

In Summary

SYRIA

In October, Syria held its first People's Assembly elections since a coalition of Islamist groups overthrew Bashar al-Assad in 2024. Almost all seats went to Sunni men who fought against Assad. Conducted through local councils instead of a popular vote, the contest attracted limited attention from Syrians struggling to rebuild after a nearly 14-year civil war that devastated the country's economy and displaced 12 million people. In addition to the 122 members elected last month, 70 will be appointed by President Ahmed al-Sharaa, the former leader of the rebel group Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham.

The vote took place in the shadow of ongoing ethnic conflict: polls were postponed in two Kurdish-controlled regions and one where the government is fighting Druze militias. After it faced criticism for the fact that only six women and ten members of ethnic minorities won seats, the electoral commission acknowledged "significant shortcomings."



GAZA

Hamas and Israel agreed to a peace plan for Gaza in October, under which Hamas released its remaining hostages. Since the ceasefire went into effect, however, Israel has killed more than 300 and been accused of holding up more than 10,000 truckloads of aid.

TAWFIQ ZAYYAD: POET, COMMUNIST, MAYOR

BY LEENA DALLASHEH

Under the leadership of poet and activist Tawfiq Zayyad, Nazareth emerged in the 1970s as a hub of anti-Zionist resistance.

I call on you
I clasp your hands
I kiss the ground under your feet
And I say: I offer my life for yours...
I was not humiliated in my homeland
Nor was I diminished
I stood up to my oppressors
orphaned, naked, and barefoot
I carried my blood in my palm
I never lowered my flags.
—"I Call on You," 1966

► **TAWFIQ ZAYYAD** was both a poet and a prominent Palestinian politician, serving as the mayor of Nazareth as well as a member of the Israeli Knesset. To this day, his 1966 poem "I Call on You" is a Palestinian national anthem of sorts, part of the "literature of resistance," as Ghassan Kanafani dubbed it. It was not Zayyad's official positions that made the most significant impact in the Palestinian struggle but rather the combination of popular leadership, poetry, and his role as the defiant mayor of the largest Palestinian municipality within Israel.

Born in 1929 to a working-class family, he joined the

WEST BANK

Longtime Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas designated a successor in October: Hussein al-Sheikh, a figure who is seen as being close to Israel. If the move is meant to reassure the West as it contemplates a role for the PA in governing Gaza, it may also encourage more radical Palestinian factions to bid for power when Abbas leaves office.



October 7, 2025

I Spent Five Days in Israel's Desert Prison

October 18, 2025

Knesset MP Ofer Cassif on the Need for Palestinian Liberation

October 22, 2025

The Global Sumud Flotilla Exposed Western Hypocrisy

Communist Party of Israel (or "Maki") as a young man, which became the main oppositional force among the Palestinians who remained after the 1948 creation of Israel. Zayyad quickly earned a reputation for militancy, leading to his nomination on Nazareth's first democratically elected city council in 1954. In 1955, during a popular campaign against the head tax levied only on Palestinians, he was arrested and severely beaten. But this only hardened his revolutionary resolve, and he became a national figure. Zayyad was elected to the Knesset in 1973. As a fierce and charismatic speaker from its chambers, he inspired tens of thousands in their confrontation with Israeli authorities. But he remained committed to local politics, and in December 1975 he led a coalition of Communists and nationalists to victory in Nazareth's municipal elections, establishing his hometown as a permanent thorn in the side of the Israeli establishment.

For the Israeli settler project, Nazareth was a problem from the very start. From the earliest months after its occupation by the Israeli army in 1948, the Palestinian



Communists in the city demanded local elections. They insisted that an elected council would defend Nazareth as a Palestinian city and advocate for those who remained in their homes in what soon became the State of Israel. The authorities,

fearing a Communist victory, blocked elections until 1954. After the Communists won the majority of the council seats, Israeli officials repeatedly thwarted their attempts to elect a Communist mayor or to form a party-led coalition, at one time even

orchestrating a violent attack on Zayyad and his fellow councilors.

It took the Communists until 1976 to finally win the mayoralship. As mayor, Zayyad continued to affirm the city's Arab identity while also using the municipal government to lead Palestinian citizens' struggle within Israel. The Israeli authorities struck back, depriving the city of crucial support for social services and development. Rejecting this blackmail, Zayyad organized the city's residents, who rushed to pay their municipal taxes. More important, Zayyad parlayed this strategy into a wider Palestinian mass mobilization in the annual working camps, which brought together hundreds of volunteers from various areas — including Palestinians from the occupied territories and Jewish Israeli allies. These events served as spaces for political agitation and education, the advancement of Palestinian nationalism, and joint Arab-Jewish opposition to Israeli policies.

The spirit of mass mobilization under Zayyad's leadership would soon prove vital to Palestinian survival. In the spring of 1976, a



ISRAEL

In October, hundreds of thousands of ultra-Orthodox Israelis rallied against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's push to modestly curtail their military service exemptions. The issue has tested the integrity of Netanyahu's coalition, whose hold on power depends on ultra-Orthodox parties.

LEBANON

Israel's attacks on Hezbollah picked up in October, threatening to undermine its ceasefire with Lebanon. The Lebanese government has adopted a US-backed plan to disarm Hezbollah, but its military may lack the capacity to rein in the group, a powerful force in Lebanese politics.

October 30, 2025

Plestia Alaqaq: Western Media Language Is Enabling Genocide

November 7, 2025

For 50 Years, Morocco Has Denied Western Sahara Freedom

September 5, 2025

The Rulers of Eswatini Are Donald Trump's Eager Accomplices

popular committee declared a general strike in protest of the government's decision to confiscate over five thousand acres of Palestinian land. Less than a week before the strike was to take place, forty-two Palestinian local authorities met in Shefa-Amr, a Palestinian town in the Galilee, to discuss the forthcoming action. They had been pressured to do so by the Israeli authorities, who hoped for the strike's cancellation. The meeting was contentious, but the vote to abort the strike failed.

Zayyad, who had been elected as Nazareth's mayor less than three months earlier, cut the discussion short, declaring, "The people have decided to strike."

The strike went ahead on March 30, despite massive police repression. By the day's end, the Israeli police and army had killed six Palestinian citizens. March 30 has since become a national protest day, commemorated within Palestine and around the world as Land Day. But even this

"The State of Israel is a binational state, and it will remain binational."

protest was part of a larger moment of Palestinian mass organizing, including in the West Bank and Gaza, where Palestinian Communists played an important role. Building on discourse and strategy developed under the British Mandate, Zayyad — along with the other Palestinian Communist leaders — combined class consciousness with nationalism, insisting that the national and local were inherently connected in the anti-colonial struggle. For his participation, Zayyad was repeatedly detained, imprisoned, and put under house arrest.

Today, with the two-state solution emptied of meaning, it is essential to realize that the demand for Palestinian self-determination espoused

by Zayyad and others did not mean accepting Israel as a Jewish state. Zayyad, like other Palestinian Communists, insisted that Israel had to become a democratic state, one in which Palestinians could enjoy national as well as civil rights. He expressed this vision in a speech in the Knesset in 1975, arguing, "The State of Israel is a binational state, and it will remain binational. Any dreams about a country 'clean' of Arabs are pipe dreams."

In the wake of the catastrophe in Gaza, this dream of Zayyad's can still light the path forward. And the demand for democracy — even from a perch as small as a little city like Nazareth — still has the power to rally the world. ▶

Opposite: Pictured here in 1976, the year he began his 20-year stint as mayor, Zayyad was a leading light of both the communist and anti-colonial movements of late 20th-century Israel and Palestine.

Below: These two posters from the mid-1980s commemorate the March 30, 1976, Palestinian national uprising against Israeli land confiscation.



AFGHANISTAN

Pakistan accused Afghanistan's Taliban leadership of supporting the terrorist group Tehrik-i-Taliban following an October attack on Pakistani soldiers. Two weeks of fighting subsequently broke out between the two governments, killing dozens of people.

TUNISIA

Authoritarian Tunisian president Kais Saied is prosecuting hundreds of opposition figures, journalists, and trade unionists for "conspiracy" and spreading "fake news." In October, one of the opposition's main defense lawyers was sentenced to five years in prison on "anti-terror" charges.

