

Nine Things Russia Must Do Before Being Allowed to Rejoin the G7

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

Since 1999, at almost every opportunity, Vladimir Putin has pursued policies that undermine U.S. national interests and the interests of America's closest partners.

Russia has sowed instability in Europe, invading Georgia and Ukraine, weaponizing gas exports, conducting cyber attacks, and simulating a nuclear strike on Poland.

The West must be clear: Russia can only be allowed to rejoin the G7 if it proves itself a responsible actor on the global stage that respects international norms.

Days before this year's meeting of the Group of Seven (G7) from August 24 to 26, President Donald Trump proposed that Russia be allowed to rejoin the group in 2020. Russia was once part of what was then the G8, and was kicked out after its invasion of Ukraine in 2014. The U.S. should not support the idea of Russia rejoining the bloc until Russia meets certain conditions regarding its nefarious behavior.

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 50 percent of global wealth.¹ They are also all democracies and close treaty allies. The group meets annually to discuss issues such as shared global security and economic matters.

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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 have generally been on a downward trajectory. 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 the tap when countries dare go against its wishes. It has conducted cyber attacks against North Atlantic Treaty Organization (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 Islamist 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, Moscow must—at a minimum—do the following:

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, 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. **Release the 24 Ukrainian sailors who have been held in custody since 2018.** During the Kerch Strait incident in November 2018, Russia illegally captured 24 Ukrainian sailors. Russia continues to hold them in custody with no official release date.
5. **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. Then, in March 2019, 23 Crimean Tatar activists were jailed for associating with the pan-Islamist political party Hizb ut-Tahrir (Party of Liberation), which is legal in Ukraine but banned in Russia.²

6. **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 to Kuala Lumpur. 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 Australia, Belgium, Malaysia, and Ukraine found Russia to be responsible for the tragedy.
7. **Comply fully with the 2008 Six-Point Cease-fire Agreement with Georgia** regarding the two occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali—which amount to 20 percent of Georgia’s internationally recognized territory. More than a decade after signing the agreement, Russia still has not lived up to its side of the bargain: (1) Russian military forces have not pulled back to pre-invasion locations, and (2) Russia has not allowed humanitarian-aid groups free access to the occupied regions. Several thousand Russian troops are stationed in these occupied regions.
8. **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 in danger of being ousted 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.
9. **Cease all meddling in the domestic elections of the U.S. and its allies.** All 17 U.S. intelligence agencies concluded that Russia meddled in 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. If Russia does change its ways, it should be invited back. Russia is a proud country. For better or for worse, it has 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. This is unlikely to occur while Putin is in power.

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Endnotes

1. Council on Foreign Relations, "The G7 and the Future of Multilateralism," August 20, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/background/g7-and-future-multilateralism> (accessed August 21, 2019).
2. "Crimean Tatars Face Unfounded Terrorism Charges," Human Rights Watch, July 12, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/07/12/crimean-tatars-face-unfounded-terrorism-charges> (accessed August 21, 2019).