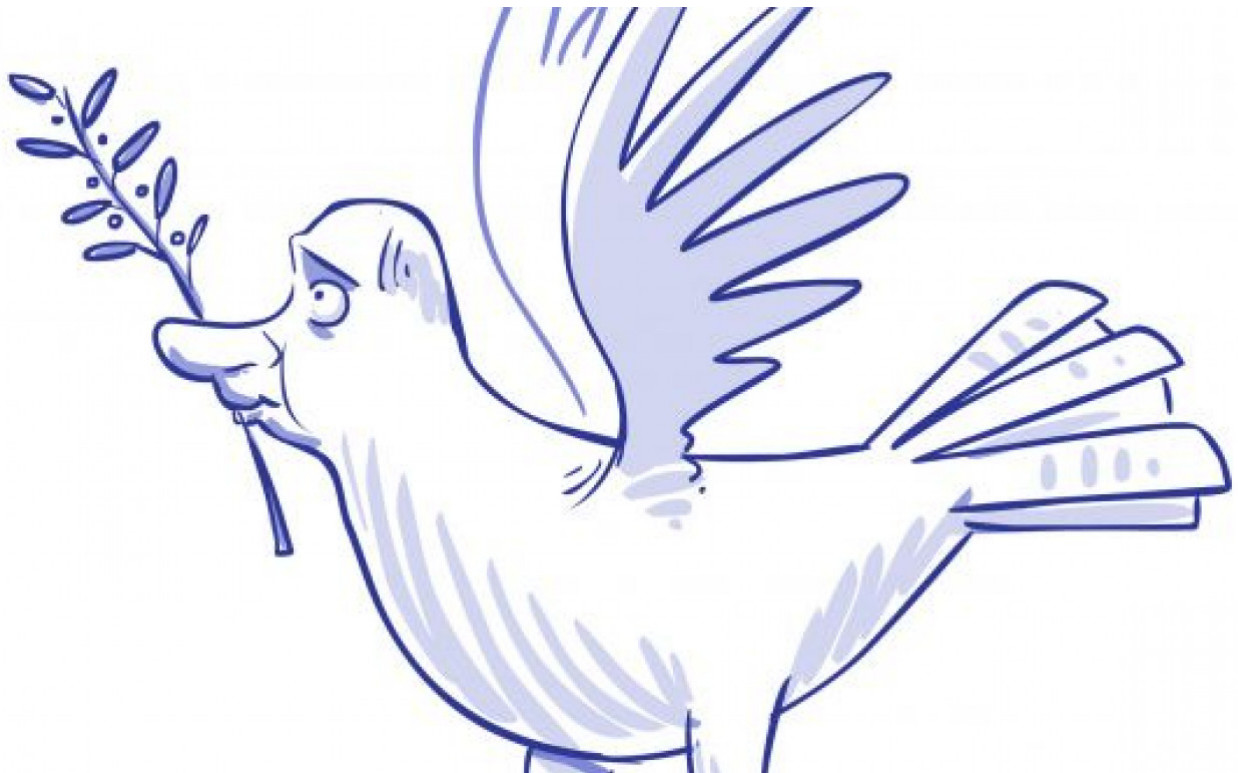


A Nobel Prize Tailor-Made for Putin

By [Michael Bohm](#)

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President Vladimir Putin's supporters cried foul when the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize went this month to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons instead of Putin.

Voicing the sentiments of many, Alexei Pushkov, chairman of the State Duma's International - Relations Committee, said the decision to recognize the inspectors' efforts to secure chemical weapons in Syria was a disgraceful snub to Putin. Pushkov argues that Putin "truly prevented war in Syria" by foiling U.S. attack plans at the last moment with his proposal to destroy Syria's chemical arms.

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But Putin is no more worthy of the Nobel Peace Prize than Syrian President Bashar Assad — or, for example, Vladimir Lenin when he helped end Russia's participation in World War I in 1918. By the time the armistice was signed in November 1918, Lenin, like Assad, was already deep into his own civil war, in which several million people died.

So much for Assad, Lenin and Putin ending wars.

Far from promoting peace, Putin has helped Assad's regime commit war crimes, resulting in an estimated 100,000 deaths over the past 2 1/2 years.

First, Putin's Russia has sold Assad hundreds of millions of dollars worth of planes, helicopters, Scud missiles, armed personnel carriers, tanks and other advanced weapons systems that were used specifically against civilians.

Second, Russia has provided valuable political cover in the United Nations Security Council, vetoing three resolutions aimed at sanctioning or simply condemning the Assad regime.

Third, Putin and his loyalists have effectively acted as Assad's apologists and PR agents, repeating his falsehoods not only in a New York Times op-ed piece, but also in the UN and elsewhere. This global propaganda campaign starts with the false premise that Assad is not engaged in a civil war but is fighting a war exclusively against terrorists, much like the U.S. war against al-Qaida and other groups. It ends with the bogus argument that opposition forces carried out a chemical attack near Damascus on Aug. 21 as a "provocation" to force the West to intercede militarily.

Thanks to Putin's proposal to destroy Syria's chemical weapons, the Assad regime has received a new lease on life that could keep the leader in power for many years to come.

Yes, Putin's plan will make it more difficult for Assad to use weapons of mass destruction again. But Assad's conventional weapons have killed far more civilians, and he will maintain his open license to kill with these weapons under the Putin-sponsored disarmament plan. In addition, Syrian government forces have recently devised an additional method for decimating areas where opposition forces are concentrated: blocking food supplies with the aim of starving the population.

Putin did not deserve the Nobel Peace Prize — and he probably would not have wanted it anyway. Just look at how much the prize has been devalued after U.S. President Barack Obama received it in 2009 and when the European Union received it last year. Its prestige has clearly dropped from the days when Soviet human rights activist Andrei Sakharov received it in 1975. Soviet authorities prohibited Sakharov from traveling to Oslo to receive the award, and five years later, in 1980, he was placed under house arrest in Gorky (now Nizhny Novgorod) for six years.

Besides, if Putin had received the prize along with the \$1.25 million award, Russian hard--liners could have labeled him a "foreign agent" for accepting money from an organization that they consider to be a front for the U.S. State Department. Remember how much trouble

the Russian election monitoring organization Golos faced in December when it accepted the Andrei Sakharov Freedom Award — along with the 308,000 rubles (\$12,000) prize — from the Norwegian Helsinki Committee.

What Putin does deserve, however, is a separate global award for having tricked so many people all over the world, including many in Washington, into believing that he is a peacemaker with his Syria plan. Like a skilled three-card Monte hustler, Putin has used the plan to shift global focus away from Assad's egregious war crimes. Instead of saving Syrian lives, the only thing Putin's plan has saved is Assad's behind.

In reality, Assad should be facing charges of crimes against humanity in the International Criminal Court in The Hague. Instead, Putin has elevated Assad to become a worthy negotiating partner with the West over chemical weapons disarmament, and far too many nations have fallen for this ruse — hook, line and sinker.

In recognition of Putin's remarkable Machiavellian skills, perhaps the Nobel Committee should devise a new award — the Ostap Bender Peace Prize, named after the legendary con artist from Ilf and Petrov's novels — and Putin could be named the first laureate.

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