

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

Luke Coffey and Alexis Mrachek

KEY TAKEAWAYS

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

Russia has sowed instability in Europe by weaponizing gas exports, launching cyberattacks, invading Georgia and Ukraine, 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.

In late May, days before the scheduled June 10 meeting of the Group of Seven countries, known as the G7, President Donald Trump postponed the meeting until September. 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 most advanced industrialized economies—Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Combined, these seven countries account for nearly 50 percent of global wealth.¹ They are also all democracies, and close U.S. treaty allies. The group meets annually to discuss shared global security issues 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 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 20 percent of that country's territory. Six years later, Putin invaded Ukraine and 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 eastern European country.

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 cyberattacks 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. Russia's support has allowed Syria to turn 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 the August 2019 meeting of the G7, the authors of this *Issue Brief* advocated that Russia fulfill nine requirements before being allowed to rejoin the G7.² One of those requirements was fulfilled in September 2019, when Russia released the 24 Ukrainian sailors held in custody since the Kerch Strait incident in November 2018. Now, before Russia is invited back into the group, Moscow, at a minimum, must fulfill the following eight requirements:

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
3. **Release all Ukrainian political prisoners who have been held in custody since 2014.** Today, Russia holds 96 political prisoners from Ukraine, including 69 Crimean Tatars.⁴
4. **Formally apologize to the Crimean Tatars for their mistreatment 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. In March 2019, 23 Crimean Tatar activists were imprisoned for associating with the Hizb ut-Tahrir (Party of Liberation), which is legal in Ukraine but banned in Russia.⁵ In October 2019, another Crimean Tatar activist was jailed for associating with the same party.⁶

5. **Acknowledge responsibility for the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 (MH17) in July 2014 and suitably compensate the families of those killed in the incident.** Flight 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 shoot-down, and in June 2019, four men who allegedly caused the crash were charged with murder.⁷
6. **Be in full compliance with the 2008 Six-Point Ceasefire Agreement with Georgia** regarding the two occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali. More than a decade after the cease-fire 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. Several thousand Russian troops are stationed in these occupied regions, which make up about 20 percent of Georgia's internationally recognized territory.
7. **End its support of 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. **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, and the U.S. government determined that Russia attempted to interfere in the 2018 midterm elections. Similar accusations have been made against Russia concerning elections in France, Germany, and Italy. This behavior is not acceptable.

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 has been at the center of global affairs for much of history. But Russia can only rejoin 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 marginal.

Luke Coffey is Director of the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy, of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for National Security and Foreign Policy, at The Heritage Foundation. **Alexis Mrachek** is Research Associate in the Allison Center.

Endnotes

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