

Class Struggle and Palestinian Self-Determination – MK Ofer Cassif part 2/2



By Talia Baroncelli Posted on October 28, 2024 October 28, 2024 3:56 pm Middle East
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In part 2, Member of Israeli Knesset Dr. Ofer Cassif discusses the regional class interests that actively oppose Palestinian statehood and equality for Israelis and Palestinians. He describes the U.S.-backed bilateral Abraham Accords between Israel and the UAE, and Israel and Bahrain, as agreements to further entrench class inequalities and capitalist military-industrial interests in the Middle East and foreclose the possibility of Palestinian self-determination.

Member of Israeli Parliament: “After Sinwar’s Killing, Netanyahu Doubles Down on Genocide” – MK Ofer Cassif Pt. 1/2

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Talia Baroncelli

Hi, I’m Talia Baroncelli, and you’re watching *theAnalysis.news*. This is part two of my discussion with a member of Knesset, Ofer Cassif. We’ll be discussing the class elements that prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state and the end of the occupation.

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Very excited to be joined by a member of Knesset, Ofer Cassif. He is a member of the Hadash–Ta’al Party, which is a left-wing coalition comprised of both Jewish and Arab Israeli citizens. Hadash is also a movement founded along the lines of communism, inspired by communism. The party or the coalition also calls for equality for all people living in Israel and Palestine and has called for an end to the occupation. Thank you so much for joining us again today, Ofer.

Dr. Ofer Cassif

My pleasure. Thank you.

Talia Baroncelli

To use this class analysis that you're talking about, can you apply it to what was previously called the normalization and the Abraham Accords? It seems like it was that impetus to have arms agreements between Israel and other countries, such as Saudi Arabia, and to have that replace a solution in which Palestinians would be able to have self-determination. It seems like those financial and military interests replaced any real attempt to have a regional solution. How do you apply that class analysis to the Abraham Accords, which I think is, in a way, still U.S. policy? There has been no change there. They still want those Accords to go ahead, even if or when this war in Gaza comes to an end.

Dr. Ofer Cassif

You're absolutely right because the Abraham Accords serve the very same interest of the minority in power, especially the economic power that I mentioned before. That goes back to the class issue. It just proves my case.

I'm happy and thankful to you for asking this question because we, Hadash-Ta'al in the Knesset, were the only fraction that voted against the Abraham Accords in the Knesset and we were accused as if we were against peace, but it's proof that we were totally right. When we voted against the Abraham Accords, it was not because we were against peace. It's exactly the opposite. We are for peace. We said, and you can see that we were totally right, we said that without Palestinian liberation, without a just solution for the Palestinian people, and that means statehood, eventually, there won't be any peace. You cannot skip the Palestinians. You cannot ignore the Palestinians. The Abraham Accords did exactly that. They tried to ignore it. They actually ignored the Palestinians. To that, the unholy trinity I mentioned before was all part of it by ignoring the Palestinians. We said that will not deliver neither peace, nor security, nor stability to the region because it ignores the core of the evil that exists there and the core of the ongoing hostility that exists in the area.

We were right, to some extent. The terrible massacre of October 7, in which I lost friends dear to me, was, to some extent, the consequence of the Abraham Accords because of the overlook of the Palestinians. I want to be very clear: this is absolutely not to justify one bit of this criminal massacre committed by Hamas, not at all. In order to understand and explain that there's no way to achieve stability, peace, and security, let alone justice, without solving the core issue in question and the main evil and unjust situation of the Palestinian people. This is exactly, going back to your question. To be more clear, this is the class issue I was talking about. Why do those regimes ignore the Palestinians in order to get to the Abraham Accords? Because it served their own political and economic interests. This is a class issue, an economic issue. Yet again, they will not deliver anything. They cannot supply the good. Only the Palestinian liberation can do that.

Talia Baroncelli

What is the solution? You listen to U.S. officials, Matt Miller, for example, always talking about a ceasefire, and then eventually to the creation of a Palestinian state, to a two-state solution. In Israel, in July, I think July 19 or so, there was a resolution that was overwhelmingly passed against the creation of a Palestinian state. So, 69 or 68 members of the Knesset voted against having a

Palestinian state, and nine members voted in favor. Then there's this constant lip service on behalf of other Western officials in the name of the two-state solution but the West Bank keeps shrinking. There are more illegal settlements being built. You mentioned there were maybe four people who have been sanctioned in the West Bank or extreme Israelis who have been sanctioned on that front. Generally, the policy hasn't changed in order to implement international law. How do we get to either a two-state or one-state solution if the very fundamentals are not being upheld?

Dr. Ofer Cassif

First of all, I have to say, and I mentioned it before in our chat in regard to another question, but it's still relevant. One of the main reasons why the fanatic fascists control the state of Israel is that this government is a full-fledged fascist government with real racist elements. People like Bezalel Smotrich, [Itamar] Ben-Gvir, and other thugs who really believe in Jewish supremacy, a racial one that echoes something from the past, unfortunately, they could not do what they do, including this ridiculous vote against the recognition of a Palestinian state, had there been an opposition. Unfortunately, there is no real opposition in that matter because the main two parties who are supposed to be the alternative to the fascist government are Benjamin Gantz's party and Yair Lapid's party. Most of them either voted with the coalition against the Palestinian State or just went out of the plenum or abstained. There is no real opposition. It happens because of them. I put a lot of the blame on them because they do not fight back, either because they agree with the coalition or because they are cowards. There is a combination of the two of those. Because of that, it seems very grim. It seems very pessimistic because there is no parliamentary opposition apart from us. We are only five out of 120 in the Knesset.

One thing that should change is, of course, there must be an opposition. A real opposition, a brave opposition. That can be done only if two things happen. One is that more and more people take to the streets and very clearly and bluntly shout out against the ongoing genocide for a peaceful political solution that I mentioned before. That may put some pressure on the opposition, which, as I said, consists today mainly of cowards. There must be international pressure. A combination of internal and international pressure may and will influence this government and the fanatics. I have no expectations from them, but it may put some pressure on or influence the opposition of those parts or elements in the opposition which do not agree with the coalition but they're afraid to speak up. That must be done. We are doomed if we do not have international support. We are doomed. We are too small. We cannot achieve much.

Unfortunately, I tweeted it last week, and I have to say it again and use your platform with your permission to spread the word. Look, the family of my grandparents on my mother's side were the only ones who were not killed by the Nazis because they left Poland before '39. No one survived from their families. I'm talking about dozens of people. Nobody survived. Everybody was killed, partly because the world stood by. They didn't do anything. They didn't care. For me, it's horrifying that it's happening again as if we haven't learned anything. It seems that the world, especially leaders who consider themselves great Democrats and Liberals, don't do anything. In what sense are they different from those who didn't do anything 80 years ago and 85 years ago? In what sense? I mean, that's going to be one of the worst stamps, as it were in human history, stamped by blood. I find it very difficult even to describe not only my rage or pain or disappointment but my disgust. This silence and overlooking.

Talia Baroncelli

It's different now, too, because this time you see it. This time, it's being live-streamed on social media. It's not like we don't have the technology to see what's happening. It is happening in front of our eyes. There's this narrative of justifying it or saying that Israel is doing everything it can to minimize civilian harm. It's unfortunate that it happened.

Dr. Ofer Cassif

Which is a sheer lie. It's a sheer lie. Everybody knows that. The government of Israel is interested in the bloodshed and the massacre. The government of Israel consists of, as I said before, fascists and wolves.

By the way, it's even very difficult to say those things. You know that I was suspended last year for 45 days from the Knesset for my parliamentary obligation to my public because I dare say that the government of Israel was interested in violence, to use it as an excuse to pursue with—with Smotrich, by the way, the decisive plan, which I specified in our last chat, I believe, last year. I compared it to some other disasters that happened in the past, and you know what? I was suspended from the Knesset because of that. Thereafter, just recently, there was an attempt to impeach me altogether from the Knesset simply because I signed a petition in support of the South African appeal to the ICJ. They were short four members of the Knesset. They needed 90. They had 86 to impeach me. Now, it seems that I'm going to be suspended for a few months. The decision is going to be published at the end of the month, I think. I do not know the decision yet. There are thousands of complaints against me to the Ethics Committee of the Knesset, not because of things that I did, but because of things that I said or did, but for political reasons, not something criminal or I don't know what. I did my duty as a human being, first and foremost, but also as a member of the Knesset of the Israeli Parliament who is obliged to specific values and to the public. I'm apparently going to be suspended from the Knesset soon for a few months simply because I signed this petition and because I said that Netanyahu is an assassin and because I used the term genocide in regard to the ongoing things in Gaza. That's the only democracy in the Middle East, yes? Everything is connected.

We were discussing in the Haddash party the crimes against the Palestinians. But also within Israel, internally, there is a process of fascism, political persecution of anyone who raises an alternative voice against the genocide, for peace, especially Palestinian citizens who are persecuted, but not only. As I just exemplified, even members of the Knesset, with immunity, are persecuted and can hardly speak. I won't be surprised if, following our conversation, there will be more charges, as it were, and complaints against me. But I must say, I will never shut up. I will never shut up. This is my obligation.

Talia Baroncelli

Yeah, it's your obligation. I also wonder, you said that the opposition doesn't really exist, that there aren't that many subversive voices in Israel right now. Is that because they don't exist, or they're totally scared? Even General Giora Eiland, who is now retired, was considered to be center-left. He is obviously incredibly belligerent and anti-Palestinian in terms of the plan that he has construed for the north of Gaza. But it's interesting how figures like him, Yair Lapid, and Benny Gantz are still considered to be somewhat more left than Netanyahu. I guess that's a reflection of how far-right the Israeli political system is. If to be considered left is to be slightly in opposition to Netanyahu's

judicial reforms, bear in mind that before October 7, there were all these protests against Netanyahu's proposed reforms of the Supreme Court system and the judicial reforms. Even Eiland was in support of encouraging people in the Israeli military to condemn the judicial reforms. It seems like these people, to a certain extent, support some aspects of Israeli democracy, but they don't support equality for everyone. Can you speak a bit more about that division or radicalization within Israeli society?

Dr. Ofer Cassif

First of all, the judicial reform is a sugar-coated term to describe a coup d'état because what the government of Israel wanted to do by this so-called judicial reform is not really to reform the judicial system or anything else. It is to actually eliminate the independence of the judicial system. This is a coup because this is a change in the very essence of the regime. That is not to say that Israel was a democracy before.

In my view, Israel was never a real democracy because the main basic value of modern democracy, we must emphasize, is equality. Israel was established on an anti-egalitarian platform because once you define a state, any state, as being a state that belongs to just one portion of the population, it doesn't matter if we are talking about a specific ethnic group or a specific gender or sex or a specific class, but once a state is defined or practiced, or both, if it belonged only to one portion of the population, even if it is the majority, this is not a real democracy because it undermines the very essence of equality. In that sense, I think that Israel should better be called an ethnocracy rather than a democracy because democracy, the *demos*, as it is called in Greek, refers to all citizens. *Ethnos* is the term that refers to a specific ethnic group within a specific society. Israel, in that sense, was always an ethnocracy and not a democracy.

There is a joke I made, forgive me for flattering myself, that the current government of Israel is the most egalitarian ever because it is going to suppress not only Arabs but Jews also. In that sense, it's the most egalitarian government because it treats everybody the same in the sense of oppressing everybody. Of course, this is a joke not only because this is not real equality, but because it oppresses the Palestinians more, including the Palestinian war citizens in Israel.

The situation now in Israel, the political persecution is to an extent that never existed before. You know what? Even not under the military rule that the Palestinian citizens in Israel were under from '48 to '66, I don't know if your listeners are aware of that, but from the very first day of the existence of the state of Israel in 1948 until 1966, the Palestinian citizens in Israel, it was obviously before, of course, the occupation of the West Bank, Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip; the Palestinian citizens in Israel were under a military rule which profoundly restricts the movement and the freedom of speech. It was removed only in 1966, and then in 1967 there was the occupation. That is to say, by the way, Israel is under military rule to some extent throughout its existence apart from one year.

Talia Baroncelli

Wow. Now, the Palestinians who are occupied in the West Bank and Gaza are also subjected to military and not to civilian.

Dr. Ofer Cassif

That's what I meant. Since 1967, of course. In that sense, it was never really a democracy. Now, as I began to say, the level of oppression is even worse than when it was under the military rule before '66 because now there is the political prosecution of any alternative voice, beginning with members of the Knesset, like the example I gave for myself, that we can hardly use such terms, which is have truth. I'll give you more examples, if you like, later, as for myself in the Knesset and the way that my freedom of speech is restricted—more than even my friends, specifically because I'm Jewish. Perhaps, if you like, I refer to it later.

There is a persecution of citizens in Israel, let alone Palestinians under occupation; that goes without saying. Within Israel, there is a persecution that was never there. I'll give you a few examples. Just last week, a teacher, a woman, a Palestinian woman, teacher, published a TikTok dance. She was dancing. TikTok automatically published the date. It was October 7. She was immediately arrested, chained, and blindfolded. As if she danced because she celebrated the massacre of October 7 which was a total lie, and she was released quite rapidly. This is only the tip of the iceberg. There are thousands of examples, even worse. It goes first and foremost for Palestinian citizens, but also for democratic Jews.

I have a good friend, a teacher, a Jewish teacher, a very acclaimed one, and very, almost a veteran. He has been teaching for more than 40 years, I think. He published last year, I think it was just after the massacre of October, he published names and ages of children in Gaza who were killed by Israel. Nothing more than that published on Facebook. In Israel, the Palestinians normally have no names or ages; they are not just numbers if they exist at all. He published, he was fired from the school he was teaching in. The municipality of the city where he was teaching forbade him from teaching in the city as a whole. The Board of Education, within two days, revoked his license to teach. He was arrested for four days, and he was accused of treason. Obviously, after four days, he was brought in front of a judge, and he was immediately released. He sued the municipality and the Board of Education, and he won. Those two examples are out of thousands. There is political persecution and silencing of anyone who raises an alternative voice to the genocide, the massacre, and the crimes. That goes on-

Talia Baroncelli

What's so crazy is the footage of him. I think there was footage of some of his students when he went back to the school, and they were shouting threats at him.

Dr. Ofer Cassif

Who?

Talia Baroncelli

Against this particular teacher saying that we hope that you die and horrible things. It seems like some of his students weren't even supporting him.

Dr. Ofer Cassif

Absolutely. As I said, this is only the tip of the iceberg. As for myself, if I dare say, if I may say, if it's okay with you, my suspension and attempt to impeach me and the persecution in general, often any member of the Knesset, with immunity and everything, we are restricted, my comrades and I, at the Knesset, we are restricted. We can hardly speak.

A few months ago, there was a huge story of soldiers in a military prison who tortured and sodomized Palestinian prisoners. When I raised this issue in the Knesset, I was silenced by members of the opposition, by the way, as well. Members of Yesh Atid, the so-called alternative to the government, Yair Lapid's party, submitted complaints against me to the Ethics Committee of the Knesset because I raised the true story of this terrible thing that happened in the military prison. When, again, this is the tip of the iceberg.

Talia Baroncelli

This was at the Sde Teiman Detention Center, and there was footage of-

Dr. Ofer Cassif

Sde Teiman, yes, absolutely. There were so many-

Talia Baroncelli

There was footage of Israeli soldiers sodomizing Palestinian detainees, and then there was a whole debate in parliament and also on various media channels, in essence, justifying-

Dr. Ofer Cassif

I was not even allowed to raise it in the Knesset. I was attacked by part of the opposition simply for raising that. I was accused of lying, and we all know that that was the truth. By the way, we mentioned this issue of Sde Teiman, of this concentration camp of prisoners, of Palestinian detainees. There is another issue, which is a great persecution, and this is the violence of the police. There is no Israeli police anymore. There is a militia of Ben-Gvir's.

Talia Baroncelli

Because Ben-Gvir is the Minister of National Security, and so he's militarized the police.

Dr. Ofer Cassif

He militarized, and you may say, fascistized the police. The Israeli police are still called the Israeli police and have the same uniforms, but it's been acting as a private militia of the minister and the government in general. It's been violent towards demonstrators, including families of the hostages. Families of the hostages have been systematically beaten and arrested by that militia called Israeli police. There are some other armed militias, extreme rightist militias, which are waiting for the D-day to shoot us. I'm saying that explicitly. That day is around the corner. They are just waiting for an order.

By the way, the very same police that were summoned by soldiers a few months ago refrained from coming. What am I talking about? I'm talking about after the Sde Teiman issue, those soldiers who sodomized and were supposed to be investigated. When the military police came to the bases in order to arrest and to investigate those suspects in sodomizing a Palestine detainee, soldiers did not allow them to enter. Sorry, not soldiers. People do not allow them to enter. Soldiers, yes, soldiers attacked them. Brutally and physically, some thugs penetrated into this base and later on into another base where a military court exists and attacked soldiers who were supposed to investigate the suspects or didn't allow those thugs to enter. The soldiers had to call the police in order to protect them. The police didn't come because the secretary of Ben-Gvir ordered them not to go.

On the one hand, the police have been terribly brutal and violent against demonstrators for democracy and against the genocide, including families of the hostages. At the same time, the same police continuously refrain from stopping the violence of settlers or thugs who penetrated into Israeli military bases. That's the situation. That's what fascism looks like.

Talia Baroncelli

All right, because you also had, I think her name was Tally Gotliv, the very extreme right politician who was also at Sde Teiman or one of the other detention centers in support of not having this investigation.

Dr. Ofer Cassif

[inaudible 00:31:31] There were a few members of the Knesset and a minister or two as well. There's no law in Israel. Not anymore.

Talia Baroncelli

This points to how much of a class issue it actually is and that in order to understand the way that the occupation and inequalities are entrenched, you need to look at these class elements to understand how it keeps reproducing itself.

Dr. Ofer Cassif

Absolutely.

Talia Baroncelli

All right, Ofer Cassif, it's been great speaking to you. I think next time, maybe we could speak about your philosophical inspirations and interests because I know in the past, you did mention how you come from this Jewish intellectual tradition of subversion, and that has always been the case. Jewish thinkers being in opposition to the mainstream and in opposition to inequality and fighting for justice. Maybe next time, we could have more of a philosophical discussion of these various texts.

Dr. Ofer Cassif

Gladly.

Talia Baroncelli

That would be really interesting.

Dr. Ofer Cassif

Gladly. Thank you.

Talia Baroncelli

Thank you for watching *theAnalysis.news*. We really appreciate all of your continued support. See you next time.