



Insight

President Obama, the EU, and the Nobel Prize

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Once again the Nobel Prize Committee has made a dubious selection. Last Friday, the Committee announced that the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize would be awarded to the European Union (EU).

In many ways, this year's selection of the EU hearkens to another head-scratching choice: the Committee's 2009 awarding of the Peace Prize to newly elected President Barack Obama.

First is the odd timing. In both cases, the Nobel Committee, like an activist judge, seeks to shape future activity as much as to appraise actual accomplishments. In the case of the European Union, the award is being given at a time when the EU is under extraordinary strain. Many doubt the decision to adopt a common currency, while austerity plans, implemented to clean up messes made by reckless countries that took advantage of more responsible ones, are deepening fissures. It is entirely conceivable that the Union itself could fall apart.

If the Nobel Committee indeed wished to [reward](#) the EU for "contribut[ing] to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe," it would have made more sense decades ago when the memories of world war were still fresh, or perhaps during the 1990s as the EU helped to stabilize Eastern Europe.

Alternatively, the Committee could have waited for one of the EU's external efforts, such as the Middle East Quartet or the six-party talks on Iran, to bear fruit. The failure of both initiatives may explain the Nobel Committee's decision not to mention them.

When President Obama received the Nobel Prize in 2009, he had been in office only a few months, having accomplished essentially nothing. His premature selection was understood as a repudiation of George W. Bush and an endorsement of Obama's campaign rhetoric and promises.

It would be interesting to get the Committee's assessment of Obama now that he's been in office a few years.

Another common thread between 2009 and today is the Nobel Committee's desire to promote international organizations. It credits the EU with encouraging democracy in southern, central and eastern Europe, and even Turkey, [ignoring](#) the worldwide trend toward democracy in places like Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East, all without the incentive of membership in a powerful regional organization.

The Nobel Committee seems to place its lot with those who view the surrendering of national sovereignty as a goal in itself. However, it is unclear whether Alfred Nobel ever intended for an organization to receive his prize. His [will](#) states that the Peace Prize should 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" [emphasis added].

In [2009](#), the Committee also praised Obama's commitment to international organizations, a commitment Obama has sustained, though the results are not necessarily peaceful. For example, his insistence on working through the UN has limited the Administration's options on Syria.

Finally, in both 2009 and today, the Nobel Committee demonstrates a complete lack of understanding of the concept of peace through strength.

Europe is peaceful today because of 60 years of Cold War between the U.S. and Russia, combined with the threat of nuclear annihilation and hundreds of thousands of U.S. troops in Europe. If the Committee really wanted to commend an organization for promoting peace in Europe, it should have chosen NATO.

Like the Nobel Committee, Obama also fails to understand peace through strength. He wants to gut our military, prizes “leading from behind, and would rather apologize for America’s history or the boorish actions of certain U.S. citizens than defend American values like free speech and democracy.

The Nobel Prize still has some caché, though most observers recognize that the award has little to do with peace. In the case of the European Union and President Obama, the Prize seeks to enhance the credibility of the recipient in order to shape its future. It rewards the erosion of national sovereignty and discounts the role of the military in achieving peace.

As Max Boot [quips](#): “It could have been worse. At least the EU didn’t get the Nobel Economics Prize.”