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White House Temporarily Lifts Sanctions on Russia's Space Chief for U.S. Visit

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Dmitry Rogozin / Kremlin.ru

The White House has temporarily lifted an entry ban imposed on the head of Russia's federal space agency to allow him to visit the United States, the head of NASA has said in an interview with Russian media.

The U.S. banned entry to and froze the assets of ex-Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, along with other officials it blames for Moscow's seizure of the Crimean peninsula in March 2014. Rogozin, 54, oversaw Russia's powerful arms industry before he was appointed to head the Roscosmos state space agency earlier this year.

Rogozin will now be able to travel to the U.S. under a workaround that removes the sanctions for the duration of his visit, NASA administrator Jim Bridenstine told the state-run TASS news agency Friday.

He did not name a date for the Russian official's possible visit.

Bridenstine visited Russia last week to oversee a two-man crew's space launch to the International Space Station (ISS) that ended in the mid-air failure of a Russian rocket.

Russian cosmonaut Alexei Ovchinin and American astronaut Nick Hague were rescued unharmed after making a dramatic emergency landing in Kazakhstan after the Soyuz rocket failure last Thursday.

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The incident put into question the safety of Russia's space program and comes on the back of an as-yet unexplained appearance of a hole in the side of a Russian module docked at the ISS.

But Bridenstine said last Friday that he had full confidence in the Russian-made Soyuz rockets and expected U.S. astronauts to fly on them again.

Underscoring the importance of Russian-U.S. cooperation in space despite geopolitical tensions on Earth, the NASA chief told TASS Rogozin's visit would mark an important milestone in upholding a collaborative relationship.

"Whatever areas of disagreement the two countries have, we don't want that to spill over into space," Bridenstine was quoted as saying. "We certainly do not want terrestrial disputes to get in the way of what we can do together in space."

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