

The Trump team's delusional fixation on getting along with Russia

By **Jennifer Rubin** July 17 at 1:45 PM

Among the most dangerous and disappointing aspects of President Trump's foreign policy operation is the expressed eagerness, not just from the president but also from his secretary of state and national security adviser, to ignore Russia's international conduct with the hope of improving relations. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson did his best impression of his predecessor, John Kerry, when he declared after the Hamburg meeting between the president and Russian President Vladimir Putin, "I think what the two presidents, I think rightly, focused on is how do we move forward; how do we move forward from here. Because it's not clear to me that we will ever come to some agreed-upon resolution of that question [of Russian interference in our election] between the two nations." (As an aside, [Garry Kasparov observed](#), "It was a bad sign that Secretary of State Rex Tillerson was the only senior American figure present at the meeting between Trump and Putin. While he was discreet enough not to wear the friendship medal he was awarded personally by Putin in 2013, Tillerson cannot be considered a check on Trump's mysterious affection for the Russian.")

Consider for a moment Tillerson's formulation: Because Russia will not confess to an attack on American democracy, we have to ignore its assault so as to improve relations between the countries. It does not seem to dawn on Tillerson or the rest of the administration that Russian conduct in attacking our electoral system, in allegedly committing war crimes in Syria, in repressing its own people and in aggression and occupation of its neighbors makes improved relations both impossible and *undesirable*. Their formula amounts to appeasement plain and simple, a capitulation that assumes getting along with a rogue regime is preferable to confronting the rogue regime and forcing a change in its behavior.

"Is it possible to work with the Putin regime? The answer to that question is decidedly 'no,'" former State Department official and human rights guru [David Kramer wrote recently](#). "A brief look at recent events ought to convince any open-minded individual that Russia simply can't be a partner—and indeed has no desire to be one." Kramer recounts:

Putin's regime simply doesn't abide by agreements it has signed or inherited. It has been violating arms control agreements by developing and testing missiles in violation of the INF treaty. It has never abided by the ceasefire deal following its invasion of Georgia in 2008. It has never complied with two Minsk ceasefire deals following its illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and ongoing invasion of and aggression against

Ukraine in that country's east. It has violated the Budapest memorandum of 1994, the Friendship Treaty with Ukraine in 1997, and the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. It didn't respect any ceasefire deals in Syria. And it grossly abuses the human rights of its own people despite being a member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Council of Europe as well as a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Putin, in other words, is a wholly untrustworthy interlocutor. His regime is thoroughly corrupt and authoritarian and poses a threat to its own people, its neighbors, and the West.

The desire to “get along” is more than dangerous naivete. It's emblematic of the mentality of an exhausted West that finds defense of its own interests and values so daunting that it must resort to self-delusion about the nature of its enemy. Kramer recommends: “The next time President Trump asks, ‘Wouldn't it be nice if we and Russia got along?’ answer with the following: How many more Russian liberal activists need to be killed or poisoned? How many more countries does Putin need to invade? How many more Ukrainians need to die? How many more civilians need to be killed in Syria? And how many more elections does he need to interfere in—before we understand the existential threat the Putin regime represents?”

Ironically, the president who asks “Wouldn't it be nice if we and Russia got along?” is one who will never maintain American greatness nor “win” on the international stage. It's the language of a loser, a weakling. You see, America is great when it stands up to the likes of Russia on behalf of democracy, universal human rights and an international liberal order that respects national sovereignty.

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