



## **Brutal Occupation Underpins Class Inequality for Israelis and Palestinians - MK Ofer Cassif**

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**Talia Baroncelli:** Hi, you're watching *theAnalysis.news*, and I'm your host, Talia Baroncelli. In a bit, we'll be joined by a member of the Israeli Knesset, Dr. Ofer Cassif, to speak about Israel's ongoing occupation of the Palestinian territories and its illegal and discriminatory bombardment of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

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Joining me now is Dr. Ofer Cassif. He is a member of the Israeli Knesset representing the Hadash party, which is also known as the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality. The Hadash party was formed in 1977 and continues to stand for Jewish-Arab cooperation. Dr. Cassif, it's great to have you here tonight.

**Dr. Ofer Cassif:** Thank you very much. Nice to be here. I am very grateful that you're having me.

**TB:** We've seen the situation in Gaza progressively deteriorate. The UN has said that over 90% of the population has been forcibly displaced. Human Rights Watch said that Israel is now using starvation as a tool of war, and the death toll has reached almost 20,000 Palestinians, of whom 9,000 are children. In your view, what would you say needs to be done to end this cycle of violence?

**OC:** First of all, we have to get rid of the seeds of this massacre. This is a peaceful solution to the situation. We've been saying for ages, since 1967 and more so as the years went by, that

the only solution is a political one, not a military one. That means ending the occupation and the siege. The only way that the two peoples of the land, the Israelis and the Palestinians, Arabs, Jews, and others, can live together and live in peace, security, and prosperity is, first and foremost, to end the occupation. The Palestinians, as a people, are entitled to have their own independent state. The compromise, the historical compromise, is by dividing the land alongside the state of Israel, an independent, sovereign, Palestinian state, which would exist in the old territories that Israel occupied in June '67. That means the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank. There is no other way. In the long run, I wish it was in the short run, but that's the solution that we must reach for. There is no other solution. The two sides must understand that we are going to be here forever, both peoples. The only way to live together is not by killing each other but by living side by side, together as good neighbors, in good relations. In the short run, of course, what should be done is to stop the war. As you said before, the war incorporates, unfortunately, war crimes. What Hamas did on October 7 is a war crime and a crime against humanity. This barbaric massacre against innocent civilians, children, women, the elderly, and others that Hamas did on October 7 is something that no one can justify, whatever the situation was before. Even the crimes of the occupation and siege cannot justify such a carnage. At the same time, the carnage that Hamas committed cannot justify the massacre that Israel has been carrying out against the Palestinians in Gaza. As you said before, the death toll is incredible. I'm afraid that it's not 20 or almost 20 because there are so many missing, and unfortunately, the assault still goes on. I am afraid, of course, I don't know the numbers, but I'm afraid that the death toll is already much closer to 25,000-30,000. As you said before, and it was published as well, at least 70% of those who were killed were innocent civilians, especially children and women. This is something that is intolerable. Unfortunately, the international community doesn't do anything to stop that. That should be done immediately.

First, because, as I said before, it involves war crimes, this is a massacre that should be stopped. First and foremost, of course, for the well-being and benefit of the Palestinians, but this is also of Israeli interest as far as I'm concerned. The government of Israel is anti-Israeli. I put it that way because the government of Israel, the only thing that the government of Israel, first and foremost, the Prime Minister, is interested in, is their own survival. Nothing else. They don't care about the lives of Palestinians for sure, but they don't care either for the lives of Israelis, those who are killed, or the hostages. The hostages are still there suffering. I'm afraid that many of them have already died. I'm afraid that some of them are going to die in the future because they live under terrible conditions. Israel, unfortunately, the government of Israel, is much more interested in revenge against Gaza rather than releasing the hostages and bringing them home safely. A ceasefire, ending the war, releasing hostages, exchanging prisoners, and beginning a real and rapid political process toward ending the occupation and reaching a just peace between both parties is a must.

**TB:** Well, I do want to speak about Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's efforts to prop up Hamas. Before we speak about that, there's one thing that I've noticed as an outsider, as

someone who's not Israeli, and that's the normalization of this dehumanizing rhetoric on the part of many Israeli officials. We just heard one member of a local council in an Israeli town close to Lebanon saying that Gaza needs to be flattened like Auschwitz. We heard the Defense Minister, Yoav Gallant, saying that Palestinians are human animals. Of course, the Finance Minister, Bezalel Smotrich, has even said that Palestinians are not people. Would you say that this is more of a right-wing phenomenon, or is this a general normalization of this dehumanizing rhetoric that's taking place within Israeli society?

**OC:** Look, I'll be very frank and blunt with you. The government of Israel is a fascist government, and there are components that are even worse. There is a part of the coalition where most of its members profoundly believe in racial and Jewish supremacy. This is something which is unacceptable. Now, I'm saying that because it's relevant. Not too many years ago, less than two years ago, those parties, especially the [Itamar] Ben-Gvir's gang, who is now the Minister for so-called National Security, although the only thing that he has achieved is bringing insecurity, he's a supporter of a mass murderer. He had a picture in his living room of Baruch Goldstein, who killed 29 Palestinian Muslims during their prayer in Hebron about 30 years ago. That's the Minister of National Security at the moment, and he's not alone there. There's a bunch of thugs like him, racists, who don't care about the lives of Palestinians for sure and the lives of others because they are Messianic. They believe in a Messianic project. One of them even said before the massacre that the land of Israel should be acquired by suffering. Perhaps they think that the killing of 1,200 Israelis is part of the suffering. They were against any deal for releasing the hostages. They don't care for their lives. They are dreaming and saying that Israel should occupy the Gaza Strip and reestablish the settlements there. They have this crazy Messianic, deadly dream, which is, in fact, a nightmare for all of us, the Palestinians and Israelis alike. Anyway, unfortunately, those thugs, those racists who were, until two years ago, more or less quite marginal, now dominate the government. They dominate the government because Netanyahu doesn't care about anything but his own political survival. Not only political, his civic survival out of prison.

As you probably know, there are three serious charges against Netanyahu. He's accused in three different cases of corruption, bribery, etc. The only thing that drives him is staying out of prison. That's the only thing he cares about. Because of that, he legitimized and normalized those racist thugs that I mentioned before because he is dependent upon them. He doesn't care that they aren't in the interest of the state of Israel and the Israelis, let alone the Palestinians. He doesn't care. Because of that, they actually dominate the government. It is true that they are not the majority among the ministers, but they dominate the government because they hold Netanyahu as their own hostage. They can achieve almost everything for Netanyahu. He allows them to, by legalization and different things, make different crazy decisions that are accepted in the government and the cabinet, crazy things. He allows them to do so, and he aligns the ad-joined forces with them for his own sake at the expense of everybody here, Israelis and Palestinians alike.

Now, because of that, until two years ago, even less than that, they were regarded by the vast majority of Israelis as crazy. Now, they have become mainstream because of Netanyahu and his dependency on those racist thugs. Now we can hear such slogans, criminal slogans that call to, for instance, a minister, one of those among those thugs from this racist gang, who is a minister and not only a bigot but also not very clever, to say the least. He actually said not too long ago that one option is to bomb the Gaza Strip with an atomic bomb. The vice chairperson of the Knesset, from the Likud party, from the party of Netanyahu, said that Gaza should be burnt down. You can hear it. People use the term elimination, including members of the Knesset and their companions in the parties in the settlements. The language of elimination, the language of eliminating a people, which involves necessarily the dehumanization and demonization of the Palestinians, became, unfortunately, the norm. Of course, not all Israelis think like that, and I guess that not even the majority, but they dominate the public discourse, including the media. You can hear such terms in the media. It reminds me of a philosopher, a French philosopher, Albert Memmi, who died two years ago. In one of his famous books, he said, in other words, that the occupier doesn't like to see a monster when he looks in the mirror. In order to justify the crimes that an occupier does, occupiers always, eventually, deteriorate into crimes because, eventually, occupation leads to resistance. In order to refrain from seeing yourself or recognizing yourself as a monster, you have to justify the crimes that you do. You do that by demonizing the occupied. It's the same everywhere. It's not something that was born under the Israeli occupation. The slave orders in the United States of America did so. The Germans did so, too, with the Jews. The Apartheid regime in South Africa did that with the non-whites, especially with the blacks; of course, there was a hierarchy of different so-called races. It is the same here, a language of occupation. This is the language of occupation. In that sense, I repeat what I said before: ending the occupation is also in the interest of Israel because Israel has been turning into a monstrous regime because of the occupation. The Palestinians should be liberated from the occupation, but we, the Israelis, should be liberated from the occupation as well. The demonization is indeed the other side of the coin of the occupation and the brutality of the occupation.

**TB:** Similar to the philosopher Memmi, Frantz Fanon, another post-colonial writer, also said that the violence unleashed by the colonizers on the colonized also affects the colonizers themselves. It has an effect on them, too, and everyone.

**OC:** Absolutely. They are not the only ones. I want to be very clear: we in Hadash, and myself, of course, as part of Hadash, support a non-violent resistance to the occupation. Of course, we oppose and condemn the massacre carried out by Hamas. That should be emphasized. But unfortunately, the writing was on the wall. I'm not talking about the massacre as it was, but it was very clear that one or another thing would have happened, and it was going to happen. The occupation began in the last few years, especially in the last year, or even more so, the occupation became more violent and more brutal, and programs by settlers against Palestinians, innocent civilians, shepherds, farmers, etc, in the West Bank

became a daily issue. It was very clear that something was going to explode. Unfortunately, it did. As I said, it is in the interest of both peoples to end the occupation and reach a just peace.

**TB:** Yeah, and while this war has been continuing in Gaza, there's also been a war by the settlers on the West Bank and on the Palestinians in the West Bank as well. I think there was a shipment of 27,000 guns, which was prevented by the U.S. because there were fears that it would go into the hands of violent settlers. I was wondering if you could comment on this regime of administrative detention because so many Palestinians are unlawfully arrested and then placed in detention without trial; why do you think this issue has only been recently spoken about?

**OC:** Unfortunately, I think it's not spoken about even now, not enough. Definitely not in Israel. Look, Israel was established in 1948. Since the very first second that Israel was established as a state, there were two systems of emergency rules that still operate. People should absorb what I just said. Israel has been under, formally speaking, Israel has been under a state of emergency for 75 successive years. There was not even one second since Israel was established as a state that there was not a state of emergency.

Given the state of emergency, there are also emergency rules. One of them is so-called, it's a sugarcoated term to call it administrative detention. In fact, it is kidnapping people and putting them behind bars. That's the real way to describe it. Even before evaluating this, before saying if it's good or bad, this is real. If someone comes to your house or your field when you're working on it or to your office and without charges takes you away and puts you behind bars for one month or six months or even years. Sometimes, it can be years without charges, without seeing a lawyer, without being brought in front of a judge. This is because part of the occupation, the military occupation, is that the Palestinians, this is part of the Apartheid system as well, the Palestinians, that are in the occupied territories, are under military rule. That means that they are also under a military set of laws. The settlers who live in the same place, of course, the settlements are altogether illegal according to international law. I'll put it aside for a second. But if you are, for instance, a Palestinian and I'm your neighbor, it's not exactly a good neighbor, but anyway, I leave two matters from you as a Jewish settler. I am subordinated to Israeli civic law. You are subordinated to the military law. Part of the military law means that it's much easier for the state to put you under the so-called sugarcoated term of administrative detention. Thousands and thousands of Palestinians, since the occupation in '67 began, have been put under this administrative detention, which I prefer to call "legal hostages," quote-unquote, of course.

This is part of the demonization and, of course, of the oppression of the Palestinians. It's very, very common in colonialist regimes. Everybody knows about it. In colonialist regimes, the occupier, the colonizer that wants to oppress any resistance of the occupied, uses different instruments. One of them is the so-called administrative detention.

I guess you know Carl Schmitt. I think Carl Schmitt is very useful in understanding that, in using two terms, he actually used combined. One is saying that, who is the sovereign? The

sovereign, according to Carl Schmitt, is not the people, even in his so-called democracy, but it is the one who dictates the exception. This is a very clear example because those Palestinians were put under the so-called, again, administrative detention; this is, as it were, an exception that the state apparatus dictates, but unfortunately, given the occupation, the exception became the rule. Another way around. This is one thing. Another thing that Carl Schmitt used to describe politics in general is that, like in esthetics, the distinction is between the beautiful and the ugly. Of course, I have to refer to it quite superficially, given our platform, but perhaps one day you can invite me to give some lectures in Germany. I would love that. Anyway, he actually said, like in esthetics there's a distinction between the beautiful and the ugly, and like in ethics, the good and the bad in politics is a friend and foe. The foe is used sometimes to unite the so-called nation.

This is another part of the occupation, the ongoing system in Israel, which we struggle against. Again, I want to emphasize it. I know that I repeat myself, but it's very important for me because I'm afraid that many people around the world do not understand that the struggle, as far as we are concerned, as we see it, is not between Israelis and Palestinians. Here, it is a class issue. It is between the oppressed and the oppressor, between the exploiter and the exploited. This distinction is much more important. We in Hadash, for instance, Palestinians and Jews together and some others, we see ourselves as part of those who oppose the oppression. It doesn't matter to us if we are Jews or Palestinians or Argentinean Christians, just hypothetically. For us, it's important to refer to the situation as one that distinguishes not between the peoples, but between the exploited and the exploiter, the oppressor and the oppressed. To take the right side, of course, given a struggle that we agree with, which is not violent, and we continue. It's tough, but we never give up.

**TB:** I think it's really important that you brought up the class element because, arguably, there's a class divide within the Palestinian territories as well. Perhaps there are some Palestinian elite who are somehow benefiting from the occupation. But most importantly, the network of Israeli elite who are propped up and supported by the U.S. and different military and industrial defense tech companies are able to perpetuate the occupation. How do you see this convergence of elite interests propelling the conflict further?

**OC:** Look, Lenin, of course, wrote a lot about national conflicts and occupation, and especially, of course, the era of imperialism, analyzing the First World War, given imperialism, as they say, and then capitalism. Imperialism as a stage of capitalism. I would like to use, if I may, one thing that I think is very, very important that Lenin referred to in length in more than one essay. I think it's very crucial to understand this situation, which I don't want to call a conflict, because conflict assumes a symmetry or a balance that does not exist. What Lenin said is that a situation of occupation and war assists the bourgeoisie on both sides. The bourgeois or bourgeoisie. How do I say it as a noun? Is it the bourgeoisie?

**TB:** The bourgeoisie.

**OC:** I'm always confused about that.

He said that the bourgeoisie of the occupying nation and the occupied nation use the situation to mobilize their own parliamentarian to their own side. Why? Once there is a sense of conflict, once there is a war or an armed struggle between occupied and occupier, I do not refer to the situation in the Middle East, between Israel and Palestinians, but in general; instead of struggling against your exploiter, which is the bourgeoisie, you join forces with your bourgeoisie against the other people. Whether as an occupier that oppresses the resistance, or you have an occupied that carry on with the resistance to the occupier. Lenin himself used the term hostility. National hostility serves the economic and political interests of the ruling classes because that way they can divert the rage, the frustration, the alienation from a class-based one to a national-based one. This is exactly what I think we should pay attention to. Those who actually benefit from the ongoing occupation on top of using cheap labor, Palestinian cheap labor, or in the north of Qatar, for instance, there are apparently some resources like gas, etc., beyond that, the hostility serves them because as long as the occupation goes on, the Palestinian proletariat, and even peasants will see the Israelis, generally speaking, of course, I have to simplify the picture; obviously it's much more complicated. For our conversation, for analytical purposes, if I may say so, the ruled classes, Palestinian-ruled classes, are going to see not their own Palestinian exploiters as the so-called rival or enemy but the Israelis and vice versa. They are exploited within Israel. The exploited Israelis, especially the proletarians, will not see their own employers as their exploiters and class enemies but as the Palestinians. Who benefits from that? Who's going to benefit from that? The exploiters. So, ending the occupation, besides being an end in itself because it involves direct oppression and exploitation, will also reduce, using the language of Lenin, the hostility between the peoples. In that sense, it will not only give us a better future to live as good neighbors but will also allow us to make it easier for us to divert our rage against our so-called domestic exploiters. There is a huge class issue.

**TB:** Of course, we can't forget the role that the United States plays in delivering weapons and delivering unconditional aid to Israel. I did want to pivot to something historical that took place in the '90s to the Oslo Accords. Oftentimes, people say that it was Yasser Arafat who just walked away, and the conversations or the negotiations fell apart because of him. What was it that was being offered at the time? What was the Palestinian state being offered? It doesn't seem like it was really much.

**OC:** Look, that's a question that I find very difficult to answer, not even to you, but to myself. First of all, there are so many details, facts, and data that are questionable. I do believe that Arafat and the PLO believed that the Oslo Accords would eventually lead to a Palestinian liberation and independent state alongside Israel. I cannot tell you that for sure. I wasn't there. From what I know, I tend to believe that they thought, and perhaps they were quite optimistic. I'm saying that because I heard an interview with Hanan Ashrawi, who you may know. I think it was on the anniversary of the Oslo Accords, the 30th anniversary, in

September. She said not these exact words, but she said that she warned Arafat that Israel was not working towards the solution he believed they were going to. She warned Arafat and probably others, we say, closed ones politically, that if they believed that the Israelis were going with them side by side towards ending the occupation was a false belief.

I take from that Arafat and others, again, I unfortunately have never met him, so I never asked him and never talked to him, so everything I say is speculation. I tend to believe what I've read and heard that there was a belief, an optimistic belief, I don't want to say a naive belief, that at the end of the day, a Palestinian independent state is waiting. Now, as far as the Israeli Party is concerned, I don't know if [Yitzhak] Rabin and others worked together. I know for sure that those in the government, [inaudible 00:32:36], for instance, they did support a Palestinian state alongside Israel. So whether they planned to get there or not, in what way, what process, I'm not sure. The only thing I'm sure about is that the assassination of Rabin is the beginning of the decline. That's for sure. No one can say what would have happened had Rabin stayed alive. Of course, this is a stupid speculation that historians, for instance, always hate to be asked. I don't know. But for sure, the assassination of Rabin brought Netanyahu in '95 to power. Although Netanyahu continued one way or another with all the problems and the reservations, it didn't totally abolish the Oslo Accords. We know that he followed the agreement, etc.

By the way, Rabin made a lot of mistakes. For instance, I think that probably the main mistake or even sin that Rabin made was that after the assassination of those 29 Palestinians in Hebron by a settler, there was a chance, and many advised Rabin to use this terrible incident, this carnage to take out this cancer from the center of Hebron. That means the settlers. Rabin didn't. He refused to do so for one reason or another. It cost the lives of more Palestinians afterward, but it also made this a cancerous settlement in the midst of a Palestinian city even more deadly, more violent, and more dangerous.

As I began to say before, the assassination of Rabin created a decline, a continuous decline, which we can see now the consequences. Israel, unfortunately, has turned into a more brutal occupier controlled by the most fanatic, Messianic, and deadly settler. It's much more dangerous to the region as a whole, not only to Palestinians and Israelis. I lament that the world doesn't want to be aware of that and doesn't want to do anything about that.

**TB:** Well, on your point about Rabin, Mark Regev, who's the spokesperson for the Netanyahu administration, was also saying, I don't know if this is accurate or apocryphal, but he was saying that Rabin didn't really believe in a true Palestinian state, a fully-fledged state. I don't know if he's I don't know if he's making that up?

**OC:** Look, I know those interpretations. It's very, very easy to speak in the name of the dead. I don't want to do that. By the way, more often than not, as history shows, you know how a specific process begins; you never know how it ends. The goal was not to be interested in the freedom of [Inaudible], and we know how it ended. This is only one example. There are



many other examples. I cannot say what Rabin actually wanted.

I know that for sure, for instance, it's very funny or ironic, if you like, when the first intifada began at the end of '87, I was the first soldier who was imprisoned for refusing to serve in the Palestinian-occupied territories. The last time I was in prison for the very same thing, altogether, it was four times I was in a military prison for refusing. The fourth and last time that I was in prison for that was September '93. I remember that we were taken out of our cells to watch [Yasser] Arafat and Rabin shaking hands at the White House.

Now, I remember that because a friend of mine, a very acclaimed journalist, wrote a piece after the Oslo Accords when I was in prison. I remember that he wrote about me. I was skeptical about the Oslo Accords. It was true. I can never tell what would have happened if Rabin was alive. Perhaps you are right, and nothing would have happened. Who knows?

**TB:** Well, if you have time, I would like to ask you quickly about Bibi Netanyahu because he recently said that he doesn't believe in a Palestinian state. The day after, he is the one to ensure that a two-state solution won't come about and that his legacy has been to prevent the creation of a two-state solution. How would you say or how would you assess his legacy? Is it true, according to former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, that he was involved in propping up Hamas to ensure that the Palestinian Authority wouldn't be a legitimate partner with which Israel could negotiate with and that, instead, they would want Hamas to be there to ensure that there'd be no [crosstalk 00:38:23].

**OC:** Absolutely. Look, as I said before, Netanyahu's only interest is Netanyahu. He cares only about himself. Even in the late '80s, when he ousted [Yitzhak] Shamir from the Likud Party, who was even more to the right than Netanyahu, he warned the Likud about Netanyahu. Before Netanyahu was in Israeli politics, he was the Ambassador to the UN, if I remember correctly. Already then, Shamir warned about him, and he said that Netanyahu is dangerous.

Netanyahu, in my view, is a psychopath. I'm not a psychologist, I'm not a psychiatrist, so I'm not using this term in the accurate, clinical, pathological sense, but he acts as if he were a psychopath. By the way, an Israeli psychiatrist, two months ago or something like that, before the massacre, I think, but I'm not sure, wrote a piece in the *Haaretz* newspaper in which he said that Netanyahu was a psychopath, as a psychiatrist. When I'm saying that Netanyahu is a psychopath, it is not something totally out of the blue.

By the way, this psychiatrist who wrote it because he wrote it against Netanyahu was interrogated by the police. But that's another issue that's part of what's going on within Israel now, which Israel is in the process of fascisation and toward dictatorship. Basic civil rights are under attack. People like myself and others are persecuted. Students have been suspended from universities because of posts and tweets. People were fired from their jobs, especially Palestinian citizens and others. There's a total prohibition on demonstrations in Palestinian cities within Israel. It's just the tip of the iceberg. There is a move towards a full-fledged

fascist dictatorship on top of the ethnic cleansing in the West Bank and the criminal assault on Gaza.

What I began to say about Netanyahu is that he cares only about himself. Because of that, he may change his attitude, endeavors, and deeds according to what he thinks may serve him better. Now, it is true. Everybody knows about it. That's a matter of fact. It's not an interpretation. It's not an assumption. It is true. Netanyahu said with his own voice and was quoted in 2019 in the convention of the Likud party that one that doesn't want to see a Palestinian state must weaken the Palestinian Authority and strengthen Hamas.

Smotrich, probably the most fanatic and extremist in this government, said in 2015, and I quote, "The Palestinian Authority is a burden. Hamas is an asset." It's not only words. Under the rule of Netanyahu, Qatar transferred more than a billion dollars to Hamas via Israel, thanks to Netanyahu. Netanyahu supported that. He was in charge of those suitcases full of dollars that went to Hamas, not to the people of Gaza. Hamas is a brutal dictatorship. Hamas doesn't do anything in favor of the people of Gaza. It does everything in favor of itself. What do you think they use the money for? For those tunnels that are now bombarded? For weapons? That was not only under the rule of Netanyahu; it was given the consent of Netanyahu and the active cooperation of Netanyahu. He wanted a strong Hamas and a weak Palestinian Authority because that way he could create a division among the Palestinians, a classic divide and rule, a classic colonialist attitude, and use the rule of Hamas in the Gaza Strip to say that there's no one to talk to because they are extremists. That's part of the legacy of Netanyahu, if you like. He will be remembered not only as the worst Prime Minister in the history of Israel but also as the deadliest one. Not only for assaulting and killing thousands and thousands of Palestinians but also because of his responsibility for the carnage that Hamas did in the south of Israel, and also because he doesn't care and doesn't do anything to save the poor hostages that Hamas holds. He will be remembered for that.

**TB:** Well, Dr. Cassif, it was great speaking to you, and I hope that we'll be able to have you on again soon for you to share insights, as there are so many other facets of what's going on that we can speak about. It was really great to get your insights on this.

**OC:** Thank you very much. It was a pleasure.

**TB:** Thank you. Thank you for watching *theAnalysis.news*. If you'd like to support the work that we do, feel free to go to our website, *theAnalysis.news*, and make a donation by hitting the button at the top right corner of the screen. Thanks, and see you next time.

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