

Barack Obama 'surprised' and 'humbled' by Nobel Peace Prize.

Chris McGreal in Washington and Gwladys Fouché in Oslo, 9 October, 2009

1 Barack Obama was as surprised as most of America, and much of the world, to be woken before dawn and told he had won the Nobel Peace Prize after just nine months in office and while he is deciding whether to escalate the war in Afghanistan. The Nobel Committee said it chose Obama "for his extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples" and for creating "a new international climate".

2 "Only very rarely has a person to the same extent as Obama captured the world's attention and given its people hope for a better future," the Committee said in its citation. "His diplomacy is founded in the concept that those who are to lead the world must do so on the basis of values and attitudes that are shared by the majority of the world's population."

3 Obama recognized the immediate scepticism from almost every quarter over awarding the Prize to a president who was in office less than a fortnight when the deadline passed for nominations and who, critics swiftly noted, has yet to achieve any significant breakthroughs in his attempts to foster Middle East peace or halt Iran's alleged nuclear ambitions while continuing to oversee a major war in Afghanistan. "I do not feel that I deserve to be in the company of so many transformative figures that have been honoured by this Prize," the president said.

4 But Obama said he would accept it as a recognition of the struggles of others for peace, and said it must be "shared by everyone who strives for justice and dignity". "I will accept this award as a call to action, a call to all nations, to confront the challenges of the 21st century," he said.

5 Obama will donate to charity the \$1.4m (£880,000) cash award that comes with the Prize. White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said it was likely that more than one charity will benefit but that the president has yet to decide which charities will share the windfall. Amid the official congratulations from the rest of the world, the Prize touched off a verbal war in the US where Republicans said he had failed to achieve anything that justified the award and characterized it as a political statement.

6 The noisy and influential conservative talk show hosts described it as primarily intended as a snub to the former president, George Bush, rather than for any particular achievements by Obama. "This is nonsensical," said radio host, Mike Gallagher, on Fox News. "You guys can't let President Bush go, can you? That's the reason for the Nobel Peace Prize. [Obama] doesn't act like a cowboy." Obama's Democratic Party responded to the attacks by accusing the

Republicans of "throwing their lot in with the terrorists – the Taliban and Hamas – in criticizing the president for receiving the Nobel Peace Prize".

7. The Norwegian Nobel Committee rejected assertions that the Prize was awarded prematurely by pointing to Obama's speech to the Muslim world in Cairo and his attempts to start the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, his emphasis on dialogue over confrontation in international diplomacy and his commitment to nuclear disarmament. "We want to emphasize that he has already brought significant changes," said the committee secretary, Geir Lundestad. "All these things have already taken place and this has already had a very significant impact on international relations. We do, of course, hope that there will be many concrete changes over the years. But when a president makes all these changes on these ideals, which are the ideals the Norwegian Nobel Committee has had for a hundred years, we felt it was right to strengthen him as much as we can in this further struggle for these ideals."

7. The former UN secretary general, Kofi Annan, described the award as an "unexpected but inspired choice". A Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, thought otherwise. "He has not taken a single step for peace in Afghanistan or to make this country stable. We condemn this year's Peace Prize as unjust," he said. The Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, said he was "not upset" by the award.

9. It remains to be seen whether the Prize will indeed strengthen Obama's hand or put him on the back foot in the US where there is acute sensitivity to perceived weakness in international affairs. The citation's assertion that Obama's diplomacy reflects "values and attitudes that are shared by the majority of the world's population" riled conservatives who view the US president's role as to stand up to hostile and untrustworthy foreigners. The award comes as Obama is under pressure from US military leaders to pour tens of thousands more troops into Afghanistan and from national security advisers to shift the conflict to pursuing al-Qaida in Pakistan.

10. Thorbjørn Jagland, chairman of the Prize Committee, said that does not detract from the award. "The situation in Afghanistan is very difficult but we cannot look away from all the other positive things he [Obama] is trying to do," he said. "It's a conflict that concerns us all. It's not tricky with regards to the Nobel Peace Prize." The award also mystified many liberals who have become increasingly critical of Obama for failing to press ahead swiftly enough on commitments to close Guantánamo Bay and domestic issues such as on recognition of gay rights. Obama is only the third sitting president to win the prize, with the others awarded to Theodore Roosevelt in 1906 and Woodrow Wilson in 1919. © Guardian News & Media 2009

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1. Key words

Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

escalate, scepticism, snub, assertion, condemn, rile, citation, windfall, inspired, breakthrough

1. A _____ is a large amount of money that you get when you are not expecting it.
2. A _____ is a discovery or achievement that comes after a lot of hard work.
3. A _____ is an official statement praising someone for something they have done.
4. An _____ is a definite statement or claim that something is true.
5. If people express _____ about something that other people think is true or right, they express doubts about it.
6. If you _____ a situation you make it worse or more serious.
7. If something _____ you, it makes you very annoyed.
8. If you _____ something, you say publicly that you think it is bad or wrong.
9. A _____ is a deliberate attempt to annoy someone by ignoring them.
10. If something is _____, it is very special or impressive.

2. What do you know?

Decide whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F).

1. Barack Obama had been in office for just over a year when he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.
2. He is the first sitting US president to win the prize.
3. The Nobel Peace Prize Committee is Norwegian.
4. Kofi Annan is the current United Nations secretary general.
5. The Iranian president was upset by the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Barack Obama.
6. The Nobel Peace Prize comes with a cash award of \$1.4m.

3. Comprehension check

Choose the best answer according to the text.

1. Which answer best describes the reaction to the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to President Obama?
 - a. Most people felt that the choice of Obama was inspired.
 - b. Most people felt that the award was unjust.
 - c. Many people were sceptical because he had only been in office for two weeks when the deadline for nominations passed.
2. What will Barack Obama do with the money that comes with the Nobel Peace Prize?
 - a. He will give it to a specific charity.
 - b. He will probably give it to several charities.
 - c. He will return it to the Nobel Peace Prize Committee.
3. Why, according to the Nobel Committee, was the award given to President Obama?
 - a. Because he has initiated changes that reflect the ideals of the Nobel Committee.
 - b. Because he spoke to the Muslim world in Cairo.
 - c. Because he has made a significant breakthrough in fostering Middle East peace.
4. What are the president's national security advisers urging him to do?
 - a. send thousands more troops to Afghanistan
 - b. pursue al-Qaida in Pakistan
 - c. close Guantánamo Bay

4. Find the word

Find the following words and phrases in the text.

1. a noun meaning *a period of two weeks* (para 3)

2. a verb meaning *to promote or to help something develop over a period of time* (para 3)

3. a two-word phrasal verb meaning *to make a lot of effort to achieve something* (para 4)

4. a two-word phrasal verb meaning *to make something unpleasant or dangerous happen* (para 5)

5. a five-word expression meaning *to decide to support or join a particular group* (para 6)

6. an adverb meaning *too soon or before the usual time* (para 7)

7. an four-word expression meaning *on the defensive* (para 9)

8. a two-word phrasal verb meaning *to make something seem less good, attractive or important* (para 10)

5. Verb + noun collocations

Match the verbs in the left-hand column with the nouns and noun phrases in the right-hand column.

- | | |
|---------------|------------------------------|
| 1. achieve | a. someone's attention |
| 2. donate | b. an impact on something |
| 3. award | c. money to charity |
| 4. have | d. international cooperation |
| 5. capture | e. a prize |
| 6. strengthen | f. a breakthrough |

6. Word building

Complete the sentences using the correct form of the words in brackets at the end of each sentence.

1. There has been a lot of _____ about awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to Barack Obama. [SCEPTIC]
2. He intends to accept the award in _____ of the struggle of others for peace. [RECOGNIZE]
3. Conservative talk show hosts are regarded as _____ in the US. [INFLUENCE]
4. They are sceptical about Obama's _____. [ACHIEVE]
5. The Nobel Committee highlighted Obama's _____ to nuclear disarmament. [COMMIT]
6. Kofi Annan described the award as _____. [EXPECT]

7. Discussion

Do you think it was right to award the Nobel Peace Prize to Barack Obama? Why? Why not?