

Nobel Prize season arrives amid war, nuclear fears, hunger

September 30 2022, by VANESSA GERA



In this Monday, Dec. 10, 2018 file photo, a bust of the Nobel Prize founder, Alfred Nobel on display at the Concert Hall during the Nobel Prize award ceremony in Stockholm. This year's Nobel season approaches as Russia's invasion of Ukraine has shattered decades of almost uninterrupted peace in Europe and raised the risks of a nuclear disaster. The famously secretive Nobel Committee never leaks or hints who will win its prizes for medicine, physics, chemistry, literature, economics or peace. So it is anyone's guess who might win the awards that will be announced starting next Monday, Oct. 3, 2022. Credit:

Henrik Montgomery/Pool Photo via AP, File

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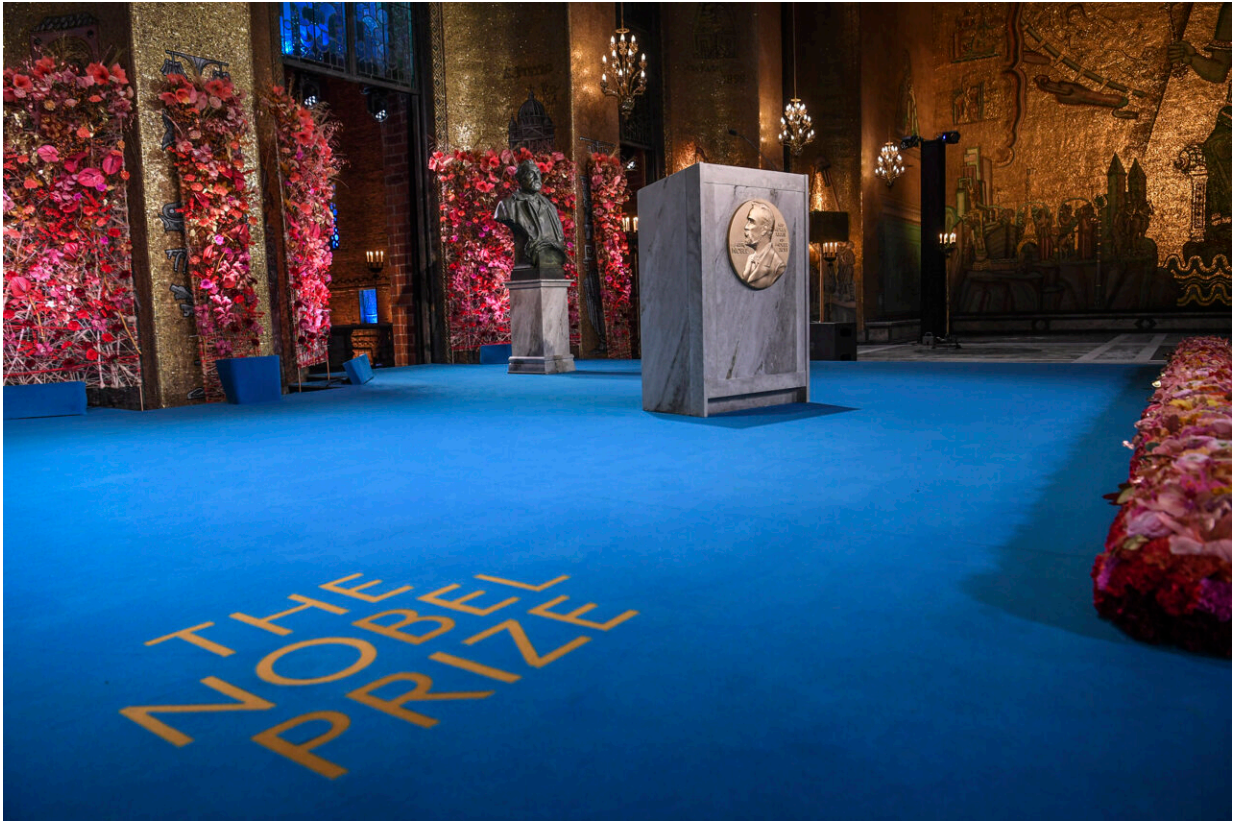
The secretive Nobel committees never hint who will win the prizes in medicine, physics, chemistry, literature, economics or peace. It's anyone's guess who might win the awards being announced starting Monday.

Yet there's no lack of urgent causes deserving the attention that comes with winning the world's most prestigious prize: Wars in Ukraine and Ethiopia, disruptions to supplies of energy and food, rising inequality, the climate crisis, the ongoing fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The science prizes reward complex achievements beyond the understanding of most. But the recipients of the prizes in peace and literature are often known by a global audience and the choices—or perceived omissions—have sometimes stirred emotional reactions.

Members of the European Parliament have called for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the people of Ukraine to be recognized this year by the Nobel Peace Prize committee for their resistance to the Russian invasion.

While that desire is understandable, that choice is unlikely because the Nobel committee has a history of honoring figures who end conflicts, not wartime leaders, said Dan Smith, director of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.



The stage is set ahead of the socially distanced virtual Nobel Prize ceremony in the Golden Hall in the City Hall of Stockholm, Sweden, on Thursday Dec. 10, 2020. This year's Nobel season approaches as Russia's invasion of Ukraine has shattered decades of almost uninterrupted peace in Europe and raised the risks of a nuclear disaster. The famously secretive Nobel Committee never leaks or hints who will win its prizes for medicine, physics, chemistry, literature, economics or peace. So it is anyone's guess who might win the awards that will be announced starting next Monday, Oct. 3, 2022. Credit: Fredrik Sandberg/TT via AP, File

Smith believes more likely peace prize candidates would be those fighting climate change or the International Atomic Energy Agency, a past recipient. Honoring the IAEA again would recognize its efforts to prevent a radioactive catastrophe at the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia

nuclear power plant at the heart of fighting in Ukraine, and its work in fighting nuclear proliferation, Smith said.

"This is really difficult period in world history and there is not a lot of peace being made," he said.

Promoting peace isn't always rewarded with a Nobel. India's Mohandas Gandhi, a prominent symbol of non-violence, was never so honored.

In some cases, the winners have not lived out the values enshrined in the peace prize.

Just this week the Vatican acknowledged imposing disciplinary sanctions on Nobel Peace Prize-winning Bishop Carlos Ximenes Belo following allegations he sexually abused boys in East Timor in the 1990s.



Nobel Peace Prize winners Dmitry Muratov from Russia, right, and Maria Ressa of the Philippines embrace during the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony at Oslo City Hall, Norway, Friday, Dec. 10, 2021. This year's Nobel season approaches as Russia's invasion of Ukraine has shattered decades of almost uninterrupted peace in Europe and raised the risks of a nuclear disaster. The famously secretive Nobel Committee never leaks or hints who will win its prizes for medicine, physics, chemistry, literature, economics or peace. So it is anyone's guess who might win the awards that will be announced starting next Monday, Oct. 3, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Alexander Zemlianichenko, File

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed won in 2019 for making peace with neighboring Eritrea. A year later a largely ethnic conflict erupted in

the country's Tigray region. Some accuse Abiy of stoking the tensions, which have resulted in widespread atrocities. Critics have called for his Nobel to be revoked and the Nobel committee has issued a rare admonition to him.

The Myanmar activist Aung San Suu Kyi won in 1991 for her opposition to military rule but decades later has been viewed as failing to oppose atrocities committed against the mostly Muslim Rohingya minority.

In some years, no peace prize has been awarded. It paused them during World War I, except to honor the International Committee of the Red Cross in 1917. It didn't hand out any from 1939 to 1943 due to World War II. In 1948, the year Gandhi died, the Norwegian Nobel Committee made no award, citing a lack of a suitable living candidate.



The Nobel diploma and medal in physiology or medicine presented to Charles M. Rice is displayed, Tuesday, Dec. 8, 2020, during a ceremony in New York. This year's Nobel season approaches as Russia's invasion of Ukraine has shattered decades of almost uninterrupted peace in Europe and raised the risks of a nuclear disaster. The famously secretive Nobel Committee never leaks or hints who will win its prizes for medicine, physics, chemistry, literature, economics or peace. So it is anyone's guess who might win the awards that will be announced starting next Monday, Oct. 3, 2022. Credit: Angela Weiss/Pool Photo via AP, File

The peace prize also does not always confer protection.

Last year journalists Maria Ressa of the Philippines and Dmitry Muratov of Russia were awarded "for their courageous fight for freedom of expression" in the face of authoritarian governments.

Following the invasion of Ukraine, the Kremlin has cracked down even harder on independent media, including Muratov's Novaya Gazeta, Russia's most renowned independent newspaper. Muratov himself was attacked on a Russian train by an assailant who poured red paint over him, injuring his eyes.

The Philippines government this year ordered the shutdown of Ressa's news organization, Rappler.

The literature prize, meanwhile, has been notoriously unpredictable.

Few had bet on last year's winner, Zanzibar-born, U.K.-based writer Abdulrazak Gurnah, whose books explore the personal and societal impacts of colonialism and migration.



US President Barack Obama talks with Nobel Institute Executive Director Geir Lundestad, left, as first lady Michelle Obama, second from right, and others look on during a Nobel Signing Ceremony at the Nobel Institute in Oslo, Norway, Thursday, Dec. 10, 2009. In a break with Nobel tradition, the former secretary of the Nobel Peace Prize committee, Lundestad, said that the 2009 award to President Barack Obama failed to live up to the panel's expectations. Lundestad wrote in a 2015 book that the committee had expected the prize to deliver a boost to Obama. Instead the award was met with fierce criticism in the U.S., where many argued Obama had not been president long enough to have an impact worthy of the Nobel. Credit: AP Photo/Susan Walsh, File

Gurnah was only the sixth Nobel literature laureate born in Africa, and the prize has long faced criticism that it is too focused on European and North American writers. It is also male-dominated, with just 16 women

among its 118 laureates.

A clear contender is Salman Rushdie, the India-born writer and free-speech advocate who spent years in hiding after Iran's clerical rulers called for his death over his 1988 novel "The Satanic Verses." Rushdie, 75, was stabbed and seriously injured in August at a festival in New York state.

The list of possible winners includes literary giants from around the world: Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Japan's Haruki Murakami, Norway's Jon Fosse, Antigua-born Jamaica Kincaid and France's Annie Ernaux.

The prizes to Gurnah in 2021 and U.S. poet Louise Glück in 2020 have helped the literature prize move on from years of controversy and scandal.



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy stands with soldiers after attending a national flag-raising ceremony in the freed Iziium, Ukraine, Wednesday, Sept. 14, 2022. This year, a group of lawmakers at the European Parliament have called for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the people of Ukraine to be recognized for their resistance to a Russian assault widely viewed as genocidal. Credit: AP Photo/Leo Correa, File

In 2018, the award was postponed after sex abuse allegations rocked the Swedish Academy, which names the Nobel literature committee, and sparked an exodus of members. The academy revamped itself but faced more criticism for giving the 2019 literature award to Austria's Peter Handke, who has been called an apologist for Serbian war crimes.

Some scientists hope the award for physiology or medicine honors

colleagues instrumental in the development of the mRNA technology that went into COVID-19 vaccines, which saved millions of lives across the world.

"When we think of Nobel prizes, we think of things that are paradigm shifting, and in a way I see mRNA vaccines and their success with COVID-19 as a turning point for us," said Deborah Fuller, a microbiology professor at the University of Washington.



Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed poses for the media after receiving the Nobel Peace Prize during the award ceremony in Oslo City Hall, Norway, Tuesday Dec. 10, 2019. Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed won in 2019 for making peace with neighboring Eritrea and a year later a year brutal and largely ethnic conflict erupted in a rebellious region of the country, Tigray. Some accuse Abiy himself of stoking the tensions, which have resulted in atrocities committed

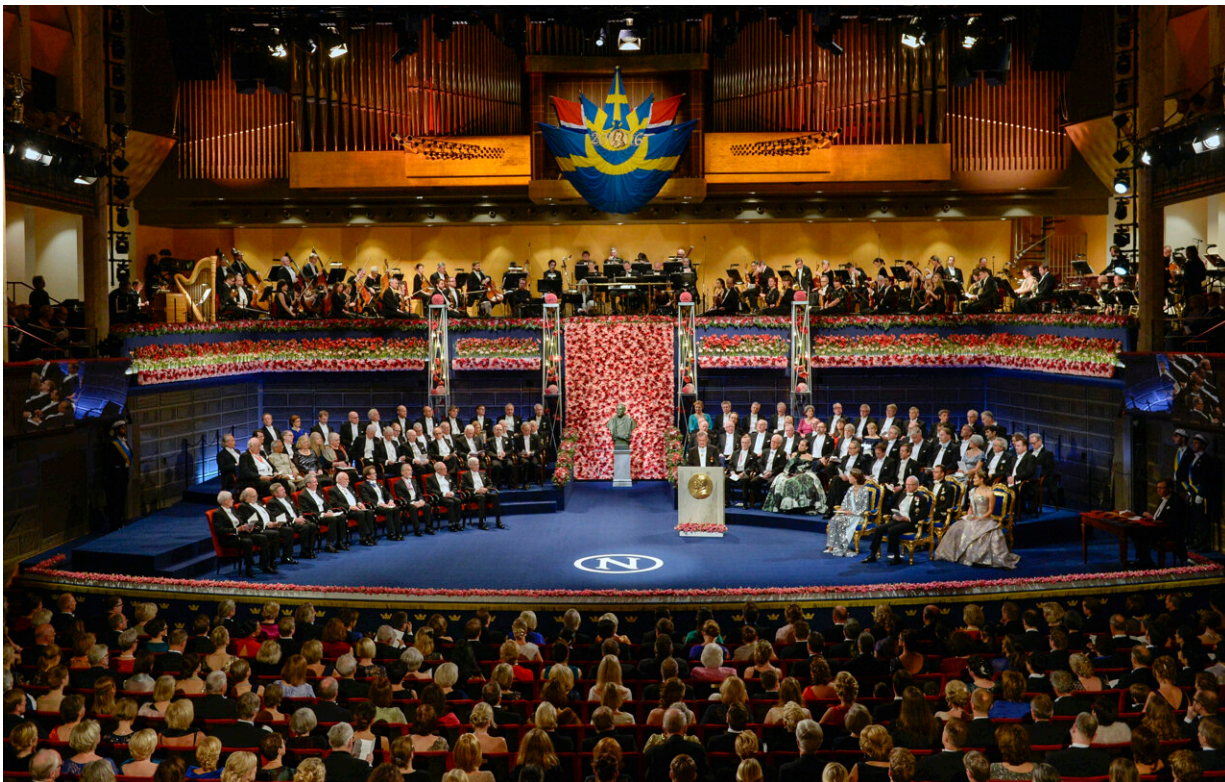
by his army along with all sides in the war, and critics have called for his Nobel to be revoked. Credit: Hakon Mosvold Larsen/NTB Scanpix via AP, File



An exterior view of Oslo City Hall the venue of the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony in Oslo, Norway, Thursday, Dec. 9, 2021. This year's Nobel season approaches as Russia's invasion of Ukraine has shattered decades of almost uninterrupted peace in Europe and raised the risks of a nuclear disaster. The famously secretive Nobel Committee never leaks or hints who will win its prizes for medicine, physics, chemistry, literature, economics or peace. So it is anyone's guess who might win the awards that will be announced starting next Monday, Oct. 3, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Alexander Zemlianichenko, File



Nobel Peace Prize winner Dmitry Muratov from Russia poses for a photo as he works on his speech at his room in The Grand Hotel in Oslo, Norway Thursday, Dec. 9, 2021. This year's Nobel season approaches as Russia's invasion of Ukraine has shattered decades of almost uninterrupted peace in Europe and raised the risks of a nuclear disaster. The famously secretive Nobel Committee never leaks or hints who will win its prizes for medicine, physics, chemistry, literature, economics or peace. So it is anyone's guess who might win the awards that will be announced starting next Monday, Oct. 3, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Alexander Zemlianichenko, File



The ten 2016 Nobel laureates in literature, medicine, chemistry, physics and economics are seated, front row left, across from King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden and the royal family during the 2016 Nobel prize award ceremony at the Stockholm Concert Hall on Saturday Dec. 10, 2016. This year's Nobel season approaches as Russia's invasion of Ukraine has shattered decades of almost uninterrupted peace in Europe and raised the risks of a nuclear disaster. The famously secretive Nobel Committee never leaks or hints who will win its prizes for medicine, physics, chemistry, literature, economics or peace. So it is anyone's guess who might win the awards that will be announced starting next Monday, Oct. 3, 2022. (Jessica Gow/TT News Agency via AP, File)/TT News Agency via AP)

Physics at times can seem arcane and difficult for the public to understand. But the last three years, the physics Nobel has honored more accessible topics: Climate change computer models, black holes and

planets outside our solar system.

Some harder-to-understand topics in physics—like stopping light, quantum physics and carbon nanotubes—could capture a Nobel award this year.

The Nobel announcements kick off Monday with the prize in physiology or medicine, followed by physics on Tuesday, chemistry on Wednesday and literature on Thursday. The 2022 Nobel Peace Prize will be announced on Oct. 7 and the economics award on Oct. 10.

The prizes carry a cash award of 10 million Swedish kronor (nearly \$900,000) and will be handed out on Dec. 10.

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