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Controversy dogs Chomsky as he accepts Sydney Peace Prize John Huxley
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(Noam Chomsky ... says peace remains a distant prospect. Photo: Jorge Dan)

In a move likely to spark another annual round of healthy controversy, the veteran American linguist, social scientist and human rights campaigner Noam Chomsky was named 2011 winner of the Sydney Peace Prize last night.

Professor Chomsky said he was honoured by the award, whose previous recipients include the South African cleric Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the Palestinian activist Hanan Ashrawi and the Australian journalist John Pilger.

In recent weeks the 82-year-old has been one of America's most-hated men, subjected to ''obscenities, intellectual hysteria and death threats'' over remarks following the shooting of Osama bin Laden.

Advertisement: Story continues below The al-Qaeda leader's crimes, he wrote, were vastly exceeded by those of the former president George Bush. ''We might ask how we would be reacting if Iraqi commandos landed at his compound, assassinated him and dumped his body in the Atlantic.''

Professor Chomsky said the ill-considered American operation had pushed the world to the brink of war, possibly even nuclear war. ''The commandos who violated Pakistani sovereignty were given orders to fight their way out if necessary. They risked coming into confrontation with the Pakistani army.

''In a society barely hanging together, the military is very stable, very professional. They are dedicated to the defence of Pakistan, which is probably the fastest-growing nuclear power in the world. If confronted it will fight.''

Professor Chomsky restated his opposition to war in Afghanistan, where two Australian soldiers died this week.

''Americans and Britons, too, are dying … in fact, to make the world more [not less] dangerous for the United States and Britain. And I'd say for the rest of the world.''

The announcement of the prize-winner was made by the NSW governor, Marie Bashir. The citation praised his unfailing courage, critical analysis of power and promotion of human rights.

Stuart Rees, the director of the Sydney Peace Foundation, said, ''Chomsky is one of the West's most influential intellectuals in the cause of peace, the most significant challenger of unjust power.''

Professor Chomsky, who receives a $50,000 prize and a hand-made glass trophy, will fly to Australia in November to deliver the City of Sydney Peace Prize lecture and attend a gala dinner at Sydney University.

He has visited Australia before, 15 years ago, when he delivered lectures about East Timor refugees at the invitation of the leader, Jose Ramos Horta.

This time, he says he hopes to spend more time, catching up with friends, meeting fellow activists, enjoying Sydney's enviable lifestyle.

Meanwhile, he said, peace remained a distant prospect in a world torn apart with wars unnoticed, such as that in the eastern Congo, and wars unwinnable, such as that in Afghanistan.

Read more: http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/controversy-dogs-chomsky-as-he-accepts-sydney-peace-prize-20110601-1fgqf.html#ixzz1RCeFwiPi