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POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY

Volume 124 · Number 4 · Winter 2009-10

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Political Science Quarterly

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The False Promise of the Nobel Peace Prize

RONALD R. KREBS

Politicization is nothing new to the various Nobel prizes, the most distinguished of international awards. This is true even to some extent of those in the sciences, and it is obviously true of the award in literature. However, the Peace Prize is the most politicized of the awards, and it, more directly than the others, seeks to change the world through its very conferral. Recognizing those who have already succeeded in changing the world—that is, the criterion of *accomplishment* that guides the rest of the Nobel prizes—is secondary for the Peace Prize, as the Nobel Committee reminded us in 2009 in bestowing the award on President Barack Obama.

Many naturally doubt that any award could have much impact even at the margins, let alone on enduring patterns, of international politics. Indeed, the award was early in its history, and more occasionally since, given to pacifists, and neither interstate nor intrastate conflict has been eliminated.¹ The Nobel Committee itself has been careful to damp down extravagant expectations, usually arguing that the award works in more-subtle ways to advance the winners' causes: by raising the profile of organizations and problems, by morally and politically bolstering the forces for peaceful conflict resolution, and by attracting international attention to repression and perhaps ultimately facilitating pressure for liberalization.²

Neither the skeptics nor the believers, however, are entirely correct. The consequences of the Nobel Peace Prize for the winners and their causes vary: sometimes, as skeptics expect, the Prize has little impact; occasionally, but

¹ But conflict seems in general to be declining—though pacifists may not be able to take too much credit. See the Human Security Report Project, accessed at www.hsrgroup.org, 12 October 2009.

² Geir Lundestad, "Reflections on the Nobel Peace Prize," December 1999, accessed at http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/articles/lundestad/index.html, 8 July 2009.

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more rarely than its advocates hope, it draws attention to ignored problems; but, sometimes, the award has also produced unexpected and unwanted outcomes—undermining organizational competence and sparking repressive state action. Such rarely recognized perverse consequences have become more common in recent years, since the Soviet–U.S. détente and especially since the end of the Cold War, as the Peace Prize has increasingly been given to promote domestic liberalization. It is precisely in this prominent category of cases that the good intentions of the Prize Committee have gone awry. In the short-to-medium run, the Peace Prize has more often brought the heavy hand of the state down on dissidents and has impeded, rather than promoted, conflict-free liberalization. If the Nobel Committee wishes to foster peaceful conflict resolution—a goal it has not been shy about endorsing—it should be more cognizant of the award’s unintended consequences.

This article is heavily empirical, with clear normative implications, but it also has relevance to theoretical debates that animate international relations scholarship. Its argument and findings part ways with both a rigid realism as well as conventional institutionalism, falling into and furthering the family of approaches that, bridging between these two schools, has elsewhere been termed “realist institutionalist.”³ Whereas realists generally see international institutions as epiphenomenal, as reflections of power politics,⁴ this article claims, in line with institutionalist logic and findings, that the Nobel Peace Prize, which might be seen as a kind of international institution, can have an independent causal impact on state behavior.⁵ However, whereas so-called neoliberals focus on how international institutions promote cooperation,⁶ this article shows that the bestowal of the Prize can, contrary to neoliberal expectations, exacerbate conflict and prompt intensified state repression, generating dynamics and consequences that are the opposite of the Nobel Committee’s purpose. The article thus also reflects realist proclivities: typical of the realist’s pessimistic worldview, it is skeptical that human efforts to effect progressive change in global politics work in straightforward ways to yield such outcomes, and it is sensitive to the possibility and reality of unintended consequences in complex political systems.⁷ As Lisa Martin and Beth Simmons argued over a

³ On “realist institutionalism,” see Ronald R. Krebs, “Perverse Institutionalism: NATO and the Greco-Turkish Conflict,” *International Organization* 53 (Spring 1999): 343–377. See also Victor D. Cha, “Abandonment, Entrapment and Neoclassical Realism in Asia: The U.S., Japan and Korea,” *International Studies Quarterly* 44 (June 2000): 261–291.

⁴ John J. Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions,” *International Security* 19 (Winter 1994): 5–49.

⁵ On this central axis of debate among IR theorists, see Robert Jervis, “Realism, Neoliberalism, and Cooperation: Understanding the Debate,” *International Security* 24 (Summer 1999): 42–63.

⁶ For the seminal work, see Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

⁷ On pessimism and the realist worldview, see Robert Gilpin, “The Richness of the Realist Tradition,” in Robert O. Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 304. On unintended consequences and realism, see Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*

decade ago, the chief issue should no longer be *whether* international institutions matter, but *how* they matter.⁸ This article contends, in line with “realist institutionalist” scholarship, that those institutions may “matter” by doing harm as well as good. Exploring the impact of the Nobel Peace Prize on its recipients’ causes is an important question in and of itself, but it also provides a window onto these theoretical disputes.

The rest of this article proceeds in four substantive parts. First, I review historical trends among the award’s winners, arguing that this inherently politicized award has become increasingly “aspirational” and has applied an increasingly broad definition of peace. Second, I explore three categories of “aspirational” peace prizes and offer contending hypotheses regarding their effects on the winner’s cause; in this section, I also develop the theoretical logic of my argument about the award’s potentially perverse consequences. Third, I examine and use computerized content analysis to cast doubt on the hypothesis that the Nobel Peace Prize benefits causes by drawing global media attention to them. Fourth, I show that when the award is given to advance domestic political change, it can have unexpected and counterproductive consequences; this section traces the award’s surprising effects in three such cases since 1989.

PEACE PRIZE PATTERNS

The Peace Prize was first awarded in 1901, five years after Alfred Nobel’s death. In contrast to the broad definition of peace that came to inform the award and the aspirational air that came to characterize its conferees, Nobel’s will defined peace narrowly and focused on candidates’ accomplishments; it was to be awarded to “the person who shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies, and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses.”⁹ But the will set the Peace Prize apart from the start with its inherently politicized character; its winners would be identified by a committee appointed by Norway’s Parliament, whereas Swedish institutions defined by substantive expertise (the Swedish Academy of Sciences, the distinguished Swedish medical school known as the Caroline Institute, and Sweden’s leading literary institute, the Swedish Academy) had the responsibility for selecting the awardees in physics, medicine, chemistry, and literature.

The Nobel Peace Prize Committee initially remained true to Alfred Nobel’s charge. Of the 19 prizes awarded between 1901 and 1914, almost all went to individuals who had made major contributions to the Inter-Parliamentary Union,

(Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 73–77; and especially Robert Jervis, *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

⁸ Lisa Martin and Beth Simmons, “Theories and Empirical Studies of International Institutions,” *International Organization* 52 (Summer 1998): 742–743.

⁹ Accessed at http://nobelprize.org/alfred_nobel/will/will-full.html, 8 July 2009.

popular peace organizations, or the international legal tradition; Theodore Roosevelt, as a sitting head of state and a realist to boot, was a notable exception, though his award, bestowed for his role in mediating the Russo-Japanese War, was consistent with the Prize's early focus on interstate peace (see Appendix).¹⁰ Between 1901 and 1945, over three-quarters of the prizes (33 of 43) went to those who promoted interstate peace and disarmament: pacifists; international lawyers, who saw law as the path to peace; leaders who played crucial roles in the League of Nations. The rest of the awards went to individuals and especially organizations dedicated to humanitarian causes or to statesmen who sought to promote specific peace processes and resolve boundary disputes. Only one award (1935) criticized and sought to effect change in a state's internal and repressive politics, as the Committee honored Carl von Ossietzky, the journalist who served as a symbol of opposition to the Nazi regime.

Since the Second World War, however, the Peace Prize Committee has implicitly adopted a definition of peace far removed from its original mandate.¹¹ Of the 21 prizes awarded between 1946 and 1970, just 6 (30 percent) went to those promoting interstate peace and disarmament; that number declined between 1971 and 2009, to merely 12 of 49 prizes (24.5 percent). An increasing number of awards (16 of 49 since 1971) sought to encourage ongoing peace processes—in line with a traditional understanding of peace—but they often intervened in processes that had borne little fruit or had a long road ahead, from Vietnam to Korea to Indonesia to Northern Ireland to the Middle East. At the same time, the awards increasingly equated peace with human well-being, paralleling the contemporaneous stretching of “security” (marked as “other” in the Appendix).¹² Thus the microlender Grameen Bank and its founder Muhammad Yunus were acknowledged in 2006 for their pioneering work promoting development. Thus Al Gore and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change were honored in 2007 for raising awareness of the problem of global warming. While one might construct plausible causal chains leading from microcredit to development to peace, or from climate change to localized resource scarcity to conflict, the Peace Prize Committee rarely justified the awards in these terms that would link it to a more traditional definition of peace.

Even more striking has been the Peace Prize's growing focus since the Second World War on domestic political arrangements. Between 1946 and 1970,

¹⁰ Geir Lundestad, “The Nobel Peace Prize,” in Agneta Wallin Levinovitz and Nils Ringertz, eds., *The Nobel Prize: The First 100 Years* (London: Imperial College Press, 2001), 165–168; Burton Feldman, *The Nobel Prize: A History of Genius, Controversy, and Prestige* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2000), 295–301.

¹¹ Douglas Bulloch, “For Whom Nobel Tolls? An Interpretive Account of the Migration of the Concept of Peace as Perceived Through the Solemn Eyes of Norwegian Lawmakers,” *Millennium* 36 (May 2008): 575–595; Lundestad, “Nobel Peace Prize,” 184–185.

¹² Roland Paris, “Human Security: Paradigm Shift or Hot Air?” *International Security* 26 (Fall 2001): 87–102.

the Prize was awarded twice (9.5 percent of the time) to domestic dissidents, to encourage change in South African and U.S. internal politics (1960 and 1964 respectively). Between 1971 and 2009, the Prize was given 10 times (20.4 percent) for this purpose. This has been slightly more true since the end of the Cold War, as over 22 percent of the awards have gone to that end (see Appendix). Here, the links to interstate conflict, and arguably to intrastate conflict too, are even more tenuous. In recent years, the Peace Prize Committee has cast opprobrium on, among others, Myanmar and Iran for their disregard of individual liberties and democratic institutions. Aung San Suu Kyi and Shirin Ebadi might be admired for their courage, but their awards do not recognize substantial contributions to interstate or intrastate peace.

Finally, the awards have also become increasingly “aspirational”—conferred on individuals and organizations that have made relatively little progress toward their stated goals.¹³ The early years of the Peace Prize were similar in this respect, as one might expect, given the heavy representation of pacifists among the recipients; 80 percent of the awards given out before 1919 marked aspiration more than accomplishment. But the balance shifted after the Second World War, as nearly three-quarters of the awards during the Cold War (1946–1988) honored recipients’ tangible accomplishments. With the end of the Cold War, the Committee again began to reward aspiration disproportionately, with 78 percent of the recipients so classified (see Appendix).¹⁴

¹³ In a sense, of course, each of the prizes was bestowed for “accomplishment”: the prize-winners have normally achieved positions of renown and prominence in their chosen arena. But individuals may well enjoy prestige out of all proportion to their efforts’ concrete effects. Thus, I distinguish between awards that have honored individuals whose past actions have led relatively directly to tangible easing of human suffering or the cessation of violence (“accomplishment”) and those awards that have honored individuals whose causes, at the time of the award, remain far from having been achieved (“aspiration”). I have drawn on the official Nobel Peace Prize Committee announcement to identify the reasons the award was bestowed. The former category (“accomplishment”) includes the negotiators of completed peace agreements (for example, 1906, 1973, 2008), humanitarian organizations (for example, 1944, 1954, 1999), scientists and financiers whose initiatives have advanced global well-being or human security (for example, 1962, 1970, 2006), and others. The latter category (“aspiration”) includes peace activists, nuclear disarmament advocates, and environmentalists—whose causes, while arguably admirable, had inarguably made little headway at the time of the award—but also key figures in ongoing conflicts (for example, 1993, 1998, 2000) and human rights and democracy activists in authoritarian regimes (for example, 1984, 1989, 2003), among others. There are, of course, cases that are difficult to classify, such as prizes given to honor individuals for their role in founding organizations like the League of Nations and the United Nations. When these prizes were given at the outset of the organizations’ existence, and not after many years of operation, I coded them as “aspirational”; at the time of the award, the organization had not yet demonstrated its value or staying power. These cases stand in contrast to the many awards given to humanitarian organizations and human rights groups after decades of consistent operation and concrete achievement.

¹⁴ While one might challenge individual codings, the trend line is unmistakable and robust. This is, moreover, not a controversial claim. See similarly, Lundestad, “Nobel Peace Prize”; Feldman, *Nobel Prize*, chap. 8.

The more aspirational the Prize, the more clearly the Committee has tried to use it for political effect. Francis Sejersted, the chairman of the Norwegian Nobel Committee in the 1990s, was open about this: “The Prize ... is not only for past achievement.... The Committee also takes the possible positive effects of its choices into account [because] ... Nobel wanted the Prize to have political effects. Awarding a Peace Prize is, to put it bluntly, a political act.”¹⁵ One might cite many examples from the award’s history, but the Committee has been particularly explicit since 2001 about its political message. That year, as the United States geared up to invade Afghanistan and amidst early talk of U.S. action against Iraq—all outside the aegis of the United Nations (UN)—the Committee conferred the award jointly on the UN and its Secretary General, Kofi Annan, “to proclaim that the only negotiable route to global peace and cooperation goes by way of the United Nations.”¹⁶ The following year, in bestowing the Prize on former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, the Committee could hardly have been more clear: “In a situation currently marked by threats of the use of power, Carter has stood by the principles that conflicts must as far as possible be resolved through mediation and international cooperation based on international law, respect for human rights, and economic development.”¹⁷ In 2003, the Committee, honoring the Iranian feminist and reformer Shirin Ebadi, pointedly noted that “at a time when Islam is being demonized in many quarters of the western world, it was the Norwegian Nobel Committee’s wish to underline how important and how valuable it is to foster dialogue between peoples and between civilizations.”¹⁸ *The New York Times* observed that the Prize sent “a message to the [George W.] Bush administration that internal change, brought about by local advocates, is preferable to invasion.”¹⁹ The Nobel Committee’s most recent award, in 2009, to President Obama, was immediately widely interpreted on both the left and the right as a censure of the style and substance of the previous administration’s foreign policy and as an embrace of Obama’s less confrontational approach and more multilateral inclinations.

A PRIZE PACKING A PUNCH?

If the Nobel Peace Prize is intended to have political effects, one should inquire: what kinds of effects might it produce? Through what causal mecha-

¹⁵ Francis Sejersted, “The Nobel Peace Prize: From Peace Negotiations to Human Rights,” accessed at http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/articles/sejersted/index.html, 8 July 2009.

¹⁶ Press Release, 12 October 2001, accessed at http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2001/press.html, 8 July 2009.

¹⁷ Press Release, 11 October 2002, accessed at http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2002/press.html, 8 July 2009.

¹⁸ Presentation Speech, 10 December 2003, accessed at http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2003/presentation-speech.html, 8 July 2009.

¹⁹ Ethan Bronner, “The Nobel Peace Prize Always Comes With a Message. But is it Heard?” *The New York Times*, 17 October 2003.

nisms? And does it actually produce the desired effects? Naturally the Prize has not directly brought about international peace, and even the Prize's advocates do not make so extravagant a claim. When the Peace Prize is given to individuals or organizations for past accomplishment, the Prize's effects on future performance are particularly difficult to gauge. Then the recipient normally has a well-established track record and funding base, and further successes cannot be attributed persuasively to the award. Alternatively, the individual is hailed for her role in facilitating or negotiating a relatively stable peace, and the Prize Committee thereby hopes to further stabilize the peace arrangement, encourage others to follow suit and pursue peaceful conflict resolution, and promote a normative climate in which negotiated solutions are valued. That the Prize furthers the first of these aims cannot be demonstrated, because continued peace can be ascribed to the conditions that gave rise to the settlement, and the Prize's contributions to the other two goals are necessarily highly indirect, if not elusive.

When the Peace Prize is given to individuals and organizations whose accomplishments are not substantial but whose aspirations are great, its effects—if there are any—might be more easily ascertained. Here the Prize's advocates plausibly suggest that the Prize helps set the international agenda, draws attention to forgotten or marginalized causes, and thereby imparts a new impetus to stalled efforts. Geir Lundestad, the distinguished historian who has served as Secretary of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, observes that “many are the Peace Prize Laureates who have reported how previously closed doors were suddenly opened to them after they had received the Prize.”²⁰ Accounts of specific cases have attributed precisely such an impact to the Prize. Students of the Tibetan struggle have claimed that the Dalai Lama's Prize was “a tremendous blow to the Chinese government's pride” that gave the Tibet issue greater international exposure, inspired Tibetan activism, and further isolated China; the award, they suggest, opened the White House's door to the Dalai Lama in April 1991 and led the U.S. Congress to recognize Tibet as an occupied country.²¹ This was, moreover, explicitly the hope of Czech President Vaclav Havel in nominating the Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.²²

Aspirational Peace Prizes have, in the last four decades, been given primarily in three circumstances. Of the 28 awards between 1971 and 2009 coded as aspirational in the Appendix, 6 honored contributions to general peace and disarmament, 9 aimed to advance incipient peace processes in specific

²⁰ Lundestad, “Reflections.”

²¹ Pierre-Antoine Donnet, *Tibet: Survival in Question*, trans. Tica Broch (London: Zed Books, 1994), 202–203; Warren W. Smith, Jr., *Tibetan Nation: A History of Tibetan Nationalism and Sino-Tibetan Relations* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 622. See also A. Tom Grunfeld, *The Making of Modern Tibet* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), 236.

²² “Burma Hits at Nobel Prize Winner,” Agence France Presse, 15 October 1991.

intrastate and interstate conflicts, and 9 sought to promote domestic change in favor of human rights and democracy. I analyze each category in turn.

First, the Nobel Committee has tried to promote disarmament by bestowing the award on individuals and organizations who have made arms control, and ultimately the banning of classes of weapons, their life's work. In many such cases, the award has done little to advance public awareness, which is already substantial. That the nuclear arms race posed a threat to humanity was hardly news in 1982, when the Committee honored Alva Myrdal and Alfonso García Robles for their work in both regional and global nuclear disarmament negotiations. That nuclear proliferation remained of concern was hardly a revelation in 2005, when the Committee honored Mohammed El Baradei and the International Atomic Energy Agency; seven years before, both India and Pakistan had made their nuclear weapons capabilities clear, and just two years earlier, the world discovered that Pakistan's chief nuclear engineer, Abdul Qadeer Khan, had been running a global nuclear technology and weapons bazaar. In cases involving less-well-known classes of weapons, the Peace Prize might conceivably play an agenda-setting function, and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), winner of the 1997 award, is a case in point. Yet the Prize proved a mixed blessing for the Campaign. On the one hand, funding for "mine action"—mine clearance, mine risk education, and mine survivor assistance—saw a massive jump in 1998, followed by two more years of double-digit percentage increases; whereas global spending had averaged merely \$64.75 million per year between 1992 and 1995, it reached \$189 million in 1998 and \$309 million in 2002.²³ Yet, while the Nobel Committee might plausibly claim credit for drawing resources to the Campaign, the Prize also sparked divisive in-fighting over the sudden prominence of coordinator Jody Williams and over how to spend the Prize funds.²⁴ The unusual case of the ICBL aside, these awards cannot in general be expected to exert much impact.

Second, the Nobel Committee has sought to advance ongoing peace processes, bestowing the award on the principals either before real progress had been made (Kim Dae Jung and his "sunshine policy," 2000, for example) or immediately after agreements were signed but with much still to do (Oscar Arias Sánchez and the Esquipulas Accord, 1987, for example). The Committee has often been self-conscious and even defensive about these awards, for instance acknowledging in 1994, when it honored the Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat, Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, and Israel's Foreign Minister Shimon Peres for the Oslo Accords, that "it has been said that the Nobel Committee ought to have waited." But the Committee justified the award by

²³ For data, see Landmine Monitor Report 2003, accessed at www.icbl.org/lm/2003/funding.html, 16 March 2009.

²⁴ "Antimine Activists at War with Each Other," *Globe and Mail*, 10 February 1998; Caryle Murphy, "The Nobel Prize Fight: Claims of Jealousy and Betrayal," *The Washington Post*, 22 March 1998.

affirming its capacity to spur further progress toward Mideast peace: “It is the Committee’s hope that the award will serve as an encouragement to all the Israelis and Palestinians who are endeavoring to establish a lasting peace in the region.”²⁵

If the Prize draws worldwide attention and resources to the conflict, then the Committee’s ambition may not be misplaced. But, even if the Committee is right, these seemingly positive developments can also call forth “spoilers” who may undermine fragile processes.²⁶ The Nobel Committee’s presumption is that transparency strengthens peace processes, and that is true in the long run, as mass publics on both sides must support any negotiated agreement. But that may not be true in the short run, when processes are brittle and when trust is scarce. In those early stages, secrecy may be an advantage. Indeed, had Israeli and Palestinian leaders tried to negotiate the Oslo Accords in the public’s full glare, the Accords might never have been signed, as spoilers like Hamas would have arisen even earlier; it is not accidental that the early stages, completed in secret, were successful, while the subsequent, more-public negotiations have been more troubled. The third option is the null hypothesis—that the Prize has no impact on ongoing peace processes, either for ill, because active peace processes have already moved spoilers, wherever such actors are present, to action, or for good, because the Prize’s agenda-setting function is weak.

Third, the Nobel Committee has increasingly sought, through its awards, to highlight political repression and human rights violations, in the hope that the brighter media light will lead authoritarian governments to behave better and even take painful steps toward democracy. This goal motivated the Committee to honor activist luminaries such as Andrei Sakharov, Desmond Tutu, the Dalai Lama, and Aung San Suu Kyi. But the Nobel Committee thereby has implicitly presumed that regimes from the Leonid Brezhnev-era USSR to apartheid-era South Africa to Deng Xiaoping’s People’s Republic of China (PRC) to junta-ruled Myanmar are so sensitive to their international reputations as “good” or “responsible” states that they would sacrifice their most-cherished values to maintain or cultivate their reputations. This is possible, but implausible. The more-likely alternative is that while the prize winners themselves, given their prominence, might be relatively spared, regimes will clamp down harshly on local dissidents to demonstrate their resolve and to prevent local and international activists from taking heart. To the extent that the Nobel Prize is successful in drawing worldwide attention to their plight, it may render an insecure regime even more anxious and thus more brutal and dangerous; regimes desperate to hold on to power are more sensitive to threats to their

²⁵ Peace Prize Press Release, 14 October 1994, accessed at http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1994/press.html, 8 July 2009.

²⁶ On “spoilers,” see Stephen John Stedman, “Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes,” *International Security* 22 (Fall 1997): 5–53.

rule than to the good opinion of the international community. Moreover, insofar as local activists believe that the Nobel Peace Prize confers moral authority, that the world has thereby given its imprimatur to their cause, and that the international community has thereby signaled that it will protect them, they may ramp up their demands or at least intensify their protest activities—intensifying the regime’s fears of encirclement and its sense of vulnerability, boosting the regime’s desperation, and calling forth still greater repression. Ironically, if the Nobel Committee’s aspirations are fulfilled—if the Prize emboldens local actors, if it boosts global media coverage of regime repression, and if it pressures authoritarian regimes—it may produce effects precisely the opposite of those it intends, with moral victories substituting for actual ones. This article contends that this tragic chain of events, in which the Nobel Committee’s noble intentions at least temporarily set back the cause of democracy and human rights, is not only plausible, but relatively common in this important subset of cases. In fact, Sejersted, the Nobel Committee chairman, has acknowledged that “in some cases the prize has in fact provoked conflict in the short term.”²⁷ His admission is revealing, but it may understate the award’s human cost.

The experience of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement is an analogous cautionary tale. Many have hailed the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* with increasing media coverage and public awareness of racism, inspiring the Civil Rights Movement, and driving a decisive nail into the coffin of segregation. But Gerald Rosenberg has persuasively argued that court decisions on civil rights, notably *Brown*, had little sustained impact on the press or mass and elite opinion. *Brown* not only produced little, if any, positive change, but “there is some evidence that it hardened resistance to civil rights among both [Southern] elites and the white public.... By stiffening resistance and raising fears before the activist phase of the civil rights movement was in place, *Brown* may actually have delayed the achievement of civil rights.”²⁸ *Brown* mobilized opponents of civil rights more than it boosted the capacity of its defenders. The same may be true of the Nobel Peace Prize, as (an exaggerated) fear of its political consequences drives states to act without offering sufficient compensating advantages.

Realists, skeptical of the Nobel Committee’s optimism, would view this more-pessimistic argument as equally misguided; they would argue that the award itself has little impact on regime behavior, for good or ill. But, even though (as I show below) the Peace Prize has typically had little impact on media coverage except in the short term, state leaders have taken the Prize seriously—contrary to realist expectations. Whether the Prize actually sets the international agenda, authoritarian leaders often act as if it does; they fear that it draws attention to, raises the prominence of, and boosts the moral authority

²⁷ Sejersted, “Nobel Peace Prize.”

²⁸ Gerald N. Rosenberg, *The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring About Social Change?* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 155–156.

of dissidents. And they have consequently sought to undermine dissidents' candidacies. When the Soviet government learned in 1973 that the well-known physicist and human rights activist Andrei Sakharov had been nominated and that an international campaign had taken shape to promote his candidacy, it ordered the KGB (the Soviet secret police) to launch a futile action to prevent him from being named; a month after the award was announced, the KGB authorized an extensive covert campaign of character assassination against Sakharov and his wife, Elena Bonner. Three years later, after the show trial of a less-prominent dissident physicist who had founded the Moscow Helsinki Watch Group, Yuri Orlov, "the KGB's main fear" was that Orlov would win the Prize, and the KGB gave "the highest priority to an active measures campaign, personally overseen by [KGB head Yuri] Andropov himself, designed to discredit Orlov and ensure that his candidacy failed."²⁹ Similarly, the Guatemalan government "furiously lobbied the world to prevent Rigoberta Menchú from getting the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize—even submitting the name of a ruling-class philanthropist (unknown outside of Guatemala City) as an alternative."³⁰

Realists would expect regimes to ignore the award or at most to pooh-poo it as international do-gooder blather or a reflection of power politics. Yet regimes have reacted as if the award mattered. They have responded with anger, not indifferent laughter. They have responded with organized campaigns to delegitimize the award and the recipient, not mild derision. The nature and magnitude of their response have been at odds with realist expectations. When the Dalai Lama won in 1989 in a clear rebuke to China after the Tiananmen crackdown, the PRC did not slough it off: the Foreign Ministry expressed "indignation" at the Nobel Committee for its "open support to the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan separatists in their activities to undermine the national unity and split China" and for this "gross interference in China's internal affairs."³¹ Nor did Iranian conservatives pay little heed after the liberal-minded activist Shirin Ebadi won the award in 2003. A leading conservative newspaper pointedly editorialized that "the goal of this prize is to embarrass Muslims and, especially, the Iranian people."³² That regimes take the Nobel Peace Prize so seriously, and view it (wrongly) as so dangerous to their hold on power, strikes a blow at the realist view and adds to the pessimistic hypothesis' surface plausibility.

²⁹ Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 322–324, 329–330.

³⁰ Susanne Jonas, *Of Centaurs and Doves: Guatemala's Peace Process* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2000), 3.

³¹ "China Deplores Peace Award to Dalai Lama," *The New York Times*, 8 October 1989.

³² The official Iranian reaction was muted, as a reformer, Mohammad Khatami, was president. But influential conservatives, in the press and the religious establishment, condemned the award as a "disgrace." See Bronner, "Nobel Peace Prize"; Robin Gedye, "Some Iranian Clerics, Catholics Object to Winner," *Daily Telegraph*, 11 October 2003; Associated Press, "Gathering Storm Over Iranian's Peace Prize," *Mercury*, 13 October 2003.

MEDIA IMPACT?

Journalists, scholars, and activists often credit the Nobel Peace Prize with attracting media attention to stalled peace processes and deplorable human rights situations, generating pressure for change. If the Peace Prize has a positive effect, this is its most likely route. But these observations are based on impressionistic evidence. If this claim has validity, one would expect to see systematically greater coverage of the recipient and of the recipient's conflict/cause in the global media—because the Prize had made reporters, editors, and publishers newly aware of a long-ignored problem; because the Prize had boosted the public's demand for information on the problem or conflict, to which newspapers and other media were responding; or because the Prize had prompted state leaders or international organizations to take the problem more seriously, and the media subsequently covered their interventions. Regardless of the mechanism, the expectation is that the organization, individual, or cause would receive increased coverage in mainstream, prominent global media outlets and that such coverage would persist for some substantial period beyond the award's announcement.

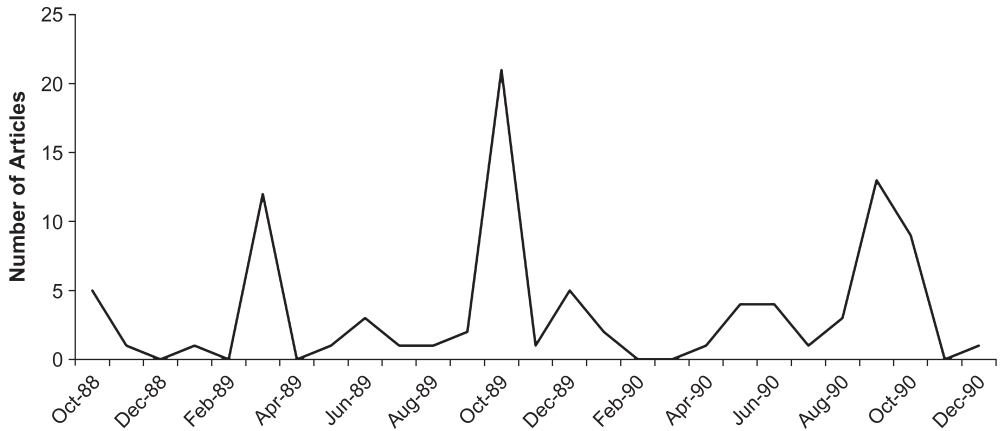
With the proliferation of electronic media, one can easily test this proposition. One might examine all “aspirational” cases since 1971, but that would stack the decks against the Prize's impact; some cases were already the subject of media scrutiny, and the media might have been saturated before the award. Therefore, I focus on cases of “less well-known Laureates and their causes”—that is, cases in which Prize advocates expect the Prize to have a substantial impact on media coverage.³³ These should be “easy” or “most likely” cases for the media impact hypothesis. If the effect is small or non-existent in even these cases, one might conclude that the Prize does not have the effect often ascribed to it. The ready availability of data since the late 1980s warrants starting the analysis then. It is also justifiable on methodological grounds to focus on awards since 1989; one might expect that superpower concerns would dominate media coverage during the Cold War, reducing the Prize's impact, and thus post-1989 cases are also “most likely” for the media impact hypothesis. These criteria—after 1989, aspirational, not already the subject of broad media coverage—leave eight cases (and 10 Nobel Laureates) worthy of examination.³⁴

These eight cases, however, reveal little evidence that the Nobel Peace Prize consistently boosts international media coverage beyond the short run.

³³ Lundestad, “Reflections.”

³⁴ The analysis therefore includes two cases that Lundestad (“Reflections”) specifically says the Prize moved higher on the international agenda: Myanmar and East Timor. The excluded post-1989 aspirational cases are South Africa's transition from apartheid (1993), the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (1994), the troubles in Northern Ireland (1998), the conflict on the Korean peninsula (2000), the United Nations (2001), nuclear disarmament (2005), and President Barack Obama (2009).

FIGURE 1
Coverage of Dalai Lama
Major World Newspapers

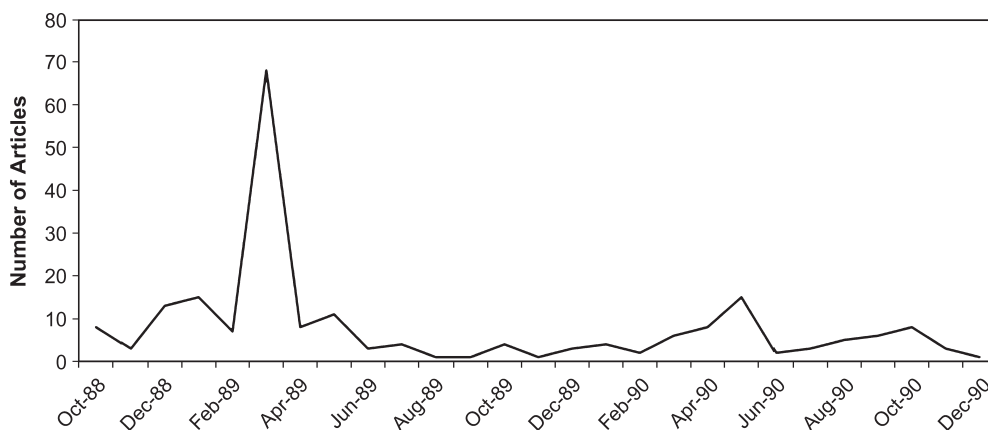


Source: LexisNexis Academic.

Moreover, in those cases in which global media sources do devote more resources after the award, it appears to be for the reasons that pessimists, not Prize advocates, would expect. Figure 1 displays the number of times the Dalai Lama's name appeared in headlines in the LexisNexis database of "major world newspapers" between October 1988 and December 1990. The announcement of the award in October 1989 produced a large spike in articles focused on the Dalai Lama and a smaller spike in December when the presentation ceremony was held. Excluding the three months of October–December 1989, the Dalai Lama received somewhat higher overall coverage in the 12 months beginning in January 1990 (38 articles) than in the year that preceded the award (27 articles), but the pattern was not consistent with the conventional wisdom, which would have expected the Prize to have initiated dependably higher coverage of the Dalai Lama in the months immediately after the award. In fact, as Figure 2 indicates, media coverage picked up only in the spring and summer of 1990 as a product of a Chinese crackdown—in line with the pessimistic hypothesis. Coverage of Tibet in general was in fact higher before the award, thanks to intensified government repression in March 1989: there were 142 articles with Tibet in the headline between October 1988 and September 1989, and 63 articles in 1990. In short, the Nobel Committee's hope—that the Prize would bring greater worldwide media attention to Tibet in particular (and perhaps to Chinese human rights abuses more generally)—is not supported by the data.

In contrast, awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi in 1991 does appear to have led to greater worldwide media

FIGURE 2
Coverage of Tibet
Major World Newspapers



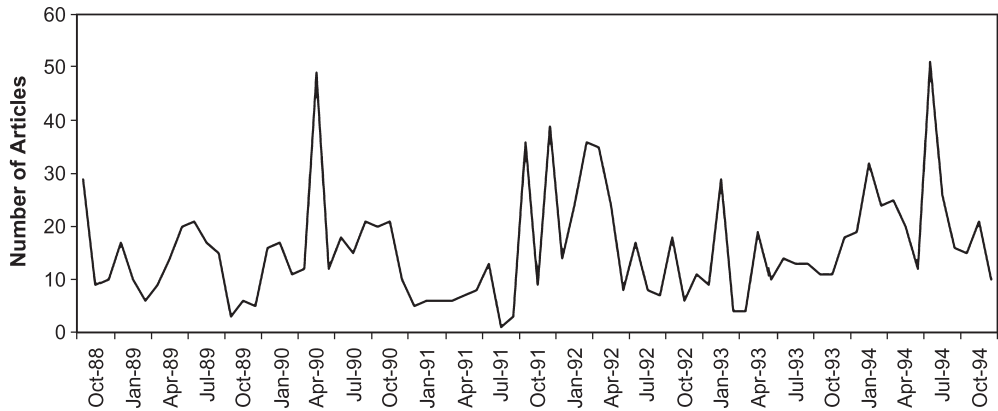
Source: LexisNexis Academic.

attention to her country. This is not readily apparent from Figure 3, which was calculated using the same method as above for Myanmar/Burma. However, in the three years preceding the award, global media coverage averaged 13 articles per month; in the three years after the award, beginning January 1992, global media coverage averaged 17.61 articles per month. The disparity is even greater in the year immediately before and immediately after the award—8.83 versus 17.33 articles. These differences are reproduced, or are even greater, when one calculates median, as opposed to mean, monthly coverage. However, Prize advocates should not take heart: as I discuss in greater detail below, in the Prize's wake, the ruling junta showed even less tolerance than usual for political dissent, and increased media attention failed to moderate the regime's repressive behavior.

The Myanmar case was less typical, however, than that of Tibet. I cannot, due to space constraints, present all the other cases in equivalent detail. But the results follow the same pattern. Neither Rigoberta Menchú nor the Guatemalan Civil War (1992) received substantially greater sustained coverage after the award.³⁵ The plight of East Timor (1996) was covered with

³⁵ This conclusion, based on systematic examination of global media, runs counter to accounts that credit the award with drawing international attention to the stalled peace negotiations and government abuses in Guatemala. See Kay B. Warren, *Indigenous Movements and their Critics: Pan-Maya Activism in Guatemala* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 53; Daniel Wilkinson, *Silence on the Mountain: Stories of Terror, Betrayal, and Forgetting in Guatemala* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 30.

FIGURE 3
Coverage of Myanmar/Burma
Major World Newspapers

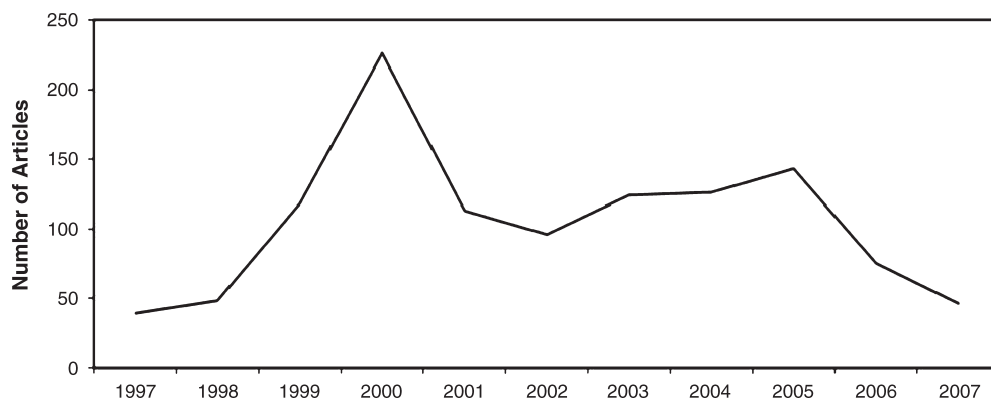


Source: LexisNexis Academic.

equal intensity (or lack thereof) in the year before the award and in the year after: respectively, 11 articles per month versus around 10 articles per month. The impressive coverage during the award period (October–December 1996)—27 articles per month—waned quickly. The following year (1997) the Committee sought to draw attention to the cause of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, but the effects were either small or nonexistent. By one measure (references to “landmines” in the text of articles in major world newspapers), there were substantially more references in the year *before* the award (238.1 per month) than in the year after (172.1). By another measure (references to “landmine” in headlines alone), the later period saw a slight increase over the earlier (14.1 vs. 12.5 articles per month). Not only is this difference small in absolute terms, but it shrinks to insignificance when one takes into account long-term agenda-setting trends: the landmines issue had been steadily gaining coverage—with monthly averages rising from 6 to 8.92 to 12.5 articles in the three years preceding the award.

In 2003 and 2004, the Nobel Committee honored two individuals with extremely low world press profiles, and the award unquestionably helped them, as individuals, gain attention from the media. Shirin Ebadi appeared in the headline and lead paragraphs of merely three articles of major world newspapers in the three years preceding her award, but nearly 400 times in the three years thereafter. For Wangari Maathai, a Kenyan environmentalist and political figure, the corresponding figures are 8 and 216. But whether their causes profited is less clear. Maathai was associated with sustainable development and especially deforestation, causes whose profile rose along with the global environmentalist movement. Global media had thus devoted increasing

FIGURE 4
*Coverage of Iran and Reform
 Major World Newspapers*



Source: LexisNexis Academic.

attention to problems of deforestation, but there was no marked increase in the wake of her award. Al Gore and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change were honored in 2007 for raising public awareness of global warming. While media coverage of climate change, and specifically rising global temperatures, rose after 2007, one cannot with confidence credit the Peace Prize; media attention to climate change had been steadily rising for years. As a leading liberal voice in Iran, Ebadi is linked to political and social reform agendas as well as human rights. Figure 4 demonstrates clearly, based on references to Iran and reform in the headlines and lead paragraphs of major world newspapers between 1997 and 2007, that Ebadi's increased personal prominence did not translate into systematically greater coverage of the impediments to, demand for, or prospects for reform in Iran.

In conclusion, with the possible exception of Myanmar (1991), the Nobel Peace Prize cannot be credited with drawing global media attention to recipients' causes. When recipients are largely unknown, the award can be a personal boon, but such cases are rare. Moreover, even in these instances, there is little evidence that the award redounds to the benefit of their causes, which the Nobel Committee wishes to further. So much for the Prize advocates' hopes.

PERVERSE CONSEQUENCES?

The conferral of the Nobel Peace Prize *does*, however, appear to have an impact in certain circumstances more in line with the previously articulated expectations of pessimists. Of the nine aspirational cases since 1971 aiming at domestic change (see Appendix), six produced the opposite effect of that desired; the other three seem to have had no effect; and in no case does the

Prize appear to have played a substantial role in bringing about the changes favored and envisioned by the Nobel Committee. The Committee has the best of intentions in promoting responsive regimes and the protection of human rights, but the consequences can be perverse.

Space constraints preclude adequate tracing of all these stories, and thus I focus on the post-Cold War cases, in which one might have expected the warming international environment to be most conducive to effective international pressure—that is, a best-case scenario for the Peace Prize. Few, for instance, would be surprised to learn that the award to Sakharov in 1975 sparked a vigorous crackdown by the authorities on Soviet dissidents; the Prize helped temporarily protect Sakharov himself, but even he would eventually be exiled to Gorky after his outspoken opposition to the war in Afghanistan.³⁶ Of the five such cases since 1989, three produced unexpected negative effects, described below. The other two are exceptional. The 1993 award, bestowed on Nelson Mandela and F.W. de Klerk, did not have disruptive effects because, while it sought to encourage democratic change, that change was already well underway, and it was transpiring, after years of confrontation, through a negotiated solution. But this was a singular case: in contrast to nearly all other domestic change cases, in which the Peace Prize honored the opponents of repression and implicitly or explicitly criticized the powers that be—a tack taken with regard to South Africa as well, with predictably disappointing results, in 1960 and 1984—the Prize Committee in 1993 hailed the South African government for its initiative, encouraging it along its liberalizing path rather than taking it to task for its misdeeds. The Prize thus worked *with* state power, rather than against it. The previous year's award, to Rigoberta Menchú, was also unusual, in that it came amidst an ongoing civil war. Levels of violence were already high in Guatemala, and the conflict had ebbed and waned several times. It is difficult to attribute any increase in state violence to the award, nor did the Guatemalan government seem to grow any more intransigent than it already was. Overall, the award seems to have had little impact on the stalled negotiations, which resumed only a year later, after a UN special representative came on the scene; Menchú and the Nobel Prize were, from the perspective of the peace process, irrelevant.³⁷

To be clear, the claim here is *not* that the Nobel Peace Prize was the primary or fundamental reason that these states repressed activism on behalf of democracy and human rights. After all, in these cases, the Prize was given precisely to draw attention to ongoing or recently intensified repression in authoritarian regimes and to pressure those regimes for change. Moreover, as I make

³⁶ Andrew and Mitrokhin, *Sword and the Shield*, 322–336; Richard Lourie, *Sakharov: A Biography* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2002), 276–277.

³⁷ Susanne Jonas, “Democratization Through Peace: The Difficult Case of Guatemala,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 42 (Winter 2000): 9–38, at 12; David Holiday, “Guatemala’s Long Road to Peace,” *Current History* 96 (February 1997): 68–74.

clear in the brief case studies that follow, an upsurge of activism and repression often preceded, and motivated, the award. Finally, as I discuss below, other factors, in addition to the Prize, often contributed to the authoritarian regime's sense of encirclement and anxiety. But, within the necessary space constraints, I do seek at least to clear room for the possibility, and to suggest that it is plausible, that the Nobel Peace Prize not only failed to produce greater tolerance of dissent, but exacerbated the regime's perceived vulnerability and boosted its incentives to stifle dissent in the short to medium run. In the long run, the increased repression that follows the award *might* contribute to liberalization, and indeed one could argue that this was the case in South Africa after Desmond Tutu was honored in 1984. But such processes are highly contingent; China, Iran, and Myanmar—the three cases explored below—have not, in the years since the award, experienced much political liberalization. Moreover, this complex causal chain does not reflect how the Nobel Committee envisions the award exerting a progressive impact. Because the Prize advocates' catalog of effects focuses on the short to medium run, so too does this article, fully aware that the repression prompted by the award may nevertheless be part of the winding, long-run, and always uncertain path to liberalism.

1989: 14th Dalai Lama

One might reasonably argue that the Peace Prize awarded in 1989 to Tibet's supreme religious leader and national symbol made little difference to the Tibetan cause. China's response to Tibetan demands for self-rule has varied over time, but it took a hard-line turn in 1988 after Tibetan activism intensified. The authorities imposed martial law in Lhasa in March 1989, after bloody clashes between protesters and police, and although it was formally lifted in May 1990, that was a "cosmetic exercise," as the authorities retained and continued to employ these repressive tools.³⁸ Tibetans were highly mobilized immediately before and immediately after the award, and Chinese policy was repressive before and after as well. The Peace Prize would, at first blush, seem to have had little impact. Yet such an account presumes that the path of politics is linear, that the Tibetans and the Chinese government would, independent of the Peace Prize, have proceeded along the same way regardless. It misses the contingency of political process, and it fails to grasp how the Nobel Prize altered the politics on both sides.

In one sense, the award was successful. It sought to give emotional succor to the Tibetan people and to democracy activists across China, and to pressure the Chinese government for change. After the Tiananmen Square massacre of June 1989, the Committee used the Peace Prize to send a message of interna-

³⁸ Human Rights Watch, *Merciless Repression: Human Rights in Tibet* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1990); Jonathan Mirsky, "Chinese Chase U.S. Loans by Lifting Martial Law in Tibet," *Globe and Mail*, 3 May 1990.

tional displeasure to the Chinese government.³⁹ In awarding the Prize to the 14th Dalai Lama, it emphasized his “philosophy of peace” and his steadfast opposition to violence, no matter how worthy the cause, in pointed contrast to the Chinese authorities’ repression; in Tibet, “as in other parts of the world, it is becoming increasingly obvious that problems cannot be solved by the use of brutal military power to crush peaceful demonstrations.” That the international community had sided with the Tibetan struggle against the “Chinese invaders”⁴⁰ indeed seems to have buoyed the spirits of Tibetans and revitalized their flagging campaign. “Tibetans everywhere considered this a major victory”—confirmation of the justice of their cause and a sign of the world’s support. Tibetans in Lhasa reacted to the announcement with pride, and some took to the streets in celebration.⁴¹ A representative of the Dalai Lama declared the award “the best thing that has happened to Tibetans in 40 years.”⁴² That fall and especially the following winter and spring, political unrest spread across Tibet.⁴³ Tibetans calculated that with the world focused upon them, thanks to the Prize, the Chinese authorities would prove more lenient. They were wrong.

The Chinese undertook a vicious crackdown in late fall 1989. A week after the Nobel Committee’s announcement, the authorities forbade even such traditional, non-violent forms of celebration as burning incense and throwing *tsampa* (flour) into the air. Public religious observances were also banned.⁴⁴ Political imprisonment, according to Human Rights Watch, abounded in the period after the award.⁴⁵ On the first anniversary of the imposition of martial law, in March 1990, China held a military parade in Lhasa that was intended, by one account, to make “clear what would follow even the most peaceful demonstration against their presence.” Tibetans reported that the parade

³⁹ Sheila Rule, “How, and Why, the Dalai Lama Won the Peace Prize,” *The New York Times*, 13 October 1989.

⁴⁰ Press Release, 5 October 1989, accessed at http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1989/press.html, 8 July 2009; Presentation Speech, accessed at http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1989/presentation-speech.html, 8 July 2009.

⁴¹ Human Rights Watch, *Merciless Repression*, 27; Melvyn C. Goldstein, *The Snow Lion and the Dragon: China, Tibet, and the Dalai Lama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 91. See also Tsering Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows: A History of Modern Tibet Since 1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 431.

⁴² Philip Colley, “Support for Tibet Grows in China,” *Guardian*, 4 January 1990.

⁴³ “Unrest Spreads in Tibet,” *Guardian*, 6 April 1990.

⁴⁴ “New Crackdown Follows Celebrations in Lhasa,” *The Washington Post*, 21 December 1989; Human Rights Committee of LAWASIA and Tibet Information Network, *Defying the Dragon: China and Human Rights in Tibet* (London: Tibet Information Network, 1991), 30; Ronald David Schwartz, *Circle of Protest: Political Ritual in the Tibetan Uprising, 1987–92* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 173; Robert Barnett, “Symbols and Protest: The Iconography of Demonstrations in Tibet, 1987–1990” in Robert Barnett, ed., *Resistance and Reform in Tibet* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 250–251.

⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch, *Merciless Repression*, 34–37.

marked the authorities' "biggest show of force" since political unrest had commenced two and a half years before.⁴⁶ The last six months of martial law—from November 1989 to April 1990—reportedly marked the period of most-intense Chinese repression, with as many as 2,000 Tibetans executed, countless more imprisoned and tortured, houses razed, and monasteries violated. Human Rights Watch/Asia Watch reported in May 1990 that "the incidence of serious torture is at least as bad as it has been for years, and in some cases, it seems worse."⁴⁷ While the intensified repression in Tibet cannot be divorced from the larger context of the Tiananmen protest and crackdown—indeed, the Nobel Prize was awarded to the Dalai Lama within that context—the patterns in Tibet were distinctive, part of a history that preceded Tiananmen and the democracy movement and proceeded at least somewhat independently of them. Repression in Tibet came not immediately after Tiananmen, but, hardly coincidentally, later—with the Dalai Lama winning the Peace Prize and with the international community seeming to legitimize Tibetan independence claims. In fact, beginning in November 1989, government cadres charged with countering Tibetan "splittism," especially in monasteries and nunneries, were specifically told, in addition to their other duties, "to condemn and campaign against the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to the Dalai Lama."⁴⁸ As one scholar concludes, the Prize, marking the culmination of a string of international successes by the Dalai Lama, signaled that "momentum appeared to have shifted to the Dalai Lama ... [and] Beijing reacted predictably to the threat this shift in momentum posed by moving to a more hard-line, integrationist policy."⁴⁹ If the Nobel Committee was sending a message, so too was the Chinese government.

Awarding the Peace Prize to the 14th Dalai Lama was gratifying to Tibetan nationalists living abroad, and it may even have been welcomed by nationalists within Tibet. But it did little to make an autonomous, let alone an independent, Tibet a reality or to make the Chinese authorities more open to Tibetan demands—just the opposite. Instead, the government, eager to prove that it could not be bullied by the international community and that it had resolve in reserves, battened down the hatches, refused concessions, and ramped up repression. That the award might have this effect was anticipated by at least some contemporary observers,⁵⁰ and the reaction may have been reinforced by Chinese cultural norms highly sensitive to loss of "face."

⁴⁶ "Eyewitness: Chinese Show of Force Chills Tibet," *Guardian*, 9 March 1990.

⁴⁷ Peter Ellingsen, "Crackdown Reported in Tibet," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 May 1990; Lena H. Sun, "Human-Rights Abuses Said to Mount in Tibet," *The Washington Post*, 29 May 1990.

⁴⁸ Ronald D. Schwartz, "The Anti-Splittist Campaign and Tibetan Political Consciousness," in Barnett, ed., *Resistance and Reform*, 217.

⁴⁹ Goldstein, *Snow Lion and the Dragon*, 91. See also Shakya, *Dragon in the Land of Snows*, 431–433.

⁵⁰ Jonathan Mirsky, "Giving Peace Prize to Dalai Lama may Tighten China's Screws on Tibet," *Globe and Mail*, 9 October 1989.

The Nobel Peace Prize did not, of course, produce this unwelcome backlash in isolation from other instances of international pressure—notably U.S. congressional resolutions—and domestic discontent in Tibet and elsewhere in China. As international “interference” in China’s “domestic affairs” grew and as civil society became more restive, the Chinese government reconsidered the moderate stance it had adopted toward Tibet in the first half of the decade, and it clamped down on the dissent it had permitted (in relative terms) to flourish. But the Prize did mark the symbolic culmination of the Dalai Lama’s efforts to win international support for the Tibetan cause and to persuade the world of Chinese aggression against his country. In the mid-1980s he began to travel more frequently abroad, with an expressly political agenda, to establish allied groups across the world, especially but not exclusively in the United States, to recruit foreign parliamentarians to the Tibetan cause, and to build global popular support for Tibet.⁵¹ The Dalai Lama proved a skilled politician, outmaneuvering the Chinese in Western forums; he was successful beyond all expectations, and the Peace Prize was perhaps his greatest tactical success. But, despite the Dalai Lama’s tactical accomplishments, the strategy was misguided, and Tibet today is no closer to autonomy than it was 30 years ago. As one historian concludes, the Dalai Lama “miscalculated.” His efforts did not “prod Beijing toward further compromise” but “only strengthened the hand of hard-liners.”⁵² The Peace Prize seems, perhaps even more than Tiananmen, to have been the proverbial straw that broke the camel’s, or perhaps the tiger’s, back. China’s reaction to the Prize was its new approach in microcosm: the Prize spurred China not to adopt a more liberal policy toward Tibetan nationalism, but rather to tighten the screws.

1991: Aung San Suu Kyi

Observers of Myanmar rightly give the Nobel Peace Prize credit for fixing the world’s attention on the plight of the democratic opposition, embodied in the figure of Aung San Suu Kyi.⁵³ But this, I will argue, represents only the positive side of the ledger. As in China, the Peace Prize brought substantial costs as well for the very cause it sought to promote.

One might argue that in Myanmar, as in China, the Nobel Prize was more a response to, than a cause of, state repression, and indeed the human rights situation had long been dire in Burma/Myanmar and, in the months before the Nobel Committee’s announcement, it was reportedly deteriorating,⁵⁴ perhaps

⁵¹ Goldstein, *Snow Lion and the Dragon*, 75–78; Grunfeld, *Making of Modern Tibet*, 230–232, 236–238; Shakya, *Dragon in the Land of Snows*, 412–416; Smith, Jr., *Tibetan Nation*, chap. 15.

⁵² Grunfeld, *Making of Modern Tibet*, 233, and generally 233–235.

⁵³ David I. Steinberg, *Burma, The State of Myanmar* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2001), 90.

⁵⁴ Louise Williams, “Junta Tightens Grip on Power,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 March 1991.

contributing to the Committee's choice. But the decision to honor Aung San Suu Kyi intensified the regime's fear of encirclement, activated its sensitivity to foreign interference in Myanmar's affairs, and increased its reason and incentives to lash out. Just before the Prize was awarded, Myanmar's military rulers—the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC)—purged the civil service, firing 15,000 civil servants. The move marked the final stage of the SLORC's steady reassertion of control over Myanmar's institutions and society,⁵⁵ but it was also “a symptom,” according to a “well-informed Yangon resident,” “of [the regime's] anxiety,” specifically its “nervousness” at the prospect of Suu Kyi winning the Prize. Later that fall, Amnesty International charged the SLORC with having intensified its efforts to crush the country's nonviolent opposition.⁵⁶ Student leaders were rounded up in the days and weeks after the Prize announcement; opposition and ethnic political party leaders were detained and asked to provide their “opinion” on the awarding of the Peace Prize to Suu Kyi. Also that fall, the remaining leadership of the country's second-largest opposition party fled to Thailand, declaring that, as a result of the regime's persecution, “the status of all political parties has been undermined.”⁵⁷ Offering concessions was the last thing on the SLORC's mind as it faced a world “bullying our country, threatening our country.”⁵⁸ It instead focused on harassing and punishing Suu Kyi's aides and on trying to discredit Suu Kyi by alleging that she was an agent of imperialist powers, by launching sexist broadsides against the very prospect of female leadership, and by playing the race card against her children.⁵⁹ When students protested that fall, all institutions of higher education were shuttered, to reopen only three years later.⁶⁰ By helping to boost “her name and her aura,” a Western diplomat observed, the Peace Prize made Aung San Suu Kyi a target; the SLORC could no longer ignore her.⁶¹ The Prize may also have undermined military moderates, who, desirous of improving Myanmar's international standing, sought a more tolerant approach toward Suu Kyi and her fellow democracy activists.⁶²

⁵⁵ Michael W. Charney, *A History of Modern Burma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 177.

⁵⁶ William Branigin, “Myanmar Said to Purge Civil Service; Opposition Leader's Candidacy for Nobel Focuses International Ire,” *The Washington Post*, 14 October 1991; Branigin, “Myanmar Steps Up Repression, Says Amnesty,” *The Washington Post*, 10 December 1991.

⁵⁷ *Myanmar: 'No Law at All'—Human Rights Violations Under Military Rule* (New York: Amnesty International USA, 1992), 9.

⁵⁸ David E. Sanger, “Burmese Military Increases Attacks on Detained Opposition Leader,” *The New York Times*, 29 December 1991.

⁵⁹ Branigin, “Myanmar Said to Purge Civil Service”; Charney, *Modern Burma*, 176.

⁶⁰ “Burmese Universities are Closed as Military Acts to Block Protests,” *The New York Times*, 13 December 1991.

⁶¹ Sanger, “Burmese Military Increases Attacks.”

⁶² Andrew Selth, “The Armed Forces and Military Rule in Burma,” in Robert I. Rotberg, ed., *Burma: Prospects for a Democratic Future* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1998), 99.

As part of its post-Nobel Prize ramped-up repression, Myanmar's military government initiated that winter an all-out military assault against pro-democratic rebels and the ethnic insurgents, notably the Karen, with which they were allied. This was reportedly the most intense assault in more than 40 years on the Karen, and for the first time, the military prosecuted the campaign on all regional fronts at once, producing a transnational refugee crisis. By the end of March, the military had scored impressive victories, including the capture of a key strategic mountain from which it could freely lob mortars and artillery into the rebel capital, though these advances fell short of the military's promise to capture the rebels' headquarters.⁶³ The campaign signaled the always-anxious regime's heightened anxiety in the wake of the Prize, but it also revealed the military's increased capability, thanks to an infusion of Chinese weapons. (A complementary explanation is that the SLORC saw these military operations as diversionary, hoping thereby to focus the population's attention on matters other than democracy.) The regime's success—magnified because the pro-democracy movement had tarnished itself by engaging in an internal witch hunt in which it used torture to extract confessions from alleged government spies—may have reduced its anxiety to the point that it could allow some cosmetic concessions, such as releasing a few hundred less-prominent political prisoners, allowing Suu Kyi's family to visit her without preconditions, opening a dialogue with the now-weakened opposition, and (by fall) lifting martial law; however, "these actions and promises," one analyst noted, "add[ed] up to nothing more than the appearance of change."⁶⁴

In sum, the Nobel Peace Prize did bring greater attention to Myanmar and coalesce Western pressure, but the result was to weaken, not strengthen, pro-democracy forces: SLORC repression grew, and the pro-democracy movement cracked. The events of 1991–1992 bore out an observation common among Burmese: the military regime has been only marginally responsive to pressure, whether domestic or international in origin, and such pressure often has proved counterproductive.⁶⁵ As one balanced critic of the West's policy of censure,

⁶³ Because of the intensity of the military's efforts, one analyst characterized the campaign as a "clear defeat," but it is not clear that the military saw it that way. See Josef Silverstein, "Burma in an International Perspective," *Asian Survey* 32 (October 1992): 951–963, at 959. See, generally, Larry Jagan, "Offensive Targets Burma's Ethnic Rebels," *Toronto Star*, 16 February 1992; William Branigin, "Burmese Recount Tales of Terror at Hands of Troops," *The Washington Post*, 16 February 1992; Barbara Crosette, "Thousands of Burmese Said to Flee Drive by Army," *The New York Times*, 5 March 1992; Philip Shenon, "Military Operations to Stop," *The New York Times*, 29 April 1992.

⁶⁴ Others attributed these liberalizing moves to the military's inability to overrun the Karen headquarters before the monsoon season. Generally, on the liberalization, see David I. Steinberg, "Myanmar in 1992: Plus Ça Change ...?" *Asian Survey* 33 (February 1993): 175–183, esp. 176–178; Silverstein, "Burma in an International Perspective"; and Robert D. McFadden, "Burmese Rulers Releasing a Dozen Political Prisoners," *The New York Times*, 26 April 1992.

⁶⁵ Sheryl WuDunn, "Dissent by Burmese Only Brings More Repression," *The New York Times*, 25 November 1990.

sanctions, and isolation notes, “the SLORC/SPDC [State Peace and Development Council, as the SLORC was renamed in 1997] has generally appeared more concerned about domestic stability than international respectability,” and the Western approach has reinforced the sense of siege prevalent among the country’s nationalistic military leaders—without substantially undercutting the state’s capacity for repression.⁶⁶

Not only did the Prize bolster regime hard-liners, but it also mobilized pro-democratic forces in Myanmar, giving the regime greater excuse to crack down and thus deepening the tragedy. Many accounts emphasize that the award gave hope to beleaguered democracy activists. One Yangon resident told journalists, “This is the best news we have had for a long time. It must make a difference. Not even the Burmese military can ignore the message conveyed by the Nobel Prize.”⁶⁷ On the very day the Prize was awarded to Suu Kyi in absentia, students rallied against the SLORC in the largest anti-government demonstration since 1988, when the regime had squashed the pro-democracy movement. Dozens of her supporters were arrested for hanging congratulatory notices, and perhaps 900 were ultimately arrested that month.⁶⁸

Computerized content analysis of global media also suggests that protest activity in Myanmar was more intense in fall 1991 and that government repression was especially severe toward the end of 1991 and especially in 1992. The IDEA database lists no “protest demonstrations” in 1989–1990 or 1992–1993, but it lists two such events in 1991, both in mid-October, after the award had been announced. This source lists more arrests and detentions in 1992, especially January and February, than in surrounding years. It cites also three times as many military raids in 1992, especially in the mid-spring; that year also saw four major military mobilizations, three in January.⁶⁹ The World Handbook of Political Indicators IV records twice as many “government violent actions” in 1992 as in surrounding years and nearly twice as many “government forceful actions.” More clearly targeted domestically are events that the database categorizes as “civil direct,” “civil violent,” and “civil forceful” actions, and these also reveal heightened activity in 1992.⁷⁰ One should not rely too heavily on

⁶⁶ Morten B. Pedersen, *Promoting Human Rights in Burma: A Critique of Western Sanctions Policy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), quote at 219, generally 221–233. See also Andrew Selth, “Burma’s ‘Saffron Revolution’ and the Limits of International Influence,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 62 (September 2008): 281–297.

⁶⁷ Neil Kelly and Tony Samstag, “Nobel Peace Prize Gives Burma Hope,” *The Times*, 15 October 1991. See also Steinberg, *Burma*, 91.

⁶⁸ “Students Protest Burma’s Junta,” *Toronto Star*, 10 December 1991; Raymond Whitaker, “Suu Kyi’s Supporters ‘Arrested’ in Burma,” *Independent*, 10 December 1991; David E. Sanger, “Burmese Dissidents Say 900 were Arrested in Crackdown,” *The New York Times*, 19 December 1991.

⁶⁹ Integrated Data for Event Analysis, available at www.vranet.com/idea. Data compiled by Aaron Rapport, August 2007.

⁷⁰ In the case of the *World Handbook*, these data are especially preliminary, according to its editors in an April 2002 memo. Data compiled by Aaron Rapport, August 2007.

such data, since media access to Myanmar is highly restricted and coverage is necessarily spotty.⁷¹ But it is suggestive. Some have argued that, more broadly, Western policy has sustained false hopes and an unrealistically hard line among the Burmese opposition and that the Nobel Peace Prize in particular may have reduced Suu Kyi's room for maneuver, compelling her to hew publicly to an uncompromising stance.⁷²

Some observers acknowledged that one could not expect “the Burmese military, with its xenophobic instincts and skill at repression, suddenly to collapse or to feel very much shame,” but they hoped that the Prize might sufficiently embarrass Myanmar's neighbors that they would bring their leverage to bear.⁷³ In November 1991, perhaps because of the attention the Prize had drawn, Myanmar's neighbors stopped opposing a UN resolution rebuking the SLORC—a resolution they had blocked a year before—and even China and Cuba, which normally opposed any measure criticizing a country's human rights situation, voted for the resolution, which explicitly noted the Prize.⁷⁴ However, this was hardly the norm. Myanmar's neighbors, with the notable exception of the Philippines, generally offered little criticism and instead continued to try to integrate the country into regional institutions. Members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) persisted in their approach of “constructive engagement,” and they continued to conduct lucrative trade in raw materials and arms with Myanmar.⁷⁵ Human rights groups singled out ASEAN member states for their lack of cooperation in bringing pressure on the SLORC.⁷⁶ For Myanmar's neighbors, Nobel Peace Prize or not, it was business as usual. European countries gradually followed suit, so that by 1995, Myanmar had won “the battle for global acceptance,” and even the U.S. commitment to isolating the regime was wearing thin.⁷⁷

⁷¹ Another concern is that the data reflect actual events less than they do global media interest, which increased after the Peace Prize. However, while coverage of Burma was greater from January 1992—as much as 30 percent more—it seems unlikely that this can account for the even larger increases in reported events, at times on the order of 200–300 percent.

⁷² Pedersen, *Promoting Human Rights*, 232–233, 250.

⁷³ Steven Erlanger, “The Power of the Peace Prize May be Lost on Myanmar,” *The New York Times*, 20 October 1991.

⁷⁴ Paul Lewis, “U.N. Rebukes Burma Military for Refusing to Yield Power,” *The New York Times*, 30 November 1991.

⁷⁵ John Bray, *Burma: The Politics of Constructive Engagement* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995), chap. 5.

⁷⁶ Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, *Burma—The International Response to Continuing Human Rights Violations*, 10 February 1992. More generally, see J. Mohan Malik, “Burma's Role in Regional Security,” in Robert I. Rotberg, ed., *Burma: Prospects for a Democratic Future* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1998), 121–123; Steinberg, *Burma*, 237–240.

⁷⁷ Barbara Bradley, “U.S. Slowly Loses Fight to Isolate Regime Over Rights Abuses,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 4 January 1995.

2003: Shirin Ebadi

In awarding the Peace Prize to Shirin Ebadi of Iran, the Nobel Committee declared its “hope that the Prize will be an inspiration for all those who struggle for human rights and democracy in her country, in the Moslem world, and in all countries where the fight for human rights needs inspiration and support.”⁷⁸ While not all Iranians were enamored of the mullahs and while some were attracted to the West, liberal reformers like Ebadi were lonely voices in Iranian society, lacking grassroots support.⁷⁹ The Nobel Committee sought through the prestigious award to bolster Ebadi and like-minded activists in Iran and across the Muslim world; to attract local support to their cause; to draw international media attention; and thereby to compel illiberal regimes to tolerate liberal oases in their midst. We have already seen that the award did not draw more international media attention to the fate of reform in Iran but that it did boost the profile of Ebadi, relatively unknown before October 2003. In the West, Ebadi came to serve as a major, if not the preeminent, symbol of the struggle for liberalism in Iran and of the regime’s insecurity and its repressive tendencies.⁸⁰

However, the Nobel Prize offered Ebadi and her fellow reformers scant protection. Not only did they make little headway, but their political position slipped as they tried to weather a relentless conservative assault. Ebadi herself lamented in 2005 that “nothing has changed in Iran. Those who were in power are still in power.”⁸¹ Reformers had confronted substantial obstacles before 2003; conservatives, led by Iran’s supreme religious leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, had, especially since the election of the reformist Mohammed Khatami as president in 1997, employed the repressive tools of the state, as well as nonstate forces (“vigilantes”), to beat back the reform challenge.⁸² But the 2003 Peace Prize offered conservatives a new opening to intervene into Iran’s constrained yet still vaguely democratic politics. In January 2004—just three months after the Peace Prize announcement—the powerful Guardian Council disqualified some 3,600 reformist candidates for Parliament nationwide, including 80 incumbents, and as many as 900 of 1,700 candidates in Tehran alone. This was hardly more of the same: the number of disqualifications in 2004 was more than triple that of 2000, marking “an aggressive reassertion of authority by

⁷⁸ Press Release, 10 October 2003, accessed at http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2003/press.html, 8 July 2009.

⁷⁹ Assef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 134; Ali M. Ansari, “Continuous Regime Change From Within,” *Washington Quarterly* 26 (Fall 2003): 53–67, at 63.

⁸⁰ See, for instance, “The Woman the Mullahs Fear,” *The New York Times*, 2 January 2009.

⁸¹ Scott Peterson, “How Iran’s Reformers Lost Their Political Way,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 1 July 2005.

⁸² See Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic*, 115–134; Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2003: Human Rights Developments in Iran*, accessed at <http://www.hrw.org/legacy/wr2k3/mideast3.html>, 8 July 2009.

conservatives”⁸³—according to some, a “conservative coup.” With many urban voters disengaged from politics and with key reformers urging a boycott, conservatives scored a large victory in the February elections; the next year, with reformers still sidelined, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was elected president.

Over the course of 2004, “the once-robust reform movement ... virtually evaporated”: newspapers and magazines were shut down; student activists were jailed or at least harassed. Human Rights Watch reported that “respect for basic human rights in Iran, especially freedom of expression and opinion,” while never strong, had “deteriorated”; torture and solitary confinement were used “routinely” to punish dissidents, independent websites were blocked. So-called “parallel institutions”—paramilitary groups, plainclothes intelligence agents, secret prisons—“became increasingly open in crushing student protests, detaining activists, writers, and journalists ... and threatening pro-democracy speakers and audiences at public events.”⁸⁴ One cannot discount the possibility that the regime might have pursued this path in 2004 regardless of the Nobel Committee’s decision in fall 2003; although Khatami’s election had put conservatives on the defensive, they swiftly regrouped, and Khatami’s presidency was generally marked by the consolidation of conservatives’ gains and by the enfeebling of the opposition.⁸⁵ Further, the U.S. victory in Iraq in spring 2003, in which the “coalition of the willing” had easily defeated the strongest Arab national army; the reported U.S. dismissal of Iran’s sweeping diplomatic overtures shortly thereafter in May; and the presence of huge numbers of U.S. troops on Iran’s doorstep—all these left the Iranian regime feeling deeply insecure in the latter half of 2003. By one account, in the wake of the Iraq war, “in their 24-year reign, the clerics had seldom felt so threatened and vulnerable.”⁸⁶ At the very least, it gave them political cover to crack down at home, so as to counter foreign interference in Iran’s affairs. By awarding the Prize to a leading reformer on the heels of the Iraq war and of Iran’s rejected “grand bargain” with the United States, the Nobel Committee only added to the conservatives’ fears of encirclement and bolstered their disinclination to give ground

⁸³ Karl Vick, “Iranian Reformers Protest Move Barring Many from Reelection,” *The New York Times*, 12 January 2004.

⁸⁴ Robin Wright, “Keeping Faith in Reform, and Islam, in Iran,” *The Washington Post*, 15 December 2004; Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2005: Human Rights Overview, Iran, 2004*, accessed at www.hrw.org/english/docs/2005/01/13/iran9803.htm, 8 July 2009.

⁸⁵ Ali Gheissari and Vali Nasr, *Democracy in Iran: History and the Quest for Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 136–145; Fakhreddin Azimi, *The Quest for Democracy in Iran: A Century of Struggle Against Authoritarian Rule* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 380–399; and Elliot Hen-Tov, “Understanding Iran’s New Authoritarianism,” *Washington Quarterly* 30 (Winter 2006–2007): 163–179, esp. 164–169. For a more generous assessment of the reformists’ achievements and of Khatami’s leadership, see Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 186–191.

⁸⁶ Trita Parsi, “The Price of Not Talking to Iran,” *World Policy Journal* 23 (Winter 2006–2007): 11–17, at 13. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for urging me to emphasize this context.

to the domestic opposition. There is some evidence that hard-liners understood the Prize precisely in this light, as an attempt to interfere with the upcoming parliamentary elections.⁸⁷ It is at least plausible that the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Shirin Ebadi contributed to, perhaps even sparked, and at least facilitated the crackdown of 2004.

Not only might the Prize have prompted the regime to silence its critics, but the critics seem to have silenced themselves. Amnesty International claims that the 2003 award “contributed to the growth and increasing self-confidence of civil society,” but it provides no evidence to substantiate this assertion.⁸⁸ In fact, conservative efforts to delegitimize the award as a tool of Western interference succeeded in putting reformers on the defensive.⁸⁹ Immediately after the award announcement, a close aide to Khatami told Reuters that Ebadi’s winning the Prize was “very good news for every Iranian,” but state-run media made little mention of the award, and Khatami himself subsequently dismissed the Peace Prize as “not very important” compared to its counterparts in science and literature.⁹⁰ Khatami thereby undercut a fellow reformer, though it is unclear whether this is because Ebadi represented a secularist break with his vision of Iran as still an Islamic republic,⁹¹ or because, ever the cautious politician, he recognized that any effort to use her prize to further the cause of reform would leave him vulnerable to conservative attack and thus politically hamstrung.⁹² This has generally been the fate in Iran of criticism originating abroad: nationalist conservatives use it to bludgeon their reformist opponents, and reformers feel compelled to join their opponents in distancing themselves from the West.⁹³

The Nobel Committee, like U.S. “democracy promotion” efforts in Iran, has adopted the view that pressure on the regime and moral as well as financial support for liberal Iranian civil society is the most effective way to promote

⁸⁷ Mahmood Monshipouri, “The Road to Globalization Runs Through Women’s Struggle: Iran and the Impact of the Nobel Peace Prize,” *World Affairs* 167 (Summer 2004): 3–14, at 7.

⁸⁸ *Amnesty International Report 2005*, Iran.

⁸⁹ For examples of conservative reaction, see Parinoosh Arami and Parisa Hafezi, “No Official Fanfare for Nobel Win in Iran,” *New Zealand Herald*, 11 October 2003; “Gathering Storm over Iranian’s Peace Prize,” *Mercury*, 13 October 2003.

⁹⁰ Arami and Hafezi, “No Official Fanfare”; “Troubled Backdrop for Iranian’s Nobel Award,” *The Financial Times*, 11 October 2003; Dan de Luce, “Iran’s President Derides Woman Lawyer’s Nobel as Unimportant,” *Guardian*, 15 October 2003.

⁹¹ For this view, see Ali Gheissari and Vali Nasr, “Iran’s Democracy Debate,” *Middle East Policy* 11 (Summer 2004): 94–106, at 103–104.

⁹² For this interpretation of Khatami’s presidency on the whole, see Jahangir Amuzegar, “Khatami: A Folk Hero in Search of Relevance,” *Middle East Policy* 11 (Summer 2004): 75–93.

⁹³ For more examples, see Bahman Baktiari and Haleh Vaziri, “Iran: Doubting Reform,” *Current History* 102 (January 2003): 36–39; Jahangir Amuzegar, “Iran’s Crumbling Revolution,” *Foreign Affairs* 82 (January/February 2003): 44–57. There is little evidence to support the International Crisis Group’s optimism in this regard: see the ICG’s “Iran: Discontent and Disarray,” Middle East Briefing No. 11, 15 October 2003, 2, accessed at www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/middle_east_north_africa/iran_discontent_disarray.pdf, 12 October 2009.

change. The aims are well-meaning, but the strategy is misguided. As a Teheran University political scientist explained, “The more pressure the reformists feel—especially if the pressure is coming from outside—the greater the negative impact on their capacity to mobilize, especially in domestic politics.”⁹⁴ Unless they are already very weak, insecure regimes, like Iran’s, are more likely to stand firm than to bend, let alone break. Iran’s relative isolation from the international community and its oil wealth have insulated hard-liners from much international and domestic pressure,⁹⁵ but the example of Myanmar suggests that even a poor regime normally has the capabilities to impose its will at home. Since 2003, Iran’s domestic milieu has become even more repressive, and increased overt U.S. support for reform, epitomized by the establishment of an Iran democracy fund, bears at least some of the blame. By 2007, the regime had undertaken “one of its most ferocious crackdowns on dissent in years”—detaining as many as 150,000 for wearing un-Islamic clothing in the spring, arresting women’s rights advocates and student protesters, banning news stories on all sensitive topics, closing and forcing underground liberal civil society organizations, and, according to one critic, fostering “an atmosphere of absolute terror.” It is revealing that the West’s ideological allies in Iran, activists like Shirin Ebadi, are among the U.S. democracy fund’s most vociferous critics.⁹⁶

CONCLUSION

Only the most pollyannaish would expect the Nobel Peace Prize to markedly and directly promote peace, democracy, and human rights. Yet, the award demands a scholarly analysis—partly because it is always accompanied by a media frenzy that presumes the award’s significance, but more importantly because both the recipients and their political opponents take the award very seriously and factor it into their calculations.⁹⁷ This article presents evidence in abundance that the realist dismissal of such prizes does not accord with the behavior of opposition activists and regime leaders; realists may be right that the Prize is the product of a blinkered liberal internationalism that fails to take into account the realities of power politics, but they are wrong to think that these prizes have no impact on the dynamics of international and especially domestic politics. At the same time, however, this article has found little support for the Prize’s advocates’ chief hope: that the Prize substantially boosts international media coverage of the recipient and his or her cause.

⁹⁴ Karl Vick, “Iranian Hard-Liners Block Reform Bill,” *The Washington Post*, 4 June 2003.

⁹⁵ Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic*, 133.

⁹⁶ Neil MacFarquhar, “Iran Cracks Down on Dissent,” *The New York Times*, 24 June 2007; Negar Azimi, “Hard Realities of Soft Power,” *New York Times Magazine*, 24 June 2007.

⁹⁷ The sparse existing scholarly literature has rather different purposes than those of this article. See Bulloch, “For Whom Nobel Tolls?”; Richard T. Kinnier, Jerry L. Kernes, Jessie Wetherbe Hayman, Patricia N. Flynn, Elia Simon, and Laura A. Kilian, “Values Most Extolled in Nobel Peace Prize Speeches,” *Journal of Psychology* 141 (November 2007): 581–587.

More perplexingly, from the standpoint of both realists and Prize advocates, in some circumstances, the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize has a real effect on politics but to the detriment of human rights and democracy: when awarded to promote domestic change, as it has been more often in recent years, it in fact mobilizes the forces opposed to change and impedes liberalization. At the same time, it often—as the Nobel Committee hopes—boosts the spirits of liberal reformers. The result is to leave these reformers exposed, precisely at the moment when leaders are feeling most vulnerable and thus most likely to apply the state's power to repressive ends. In short, in such cases, the Nobel Peace Prize brings few benefits and substantial costs. The Nobel Committee's intentions are often noble, but the noblest of intentions can result in tragic consequences. That outcomes often depart from actors' intentions is, of course, something that realists have long observed about politics, and so this analysis marries a realist's structural and pessimistic sensibility to a liberal's appreciation of process.

In most recently honoring President Obama, the Nobel Committee clearly hoped to encourage his administration to further distance itself from the unilateralist tendencies, confrontational bearing, dismissive rhetoric, and disengaged posture of the George W. Bush years. Whether the Prize will have this effect remains to be seen, but, as this article's analysis might suggest, there is reason for skepticism. Obama is hardly a vulnerable liberal activist in an authoritarian regime, but he must worry about how his Peace Prize will reverberate in America's domestic politics. To those (more conservative) Americans less enthralled with Obama, the Peace Prize may be seen as a warning sign that Obama perhaps shares the Nobel Committee's international agenda (ultra-liberal, as they see it) and perhaps cares more deeply about advancing the common interests of the international community than about promoting the interests of the United States. The Nobel Peace Prize may thus prove a political liability for Obama and may compel him, in a political environment still deeply shaped by the legacy of September 11, to take steps to counteract the impression that he is some internationalist peacenik. Rather than release his inner dove, the Nobel Peace Prize may force him to brandish his public hawk. He may even feel required to part ways with the international community just to bolster his credentials as a defender of American interests.⁹⁸ If this comes to pass, the Nobel Peace Prize may once again help produce a world at odds with the Committee's intent and vision.

Insofar as the Nobel Peace Prize rewards accomplishment, it can be welcomed for its performative value, reproducing and thereby reaffirming liberal ideals. But insofar as the Prize is bestowed for actors' aspirations and insofar as it seeks to promote democratic political change, winners beware.*

⁹⁸ This paragraph draws on Ronald Krebs, "Winning the Prize, Losing the Peace," *The Washington Post*, 11 October 2009.

* For helpful comments on earlier versions of this article, the author is grateful to David Edelstein, Aaron Rapport, and the anonymous reviewers for *PSQ*. Thanks to Aaron Rapport for excellent research, without which this article would not have been possible. For financial support of this research, the author acknowledges the McKnight Foundation through the University of Minnesota.

APPENDIX

Nobel Peace Prize Winners, 1901–2009

<i>Year^a</i>	<i>Winner^b</i>	<i>Category^c</i>	<i>Accomplishment or Aspiration?</i>
1901	Henry Dunant	H	Accomplishment
1901	Frédéric Passy	P/D	Aspiration
1902	Élie Ducommun	P/D	Aspiration
1902	Albert Gobat	P/D	Aspiration
1903	Randal Cremer	P/D	Aspiration
1904	Institute of International Law	ORG-P/D	Aspiration
1905	Bertha von Suttner	P/D	Aspiration
1906	Theodore Roosevelt	PP	Accomplishment
1907	Ernesto Teodoro Moneta	P/D	Aspiration
1907	Louis Renault	P/D	Aspiration
1908	Klas Pontus Arnoldson	P/D	Aspiration
1908	Fredrik Bajer	P/D	Aspiration
1909	Auguste Beernaert	P/D	Aspiration
1909	Paul Henri d'Estournelles de Constant	P/D	Aspiration
1910	Permanent International Peace Bureau	ORG-P/D	Aspiration
1911	Tobias Asser	P/D	Aspiration
1911	Alfred Fried	P/D	Aspiration
1912	Elihu Root	PP	Accomplishment
1913	Henri La Fontaine	P/D	Aspiration
1917	International Committee of the Red Cross	ORG-H	Accomplishment
1919	Woodrow Wilson	P/D	Aspiration
1920	Léon Bourgeois	P/D	Aspiration
1921	Hjalmar Branting	P/D	Accomplishment
1921	Christian Lange	P/D	Aspiration
1922	Fridtjof Nansen	H	Accomplishment
1925	Sir Austen Chamberlain	PP	Accomplishment
1925	Charles G. Dawes	PP	Accomplishment
1926	Aristide Briand	P/D	Accomplishment
1926	Gustav Stresemann	P/D	Accomplishment
1927	Ludwig Quidde	P/D	Aspiration
1927	Ferdinand Buisson,	P/D	Aspiration
1929	Frank B. Kellogg	P/D	Aspiration
1930	Nathan Söderblom	P/D	Aspiration
1931	Jane Addams	P/D	Aspiration
1931	Nicholas Murray Butler	P/D	Aspiration
1933	Sir Norman Angell	P/D	Aspiration
1934	Arthur Henderson	P/D	Aspiration
1935	Carl von Ossietzky	DC	Aspiration
1936	Carlos Saavedra Lamas	P/D	Accomplishment
1937	Robert Cecil	P/D	Accomplishment
1938	Nansen International Office for Refugees	ORG-H	Accomplishment
1944	International Committee of the Red Cross	ORG-H	Accomplishment
1945	Cordell Hull	P/D	Aspiration
1946	Emily Greene Balch	P/D	Accomplishment
1946	John R. Mott	P/D	Accomplishment
1947	Friends Service Council, American Friends Service Committee	ORG-H	Accomplishment
1949	Lord Boyd Orr	H	Accomplishment

(Continued)

Appendix Continued

<i>Year^a</i>	<i>Winner^b</i>	<i>Category^c</i>	<i>Accomplishment or Aspiration?</i>
1950	Ralph Bunche	PP	Accomplishment
1951	Léon Jouhaux	P/D	Accomplishment
1952	Albert Schweitzer	H	Accomplishment
1953	George C. Marshall	P/D	Accomplishment
1954	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	ORG-H	Accomplishment
1957	Lester Bowles Pearson	PP	Accomplishment
1958	Georges Pire	H	Accomplishment
1959	Philip Noel-Baker	P/D	Aspiration
1960	Albert Lutuli	DC	Aspiration
1961	Dag Hammarskjöld	PP	Aspiration
1962	Linus Pauling	P/D	Aspiration
1963	International Committee of the Red Cross, League of Red Cross Societies	ORG-H	Accomplishment
1964	Martin Luther King Jr.	DC	Accomplishment
1965	United Nations Children's Fund	ORG-H	Accomplishment
1968	René Cassin	H	Accomplishment
1969	International Labour Organization	ORG-H	Accomplishment
1970	Norman Borlaug	H	Accomplishment
1971	Willy Brandt	PP	Accomplishment
1973	Henry Kissinger	PP	Accomplishment
1973	Le Duc Tho	PP	Accomplishment
1974	Seán MacBride	H	Accomplishment
1974	Eisaku Sato	P/D; PP	Accomplishment
1975	Andrei Sakharov	P/D; H	Aspiration
1976	Betty Williams	DC	Aspiration
1976	Mairead Corrigan	DC	Aspiration
1977	Amnesty International	H	Accomplishment
1978	Anwar al-Sadat	PP	Accomplishment
1978	Menachem Begin	PP	Accomplishment
1979	Mother Teresa	H	Accomplishment
1980	Adolfo Pérez Esquivel	H	Aspiration
1981	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	ORG-H	Accomplishment
1982	Alva Myrdal	P/D	Accomplishment
1982	Alfonso García Robles	P/D	Accomplishment
1983	Lech Walesa	DC	Accomplishment
1984	Desmond Tutu	DC	Aspiration
1985	International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War	P/D	Aspiration
1986	Elie Wiesel	O	Accomplishment
1987	Oscar Arias Sánchez	PP	Aspiration
1988	United Nations Peacekeeping Forces	ORG-P/D	Accomplishment
1989	The 14th Dalai Lama	DC	Aspiration
1990	Mikhail Gorbachev	P/D	Accomplishment
1991	Aung San Suu Kyi	DC	Aspiration
1992	Rigoberta Menchú Tum	DC	Aspiration
1993	Nelson Mandela	DC	Aspiration
1993	F.W. de Klerk	DC	Aspiration
1994	Yasser Arafat	PP	Aspiration
1994	Shimon Peres	PP	Aspiration

(Continued)

Appendix Continued

<i>Year^a</i>	<i>Winner^b</i>	<i>Category^c</i>	<i>Accomplishment or Aspiration?</i>
1994	Yitzhak Rabin	PP	Aspiration
1995	Joseph Rotblat, Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs	P/D	Accomplishment
1996	Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo	PP	Aspiration
1996	José Ramos-Horta	PP	Aspiration
1997	International Campaign to Ban Landmines, Jody Williams	ORG-P/D	Aspiration
1998	John Hume	PP	Aspiration
1998	David Trimble	PP	Aspiration
1999	Médecins Sans Frontières	ORG-H	Accomplishment
2000	Kim Dae-jung	PP	Aspiration
2001	United Nations, Kofi Annan	ORG-P/D	Aspiration
2002	Jimmy Carter	PP	Accomplishment
2003	Shirin Ebadi	DC	Aspiration
2004	Wangari Maathai	O	Aspiration
2005	International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohamed ElBaradei	ORG-P/D	Aspiration
2006	Muhammad Yunus, Grameen Bank	O	Accomplishment
2007	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change	O	Aspiration
2007	Al Gore	O	Aspiration
2008	Martti Ahtisaari	PP	Accomplishment
2009	Barack Obama	P/D	Aspiration

Source: http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/.

^aFor various reasons, a prize was not given in every year. Those years are excluded from this list.

^bIn years with multiple prize winners, winners are generally listed separately, except in those cases in which the winners are inseparable (for example, leader and organization, multiple arms of same organization).

^cAssignment based on the Nobel Committee's cited reason for the award. Categories of award: general peace/disarmament (P/D); humanitarian (H); intervention in specific peace process (PP); domestic change (DC); organization (ORG); other (O).