
PUTIN: RUSSIA RESERVES RIGHT TO CUT FURTHER U.S. DIPLOMATIC MISSION

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Russia reserves the right to cut further the number of U.S. diplomatic staff in Moscow, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Tuesday, in response to what he called Washingtons boorish treatment of Russias diplomatic mission on U.S. soil.

Speaking after U.S. officials ordered Russia to vacate diplomatic premises in several American cities, Putin said he would order the Russian foreign ministry to take legal action over alleged violations of Russias property rights.

That the Americans reduced the number of our diplomatic facilities - this is their right, Putin told a news conference in the Chinese city of Xiamen, where he was attending a summit of major emerging economies.

The only thing is that it was done in such a clearly boorish manner. That does not reflect well on our American partners. But its difficult to conduct a dialogue with people who confuse Austria and Australia. Nothing can be done about it. Probably such is the level of political culture of a certain part of the U.S. establishment.

As for our buildings and facilities, this is an unprecedented thing, Putin said. This is a clear violation of Russias property rights. Therefore, for a start, I will order the Foreign Ministry to go to court - and lets see just how efficient the much-praised U.S. judiciary is.

A U.S. State Department official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Washington hoped to avoid further retaliatory actions with Moscow, but was confident in the legality of the consular closure and restrictions ordered last week.

U.S. President Donald Trump took office in January, saying he wanted to improve ties with Russia.

Putin also spoke favorably of Trump.

But relations have been damaged by accusations from U.S. intelligence officials that Russia sought to meddle in the presidential election. Russia has denied interfering in the vote.

Asked by a reporter if he was disappointed with Trump, Putin said: Whether I am disappointed or not, your question sounds very naive - he is not my bride and, likewise, I am neither his bride nor bridegroom.

We are both statesmen. Every nation has interests of its own. In his activities, Trump is guided by the national interests of his country, and I by the interests of mine.

FILE PHOTO: A sign outside the entrance to the building of the Consulate General of Russia is shown in San Francisco, California, U.S., August 31, 2017. REUTERS/Stephen Lam

I greatly hope that we will be able, just as the current U.S. president said, to find some compromises while resolving bilateral and international problems ... taking into account our joint responsibility for international security.

DIPLOMATIC PARITY

The U.S. order for Russia to vacate some of its diplomatic properties was the latest in a series of tit-for-tat actions that began when former U.S. president Barack Obama, late last year, expelled 35 Russian diplomats.

The Obama administration said it was retaliating for Russian meddling in the U.S. presidential election.

In July, Moscow responded, ordering the United States to cut the number of its diplomatic and technical staff working in Russia by around 60 percent, to 455.

Moscow said the move aimed to bring the number of U.S. and Russian diplomats working on each others soil to parity. But Putin said the latest expulsions ordered by Washington brought the number of Russian diplomats on U.S. soil to below parity.

He said the United States was erroneously counting 155 Russian diplomats working at the United Nations headquarters in New York as being Russian diplomats on U.S. soil. If they are removed

from the equation, Putin said, Russia has fewer than 455 diplomats in the United States.

We reserve the right to take a decision on the number of U.S. diplomats in Moscow. But we won't do that for now. Let's wait and see how the situation develops further, he said.

The United States has ordered the closure of the Russian consulate in San Francisco and two buildings housing trade missions in Washington and New York.

U.S.-Russian relations have also been badly strained by Moscow's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the subsequent separatist conflict in eastern Ukraine, developments which led Washington to impose economic sanctions on Russia.

Trump, himself battling allegations that his associates colluded with Russia, grudgingly signed into law the new sanctions against Moscow that had been drawn up by Congress.

Kaynak/Source: