

“Not worth a rat’s tail:” reflections on what Palestinians mean to the “pro-Palestinian” crowd

By Lev Tsitrin

To learn the riches of idiomatic language, one has to be immersed in it from an early age. My exposure to the English of the streets was unfortunately very limited: I came to America in my mid-twenties, and had contacts with Americans only while doing white-collar jobs, The books I read were of rather staid kind; movies could have helped to teach me colloquialisms – but I am just no fan of the genre. Besides, the need did not seem to be particularly pressing.



This said, my colleagues would sometimes drop a colorful word into a business conversation: in a meeting on the need to regularize some company policy – I don’t now remember which – a co-worker opined that the effort was “not worth a rat’s tail.” I had no clue what that meant – and therefore, no way of processing the info. “Is a rat’s tail something valuable?” I asked. “Not at all” she replied. “It is utterly worthless.”

Watching the international puffing and huffing done ostensibly on behalf of Palestinians – by the self-declared “pro-Palestinian” countries like South Africa, Ireland, Norway, Spain that daily breath out condemnations of Israel’s post-October-7 war on Hamas in international fora – the UN, the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court – as well as by Israel’s allies (US, UK, Canada, Australia) who threaten to withhold arms sales to Israel out

of concern for Palestinian civilians caught up in the fighting, I wonder how much this seeming “pro-Palestinianism” is motivated by the concern for the Palestinians themselves – and how much of it has nothing whatsoever to do with them. Put simply, are the Palestinians worth to the likes of South Africa, Ireland, Norway, Spain – and for that matter, to Biden administration – more than a “rat’s tail”?

My criterion is simple: actions rather than words. Consider what Israel did when Ethiopian Jews came under threat during Ethiopian civil war in 1991. There was no grandstanding in the UN, no referral of the matter to the International Court of Justice or International Criminal Court. In what later became known as [Operation Solomon](#), Israel simply airlifted the endangered Ethiopian Jews to the safety of Israel. Some forty years prior, the [entire Yemeni Jewish community](#) was similarly airlifted to Israel – by Alaska Airlines.

If suchlike actions be used as criteria for genuine concern for the well-being of those one presumably deeply cares about, how “pro-Palestinian” are those professing “pro-Palestinianism?” Admittedly, there is no airport in Gaza from which South Africa, Ireland, Norway and Spain could airlift the huddled Palestinian civilians – but Gaza has a long coastline, and these countries are maritime powers all. If they really cared, they could have brought plenty of ships – both passenger and cargo – offering to carry the Palestinians now housed in tents and enduring much hardship to the comfort of their countries. Yet somehow, this course of action does not occur to them – just as it does not occur to Egypt to open its border for Gazans to escape the privations of war. “Pro-Palestinianism” goes only so far, and is deployed in only one context – that of demonizing Israel in international fora, and of fueling antisemitism the world over. Palestinians are only a means to attaining that end, and their worth is only measured by their effectiveness as levers that multiply anti-Israel sentiment, and cause legitimization of antisemitism. Since that lever is Palestinian misery, their misery should not be alleviated (that would be totally counter-productive!) – hence, no offer from the so-called “pro-Palestinians ” to get the Palestinians out of the danger zone. Put simply, “pro-Palestinianism” is not about helping the Palestinians (and in fact, it has nothing whatsoever to do with the Palestinians at

all) – it is only about hurting Jews and Israel.

Unlike the ilk of South Africa, Ireland, Norway and Spain, the Biden administration cannot be suspected of such underhanded motives. Its intentions in vetoing the Gaza siege and strong-arming Israel into feeding its enemies, were likely fueled by genuine humanitarian concerns. Yet intentions are one thing, and results, a completely different one; Biden's "humane" decision not to allow Israel to use food and fuel as a weapon of war resulted in far greater Palestinian (and Israeli) casualties – simply because that very food and fuel was used by Hamas as a weapon of war. It helped Hamas feed and fund its army – and assured Hamas' grip on Gaza's body politic by making Gazans beholden to Hamas for their food and fuel. A siege would have sown public discontent with Hamas, separating combatants from non-combatants like milk separates into curds and whey; it would have also facilitated the release of hostages – by offering Palestinians the incentive of food in exchange. A siege would have allowed non-combatants to be screened off and placed into humanitarian zones – and the entrenched Hamas combatants struck with full force, without fear of causing "collateral damage." This would have been a totally different kind of war, a war in which far fewer people would have died – simply because Hamas would have been deprived of its human shields. It was embarrassing to listen to the [exit interview of Biden's ambassador to Israel](#) Jack Lew touting as his greatest achievement the twisting of Israel's hands into feeding its enemies – while acknowledging at the same time that Hamas is entrenched among Palestinian civilians, resulting in "collateral damage" – without linking the two. So how much does even the Biden administration care for the Palestinians given that it pushed Israel into abandoning the Gaza siege that would have likely saved lives of at least a few thousand Palestinians – and of not a few Israelis?

So no matter what kind of "pro-Palestinianism" we are talking about – the anti-Israel, antisemitic one of European vintage (that is also practiced by the American academe), or the Biden administration's goody-goody but ultimately inhumane one – one thing is clear: not only does it do nothing for the Palestinians – but it is not intended to do anything for them. It is either a case of pure Jew-hatred, or of sanctimoniously

clearing the conscience at the expense of many more Palestinians (and Israelis) killed. Put simply, to the “pro-Palestinian” crowd the worth of Palestinians is no greater than that of a rat’s tail. I am glad I learned at least that single American idiom – it sums up the policies of so many countries so well!