



Written by [Steven J. DuBord](#) on October 9, 2009

## President Obama Awarded Nobel Peace Prize

U.S. President Barack Obama has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize worth 10 million Swedish crowns (\$1.4 million).

The Norwegian Nobel Committee said that President Obama merited the award because his international diplomatic efforts and calls for nuclear weapons reduction have given the world “hope for a better future.” They commended Obama for “his extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples.”

Bloomberg on October 9 quoted Thorbjørn Jagland, chairman of the five-member Nobel committee, as saying: “The Nobel Committee has in particular looked at Obama’s vision and work toward a world without atomic weapons. [Obama has as president created a new climate in international politics.](#)”



Since taking office, Obama has engaged in diplomatic efforts regarding the Middle East peace process and promoted nuclear disarmament. Despite such lofty ambitions, few real-world successes have been scored. In September, Obama did chair a United Nations Security Council meeting during which a U.S.-drafted resolution calling for nuclear-armed nations to destroy their arsenals was unanimously approved.

“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 Nobel committee said in their citation. Nonetheless, the President faces tough choices on Iran and Afghanistan that will put his image as a bringer of hope to the test.

Reuters noted on October 9 that “[Obama is the third senior U.S. Democrat to win the prize this decade](#) after former Vice President Al Gore won in 2007 along with the U.N. climate panel and Jimmy Carter in 2002.” Bloomberg pointed out that “Obama is the third sitting U.S. President to be awarded the prize”; Theodore Roosevelt won in 1906 and Woodrow Wilson won in 1919.

It is interesting to consider the other persons who might have won the prize. AP reported before the announcement that Norwegian national broadcaster NRK had named several frontrunners. Zimbabwe’s Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, Colombian Senator Piedad Cordoba, Chinese dissident Hu Jia, French-Colombian politician Ingrid Betancourt, and Afghan woman’s rights activist Simi Samar were all [listed as favorites](#).

That none of these other contenders emerged with the award may be related to something Kristian Berg Harpviken, the director of the Peace Research Institute in Oslo, recently told journalists. Harpviken mentioned that Nobel committee chairman Jagland just finished a four-year term as President of Norway’s Parliament, and he was subsequently elected for a five-year term as Secretary General of the



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Council of Europe on September 29.

Harpviken speculated that Jagland's ties with both the Norwegian government and the Council of Europe would cause the Nobel committee to be "careful" about its choice. The prize givers would want to avoid controversy about their political independence, and Jagland would shy away from anything that might complicate his time as council head. "It would be hard to think that it hasn't had an impact" on the choice of a winner, Harpviken stated.

Regardless of the thought processes of the Nobel Committee members, the disparity between President Obama and last year's winner should be noted. The 2008 Nobel Peace Prize was given to Finland's ex-President Martti Ahtisaari, who has worked for decades as a peace mediator.

While Ahtisaari's efforts on behalf of the UN would not make him a model for U.S. diplomats to imitate, one can at least see the logic in recognizing years of work on conflict resolution. Barack Obama has not even been on the international scene for one year, and already the committee equates his efforts with someone who dedicated his life to international diplomacy.

Some of the dissidents, activists, and politicians NRK mentioned as potential Peace Prize winners would also have made a more logical choice. The committee could have at least made the bestowing of such an honor on President Obama look more legitimate if it had waited until Obama put several years of successful international diplomacy under his belt.

Harpviken seems to have been correct that the Nobel Committee is playing it safe this year with their choice of Barack Obama as a winner of dubious distinction.

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