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Outgoing Obama Administration Fires Off New Sanctions at Moscow Over Cyberattacks

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Kremlin Press Service

The Obama administration has followed through on its threats to sanction the Kremlin in response to alleged Russian interference in the U.S. presidential election earlier this year. On Thursday, the White House ejected 35 Russian intelligence operatives from the United States, and imposed sanctions on Russia's two leading intelligence services, including four officers who belong to the military unit Washington says ordered the attacks the Democratic National Committee and other political institutions.

The White House has also sanctioned two hackers already listed on the FBI's most wanted list, Evgeny Bogachev and Alexey Belan, who are suspected of fraud, racketeering, computer intrusion, and several other crimes.

Speaking to The Moscow Times, Andrei Soldatov, an expert on the Russian security services,

called the Obama's administration's new sanctions “a political decision,” saying “either the U.S. intelligence community doesn't want to reveal how exactly its investigation was organized (fearing for its sources, for example), or it doesn't have this information.” The two hackers added to the sanctions, Soldatov says, played no role in the cyberattacks on the U.S. election.

Russian foreign policy analyst Vladimir Frolov told The Moscow Times that the Kremlin can be expected to respond symmetrically, ejecting 35 U.S. officials and closing some American properties. “I don't really understand how it will harm the Kremlin,” Frolov said of the White House's new sanctions.

President-elect Donald Trump, whose critics say he won the November election with help from the Kremlin, told reporters on Wednesday that he thinks the nation needs to put the cyberattack on the DNC behind it. “I think we ought to get on with our lives. I think that computers have complicated lives very greatly,” Trump said at his home in Florida.

A spokesperson for the Russian Foreign Ministry told the news agency Interfax that the Obama administration is trying to damage the restoration of normal relations between Washington and Moscow, which is widely expected to take place under President Donald Trump.

“I can only reaffirm that this sanctions hysteria demonstrates how completely clueless the outgoing U.S. administration is,” diplomat Konstantin Dolgov said.

Online, prominent figures in Moscow are already mocking the White House's effort to punish Russia for its supposed cyberattacks. Moments after the new sanctions were announced, Margarita Simonyan, the chief editor of Russia Today, the Russian government's flagship news agency, tweeted, “Oooh, I'm so scared!”

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