

Palestine 36 [12A]

2025 France/Occupied Palestine and others 115 mins

UK released	31 October 2025
Director	Annemarie Jacir
Screenplay	Annemarie Jacir
Cinematography	Sarah Blum; Tim Fleming; H��l��ne Louvart; Leandro Monti
Music	Ben Frost
Cast	Hiam Abbass (Hanan); Robert Aramayo (Orde Wingate); Saleh Bakri (Khalid); Yasmine Al Massri (Khouloud) Karim Daoud Anaya (Yusuf); Jeremy Irons (Arthur Wauchope); Billy Howle (Thomas); Liam Cunningham (Charles Tegart)

It's a grim coincidence that Jacir's film, which focuses on a pivotal moment in Palestinian history, has arrived during another painfully formative moment for the country. *Palestine 36* takes as its focus not Israel's 1948 declaration of independence – known to Palestinians as the Nakba ('catastrophe') – though that looms ominously on the film's horizon, but an earlier moment of profound change: the year 1936, when the Great Palestinian Revolt broke through the complacency of British rule to protest against long-standing injustices, land theft and Zionist policies.

The story of the revolt, and the violent backlash from the British authorities, is complex and sprawling. Jacir tackles this challenge through an ambitious, multi-stranded narrative featuring a diverse ensemble of characters who together offer a cross-section of a society in flux. Port worker Khalid (Saleh Bakri) is pushed into the rebel movement by poor working conditions; sophisticated journalist Khouloud (Yasmine Al Massri) finds herself at odds with Jerusalem's high society when she exposes colonial injustices; a village community, including young Afra (Wardi Eilabouni) and her grandmother Hanan (Hiam Abbas) face escalating threats from settlers. Meanwhile British officials, including an idealistic administrator (Billy Howle), an inept high commissioner (Jeremy Irons) and the Christian Zionist army officer Orde Wingate (played by Robert Aramayo as a sadist), struggle to maintain the status quo in the face of mounting resistance. At the centre of the story is Yusuf (Karim Daoud Anaya), a young man from the village who serves as a connector

between urban and rural worlds when he becomes the protégé of a wealthy patron in Jerusalem.

With films such as *When I Saw You* (2012) and *Wajib* (2017), Jacir has established herself as a nuanced chronicler of Palestinian life. *Palestine 36* addresses her trademark themes – identity, the weight of history – on a much larger scale, combining the conventions of classic period drama with a thorough unpacking of the geopolitical failures that have shaped the region. *Palestine 36* packages complex colonial history in Merchant Ivory-style period upholstery, an approach that is perhaps easy to dismiss. And it's true that *Palestine 36* has flaws. It's a huge story, and many characters are rendered in broad strokes – the idealistic rebel, the psychopathic soldier, the fiery journalist – while the need to swiftly cover fast-moving political developments means that dialogue is often expositional.

Palestine 36 arrives in cinemas at a time when Palestinian films - such as *Bye Bye Tiberias* (2023) and *No Other Land* (2024) - are receiving unprecedented attention. Jacir's film is less layered and formally interesting than those films, but it does offer an engaging, accessible historical primer, which will likely reach audiences that would never come to the cinema to see this story told as documentary. Despite occasional slickness, it's clear by the devastating conclusion that Jacir is not shying away from brutal reality. An affecting denouement, which gestures towards seemingly unbreakable chains of intergenerational violence, shakes off any remaining comforting period drama gloss to speak directly, arrestingly, to today.

Rachel Pronger, *Sight and Sound*, 27 October 2025 (abridged)

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