

The Biden Administration Should Unseat Russia from the Group of 20

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the G20 Leaders' Summit serves as an opportunity to condemn Putin on the world stage and support Ukraine.

Allowing Putin, who is continuing his barbaric assault on Ukraine, to attend the G20 summit is fundamentally wrong and morally unacceptable.

The U.S. must lead on holding Russia responsible for its aggression by expelling it from the G20, strengthening economic sanctions, and exposing Kremlin-CCP ties.

This year's Group of Twenty (G20) Leaders' Summit will take place from November 15 to 16, hosted by Indonesian President Joko Widodo in Bali.¹ The G20, a political and economic forum of the world's 20 largest economies formed in 1999, was billed as a league that aims to bring together the most important industrialized and emerging economies to discuss international economic and financial stability.

The collection of the 20 members—Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union—represents more than 80 percent of world gross domestic product, 75 percent of international trade, and 60 percent of the world population.² The

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group’s annual Heads of State Meeting, taking place in November this year, is a gathering of G20 leaders that debuted in 2008 and has evolved into a discussion platform for pressing global issues, with bilateral meetings on the Summit’s sidelines.

The November G20 Leaders’ Summit has been billed as “the pinnacle of the G20 process and intense work carried out within the Ministerial Meetings, Working Groups, and Engagement Groups throughout the year.”³ Yet if the G20 cannot make meaningful decisions, it seriously risks irrelevance, particularly in light of Russia’s ongoing and unprovoked war against Ukraine, as well as other interwoven global challenges stemming from China.

In the run-up to the November G20 Leaders’ Summit in Bali, the United States and other willing G20 members must be clear that Russia cannot be allowed to join the Leaders’ Summit. In fact, Russia should be expelled from the G20.

The G20 Should Follow the G8 and Expel Russia

On March 24, 2014, the leaders of G7—Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States—plus the president of the European Council and the president of the European Commission cancelled the planned G8 summit, which was to be held in June of that year in Sochi, Russia, and suspended Russia’s membership of the G8 indefinitely due to Russia’s annexation of Crimea. It was a direct, collective response from major countries allied against Russia’s invasion of Ukraine’s territory.

The G7 statement on the decision, known as The Hague Declaration, pinpointed in 2014:

International law prohibits the acquisition of part or all of another state’s territory through coercion or force. To do so violates the principles upon which the international system is built. We condemn the illegal referendum held in Crimea in violation of Ukraine’s constitution. We also strongly condemn Russia’s illegal attempt to annex Crimea in contravention of international law and specific international obligations. We do not recognize either...

[W]e reaffirm that Russia’s actions will have significant consequences. This clear violation of international law is a serious challenge to the rule of law around the world and should be a concern for all nations.⁴

The G7’s declaration is still precisely pertinent today, and far more so to the upcoming G20 summit.

Now the G20 should show the resolve of the G7, and the United States should lead willing partners to hold Russia accountable for its war against Ukraine.

No More Empty, Diplomatic Theater

Unambiguously, 2022 has turned out to be the most consequential year in geopolitics since the end of the Cold War three decades ago. Russia's unprovoked second invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, has brought new and greater urgency to the need for serious, practical cooperation between the United States and like-minded countries in meeting the demands of this new era of conflict. Russia and China both pose grave and wide-ranging challenges and threats. Such cooperation necessitates reinforcing and amplifying the strength of America and its allies more than ever.

No immediate task is more important than acting with unity for Ukraine and its sovereignty. More than six months into Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, the war seems nowhere close to ending. Kevin Roberts, president of The Heritage Foundation, said it bluntly: "America has clear national security and economic interests in a Europe that is stable and secure. Providing military resources to the people of Ukraine in their fight against Russia's brutal invasion is a worthy cause that also advances those interests."⁵

Those interests are shared by other countries and should be furthered by continuing to supply weapons to Ukraine and strengthening economic sanctions against Russia. Ukrainians are willing and capable of fighting for themselves, with a strong consensus that a free, thriving, and secure Ukraine and a rebuffed Russia benefit America and its allies' interests.

The United States and its G20 partners must ensure that Russia pays the highest possible cost for its invasion of Ukraine. Toward that end, Washington should work with other governments around the world to:

- **Expel Russia from the G20.** Indonesian President Joko Widodo said in a recent interview that he has received assurance from Vladimir Putin that he would attend the November G20 summit in Bali.⁶ Permitting Putin to be present in the upcoming G20 summit is fundamentally unacceptable and morally wrong. Russia is a barbaric aggressor, and Ukraine is a victim. And the ongoing unconscionable, horrific tragedy invoked by Putin involves far more than Russia and Ukraine, which warrants, as well as necessitates, far broader consequences than individually sanctioning Putin and his cronies.

President Biden must take necessary steps to ensure that Russia—a national security threat which breached international law with its unprovoked invasion of Ukraine—is expelled from the G20.

- **Expand the scope and reach of economic sanctions against Russia.** The humanitarian and military situation remains dire in Ukraine, and now is not the time to keep additional sanctions in reserve. The existing unprecedented economic sanctions should be elevated and amplified to sanction—in their entirety and without exemptions—Russia’s major economic sectors, such as energy and banking.
- **Expose the geopolitical, economic Kremlin–Beijing linkage and confront it.** Russia’s and China’s strategic goals are nearly identical. They both want a weakened and divided world that they can exploit. They both want to eclipse the U.S. and other nations’ partnerships so that the free world is divided and more vulnerable. The Biden Administration should continue the leadership demonstrated by the previous Administration to rally countries to confront and push back against the real threat from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).
- **Strengthen good economic governance based on the principle of economic freedom.** As economic freedom has grown since the end of the Cold War, the global economy has more than doubled, lifting hundreds of millions of people out of poverty and helping to promote more effective democratic governance. The Heritage Foundation’s annual *Index of Economic Freedom*, along with other indices, has long documented the importance of good economic governance, which is critical to levels of economic growth and prosperity, which in turn generate more opportunities and greater economic security. Free countries are prosperous due to robust and market-based economic governance. Massive government spending and controls hamper that growth. People in economically free societies enjoy longer and healthier lives. They have access to higher quality “social goods,” such as education, health care, and a cleaner environment. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and challenges from China and its CCP have shown that economic freedom buttressed by transparency and accountability matters more than ever.

Russia Is Unfit for the G20

In response to Indonesian President Widodo’s interview that revealed his invitation to Russia to join the November G20 summit and Putin’s acceptance, a spokesperson for Britain’s foreign ministry stated, “We welcome Indonesia’s efforts to ensure that the impacts of Russia’s war are considered in G20 meetings, as well as indications that Ukraine may be represented by President [Volodymyr] Zelenskiy at the G20 Leaders’ Summit.”⁷

The spokesperson further noted something more important by unambiguously pointing out that “Russia has no moral right to sit at the G20 while its aggression in Ukraine persists.”⁸

As Russia’s barbaric invasion of Ukraine grinds on, now is the time for the Biden Administration to push for ousting Russia from the G20.

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Endnotes

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7. "Russia Has No Moral Right to Sit at G20, Says Britain," Reuters, August 19, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-has-no-moral-right-sit-g20-says-britain-2022-08-19/> (accessed August 24, 2022).
8. Ibid.