



Russia

Summary and Key Talking Points

Policy Proposals

1. Maintain solidarity with European allies on sanctions for Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
2. Support the construction of the Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline and the Southern Gas Corridor project.
3. Oppose the construction of the Nord Stream II Pipeline, which would only increase Europe's dependency on Russian gas.
4. Establish a permanent U.S. military presence in the Baltic region.

Quick Facts

1. The Trump Administration has kept and introduced multiple rounds of sanctions on Russia, including on more than 200 Russian individuals and entities.
2. Since 2014, Russia's war in eastern Ukraine has claimed more than 13,000 lives and displaced over 2 million Ukrainians.
3. In 2018, Russia introduced a \$306 billion investment plan for new military equipment and force modernization.

Power Phrases

A Track Record of Aggression

- Russia has a recent history of using military force to advance its national interests.
- The Russian military threat might seem distant to Americans, but it poses a real threat to our allies in Eastern Europe.

International Meddling

- Russia poses a threat to U.S. interests beyond its military threat to our allies. It includes election meddling in the U.S. and Europe, the attempted assassination of a former Russian spy in Britain, and the illegal capture of 24 Ukrainian sailors in international waters.

A Strong Posture

- The U.S. must maintain a strong position towards Russia, standing by our allies, committing unconditionally to NATO, and encouraging Europe to maintain sanctions as long as Russia continues its aggression

The Issue

Russia is a 21st-century country with 19th-century ambitions. As long as Vladimir Putin is in power, Russia will remain a geopolitical adversary and competitor for NATO and the United States. Since coming to power in 1999, Putin has tried to undermine the U.S. and its allies at every turn. No matter how distant the Russian military threat might seem to Americans, it poses a legitimate threat to countries in Eastern Europe, many of which the U.S. is required by treaty obligation to defend.

Russia has shown a willingness to use military force to advance national interests. Since March 2014, it has illegally occupied Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula and sustained a war in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region. In August 2008, Russia invaded Georgia and now occupies 20 percent of that country's internationally recognized territory. Each year, Russia constructs barriers and fences, taking more of Georgia's territory through what has been called a "creeping annexation."

In addition to its use of military force, Russia continues to undermine U.S. and European interests. Moscow's election meddling in the U.S. and Europe is well documented. In March 2018, Moscow used a nerve agent in an assassination attempt on a former Russian spy and his daughter in Britain. In November 2018, Russia illegally captured in international waters 24 Ukrainian sailors under the dubious and provocative pretense that they had strayed into Russian waters.

Russia's threat and meddling extend to other regions as well, including the Middle East and Latin America. Russia's support of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has detrimentally allowed the civil war and killing to continue. Russia's close relationship with Iran has also proven problematic, particularly for the United States, since Russia provides diplomatic cover to Iran on international statutes at, for example, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), sells arms to Iran, and enables Iran's rogue behavior in Syria. In Venezuela, Russia backs former Socialist dictator Nicolás Maduro in clear opposition to the United States' support of new interim president Juan Guaidó.

Recommendations

Continuously state America's commitment to Europe. President Trump should never miss an opportunity to reiterate that it is in America's best interest to remain actively engaged in NATO. Future Presidents should follow this message. A peaceful, stable Europe has led to economic, political, and military dividends that have had an immeasurable positive effect on the U.S.

Take a realistic approach to Russia. So far, the Trump Administration's policies have been the toughest on Russia in a generation. Today, Russia is a 21st-century power with 19th-century imperial ambitions. Given the threat that Russia poses to Europe's stability, NATO is as important now as it was in 1949.

Work with allies in Europe to maintain solidarity on sanctions. The U.S. should strongly encourage allies in Europe to keep sanctions in place against Russia for its actions in Ukraine. The U.S. should work with its European allies to ensure that these sanctions remain in place as long as Russia continues its aggression.

Focus on Ukraine's achievements in fighting corruption and not on unrealistic expectations. Social, economic, and political reforms in Ukraine will take time. Reform is a process, not a single event. Over the past few years, Ukraine has made some progress. It has accomplished government finance reform, pension reform, and energy sector reform, among others. It still, however, needs to reform its judicial system, strengthen the rule of law, and curb corruption. Western policymakers need to support Ukraine on the path to reform, even if change takes a whole generation.

Continue to assist in Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration. Georgia is a staunch ally of the U.S. and NATO. It has suffered more per capita loss than any other country in the war in Afghanistan, where it is the largest non-NATO troop contributor. Georgia has been on a journey to democracy since regaining independence in 1991, and it is in America's interest that Georgia remain on this path for the sake of regional stability. Georgia is firmly committed to the transatlantic community, and represents the idea in Europe that each country has the sovereign ability to determine its own path. The U.S. needs to remember this and support Georgia in its Western aspirations.

Push for Russia to end its support for Syrian President Bashar al-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 intervened militarily and has since propped up the Syrian dictator. This has 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.

Offer political support for the construction of the Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline and the Southern Gas Corridor project. As Europe seeks alternatives to Russian gas, the Southern Gas Corridor and completion of a Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline will play important roles. This is because they will both link Caspian region energy markets with Europe, bypassing Russia and Iran. Furthermore, the construction of the Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline will help to ease regional tensions between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan.

Push back against Nord Stream II. The Nord Stream II pipeline project that would connect Germany with Russia is neither economically necessary nor geopolitically prudent. Rather, it is a political project to greatly increase European dependence on Russian gas, magnify Russia's ability to use its European energy dominance as a political trump card, and specifically undermine U.S. allies in Eastern and Central Europe. Each year until no longer necessary, the U.S. should use the NATO summit, a key forum with European allies, to specifically address Nord Stream II, expressing U.S. opposition, and linking the pipeline to NATO collective defense, which it would greatly undermine. A U.S. focus on stopping Nord Stream II at NATO summits may give other member states concerned about the project political cover to express their own concerns and opposition.

Commit unconditionally to America's NATO treaty obligations. As long as the U.S. remains a member of the Alliance, it must be made clear to any adversary that an attack on one NATO member will, without question, be considered an attack on all. Any deviation from this commitment would only invite aggression.

Continue to press NATO allies on defense spending. While the U.S. should acknowledge the consistent recent increases in defense spending by its NATO allies, far too few allies are living up to their defense spending commitments. America's leadership role in NATO means continuing to encourage allies to have a plan to live up to their defense spending commitments, and to maintain and increase the progress of recent years.

Establish a permanent military presence in the Baltic region. The deployment of four rotational battalions to the region is a good start, but more should be done. The threat from Russia will remain for the foreseeable future. The U.S. and NATO need to show an enduring commitment to the region by permanently stationing armed forces in the Baltics.

Continue to participate in training exercises in the Arctic region. Exercises above the Arctic Circle are vital to ensuring that the NATO Alliance is prepared to meet potential threats to Arctic security. The U.S. should also consider hosting NATO exercises in Alaska.

Keep NATO enlargement on the agenda. NATO's open-door policy has been a crucial driver of modernization and reform in candidate countries, has promoted stability and peace in Europe, and has made it easier for the Alliance to coalesce around collective defense. The U.S. should continue to promote this important NATO policy and make it clear that Russia does not have an indirect veto over the process.

Facts and Figures

FACT: The Trump Administration has been the toughest on Russia since Ronald Reagan.

- The Trump Administration has kept and introduced multiple rounds of sanctions on Russia, including on more than 200 Russian officials and entities. To date, Russia has lost between \$300 and \$320 billion due to U.S. and EU sanctions and a decrease in foreign investment.
- Russia's diplomatic presence within the United States has been largely downsized. So far, the Trump Administration has expelled 60 Russian diplomats and spies from U.S. soil and closed the Russian consulates in San Francisco and Seattle.
- The Trump Administration has armed Georgia and Ukraine, both under partial Russian occupation, with advanced defensive weapons, something the previous Administration refused to do. Ukraine is now armed with Javelin anti-tank missiles, and Georgia with Javelin and Stinger anti-aircraft missiles, to deter against Russian aggression.

FACT: Russia continues to violate the sovereignty of its neighbors.

- Since 2014, Russia's war in eastern Ukraine has claimed more than 13,000 lives and displaced more than 2 million Ukrainians. Russia also illegally annexed Crimea and is stoking a war in eastern Ukraine.
- In November 2018, Russia illegally captured in international waters 24 Ukrainian sailors under the dubious and provocative pretense that they had strayed into Russian waters.
- Since 2008, Russia has illegally occupied 20 percent of Georgia's territory. Russian forces continue to erect barbed wire and fences to expand its occupation in what has been referred to as Russia's "creeping annexation" of Georgia.
- Since the 1990s, Russia has thoroughly violated Georgian human rights. Past conflicts, coupled with Russia's current occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, have displaced more than 200,000 ethnic Georgians from their homes.

FACT: Russia is greatly improving its military capabilities.

- In 2018, Russia introduced the new State Armament Program 2018–2027, a \$306 billion investment in new equipment and force modernization.
- Russia is using eastern Ukraine and Syria to test its military equipment. So far, Russia has tested shipborne and air-launched long-range cruise missiles in Syria, and flying platforms and unmanned aerial vehicles in Ukraine.
- Russia is quickly boosting its military presence in the Arctic. Russian investment in Arctic bases over the past decade has resulted in 14 operational airfields along with 16 deepwater ports. Russia has begun laying a nearly 8,000-mile-long fiber-optic cable across its Arctic coast to link military installations from the Kola Peninsula all the way to Vladivostok, to be completed in 2025.

Additional Resources

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