

Pres. Obama: An Inspired and Inspiring Choice for Nobel Peace Prize

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As I read the—surprised and surprising—reactions to Pres. Obama's receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, I am reminded of something that happened ten years or so ago, when my father was still alive. I was complaining about one thing or another that then-Pres. Clinton had done. Dad, who had first voted for FDR and had years later become very embittered by Pres. Nixon—in other words, he had seen and lived through the best and worst that our nation had to offer—told me something I'll never forget:

"A leader can't control everything. He has to work with what he's got. So he can't make everything right overnight. And he'll make some mistakes, too; he's only human. But the thing to watch is the direction he's taking us. It might be slower than you'd like, but are things generally headed the right way or not? That's how you judge a leader."

By the way, that was part of my dad giving his approval of Pres. Clinton's actions, in general and in particular for his achieving the first growth in real (inflation-adjusted) wages for American working people in a great many years.

In awarding the Peace Prize, the Nobel Committee cited Pres. Obama's "extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples."

Against the background noise of insane but persistent cries from the "birthers," Pres. Obama fulfilled his campaign pledge and spoke to the world's billion Muslims shortly after attaining office, to reassure them that—despite what the bin Ladens (and some of the "crusaders" in our nation) say—Americans want peace in the world, including with Islamic peoples. That was indeed "extraordinary." (Can one image Pres. Obama's predecessor making the same speech or impact?)

And yes, Pres. Obama has inherited wars in the heart of the Islamic world. But I believe he is doing everything humanly possible to not fight a "dumb war"—as he said in his famous speech opposing intervention in Iraq—while securing the safety of Americans, and others, in uniform and at home. He is drawing down our forces in Iraq, and even somewhat faster than had originally been thought possible, while trying to retain some sense of stability in the "Pottery Barn" we broke.

The strategy he is formulating for Afghanistan is admirably being based first and foremost upon helping everyday Afghan people stabilize their own economic and political situation (despite the apparent corruption of their leaders), which unavoidably requires security—by our forces for now and by Afghan forces being trained—as to protect otherwise defenseless humanitarian assistance. At the same time, American drones, special ops, and other forces are as surgically as possible disrupting and destroying al Qaeda command and control centers, leaders, and networks, now based primarily in Pakistan, which of course poses dicey problems and limitations of its own. There is no easy fix.

Whether or not we agree with his decisions, I think all of us should appreciate that Pres. Obama and his national security team, including Secretary of State Clinton, are doing their very best to be responsible, for all concerned.

Remember, our allowing al Qaeda to have a safe haven previously cost us dearly, and led to the situations we are in now. Preventing further disaster prevents further war.

Pres. Obama's efforts to curb nuclear proliferation are also being cited for his receiving the Peace Prize. Every day the catastrophic potential of this threat becomes more real, as nuclear materials and technology are being disseminated and developed at an increasing rate, by nations and groups that openly and clandestinely threaten us and our allies. Pres. Obama's working with all parties—including making agreements already with Russian Pres. Medvedev and holding the first (tentatively promising) talks between our nation and Iran in decades—is a mark of good faith on

the part of the American people in the world, after years of our—disastrously—"going it alone." Pres. Obama is trying to regain—re-earn—for America the international good will that the previous administration squandered in the wake of 9/11.

Pres. Obama has dispatched George Mitchell, who helped make the peace in Northern Ireland, to help make the peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians, another conflict that has persisted stubbornly for decades, and that inflames and complicates all the other issues in the Middle and Near East.

Like Al Gore (and unlike the previous administration), Pres. Obama has taken leadership and agreed to cooperation in alleviating global climate change, another problem too big for one nation to solve alone.

And finally, remember that Pres. Obama's "extraordinary efforts to strengthen ... cooperation between peoples" does not just apply to international efforts. Like the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Pres. Obama I believe has won the Peace Prize for his leadership in helping make peace between people of different races—and every other description—here in our country, where such differences have long divided us and thus weakened us, socially, economically, and morally. America is more at peace with itself because of Pres. Obama's leadership—and really, for what he represents to so many of us.

The Peace Prize often helps give impetus to international movements that are gaining

momentum, such as the fight against Global Warming. As Nobel Committee chairman Thorbjørn Jagland said of Pres. Obama's award: "He got the prize because he has been able to change the international climate. ... Some people say, and I understand it, isn't it premature? Too early? Well, I'd say then that it could be too late to respond three years from now. It is now that we have the opportunity to respond—all of us." It is obvious that Pres. Obama represents a new face, ethnically and figuratively, of America—the most powerful nation—to the world: a vision of hope through working together with, not against, one another.

And that indeed is the only road that leads to peace. Pres. Obama says he is "humbled" by the Prize; I am proud of the honor he has brought to America. And I'm sure my dad is smiling down on us all.