

Why Expulsion of US Diplomats From Russia Caught Washington Off Guard

Washington has once again misread Moscow, not expecting that a series of anti-Russia measures adopted under the Obama and Trump administration would result in the large-scale expulsion of US diplomats from Russia, Pavel Salin, the director of the Center for Political Studies at Moscow's Financial University, told Radio Sputnik.

Moscow's decision to have the US diplomatic staff in Russia reduced by 755 people has obviously caught Washington by surprise, Pavel Salin, the director of the Center for Political Studies at Moscow's Financial University, says, explaining that the White House could not imagine that the Kremlin would adopt such a large-scale measure.

On July 28 the Russian Foreign Ministry suspended the use of all US Embassy warehouses as well as its compound in Moscow, and instructed the US to cut the size of its diplomatic staff in Russia to 455 people by September 1.

Speaking at a weekly press briefing on August 9, US State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert expressed regrets regarding the expulsion of American diplomats, which came as a response to a series of anti-Russia measures the US adopted under the previous and current administrations.

However, the Russian Embassy in the United States reminded the State Department that it was not Moscow who threw the first punch.

Back in December 2016, then-US President Barack Obama ordered to send 35 Russian diplomats out of the United States and froze access to two Russian diplomatic compounds over Moscow's alleged interference in the US 2016 presidential run. The Kremlin has repeatedly rejected the allegations, denouncing the claims as absurd and referring to the lack of any evidence.

Earlier this month a new package of restrictions against Russia was signed into law by US President Donald Trump after it had passed almost unanimously by

Congress.

The new law targets Russia's defense, intelligence, mining, shipping and railway industries and restricts dealings with Russian banks and energy companies.

"This is a very short-sighted and even dangerous policy fraught with undermining stability for which Moscow and Washington bear a special responsibility," the Ministry highlighted.

Commenting on the Kremlin's move Salin emphasized that Russia merely couldn't to leave Washington's actions unanswered. However, according to the Russian scholar, it appears that Moscow caught the US leadership off guard.

"It seems to me that the US did not expect [Moscow to adopt] such large-scale measures," Salin told Radio Sputnik.

Although the scholar believes that the relationship between the US and Russia would be "frozen" at the current level he didn't exclude that new scandals, similar to the Siemens issue, would emerge in Europe.

"The US response will not be a mirror one," Salin suggested, "Now they are likely to increase pressure on Russia's counterparts in Europe. I would expect new scandals, like the Siemens case, but maybe in a slightly different perspective. In this regard, I think we should expect unpleasant surprises for Moscow."

Last week the EU imposed additional sanctions on Moscow over a scandal surrounding the transfer of turbines supplied by German company Siemens to the Russian peninsula of Crimea in violation of previous Brussels' sanctions.

For its part, the Russian Foreign Ministry said that Moscow considers the EU and the German government as those responsible for the "unfriendly and unjustified" decision of the sanctions' extension and added that the Russian government reserves the right to respond.

Source: <https://sputniknews.com/politics/201708101056355322-us-diplomats-russia/>

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