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# Obama Peace Prize Award Elicits Praise, Criticism

By Michael Bowman  
Washington  
09 October 2009

Global reaction to U.S. President Barack Obama being awarded the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize ranges from hearty congratulations to expressions of disbelief and derision.

The Norwegian Nobel Committee recognized the president for his work to strengthen international diplomacy, citing in particular efforts to rid the world of nuclear weapons. The peace prize appears to have caught everyone, including Mr. Obama himself, by surprise.

White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs said he called to wake President Obama early Thursday with the unexpected news. "I think it is safe to say he was surprised," he said.

Less than a year after taking office, Mr. Obama is joining an elite group of recognized peacemakers that includes Nelson Mandela, the Dalai Lama, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Speaking at the White House, Mr. Obama's tone was one of humility. "To be honest, I do not feel that I deserve to be in the company of so many of the transformative figures who have been honored by this prize -- men and women who have inspired me, and inspired the entire world through their courageous pursuit of peace," Mr. Obama said.

Global reaction was swift and varied. U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon described the peace prize as "great news". "President Obama embodies the new spirit of dialogue and



AP Photo

**President Barack Obama speaks at the White House about winning the Nobel Peace Prize, 09 Oct 2009**

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engagement on the world's biggest problems: climate change, nuclear disarmament and a wide range of peace and security challenges," he said.

Several Nobel laureates were in agreement, including South Africa's Desmond Tutu. "It is an award that anticipates an even greater contribution towards making our world a safer place for all," Tutu said.

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter described the Obama selection as "a bold statement of international support for his vision and commitment to peace and harmony in international relations".

Across the United States, many Americans expressed surprise.

"I am flabbergasted and amazed, actually," one person said. Another added: "I was a little shocked because I thought the timing was interesting in that he has not been in office for very long." A third person had this reaction: "As much as I like Barack Obama, I just do not know that he has done enough to warrant such an honor."

At American College in Cairo, political scientist Saiid Sadek found Mr. Obama's selection odd and undeserved. "There is no peace in Iraq, nor in Afghanistan. The Arab-Israeli conflict is still at a standstill. As usual, nothing happened. And Guantanamo Bay jail is still open. So what for is he getting that prize?," he said.

President Obama's domestic political rivals echoed the criticism. Republican National Committee Chairman Michael Steele said, in his words, "It is unfortunate that the president's star power has outshined tireless advocates who have made real achievements working towards peace and human rights."










For his part, the president attempted to share the honor with the nation as a whole. "Let me be clear: I do not view it as a recognition of my own accomplishments, but rather as an affirmation of American leadership on behalf of aspirations held by people in all nations," Mr. Obama said,.

The chairman of the Nobel committee, Thorbjørn Jagland denied the honor is premature. He said the committee has on many occasions tried to enhance what many personalities are trying to do.

If the peace prize was awarded to cheer ongoing efforts, some are suggesting it will increase pressure on President Obama to deliver concrete results on the world stage. French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner says Mr. Obama will have to prove himself even more from now on.

Two other sitting U.S. presidents have become Nobel laureates:

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