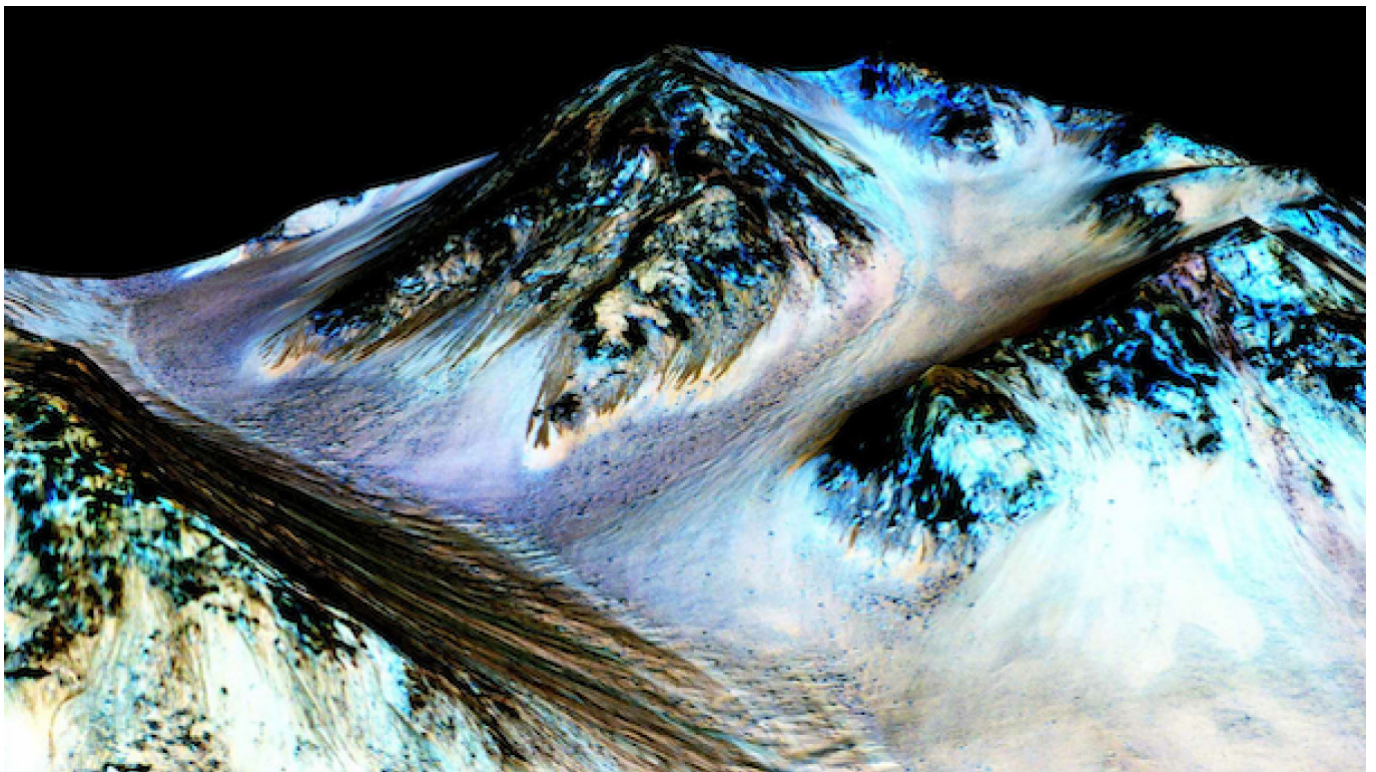


# Russian Lawmaker Accuses NASA of Timing Mars Announcement to Upstage Putin

By [Matthew Bodner](#)

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The United States timed the announcement of NASA's landmark discovery of liquid water on the surface of Mars in a concerted attempt to draw attention away from Russian President Vladimir Putin's much-hyped address before the United Nations on Monday, a Russian lawmaker said.

Putin's speech had been built up in the Russian media in the lead-up to his appearance at the UN General Assembly in New York on Monday — his first visit to the U.S. in nearly a decade — as a milestone event in his presidency, and a potential game-changer for Russia's role on the world stage.

“Putin’s speech was, of course, the central element of the UN General Assembly session,” State Duma Deputy Vyacheslav Nikonov, who is the chairman of the legislature’s education committee, was quoted by the state-run TASS news agency as saying late on Monday.

But the Russian president’s moment in the global spotlight coincided closely with another major media event: a mysterious NASA news conference, announced last week, which promised to answer a major Martian question.

NASA’s announcement that the Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter had found strong evidence that liquid water flows intermittently on the planet Mars left news outlets scrambling over which story took precedence.

Although NASA had already found frozen water on the Martian surface, the discovery of liquid water remained elusive, with many speculating that Mars had lost all of its free-flowing water long ago to climate change or even asteroid impact.

“It is no coincidence that the United States took such a significant and unprecedented action as [holding] a NASA news conference where the discovery of water on Mars was announced at the same time as Putin’s speech,” Nikonov said.

“The discovery of water was, of course, a major global event for all English-language media,” Nikonov said. “This means that Putin’s speech had to be killed by something very serious,” he said.

The Russian president used the UN podium to chastise the United States for pursuing a global policy of double standards, as well as to propose an international coalition to fight the Islamic State and call for a global forum combating climate change.

Nikonov, a member of the pro-Putin United Russia party and the grandson of Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov, was not alone in seeing a conspiracy in the timing of NASA’s announcement.

And Now, seconds before Putin's speech, NASA reports that they have confirmation of water on Mars. 100% Obama ordered them to wait until now

— ☒ Maria Engström ☒ (@maria\_engstrom) [September 28, 2015](#)

As broadcasters around the world struggled to decide if they would continue with ongoing events at the UN General Assembly or switch over to NASA’s Mars news conference, Twitter users speculated that Obama had instructed the U.S. space agency, which maintains strong ties with its Russian counterpart, to upstage Putin.

However, NASA’s information office told Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty that the timing of the news conference was dictated by an information embargo set by the scientific journal Nature Geoscience, in which the NASA published its findings.

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