

II. Interviews

Interview: *Ambassador Manuel Hassassian*

We Shall Overcome: Peace, Palestinian Independence, and the Oasis Plan in Southwest Asia

Palestinian Authority ambassador to Denmark, H.E. Ambassador Prof. Dr. Manuel Hassassian, was born and raised in Jerusalem and attended the American University of Beirut. He received his master's degree in international relations from the University of Toledo, Ohio, and his Ph.D. in political science from the University of Cincinnati. He became the Executive Vice President of Bethlehem University on the West Bank in 1996, the highest position of a Palestinian in a Catholic school. He was also a professor at the University of Maryland where he developed a unique curriculum for a course on Israel-Palestine conflict resolution, which he co-taught with Israeli Prof. Edy Kaufman for 26 years—a project which he described in detail in the full interview, but which is not included here because of length limitations.

H.E. Prof. Dr. Hassassian has served as the Palestinian Authority ambassador to the UK (thirteen years), and to Hungary, and is currently serving as the ambassador to Denmark, a position he has held for the last four years. He has also been the PLO's chief advisor in negotiations over the status of Jerusalem. A more complete biography, including other academic positions and awards, may be [read here](#).

Below are excerpts from an interview conducted by the chairman of the Schiller Institute in Denmark, Tom Gillesberg. The full video and transcript of the interview is [available here](#).

After a brief introduction, Dr. Hassassian enters into a discussion of his perception of the current political climate in Denmark, Europe, and beyond.

H.E. Prof. Dr. Manuel Hassassian: I really appreciate the Danish public: They're very supportive of the Palestinian problem, because they are champions of



Courtesy of the Mission of Palestine in Denmark
H.E. Ambassador Prof. Dr. Manuel Hassassian

human rights, and they have been during the Holocaust, when they helped all those diasporized Jews, who had been slaughtered by the Nazis and the fascists. So there is a long record for Denmark to be a champion of human rights, and we are not surprised to see the same people, with the same stamina of supporting the Palestinians, at least on the public level, where they want to see a cessation of this conflict, and the opening of borders for humanitarian assistance. And unfortunately, the government is not on par with the public opinion.

Tom Gillesberg: It's like at the time of the Danish occupation: It was not the government who helped the Jews get to Sweden.

Amb. Hassassian: It was the people.

Gillesberg: It's the people.

Amb. Hassassian: Absolutely.

Gillesberg: And I think that's an important point.

Amb. Hassassian: So that's why I'm trying to draw a comparison, which in my humble opinion and knowledge about the history of Denmark—I came here knowing a little bit about Denmark, but now I can tell you, I know the culture, the people, the way they think, the way they promote their politics, and I can see there is a wedge between the public opinion, not only on the issue of Palestine, but on issues of local politics. This government is conservative, and regardless that it has certain apologetic stands when it comes to Palestine, but still this government helps the Palestinians in terms of subsidies, in terms of infrastructure development, in terms of supporting UNRWA. But on the political level, they are for a two-state solution, but they don't show their political teeth, to put pressure on the Americans or the Israelis, in order to stop this carnage, this onslaught, this butchery of civilians in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

So, we are a little bit, with cautious optimism, we relate—myself, as an ambassador—I relate to the government, I can't say they have been reticent in receiving me as the Dean of the Council of Arab Ambassadors, let alone that I also lead on issues relating to the Middle East, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). We have met several times with the foreign minister, with the deputy foreign minister, with the director of MENA [Middle East, North Africa], and we had regular discussions about the updates of what's happening in Palestine, the Middle East, the Red Sea, the burning of the Quran, and what have you. So, I can say that there is a certain kind of a rapport between our Embassy, the Council of Arab Ambassadors, and the Danish government. But we don't see immediate action.

We don't see, in the bilateral relations, coming out strongly in supporting the Palestinians, stopping this carnage! Today, our people are dying from hunger and starvation, lack of medicine, food. Thirty-six hospitals have been destroyed. We have only six operating now. It is a shame that 12,000 children have been martyred, let alone more than 7–8,000 women and elderly. And these are staggering figures! Even during the Second World War we didn't witness such a tremendous number of casualties.

This systematic onslaught on our people is not

only—and allow me to say, it's not against Hamas. Now, it is obvious, it's against the Palestinian people. They want to throw us into the sea, into the desert, and once they finish with Gaza, they want to start, and they already started, in the West Bank, let alone they are putting economic strangulations, all kinds of hurdles, even during the month of Ramadan for our faithful to go and pray in Al Aqsa Mosque.

You can see there is a systematic policy of apartheid, ethnic cleansing and decimation of a nation.

All these three are being practiced by such a government, that is a very, very, very extreme, fascist government. I would say it—sorry, I have to say—fascist government, because the way it has been playing this conflict, it has been ruthless in its policies. It never showed any kind of tolerance, but the absolute idea behind this is the reoccupation, again, officially, of the West Bank and Gaza. And this is where we have to have the international community—with all the UN resolutions that have been in favor of Palestine; unfortunately, they have been vetoed by the Americans, and that's why, for 30 years, the Americans have failed to broker the peace process, because they were supporting the top dog over the underdog.

And now we are looking for a collective broker-ship, i.e., starting with the United Nations—maybe Denmark could play a very important role, let alone Europe. And we are not dismissing the United States, but it cannot be the sole broker in this conflict, because they have showed reluctance in finding a plausible solution during this conflict. All the Americans have been doing for the last 30 years is crisis-management.

Gillesberg: Now we've reached clearly a point, and I think the story is Oct. 7 happened, then this whole thing started. But if you look at the process that was ongoing in the West Bank before Oct. 7, it clearly was that these policies that we now see in place, of basically, annexing both the West Bank and Gaza, to be a permanent part of Israel, that was already ongoing! It's not like the attacks began after Oct. 7?

Amb. Hassassian: Actually, you have hit the bulls-eye with this comment. Because unfortunately, the international community—Europe, America, what have you—thought that this conflict started with Oct. 7, with the onslaught of Hamas against innocent civilians. But nobody has even thought about the root cause of this problem, which started 75 years ago. Let alone in 1948 our people were diasporized, and this Zionist entity was

established and created by the support of Great Britain and the international community, with the displacement of the Palestinian people and the creation of something called the State of Israel. And people are not aware that we have been living under occupation for so many years, and Gaza has been strangulated for the last 16 years, with the economic blockade, and with the lack of any kind of basic subsidies. And, of course, if you put anybody in a pressure cooker it has to explode. And the explosion of the Oct. 7, for the Gazans, by Hamas and Islamic Jihad and the others, was a mere reaction to this blockade, to this suffocation of 2.2 million people living in the most densely populated area in the world.

And people started looking at Hamas and others as being the terrorists, but they forgot that Israel has been practicing state terrorism! This is not the first onslaught on Gaza: This is the fourth war against the people of Gaza! And there have been ongoing onslaughts in the West Bank with the building of settlements, with the settlers taking the law into their own hands, and trying to uproot the Palestinians, trying to uproot the orange trees and olive trees, and trying to create havoc among the Palestinians by shooting, by killing, by looting, by uprooting and what have you.

So the question should not be a separation of Gaza from the West Bank, let alone East Jerusalem, with all the settlements, with the creeping settlements that have been taking place by a government that is called a settlers' government: This land-grab also created a certain kind of chaos and confusion, let alone stringent policies against the people living in East Jerusalem. And today, during the month of Ramadan, also, we have been seeing harassment, we have been seeing blockades of people from the West Bank to come and pray during the holy month of Ramadan. In other words, Israel is creating more tension, it's creating more absolute policies that will make it very uncomfortable for the people living in Jerusalem, let alone its continuous bombardment, killing in the West Bank, and in Gaza, ongoing, unstopped by the international community.

Gillesberg: Also, one thing is what has been going on for a long time, what you can call the "silent death" of Palestine. But what we've seen after Oct. 7 is, I think, something which is unprecedented, since the Holocaust. Maybe there have been other holocausts ongoing, but they were in the background. Here we have fully televised, with the whole world watching, since Oct. 7, this genocide in Gaza, and even the International

Court of Justice came out and said, yes, it is very plausible that a genocide is ongoing. We'll look into it, and meanwhile, we demand of Israel, we demand of the IDF, the Israel Defense Forces, that they do everything to make sure that no genocide is ongoing. Not just because people were killed, but because there clearly was this intention of killing, in the statements from the government, from military persons, and so on.

But this is still ongoing.

Now, the Israeli government has said, if we get to Ramadan and we do not have an agreement for Hamas and the other groups to let go of all the hostages, then we will begin an attack on Rafah; then comes the next phase of what is a leveling of Gaza.

And now, we are in Ramadan, so what do you see is going to happen?

Amb. Hassassian: Actually, I want to comment on the International Court's decision, which was considered to be a consulting perspective, which was totally bogged down by the American veto. So Israel doesn't care about the United Nations and the resolutions. They have never abided by them, because, always, the Americans are behind them politically, by using the veto, let alone, militarily and financially, and they are accomplices in the genocide, by sending, also, certain Marines to fight in Gaza. So this is not something that we don't know—

Gillesberg: And all the bombs that are falling on Gaza—

Amb. Hassassian: —are all American made.

And that's why I wanted to make this short comment, that the International Court of Justice is an advisory opinion. It's not binding, and Israel just overlooks that and they don't care.

Saying this, look today at Gaza: We have more than 31,000 martyrs. And I said how many children, and women and elderly.

Seventy percent of the infrastructure and buildings are totally destroyed. Gaza is almost flattened. 2.2 million people don't know where to go; they are displaced from their homes, 1.9 million.

Now, they were once in the north, went to the south, back to the north. And now, with the threats that are coming from Israel to invade Rafah, again, something that shows the intentions of Israel, that Israel is interested in occupying Gaza and flattening Gaza, and get-

ting rid of the 2 million Palestinians in Gaza, so it is a war on the Palestinians, not a war on Hamas. Because, if the war was on Hamas, tell me what the Israelis have achieved so far? They did not get rid of Hamas, and they will never get rid of Hamas. I say it as a member of the PLO.

Gillesberg: But it's an ideology—you cannot kill an ideology.

Amb. Hassassian: It's an ideology—absolutely! Absolutely! You just snatched it from the horse's mouth.

Second, they did not manage to diasporize the Palestinians in Gaza, because the Palestinians in Gaza are resilient and determined to stay on their land. They do not want to revisit the Nakba of 1948. That's number two.

Number three, they are depleting all their resources with no end result. Therefore, they have lost the world public opinion, although, still, governments support them. And they now have a badge of dishonor on this government in Israel, that is a settlers' government, an apartheid government, that does not want peace with the Palestinians, but they want to kill them and kick them out of the country.

All this has been negative repercussions when it comes to Israel. So what is the number that Israel wants in terms of casualties, to say that our mission is complete? It's like $\frac{10}{0}$, undefined!

Under the rubric of security, Israel has been justifying all of its atrocious crimes during the last 75 years of occupation. Israel is now known, not as a democracy, but as a rogue state with the hierocratic ideology of the supremacy of the Jews over the Christians and Muslims in the world, not only in Palestine. And their consistent, systematic policy of the confiscation of land in Jerusalem, the taking over of religious places, the spitting on priests and sheikhs, all this is a reflection of how hateful these settlers are against the non-Jewish or non-Israeli citizens such as myself.

And look, 22% of the population in Israel are Palestinians who have Israeli citizenship. They are being discriminated against. And they are being put on radar, as far as they are concerned, that these are not committed Israeli citizens. Although we are represented in the Knesset, in the parliament. But there is no respect, and they are being treated as third-class citizens, in what

they claim to be the democratic state of Israel.

From this perspective, we conclude that this government will never have peace with the Palestinians! And this government should not be supported by the international community. It has showed its ugly face of occupation, and it has showed that it's not for the two-state solution! They are for one state, apartheid state, having all the ethnic minorities, the Arabs, and what have you, under their control, under the Israeli flag.

And that, as you can see, is impossible with the adamancy of the Palestinian people fighting for their inalienable rights, and their rights to self-determination in having their independent state. The international community has accepted that during the Oslo process—during 30 years, nothing has been done to rectify the situation and to end the occupation.

I tell you, violence, insecurity, instability in the Middle East, will end with the creation of an independent, democratic Palestinian state, with the borders of 1967. We, the PLO, already in 1988, had given, on a golden platter, the recognition of the State of Israel on 78% of historic Palestine. What else can we do in order to honor our promises to the international community?

Gillesberg: You mentioned this Oslo peace process, and the Schiller Institute at the time, and the leader at that time of our organization, Mr. Lyndon LaRouche, was a very prominent voice in supporting that process, but also saying that it will not be successful unless there's an economic development policy driving it. That is, that both for the Palestinian State to function, but also for Israel to function, and for them to live in peace and harmony, there's got to be a collaboration on a greater goal, of an Oasis Plan for the whole region, which will benefit all.

So, instead of seeing your neighbor as your enemy, you will see your neighbor as a collaboration partner in this development process. And in light of this terrible onslaught that's been going on in Gaza, we have, from the Schiller Institute, released a new video on this idea, called "[The Oasis Plan: LaRouche's Solution to the Middle East](#)" where it describes the late American economist and statesman Lyndon LaRouche's proposal—developed since 1975!—for peace through development between Israel and an independent Palestine, by developing water resources, including nuclear power desalination plants, along two new canals between the Dead Sea and the Red Sea; and the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean; transportation and other infrastruc-

ture, to create a future vision where Israelis and Palestinians would economically develop the region, as a way of paving a path to peace.

We might get back to what a solution might look like, in terms of states, but before that, what do you think of the Oasis Plan proposal, and having a greater vision for making the impossible possible in the region?

Amb. Hassassian: I want to be very brief on this comment, which you have made. I've seen your video and I was very impressed with your vision for the future. Economic development should be always tied with political stability, and if we are not independent as Palestinians, to pursue economic development in partnership with Israel and Jordan, what I call the "Benelux model of economic development," where you meticulously have stated in your statement about how to proceed and how to build that kind of, what I call "sustainable development," that sustainable development would add to the prolongation of peace and stability between the two countries. But we cannot really apply economic development between occupier and occupied. It has to be on equal footing. You have to see, symmetrically, both as independent entities.

But definitely, economic development and cooperation between countries in conflict will really add to the sustenance of peace, the longevity of peace in the future, where peace and harmony will create coexistence, and that coexistence could be transferred into markets of economic interest, into cooperation, also into wielding public sector with the private sector, to come on par with the process of development, that is totally tied with the evolution of our curricula, our education, our health, and what have you; and you could exchange, in terms of skill, the development of countries like Israel, which is highly developed technologically; we have the sources of manpower. We are the most intellectual in the Middle East. So, with resources, with intellectualism, with the manpower that we have, we could create a certain kind of joint entity that will benefit both peoples.

Economic development after political independence is the way to our security and stability. And as you know, the Middle East has been the fulcrum of conflict for the world, because everybody is trying to seek their national interest in the Middle East. Once we have that kind of stability and security, I think we will be open for more economic transactions, for more bilateral, for

more international trade systems, for a NAFTA kind of economic relationship, with Israel, with Jordan, with the Arab world, with the Islamic world. And look, Israel could benefit a lot with the opening to Asia, Islamic Asia and to Africa, and to the Middle East.

So there is benefit, much more than non-interest I would say, in this part of the world.

But, Israel has been choosing the path of destruction, the path of instability, the path of supremacy, the path of apartheid, over the good things that you have said, which would create that kind of harmony, peaceful coexistence, between epistemic communities that have been too long in a conflict, where this is the time for conflict resolution.

Gillesberg: Things are so terrible that you would say, "How can this end?" But all wars do end at some point. If nothing else, simply by exhaustion. Israel, even in this short time since October 7th, the Israeli economy has shrunk by 20%. So, it's not a free ride. And if the war expands as some people in the government in Israel are talking about, to Lebanon, against Hezbollah, against other parties, this is also leaving Israel in ruins.

So, at some point, and hopefully with Western intervention, hopefully with the United States realizing that they're simply losing all respect anywhere in the world if they don't intervene to stop this. Then people have to sit down—probably not with the present government; they probably will be kicked out or Netanyahu thrown in jail or whatever. But still, the Palestinians and the Israelis have to sit down together and figure out how do we solve this in a way where we all can live here?

You have earlier written about a two-state proposal; you have also written about that maybe it won't be a two-state, maybe it has to be one state. What are your thoughts?

Amb. Hassassian: Thank you again for a very interesting question. Let me first say that Israel also is paying a heavy price, but not in terms of casualties as much; and you cannot compare it with that of Gaza, of course. But as you said, their economy shrunk by 20%, and if they continue, it will shrink even more. And there will come a time when the Americans—because now they are going into elections—they might stop sending arms to Israel, and that will be negative as far as the Israelis are concerned.

But let's not forget that half a million people al-

ready emigrated from Israel since October. And this is a sign that Israel is no more a safe place to live, for the simple fact that this kind of policy has brought negative repercussions in the Israeli society. And let me assure you, now the Israeli public is going onto the street, they want Netanyahu down, and they want early elections. This is one of the negative repercussions of this onslaught in which Israel misjudged the outcomes. They thought that they would win with a blitzkrieg; they could flatten Gaza and get rid of Hamas. But now it's becoming a war of attrition. They are not fulfilling their objectives, and they are losing now in terms of international support. Let alone that the Gazans have proved their resilience in staying on the land. So in general, when you talk about the stoppage of the war, Israel is also wearing out all these machines. Look, every day there are desertions from the Israeli Army; people now are not convinced about this war, because they saw that a calamity is coming in their society.

I tell you, now they are against Netanyahu; tomorrow they will be against the war in Gaza. Because they know that they have—it is inevitable historically—that they will not get rid of the Palestinians. They have to think and to learn how to survive.

And I tell you, if you go back to the history of Andalusia, Muslims, Christians, and Jews lived happily ever after. It is not something that we never perceived. We perceived it, but it's Zionism that has been the root cause, and not Judaism. That's why we make the distinction. The Israeli people are not all Zionists. Let's say that not all are Zionists; many are for the two-state solution, many believe in coexistence.

That's why we as Palestinians would try to mobilize more and more people from inside, because the change in Israel is not coming from a political diktat from an outside power. Even the United States cannot impose its political diktat to stop this war. But it has to come from within. The Israelis from within should understand that such a government is bringing destruction. So far, unfortunately, we did not reach that level in terms of public opinion in Israel. They are all circling around their government in support, because it has always been the security obsession that makes people encircle themselves in providing support to the government. Although this government is an apartheid settler government, still the majority of the Israelis, right-wingers are supporting such a government. Unless we change, inside, the political discourse in Israel, that this government is going to bring in the future, total

destruction of Israel, from within its society, we cannot see an improvement on the ground when it comes to negotiations for final status talks with the Palestinian side.

Gillesberg: Just in terms of, on the other side, that's also why we put out this Oasis Plan; is to say somehow you have to—there's a tendency, when people are in these things, people say, "First we need the political solutions. Once we have the political solutions, then we can go on to the economic ones." The problem is, on what basis will you get political solutions, if there is no trust? Somehow, you have to have trust coming, on the one side from a vision of how the future should be. Instead of saying "The policies today—we simply keep doing what we have been used to doing for a long time," with the same results. You have to say, "We want a different future; we have a vision for the future, but if we want to get there, then we need collaboration." Because without collaboration, without burying the hatchet, without changing the geometry, we will never get there.

I think there's a recognition in Israel that you can't go back simply to the 6th of October; that's gone. You are in a different world now, so somehow something has to change.

Amb. Hassassian: Let me make two brief comments. The first comment, I do agree with you; economic development is a key factor for stability. In the context of conflict, what we have witnessed in 1993 with the Oslo Agreement, is that we should have strengthened our nexus of civil societies by collaborating economically, educationally, and what-have-you, as part of economic development, in order to make it much stronger in the process of negotiations and in the outcome. Nobody could achieve maximalist position in a negotiating process; it has to be an optimal one, which would be giving in, conceding, both parties to each other. But as long as the negotiations are not symmetrical, but asymmetrical, where the top dog is over the underdog, that is not going to be successful.

That's why I do agree with you. What happened in Oslo is that economic development did not proceed the way it should have. More settlements have been built; Netanyahu came to power; Camp David's failure, and look where we are now. I will stop on this issue, but I do agree with you that economic development is the fulcrum of any stability in the world.

But without political independence of the Palestinians, we cannot talk about the process of economic development in its full context of bringing longevity of peace and what-have-you in the future. I do agree with you that economic development is extremely important. It could have pushed the peace process and the negotiations to a much better level. But unfortunately, the Israelis have wrecked this.

Gillesberg: On April 13th, we will have an international online conference—it's on a Saturday—called ["The Oasis Plan: The LaRouche Solution for Peace through Development between Israel and Palestine, and for All of Southwest Asia."](#) We urge everybody to participate in that and share the invitation; get involved in dialogue.

One big change—now you are a diplomat in Denmark, I'm very ashamed to say it, but it's not just a Danish problem. We used to pride ourselves on having dialogue. Even if you disagreed, you could still sit down and discuss and learn the other's viewpoint. And exactly that part of diplomacy, you could say, has been taken out in the Western world of the political process. There is no dialogue; there is no trying to see the other point of view. It's just the narrative, the narrative, the narrative. The narrative comes down; it wasn't Moses coming with the tablets of clay. This is just whoever coming down, "This is the narrative, this is what you have to repeat. If you don't repeat it, then you are out." And unfortunately, this has very much become the case in Denmark, but I think most people in Denmark, and other places, are getting pretty tired of this.

They want to be able to think; they want to be able to formulate their own thoughts. To do that in a good way, you need information, and that's what we do, for example, with this online conference. But also here, since we are closing, do you have any concluding words for the viewers? Also, what do you think, and is there something they should do?

Amb. Hassassian: Absolutely! I commend you for what you have been doing. I commend the institute for its continuous struggle to bring justice to the world. I think this is your noble mission, and we believe that by raising awareness and stating the true facts on the ground, it will make people listen to you. I think your approach to conflicts, not only Palestinian-Israeli, but to the international conflicts, gives you great credibil-

ity, because you look towards peace and justice through economic development. Your Oasis video is one of the most impressive I have ever seen for the Schiller Institute, let alone comparing it with others. And I think you have to continue with what you are doing.

I know you cannot reap the benefits immediately; this is an ongoing process by recreating a new generation in Denmark, and around the world, to understand that wars are quick fixes, but the process of negotiations, tolerance, understanding, justice, human rights is a long process. It's a tormenting path. Once you instill those good qualifications in the mindset of people, especially the youth, then we can reap the benefits of your contribution in the coming generation, where in this generation, we are sick and tired of regional conflicts, world conflicts, where unipolar power has proved to be a dismal failure. We're looking for a balance of power on the political level, in international relations; but also, we need institutes like yours to continue working with civil society, with culture, between adversarial cultures, to come to a conclusion where our humanity should not be lost; our fairness should be there; our inclusion of each other is of utmost importance; and tolerance is the key towards a sustainable development, in terms of security and stability all around the world.

I commend you for what you have been doing. And I would be, from now on, a supporter and a spokesman for your institute, which I think is one of the most brilliant and impressive institutes that I have met in Denmark. My loyalty and respect to you, and I hope that we continue our future relationship by bringing more people into dialogue and try to create a harmonious peace among adversaries.

May God also help us in this process, because really it is full of hurdles and full of complexities. But eventually we shall overcome.

Gillesberg: Well, thank you, Your Excellency Ambassador Prof. Dr. Hassassian. It has been a great pleasure.

Amb. Hassassian: My pleasure.

Gillesberg: We hope to speak again.

Amb. Hassassian: Hopefully, hopefully. Thank you so much for hosting me.