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## Hey Joe: a Memo to Biden on Palestine



Photograph by Nathaniel St. Clair

*Thou art not conquered yet, dear land,  
Thy spirit still is free.  
Though long the Saxon's ruthless hand,  
Has triumphed over thee.  
Though oft obscured by clouds of woe,  
The sun has never set,  
Twill blaze again in golden glow,  
Thou art not conquered yet [...]*

*Through ages long of war and strife,  
Of rapine and of woe,  
We fought the bitter fight of life,  
Against the Saxon foe,  
Our fairest hopes to break thy chains,  
Have died in vain regret,  
But still the glorious truth remains,  
Though art not conquered yet.  
Thou art not conquered yet, dear land,  
Thy sons must not forget,  
The day will be when all can see,  
Thou art not conquered yet*

Michael O’Rahilly penned these words. Known simply as “The O’Rahilly” he was a republican and founding member of the Irish Volunteers. With some 64 other rebels, he gladly offered up his life to Irish freedom in the Easter Sunday uprising of 1916. Joe Biden would never know that.

Joe Biden takes pride in his Irish roots, as well he should. He finds comfortable repose in the romantic words of Irish tradition. He speaks of Irish bonds... words of warmth and love and hope. Irish is all that ... but it is so much more. It is a journey of 800 years of occupation, of resistance at its finest, resistance at its purest, resistance at its deadliest. It is a chronicle Joe Biden has never lived nor learned.

Education is, for some, a privilege, for others a right, for more than a few a selective tailored read. Joe Biden is one such browser; a head-note sort of guy. Like his ignore of the necessarily militant, fierce chronicle of the Irish journey, Joe Biden prefers the packaged, heavily redacted narrative of another occupied people... Palestinians.

To Joe Biden, Palestinians are essentially little more than gate-keepers; visitors tasked by some biblical assign to safeguard the land awaiting the rightful return of relics from an Old Testament psalm long rewritten to serve the geopolitical needs of a Euro/Western colonial project. Of course, when it comes to Palestinians, like so many other political theists across the aisle, Joe Biden typically says all the right things: “except for Hamas terrorists, Palestinians are decent people... good people... honest people who must be treated with dignity and respect.” As for Israeli Jews, Biden’s cerebral tattoo is an echo of the crude international talisman that they are “entitled to live in peace and security.” How profound and deflective. And on those all too familiar occasions when the perpetual victim becomes the ever-lurking victimizer... by burning to death a Palestinian family, or running over a Palestinian toddler, or attacking farmers, damaging chicken coops and killing over 300 chickens or through “settler” pogroms that ravage entire Palestinian communities... Joe

Biden is among the first to denounce the deadly targeted assaults with the all too convenient preach “there are very fine people on both sides.”

It’s not difficult to discern Joe Biden’s myopic cheer for Israel over the course of almost half a century of his legislative applause. Anything but nuanced, or disguised, time and time again he voted aye for all pro-Israeli resolutions and nay for any that might begin to temper the systemic corrupt imbalance between the occupier and the occupied. To Biden and his generation of legislative pander, votes which might suggest, let alone facilitate, any modicum of equity or justice between Palestine and Israel were viewed as political surrender... if not suicide.

Yet, in the United States, political drive of legislative prerogative is far less indicative of one’s theological thirst than what they pursue when they wield the executive gavel of largely unfettered, unitary power. Here, eight years as vice president speaks volumes of Joe Biden’s heretofore zeal to protect Israel at all cost and to deny Palestine any safeguard of consequence whatsoever.

In the often uncomfortable world of reality, executive political power must be measured not by the echo of appealing words but, rather, the pound of deeds. Who better to measure the reach of Joe Biden when he reigned as the second most powerful man in the United States than Barack Obama. According to Obama, for eight years Biden was the last to leave the room of tough decisions and among the most active in shaping what they were to be and just where they were to go. And what were those decisions regarding Palestine?

With, by then, settled norm, Obama/Biden refused to accept the Israeli drive to annex land seized from the West Bank of Palestine. Likewise, the Zionist remake of al Quds into the recognized capital of a European implant went no further than their long standing holiday wish list... as did the transplant of the US Embassy to there from Tel Aviv. There was nothing remarkable about this political “intransigence,” nor did it slow the rapacious Zionist appetite to steal more and more occupied land in rank violation of settled international law. Indeed, in the half century since the on-set of Israel’s second wave of land snatch begun in 1967, American presidents have followed a fairly rote policy of “freeze” and wait while Israel, imbued with blanket U.S. legislative cover and a limitless checkbook, found little reason to pause in increasing its “settler” population in the occupied territories from the 10,000 of 1967 to more than 600,000 by 2016.

What, then, deciphers the political rhetoric of Obama/Biden to display the true nature of their largely unbounded support of a European colonial project committed to the eradication of an age-old indigenous population... whether by siege, violence, or categorical expulsion? During the eight years of Obama/Biden, that translate was not at all hard to find. There was, after-all, nothing subtle about Israel’s drive to punish Palestinians, for little more than their mere existence, during the time that Joe Biden readied himself to move from front row seat to

oval office desk. Just several weeks before taking power in 2008, the future President got a primer on Israeli brutality through the lens of “Operation Cast Lead.”

With an opening salvo of war crimes on December 27, 2008, the first day of the operation, Israel bombed the main police headquarters in Gaza City, killing 42 police cadets standing in formation without weapons. Later that day, it bombed some 18 other police stations throughout the Gaza Strip. In total, 248 police officers were killed that day having not fired a single round at Israeli forces. Over the twenty one days of the Israeli onslaught that followed, it deliberately targeted civilians and civilian infrastructure and made widespread use of prohibited weapons, such as white phosphorous, in highly populated areas in clear violation of international law. During the attack Israeli fire targeted 23 U.N. buildings and/or compounds killing numerous civilians who had taken shelter there. In the most deadly case, 43 Palestinian civilians were killed by an Israeli shelling in one such compound.

Palestinian schools were also targeted. On January 5, an aerial strike killed three men who had sought shelter at the Asma Elementary Co-Ed A School. On January 17, a military ordinance struck the Beit Lahia Elementary School while it was being used as an emergency shelter... killing two young boys and injuring 13 others. Human Rights Watch documented at least seven instances where Israeli soldiers shot and killed civilians... including five women and four children who were in groups waving white flags to convey their civilian status. In one such incident, Israeli soldiers shot and killed several members of the al-Najar family in Khuza'a village, east of Khan Yunis. Following orders from soldiers to leave their neighborhood, and while waving white flags, Rawiya al-Najjar and her family were gunned down.

When the carnage ended, some 1440 Palestinians were killed and more than 5,000 injured... most of them civilians. According to the Israeli Human Rights group B'Tselem, 252 minors under age 16 (boys and girls) who did not take part in any fighting were killed along with 111 women and girls over 16. Nine Israeli soldiers were killed and 340 wounded.

Five years later, in the summer of 2014, Joe Biden got another stark, deadly reminder of just what it is to be a Palestinian in the cross hairs of a colonial fiend hell bent on relegating them en masse to the history of the disappeared. During Israel's unhinged six week rampage on Gaza it dropped 40,000 tons of explosives on more than 5200 “targets”. At its end, some 2200 were slaughtered, including 550 children, and some 10,000 injured. Almost all the victims were civilians. More than 1900 children were orphaned, hundreds of thousands of civilians internally displaced with 20,000 homes, 26 NGO service providers, a half-dozen UNRWA facilities, 23 hospitals and health-care facilities, 133 schools, 360 factories, 50,000 acres of crop lands and half of Gaza's poultry stock targeted and destroyed or damaged by Israel.

In the years since “Operation Protective Edge”, as so much a brazen dare to the rest of the world, Israel's assault upon Palestinians has been as public as it has been relentless and

diverse. In its 21 month-long attacks on tens of thousands of Palestinians during the Great March of Return, it met peaceful demonstrators in Gaza with tear gas canisters, some of them dropped from drones, or rubber bullets and live ammunition, mostly fired by positioned, hilltop snipers. The Israeli carnage resulted in the murder of 217 civilian protestors, including 48 children, 2 women and 9 persons with disabilities. Another 36,100 demonstrators were injured... including 8800 children. Of the 7,000 injured by live fire, 207 became permanently disabled with 156 requiring amputations. Among those killed and wounded were dozens of prominently identified journalists and medical staff.

Throughout Gaza, soon entering its fifteenth year of a choking siege, life remains a daily suffer for those living in one of the most densely populated areas of the world ...all the while denied the minimal, essential guideposts of a healthy society. With large swaths of its infrastructure still in ruins and Israeli air attacks very much the norm, its two million residents live lives of isolated deprivation and despair subject to Israeli and Egyptian embargos of food stuffs, clean water, electricity and crucial medical supplies. For many in need of sophisticated medical treatment or equipment, the wait to exit the shuttered civilian prison becomes too little too late as they pass awaiting their turn. Others, including children, take their final breath alone in Israeli hospitals with families but 50 miles away denied passage with their loved ones not knowing if they will again see them alive.

In the West Bank armed “settlers” rampage daily attacking the young, the elderly, the frail, or those who dare to go for a walk or a drive. Not a day goes by without a report of another farm or grove attacked with century old olive trees destroyed for no reason but to tatter local economies and to devastate often elderly tree tenders, tasked with the protection of an age old tradition. According to the United Nations, 11,000 olive trees have been damaged or destroyed in a calculated settler strategy for dispossessing Palestinians of their land.

On November 3, 2020, the Israeli Civil Administration arrived suddenly at the Khirbet Humsah community, in the Northern Jordan Valley, with a military escort and two bulldozers and diggers. With but a few moments notice, they destroyed dozens of tents, sheds and livestock pens, water containers, solar panels, feeding troughs and tractors, and 30 tons of livestock fodder. By the time they moved on to the next village, they had smashed a community that was home to 74 people including 41 minors and numerous sheep and newborn lambs. Its destruction was ordered as one of 38 such villages that sit on land the Israeli military wants for training... training to destroy countless other villages, homes, lives with greater speed and proficiency.

Several day before Israel destroyed a water supply line in Masafer Yatta, South Hebron Hills, which provided water supply to the communities of Maghayir al-‘Abid and Khirbet al-Majaz. In late September of this year, Israeli bulldozers descended upon the community of She’b al-Batem, in the Masafer area of the South Hebron Hills. Before they left, they destroyed the home of two families... leaving 14 people homeless, including 10 children... one of them

with a physical disability. Later that day, they proceeded to the community of Khirbet a-Rakeez where they demolished the homes of four families, leaving 17 people, including 10 minors and a woman with special needs, without any shelter. The week before, Israeli Civil Administration arrived at the community of Khalet Taha, in the Hebron District, accompanied by a military escort and Border Police. When they left, the homes of three families had been destroyed along with a large water reservoir, a well under construction, a power grid that stretched over 600 meters and razed land intended for building another water reservoir and a cattle pen.

These demolitions are by no means an anomaly. They occur daily throughout Palestinian Bedouin districts leaving countless families homeless, modern infrastructure destroyed, international development and improvement grants wasted and a tradition of the millennium struggling to see but another tomorrow. Yet they are not limited to distant desert outposts.

Very much the quiet, public face of an unbroken tear of ethnic cleansing, civil Israeli society aspires to undertake, in relative silence, what its military has long accomplished by unleashed bomb and bullet. Indeed, in its rush to erase generations of cultural and religious diversity, over the last few years Israeli demolitions in the greater East Jerusalem area have caused the destruction of several hundred residential and commercial structures... leaving hundreds of Palestinians homeless and dozens of businesses in ruins. This drive to turn Jerusalem into one huge Euro/American synagogue is but a continuum of the last fifteen years during which more than one thousand- five hundred residential and commercial units have been demolished by Israel... leaving more than three-thousand Palestinians homeless... including some one thousand- five hundred minors. But, then again, with history, at times, a precursor of what is yet to come and almost 10,000 Palestinian children detained... largely uncharged, unprosecuted and unrepresented over the last two decades... Zionists might argue, with straight face and determined purge, in Palestine there's really no need for permanent housing. Joe Biden has spent 50 years fleeing necessary friction; slapping backs trying in the name of some useless call for collegiality, to be all things to all people... that is, to those like him who find comfort in the myth of labor but, in reality, the privilege of birth. And now, Joe Biden, it is your time. What will you do? You are 77 years old, surely but a one term president who owes nothing to anyone or anything but to history. But for you that is a debt long overdue and riddled with the liberty and life of others. To get a flavor of your crossing, it would be easy to walk down the lane of history and stop at the headstones of your Criminal Justice Act of 1996, your pillage of Anita Hill, your support of an Iraqi sanction that starved the final breath from half a million children. These were your personal gold stars to own... ones that forged a political pathway which took a true believer to the apex of power... and, now, you are there. To millions of Palestinians, their nightmare is a parallel travel in time to that of yours. Though you have felt the unfortunate sting of personal pain and suffer, imagine that of a stateless people, long abandoned, left to fend for themselves against an unbroken volley of

Israeli violence and world indifference. You have played a role in that tragedy. Your votes have enabled and your silence empowered unspeakable and undeniable crimes. It is not enough to say “no” to Israeli plans to annex lands that are not theirs... and never have been. Money, once again, for UNRWA will be but crumbs on a table long smashed by an occupation now in its seventh decade. To reopen the shuttered Palestinian consulate in Washington D.C. will surely help thousands of Palestinians to navigate a world of documents yet do nothing to unfold a state that is no less legitimate, than the one you are about to lead. Be daring, be bold, be decent, be humane. Israel must understand that until the siege on Gaza ends, the theft of Palestinian lands done, and political prisons shuttered, the US checkbook remains closed.

You speak often of your faith... one that welcomes all; a community of love, compassion and embrace. Words can become reality if only you dare.

In moving closer to the sage in action, as well toward a personal end of days, keep an eye and mind on Ecclesiastes for guidance.

“Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute,” (Psalm 82:3). “Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, and please the widow’s cause,” (Isaiah 1:17).

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