DEMOCRACY AND SOCIETY 01.10.2025 | Hanna Kirchberger

Make peace great again

A Nobel Prize for Trump may be less far-fetched than many might think

Giving a speech at the United Nations is supposed to last fifteen minutes. Donald Trump showed little regard for that rule, as his address to the UN General Assembly in New York on Tuesday 23 September stretched to nearly an hour. And as often happens when the US President says anything in public, he soon made the headlines. Even his arrival was marked by mishaps: the escalator malfunctioned, forcing Trump and the First Lady to take the stairs. An incident he took personally, accusing the UN of sabotage.

Trump touched on an array of issues, accusing the UN of funding an 'invasion' of immigrants, questioning the existence of climate change, yet again, and referring to climate protection measures as 'the greatest hoax of all time'. He sternly criticised the UN for failing in its peacekeeping efforts and portrayed himself as a successful peacemaker, claiming to have resolved seven conflicts in seven months: between Cambodia and Thailand, Kosovo and Serbia, Congo and Rwanda, Pakistan and India, Israel and Iran, Egypt and Ethiopia, and finally Armenia and Azerbaijan. These achievements, Trump asserted, made him a prime candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize, insisting that 'everyone' thought he deserved it. He also claimed it wasn't about the prize itself, but the lives saved. Trump has long positioned himself as a future Nobel laureate, putting in great efforts to win the prize, including a call in July to Norwegian Finance Minister and former NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg to raise the prospect of a nomination.

Trump is not alone in seeing himself as Nobel-worthy. Several world leaders have reportedly nominated him, including Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Even his former presidential rival Hillary Clinton recently said she would nominate Trump if he managed to broker peace in Ukraine.

An award like no other

Named after Swedish inventor Alfred Nobel, the Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded by the Nobel Committee in Oslo every year on 10 December – the anniversary of Nobel's death – since 1901. It is the world's foremost accolade that recognises extraordinary contributions to peace and human rights. Past recipients include organisations such as the International Red Cross for its humanitarian work during the World Wars and individuals such as Pakistani activist Malala Yousafzai for her fight for education and against the oppression of young people.

Trump wouldn't be the first US president to receive the Nobel Prize: Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Jimmy Carter and Barack Obama have all been laureates. The decision to award Obama with the prize less than a year into his presidency in 2009 sparked controversy. And now, looking back, it is certainly questionable. Obama waged war throughout his eight years in office and was known, among other things, for his excessive use of drones, his deployment of US troops to Syria and Iraq, and a kill list, which contained the names of everyone who was to be eliminated abroad. Yet he was honoured for his extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples, and the hope for a better future that he inspired. Donald Trump, who has been waging a personal crusade against Obama for years, cannot bear to see Obama surpass him in terms of awards.

Awarding the prize to Obama in 2009 has shown that the Nobel Peace Prize is not necessarily reserved for conflict-free presidencies, but it can also recognise 'perceived efforts.'

Awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to Donald Trump would undoubtedly be controversial — his 'peace efforts' are certainly subject to dispute. On the one hand, Trump has a tendency to join in on negotiations that are already in progress and claim credit for their success; on the other, questions remain about how sustainable his initiatives actually are. Add to that the dramatic escalation of drone strikes carried out under Obama, with over 2 243 during his first term alone. Furthermore, Trump's attempts to play peacemaker are in stark contrast to his domestic policies, which have included curbs on free speech, incidents of abduction and assaults by masked agents on public streets, and a military presence in civilian spaces.

A Nobel Prize for Trump might not be entirely inconceivable, though. He has cultivated the narrative of an active and remarkably successful

peace broker. Awarding the prize to Obama in 2009 has shown that the Nobel Peace Prize is not necessarily reserved for conflict-free presidencies, but it can also recognise 'perceived efforts.' In Obama's case, the Nobel Committee explicitly stated that it aimed to support ongoing developments toward peace. Under the same logic, Trump could conceivably be considered for the prize. Unlike some other US presidents, Trump has not invaded any other country (so far).

If we look beyond the increasingly polarised media landscape, where Trump is either vilified or idolised, we can be a bit more pragmatic. The fact that various world leaders have nominated him says something about the global perception of his political ambitions. Awarding the prize to Trump could even, paradoxically, be a positive step: his discernible narcissism might encourage him to lean even more into his role as peacemaker. Not necessarily for the sake of peace, but out of vanity. For a politician who values recognition above all else, the Nobel Prize could provide an incentive for further diplomatic efforts.

More than anything, the award is a symbol of hope and diplomatic initiative.

It isn't enough to deny Trump the award just because we don't like him or, more objectively, because he is far from a pacifist, both politically and personally. A look at past laureates reveals that some of them were far from innocent. Beyond warmongering US presidents, there are other controversial figures such as Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, whose government carried out ethnic cleansing against the minority Rohingya people in Myanmar. Menachem Begin, the former leader of the radical Zionist paramilitary group Irgun responsible for the 1946 bombing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem that killed at least 91 people, was awarded the prize in 1978 as Israel's prime minister for his role in achieving peace with Egypt. And former East Timor bishop Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo, who was accused of sexually abusing children, received the Nobel in 1996 for his advocacy of self-determination during the Indonesian occupation. The list of controversial recipients is far from exhaustive.

This raises the question of how much a Nobel Peace Prize truly reflects the character and intentions of its recipient. More than anything, the award is a symbol of hope and diplomatic initiative. Whether we think Trump has a good shot at it or not, his address to the United Nations

shows exactly how he sees himself: a successful mediator deserving of recognition and someone who consciously positions himself on the global stage as such. A Nobel Prize for Trump may be less far-fetched than many might think. After all, the Peace Prize has historically been as much about aspiration as achievement. Following this logic, French President Emmanuel Macron even pleaded with Trump to end the war in Gaza, maintaining that only he had the power and deserved the prize for doing so.

Ultimately, it may not really matter who receives the prize as long as real peace is achieved. So, the question remains: should the self-proclaimed peacemaker receive the award?



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