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MINNPOST

PR campaign gears up to get Nobel Peace Prize for Putin

By Nick Hayes | 09/16/13



REUTERS/Maxim Shemetov

The press has forgotten or moved to the back page its usual litany of Russian President Vladimir Putin's transgressions.

Last
Friday,
just as
U.S.

Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov were working out the final details of an agreement on the Syrian crisis, the Russian media went into high gear starting its drive for awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

PravdaTV, a media outlet friendly to the Kremlin, produced and distributed a video clip opening with a scene of Putin tenderly caring for a Siberian tiger cub while the narrator says, "What does a peace prize mean, if not the prevention of war." Scenes of Putin on location in the Middle East follow. A rhetorical question with a bit of an edge ends the video: "We must remember that in 2009 Barack Obama got the prize, in 1990, Gorbachev, so why not Putin?"

As the Kremlin-driven lobbying effort and petition drive to award Putin the prize heats up, my advice

to the Nobel Committee is to remember a line from Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Canterbury Tales": "If gold rusts, what shall iron do?"



However, we can both retain our reservations about Putin's nomination for the Nobel Prize and also admit that Putin's on a roll.

The week before last, he upstaged President Obama at the St. Petersburg G20 summit. Last week, he stole a throw-away idea Kerry had half-heartedly tossed about in London and turned it into a diplomatic breakthrough that has averted what was potentially the most dangerous confrontation between the United States and Russia since the Cuban Missile Crisis 51 years ago.

Overlooking transgressions

The press has forgotten or moved to the back page its usual litany of Putin's transgressions. We hear little or nothing about Pussy Riot; the NSA leaker Edward Snowden's asylum in Russia; Putin's political nemesis, the opposition leader Aleksei Navalny; or gossip about the Russian president's recent divorce.

Over the past few days, the main accusations against Putin charged that he had stolen someone else's idea for resolving the issue of Syria's chemical weapons. The White House claims Obama raised the idea of turning Syria's chemical weapons over to the UN in the brief one-on-one conversation he and Putin had in St. Petersburg. Kerry claims bragging rights for the idea that he had offered and was dismissed. Over the weekend, Norway, Sweden and Poland complained that Putin had stolen the idea from them.

In Washington, liberals and conservatives, Democrats and Republicans, did find common ground in objecting to Putin's op-ed, "[A Plea for Caution From Russia](#)," published last Thursday in The New York Times.

From the White House spokesman Jay Carney to U.S. Senator John McCain, the beltway indignation over Putin's op-ed ignored how well his remarks were playing in the rest of the country and in world opinion.

Getting message across

Putin had help in getting his message across. The [Kremlin retains a U.S. PR firm](#), Ketchum, for packaging the image of Putin abroad. In 2007, Ketchum lobbied Time magazine to name Putin as its "Person of the Year." In 2011, Ketchum placed a flattering story on Putin as an outdoor sportsman in Outdoor Life magazine. The public relations firm also helped place Putin's op-ed in The New York Times. Assume that Ketchum is already lobbying the Nobel Peace Prize Committee.

My own candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize is former U.S. Sen. George Mitchell for his efforts to bring peace to Northern Ireland. The betting odds, however, are not on Mitchell.

A popular Putin joke on the streets of Moscow goes: “When you type the Russian president’s name on your keyboard, it automatically capitalizes the ‘V’ and ‘P.’ The Kremlin is already designing Russian keyboards that automatically type ‘Nobel Laureate’ after Putin’s name.”

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