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U.S. Consulate in St. Petersburg Smoke-Bombed on Eve of July 4th

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As U.S. citizens in Moscow took extra precautions this year while celebrating the 238th anniversary of their country's independence, activists in St. Petersburg seized the holiday spirit as an opportunity to cause trouble.

Independence Day festivities in Moscow and St. Petersburg were notably toned down this year. Due apparently to security concerns, the regular bash organized by the American Chamber of Commerce took place at a private golf club instead of the usual city park, and a celebration at the ambassador's residence drew noticeably fewer Russians than in recent years, The Associated Press reported.

Despite the friction over the Ukraine conflict, President Vladimir Putin wished his U.S. counterpart well on the holiday, according to a letter posted on the Kremlin website, and said he hoped their countries, which "bear particular responsibility for ensuring international stability and security," will improve their relations "despite the current differences

and difficulties."

In stark contrast to Putin's diplomatic approach to the festivities, St. Petersburg activists hurled smoke bombs at the city's U.S. Consulate and burned a mock-up of the American flag emblazoned with a skull and crossbones on the eve of the holiday.

Only one activist was detained, a "37-year-old unemployed man" who faces a misdemeanor charge of "petty hooliganism," official state newspaper Rossiiskaya Gazeta reported Friday. The consulate was closed that day due to the holiday.

Opposition movement The Other Russia, known for staging unauthorized rallies in Moscow and St. Petersburg with the aim of advocating for Russians' constitutional right to peaceful protest, admitted responsibility for the consulate event while denouncing U.S. support for the Ukrainian government.

The Other Russia's rallies are regularly broken up by police, but the group's most recent one in Moscow, on May 31, surprisingly received authorization from the city, the first time such approval has been given in five years.

During that event — which gathered hundreds of people, many holding up flags of the self-declared Donetsk People's Republic — the group's leader Eduard Limonov called for Russia to offer more help to the separatists in Ukraine. He also shrugged off rumors that the rally might have been permitted because he so staunchly favored Russian military intervention in the country.

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