

Space Station Deserves Nobel Peace Prize

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Over the past several months, we have witnessed an almost major collapse in bilateral relations between Russia and the U.S., seemingly throwing to the wind more than 20 years of modest but quantifiable rapprochement between these powerful and once bitter enemies.

The Nobel Committee, which will award the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize in October, should look closely at the contribution each candidate makes toward the easing of tensions between Russia and the West when choosing this year's winner.

One candidate in particular has contributed more toward these ends than any other nominee: the International Space Station partnership.

This partnership, formed more than 15 years ago to facilitate the construction and operation of a \$150 billion outpost in space, represents the largest international collaborative project ever undertaken during peacetime.

Space agencies have so far refused to allow political currents to interfere with the International Space Station program. The crisis in Ukraine, however, has thrown the future of the program into question.

In response to U.S. sanctions, and a federal government order for NASA to suspend all cooperation with Roscosmos outside of the ISS program, Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin said in May that Russia was not interested in extending ISS participation beyond 2020. Roscosmos is in talks with the Russian government over the fate of ISS participation, but there are real concerns that politics will torpedo the otherwise bright future of the ISS program.

Ending Russian participation in the ISS could easily lead to a return to Cold War enmity with the very real potential of sparking an arms race in space, a scenario only narrowly avoided when the U.S. and U.S.S.R. competed for glory on the final frontier.

It would also wreck one of the few examples of major international cooperation as governments burn bridge after bridge in the Ukrainian crisis.

The men and women of these national space agencies that make up the International Space Station partnership — the organizational structure established by partner agencies from 15 nations that support the football-field-sized space station — has promoted cultural understanding between all participants. NASA, European, Canadian and Japanese space officials live and work among their Russian peers in Moscow, and Roscosmos officials do the same in Houston.

Their interactions range from the mundane — arranging housing and office spaces for visiting delegations, to the extraordinary — preparing multinational teams of cosmonauts and astronauts to live and work in space through an exhaustive and collaborative training program at space centers around the world.

International space cooperation has also fostered understanding by engaging the military, scientific and industrial bases of the U.S. and Russia in a challenging, peaceful and forward looking mission, rather than pursuing purely competitive and militaristic ends.

Awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to the ISS would also encourage all governments involved to allow their space agencies to work together well into the future. With 50 nations now exploring space, the ISS also sets a exemplary standard for international cooperation, helping ensure that peaceful, civilian space efforts remain the norm.

The ISS shows that it is possible to overlook political differences and work together toward a truly global and uplifting goal: creating the framework for the human race to continue its push beyond Earth's orbit.

It is due time for the international community to make an unequivocal statement of support for the positive efforts of the U.S., Russia and their 13 partners aboard ISS during times of heightened and dangerous tension between Russia and the West.

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