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Eight Things Russia Must Do Before Being Allowed Back in the G7

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In early June, during the most recent meeting of the Group of Seven countries, commonly referred to as the G7, President Trump proposed that Russia be able to rejoin the group. Russia was once part of what was then known as the G8, but was kicked out after its invasion of Ukraine in 2014. The U.S. should not support the idea of Russia rejoining the bloc until certain conditions regarding Russia's nefarious behavior are met.

International Cooperation

The G7 consists of seven of the world's advanced industrialized economies—Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Combined, these seven countries account for 62 percent of global wealth. They are also all democracies and close U.S. treaty allies. The group meets annually to discuss issues such as shared global security and economic matters.

In 2014, Russia was part of the group, the G8. Russia first joined in 1997. This was at a time when Boris Yeltsin was still in power and Western relations with Russia looked promising.

Since President Vladimir Putin ascended to power in 1999 relations with Russia have ebbed and flowed, but generally been on a downward trajec-

tory. Since 1999, Putin has done nothing to indicate that he would be a trustworthy partner to America. At almost every opportunity, he has pursued policies that undermine U.S. national interests and the interests of America's closest partners.

Putin Cannot Be Trusted

Putin's behavior resembles that of the czars more than that of his Soviet predecessors. Everything this imperial leader does aims to maximize and secure his personal power. The impact of his reign has been bad for Russia. In recent years, democracy has been in retreat, basic freedoms (of speech, assembly, and a free press) have been eroded, minority groups and political opposition figures are often oppressed—and sometimes killed—and the country's economy is in tatters.

To distract his people from their many woes, Putin has pursued a dangerously aggressive and expansionist foreign policy. Along the way, he has undone the post-World War II world order and undermined America's strategic interests in many parts of the world.

Russia invaded the Republic of Georgia in 2008 and continues to occupy, illegally, 20 percent of that country's territory. Six years later, Putin invaded Ukraine and illegally annexed the Crimean peninsula—the first time one European country used military force to annex part of another since the days of Hitler. Russia still fuels a separatist conflict in the eastern part of Ukraine, creating strife for yet another.

Russia has sowed anxiety and instability throughout most of the rest of Europe, as well. It has weaponized its natural gas exports to Europe, turning off

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the tap when countries dare go against its wishes. It has conducted cyber attacks against NATO member Estonia and NATO partners Georgia and Ukraine, and has conducted military exercises to simulate a nuclear strike against NATO member Poland.

In Syria, Russia continues to prop up President Bashar al-Assad. This has turned Syria into a breeding ground for extremists and has led to the endless suffering, displacement, and death of millions of Syrians.

Not Ready to Rejoin

When Russia decided in March 2014 to illegally annex Crimea and invade the Donbas region of Ukraine, it proved it was no longer a trustworthy actor on the international stage. Moscow was duly removed from the G8 and the group reverted back to the G7.

Before Russia is invited back into the group, at a minimum, Moscow must do the following eight things:

- 1. Fully restore Ukraine's internationally recognized territory.** This includes the Crimean peninsula and the Donbas region in eastern Ukraine. From these two regions, Russia must remove all of its troops, Russian mercenaries, and security officials. Moscow must also introduce a robust disarming and demobilization program for Russian-backed separatists in these regions.
- 2. Pay full compensation and economic reparations to Ukraine for its actions since 2014.** At the time of occupation, Crimea alone accounted for 4 percent of Ukraine's gross domestic product. In 2017, Ukraine's Ministry of Justice assessed the economic damage of Crimea's annexation alone to be \$100 billion.
- 3. Release all Ukrainian political prisoners who have been held in custody since 2014.** Today, Russia holds more than 70 political prisoners from Ukraine.
- 4. Formally apologize to the Crimean Tatars for their treatment during Russia's occupation of Crimea.** The Crimean Tatars are a Sunni-Muslim and ethnically Turkic minority group who have encountered much religious and political persecution from the Russians. In June 2018, five Crimean Tatar activists were jailed for their involvement in anti-Russia protests in February 2014—before Russia annexed Crimea.
- 5. Acknowledge responsibility for the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 in July 2014 and suitably compensate the families of those killed in the incident.** MH17 was en route from Amsterdam, Netherlands, to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. When the plane was flying over eastern Ukraine, Russian soldiers fired a missile from the 53rd anti-aircraft missile brigade and shot it down, motivation unknown. A total of 298 people from 17 countries died as a result. In May 2018, a Joint Investigation Team consisting of experts from Belgium, Ukraine, Australia, and Malaysia found Russia to be responsible for the tragedy.
- 6. Russia must also be in full compliance** of the 2008 Six-Point Ceasefire Agreement with Georgia regarding the two occupied regions of Abkhazia and **Tskhinvali Region**. A decade after the ceasefire ended, Russia still has not lived up to its side of the bargain: (1) Russian military forces must pull back to their locations before the start of hostilities and (2) Russia must provide free access to humanitarian-aid groups. There are several thousand Russian troops stationed in these occupied regions, which total up to 20 percent of Georgia's internationally recognized territory.
- 7. End its support for Syrian President Assad and demonstrate a genuine willingness to work with the international community to bring a political end to the Syrian civil war.** When it appeared that Assad was on the ropes in 2016, Russia militarily intervened and has since propped up the Syrian dictator. This has since prolonged the killing, which has left more than 600,000 people dead and has turned Syria into a breeding ground for Islamic extremism. The sooner this civil war ends, the better for everyone.
- 8. Russia must cease all meddling in the domestic elections of the U.S. and its allies.** All 17 U.S. intelligence agencies concluded that Russia was behind meddling during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign. Similar accusations have been made against Russia concerning elections in France, Germany, and Italy. This behavior is not acceptable for a G8 member.

Russia Has a Long Way to Go

The G7 is an organization that allows like-minded democracies to work together to tackle many of the world's major problems. Putin has not demonstrated that he can be a trusted partner, and President Trump is wrong to say that Russia should be allowed back in the club at this time. However, if Russia changes its ways, it should be invited back. Russia is a proud country. For better or for worse, it possesses a history of being at the center of global affairs. But it can only re-enter the G7 once it demonstrates that it is a responsible and collegiate actor on the international stage. Sadly, this is unlikely to occur while Putin is in power. The Russian people will continue to suffer, and Russian influence on the international stage will continue to be marginalized.

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