRWA provides aid to these refugees at a rate considerably higher than that given to other refugees by the UNHCR, and without any prospect of their status changing. UNRWA currently has an income in excess of £900 million per year, or £150 per 'refugee' (£4,500 per 'genuine' refugee). In contrast, the UNHCR spends around £65 per refugee under their care.

The 'Two-State Solution'

Meanwhile, the rest of the world is sticking to the mantra of the 'Two-State Solution'.

This is actually wrong on two counts. First, as we have seen, there already are two states in Palestine, an Arab one called Jordan and a Jewish one called Israel. So dividing Israel by taking away its heartland of Judea and Samaria would create a second Arab state, the third state in total.

But there is also no love lost between the Arabs of the so-called 'West Bank' and those who live in the Gaza Strip. For many years they have been unable to form a joint government so, potentially, the Gaza Strip would also have to be given its own independence - a fourth state in the area.

So 'Two-State' is clearly wrong

Secondly, it would not provide a solution to the Arab-Israeli dispute. As we have already seen, the Palestinian leadership want to 'liberate' Palestine 'from the river to the sea'. They will only be satisfied with the total elimination of Israel, which is not going to happen!

So the 'Two-State Solution' is, in fact, a 'Three-State (or even Four-State) Scenario', which our politicians and much of the church needs to know.



Will peace come?

Possibly, but it is worth remembering that the Palestinian Authority has been educating its people to hate Israelis for over fifty years. It will take a massive programme of re-education to change the situation to one of real peace.

Golda Meir, Israel's Prime Minister from 1969 to 1974, was quoted as saying, "Peace will come when the Arabs start to love their children more than they hate us. We can forgive [them] for killing our children. We cannot forgive them from forcing us to kill their children. We will only have peace with [them] when they love their children more than they hate us."



The current Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas is now in the 19th year of his 4-year term of office. When he dies, there may be some sort of accommodation with Israel.

HAMAS has been in power in Gaza for 17 years. If Israel destroy them in the current war there may be a temporary peace.

But real peace will only come when the Prince of Peace comes!

Roy Thurley

February 2024