

Nobel Peace Prize Decision a Nod to Putin, Analysts Say

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Correction appended:

Senior Russian lawmakers and pundits have accused the Nobel Committee of bias for failing to grant this year's Nobel Peace Prize to President Vladimir Putin after the award went to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, or OPCW, on Friday.

Many Russian observers said Putin deserved the prize for preventing a U.S. military strike on Syria by proposing to instead destroy the country's chemical weapons. His candidacy for the prize was submitted by an obscure Russian public academy and was supported by several State Duma deputies and Venezuela's President Nicol3s Maduro.

But some observers said the Nobel Committee had indirectly acknowledged Putin's merits by giving the prize to an organization involved in resolving the Syria conflict, which has killed 110,000 people since 2011, according to United Nations estimates.

"Giving the award to the OPCW is a politically sophisticated choice, but it looks like a cunning move and a way to avoid giving the prize to those who prevented a war in Syria," Alexei Pushkov, head of the State Duma's International Affairs Committee, wrote on [Twitter](#) on Friday.

Valery Ryazansky, a senior Federation Council member, was more upbeat about the Nobel Committee's decision, saying that by awarding the prize to the OPCW, the committee had "acknowledged that the resolution of the Syrian issue proposed by the Russian leadership to the international community was recognized as the most effective," RIA Novosti [reported](#).

According to the statement released by the Nobel Committee, the resolution of the Syria conflict was not the only basis for awarding the prize to the OPCW, however.

The OPCW, an international body based in The Hague with 189 states as members, received the prize "for its extensive efforts to eliminate chemical weapons" since the signing of the 1997 UN Chemical Weapons Convention, the committee's statement [said](#).

The Syria crisis "underlined the need to enhance efforts to do away with" chemical arms, the statement said. The conflict reached its peak Aug. 21 when a chemical attack was carried out on the outskirts of Damascus, leaving hundreds dead. According to the UN, the attack was conducted by forces of Syrian President Bashar Assad, and it nearly triggered a U.S. military strike.

Some states have not joined the OPCW, while others, including the U.S. and Russia, failed to meet the April 2012 deadline for getting rid of their chemical stockpiles.

Senior State Duma deputy Iosif Kobzon called the deal to make Syria surrender its chemical weapons a "mechanism launched by Putin" in comments carried by Interfax on Friday, apparently referring to Putin's role in persuading the U.S. to drop its plans to attack Syria.

As part of the deal brokered to prevent the U.S. from launching a strike on Syria, a UN Security Council resolution passed Sept. 28 requires Damascus to eliminate its chemical weapons by mid-2014 under supervision of experts from the OPCW and the UN. The resolution stops short of approving the use of force against Syria if it fails to comply, however.

"The mechanism was awarded and its author was not," Kobzon [said](#), calling the decision to award the OPCW "just another ineptitude and failure" by the Nobel Committee, which "is guided by the will of the American people and does not listen to the opinions of the international community."

Dmitry Suslov, Deputy Director of the Center for Comprehensive European and International Studies, was similarly skeptical about the motives behind the committee's decision, describing the Nobel Peace Prize as "politicized."

"It was impossible to present the award to Putin given his international reputation as a defender of Middle East dictators, usurper of power in Russia and suppressor of democratic freedoms," Suslov said by phone.

But the "compromising decision to award a technical organization with the prize indirectly confirms Russia's contribution" to the Syrian resolution, Suslov said.

Regardless of Putin's contribution to averting a war in Syria, the Nobel Peace Prize "may not have been an appropriate measure" to recognize his merits, Suslov said, for it remains "unclear whether the Syria deal will lead to the peaceful settlement of the conflict in the future."

"The fire has not stopped in Syria and [U.S. President Barack] Obama has not abandoned his plans to remove Assad," Suslov said.

Alexei Arbatov, head of the Center for International Security at the Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences, agreed that awarding Russia the prize would have been premature. Russia's success in "delaying a military conflict" was "just a first step" toward resolving the Syrian civil war, he said.

"Acting politicians or heads of state should not be awarded the Nobel [Peace] Prize at all because later they may do something that will discredit them," Arbatov said.

Large organizations like the OPCW should not be granted the prize either, he said, because since its foundation in 1895, the award was meant primarily for individuals — scientific, public, cultural and political figures.

Russia's Foreign Ministry seemed satisfied with the Nobel Committee's decision, however.

In a statement Saturday, the ministry praised the move to award the OPCW, calling it "one of the most effective international structures in the sphere of disarmament and nonproliferation," the ministry's website said.

Mikhail Gorbachev, winner of the 1990 Nobel Peace Prize and a former Soviet leader, echoed that sentiment, saying in an e-mailed statement through Green Cross International that the OPCW deserved the prize.

"The OPCW has worked tirelessly to rid the world of chemical weapons," Gorbachev said.

"Politicians must pay heed to this worthy decision by the Nobel Committee and take action to make chemical weapons a thing of the past," he said.

Due to an editing error, an earlier version of this story said that 11,000 people have died in the Syrian conflict, according to UN estimates. In fact, the death toll is thought to be about 110,000.

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