



By: *Catriona M. Munro, TA Editor in Chief*

Biden in Belfast and several other places



Like a rolling stone, US President Joe Biden's whistlestop tour of Belfast and various stop offs throughout the Republic of Ireland gathered no moss.

Washington winced first, forced to correct Biden's apparent confusion between a famous Antipodean rugby team, the All Blacks, and a brutal 1920s British security force known as the Black and Tans. It was clearly a gruelling long haul flight for the 80 year old president.

His public words did not echo the drama of a predecessor on a visit to another European city: "Mr Gorbachev, tear down that wall!". But nobody really expected that.

He made a slightly abstruse reference to a city called Nottingham in the English midlands: famous for freedom fighter and champion of the poor, Robin Hood. I think we can let that pass. The point was, he kept both the Northern Irish protestant and catholic communities happy.

Where he really wanted to be

Biden's twinkle eyed excitement sparked as soon as he landed in Dublin. He was home; his roots all around him; an enthusiastic crowd to welcome a fellow Danny Boy who has undeniably achieved the pinnacle of global prominence.

It was now Irish president Michael Higgin's turn to break protocol's first law: do not appear on the international stage with animals.

Higgin's dog, an enormous Bernese mountain dog called Misneach, which means courage in Irish gaelic, took an instant dislike to the world's most powerful president. It barked; it backed away.

Baseball be damned! It was all about Camogie

Irish Toiseach Leo Varadkar decided to introduce Biden to the thrills of Camogie,

which is a female version of the notorious ball game Hurling, played by fearsome Irish men.

Players use sticks and a ball, and It can be described as a mixture of hockey and lacrosse. And it knows few rules.

A reporter with the president relayed that a blue eyed, black haired Irish beauty launched a sliotar - a Camogie ball - perilously close to the president's left shoulder inspiring gasps of alarm from spectators.

Whether the same alarm was shared by the president's Security Service protectors remain a state secret.

Time to talk about young Hunter Biden

Hunter, whom we are all aware is under investigation for federal tax evasion and constant threat from republicans, was present constantly throughout the trip.

The president sought help from his busy son when he decided to take questions from a group of children whose provenance is not clear, although some were clearly offspring of local US Embassy employees.

"Any of you guys want to ask a question?", asked Hunter, before becoming distracted by a kid with a toy model of Air Force One.

He then pointed to another child and told his dad, "the kid at the back; he's got a question". Neither a question nor a reply ensued.

Please note there has been no official press conference of the entire trip.

More sombre and deeply personal moments

Biden made an emotional visit to a new hospice established by Irish local relatives in honour of his late son and tragically lost heir

apparent, Beau.

The president had already visited the hospice in Castlebar in 2017, to “break the sod” of the new building, but this time it bore a blue plaque with Beau’s name.

The presidential entourage’s next trip was to pilgrimage site Knock shrine in County Mayo, where retired Army Chaplain, Frank O’Grady, who administered Beau’s last rights in the US is now working.

Eyecatching and more flamboyant farewell

Biden wrapped up with a turn outside Saint Muredach’s cathedral in Ballina, again greeted by cheering fans.

The Irish are well known to have the “gift of the gab”, and Biden is no exception. Reaching back to his roots, he recounted how his great, great, great, great grandfather was paid £21 and 12 shillings in 1828 to supply bricks to build the cathedral.

“I doubt he ever imagined that his great great grandson would return 200 years later as president of the United States of America. Isn’t that amazing?”, asked Biden.

Never miss a political opportunity

In a clearly pre-staged, dramatic lightshow, punctuated by spotlights, Biden’s team foreshadowed another another American run for reelection, and victory for Biden’s personal story linked closely to Ireland.

After all, those St Patrick Days are not cheap, what with the leprechaun costumes and all that green dye in the rivers.

Biden is a teetotaller, so he failed to emulate other VIP visitors to Ireland and sink a pint of its notorious Guinness beer. This was of no

significant importance.

The verdict: success

The anticipated wrinkles and unexpected awkwardnesses are factored into major diplomatic event planning, with a tailored anti-migraine insurance policy.

The ultimate objective is symbolic success, and this visit had it in spades. Nobody will remember the grizzly Black and Tans or aggressive dogs; the seal set on the visit will be powerful and lasting.

Putting the Good Friday Agreement and the Windsor Agreement before accepting an invitation to the new British King’s forthcoming coronation in early May has been a form of a masterstroke.

The Troubles of this tiny yet vastly complex and sometimes intractable conundrum, has been a patient unthreading of a Gordian Knot without Alexander’s thrashing sword.

There had to be a pragmatic solution yet packed with symbolism for Northern Ireland, the UK, the EU and the US, and Biden has delivered it.