

Whither the Nobel Peace Prize?

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To the disappointed and dejected people of the world who had witnessed the dark and gloomy years of George W. Bush's presidency, Barack Obama's electoral slogan of "change" seemed to be an encouraging pledge of rebirth and revitalization which could eventually extricate them from war, destruction, sanctions and militarism.

Obama's catchphrase of "change" was so inspirational and exciting that 140 heads of state sent him congratulatory messages upon his election as the President of the United States in 2008. The whole world believed that a new change would be underway; a change that had seemed basically unreachable under the ex-President Bush.

Barack Obama, who endeavored to appeal to the Americans as a pacifist politician who has come to revamp the public image of his country in the eyes of public opinion and put an end to the hawkish policies of his republican predecessor, won the hearts and souls of his compatriots by promising them to pursue a strategy of détente, withdraw the troops from Iraq, seek reconciliation with Iran and put forward a comprehensive public healthcare program.

With his matchless features as an African American president with Muslim background, Obama indicated his willingness to be reminiscent of Abraham Lincoln for his fellow citizens; therefore, he intelligently began taking steps which would bring to the minds of Americans the delightful history of their country's rescue from the Civil War under Lincoln. Firstly, he announced his candidacy for the president of the United States before the Old State Capitol building in Springfield, Illinois, where Abraham Lincoln delivered his memorable "House Divided" speech in 1858.

Harold Holzer, the American writer and Lincoln biographer believes that from the beginning of his political career, Obama tried to model himself on Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the United States and one of the most popular figures in the history of the country. They both became lawyers and consequently served in the state legislature and then served a single term in the Congress. It goes without saying that they both come from the same state: Illinois.

According to Douglas Brinkley, a Rice University professor of History, Obama and Lincoln both appealed to the nation by the virtue of their effectual public speaking: "Lincoln and Obama shared a love of words, a belief that rhetoric and oratory could change people's minds, and the way they would express things, the confidence they would have in a debate – not by fiery oratory, but by a calming presence, a reasoned argument."

In order to take part in the inaugural ceremony and assume office, Obama traveled from Illinois to Washington by train, a tradition first devised by Abraham Lincoln in 1861 when he

wanted to pass through New York to the capital. Obama even adopted his inaugural luncheon menu from the favorite foods of Abraham Lincoln: lobster, scallops and shrimp. Obama's inaugural address was thoroughly glorified with the phrases and expressions exclusive to Abraham Lincoln; from "A New Birth of Freedom" derived from the Gettysburg Address to "renewal, continuity and national unity."

Obama tried his best to appear as a duplicate of Abraham Lincoln, with the same pacifistic ideology and reconciliatory trajectory. He spoke of peace, extended hands, equality, mutual respect, human rights and non-intervention in the internal affairs of other countries. He resorted to his eloquence and proficient oratory to captivate the global public opinion, and mostly succeeded. Bearing in mind the aggressive speeches of ex-President Bush whose ultimate solution for each problem would be found in military expedition and bellicosity, Barack Obama should have been the most ideal president every American and even non-American citizen might seek, and there would be no room left for doubt and uncertainty regarding Obama's excellence as an unparalleled peace-lover who could save the US from the quagmire George W. Bush had created during his 8 years of aggressive administration.

Obama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on October 9, 2009, only 10 months after assuming office as the President of the United States. He was granted the prestigious award "for his extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples," and this was the juncture where the controversies would arise. Having decreed the recruitment of extended troops to be dispatched to Afghanistan, failing to hold Israel accountable for its relentless massacre of Palestinians in the Gaza war and refusing to order the cessation of drone attacks on the Pakistani civilians, Obama found his winning of the Nobel Peace Prize embraced by the international community's astonishment and surprise.

Although few people doubted that Obama is far more qualified and tolerable than George W. Bush, the early endowment of a Nobel Peace Prize to him was not well received by many. Once it was officially announced that Barack Obama would be the winner of Nobel Peace Prize, the frontpages of world newspapers became filled with astounding editorials the following day. Gideon Rachman, the Financial Times' chief foreign affairs commentator wrote in an interesting editorial titled "What Did Obama Do to Win the Nobel Peace Prize?"; "I doubt that I am alone in wondering whether this award is slightly premature. It is hard to point to a single place where Obama's efforts have actually brought about peace - Gaza, Iran, Sri Lanka?"

The London Times, however, attacked the Nobel committee more intensively. Michael Binyon of the London Times wrote in a hard-hitting editorial that the Nobel committee's decision has made a mockery of the Nobel Peace Prize: "Rarely has an award had such an obvious political and partisan intent. It was clearly seen by the Norwegian Nobel committee as a way of expressing European gratitude for an end to the Bush Administration, approval for the election of America's first black president and hope that Washington will honor its promise to re-engage with the world."

However, the gist of story was best described in a Globe and Mail article written by Norman Spector on October 9, the same day the award was given to Barack Obama: "the simple explanation for the Committee's decision to cite Mr. Obama at this stage of his presidency is that he is not George W. Bush."

The Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the US President on a comparative basis. Comparatively, Obama was better than Bush, and that's why he received the prize. It was just a compliment to his "not being" the same as George W. Bush; however, it has recently become evident that Obama has the potentiality to become an aggressive and belligerent leader like what George W. Bush was, and this simply discredits the Nobel Foundation and its premature decision. Barack Obama has threatened Iran with a nuclear strike, and this is not the practice of a Nobel Peace Laureate. If it was somehow difficult to reject the Nobel committee's decision at the early stage, it's now completely unjustifiable to consider Barack Obama as a meritorious choice for winning the Nobel Peace Prize. Someone who is awarded for his endeavors to promote peace does not threaten a 70-million nation with a nuclear attack, nor does he impose crippling sanctions on them to paralyze their economy and their daily life.

Even if the Nobel committee's decision was to encourage the US President to remain the same man of "change" he had promised earlier, it should not have been taken that frantically, only 10 months after he took office. The 2009 Nobel Peace Prize was a "comparative award," and made millions of people laugh at the credibility and authenticity of the foundation which is aimed at the preservation of Alfred Nobel's heritage; however, from another comparative viewpoint, the Nobel committee had already brought itself into question by awarding people such as Shimon Peres who are simply unable to spell the word "peace."

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