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Moscow Hears Political Saber Rattling in Fresh U.S. Sanctions Vote

The vote sparked harsh rhetoric not heard since Trump has come to office

By Lena Smirnova

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Roman Pimenov / Interpress / TASS

Top Russian officials on Wednesday slammed a U.S. House of Representatives vote in favor of fresh sanctions, with one official warning it could trigger "a new Cold War."

"Washington is a source of danger," Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov told the state-run TASS news agency. "This is a blatant, deliberated choice by Russia's enemies in the United States."

"There are quite a few of them" he added. "They've let themselves go and nothing is holding them back."

The bill expands sanctions on Russian businesses and individuals. It also codifies existing sanctions introduced in retaliation of Russia's meddling in Ukraine, which would make it more difficult for the Trump administration to attempt to lift them.

The bill is not yet a done deal. It still has to pass through the U.S. Senate and could also be vetoed by President Donald Trump, whose administration has been embroiled in allegations of collusion with Russia since moving into the White House.

But in Russia's upper political circles, there was little doubt on Wednesday that it would receive the U.S. president's stamp of approval.

"Trump will sign it, confirming he is a hostage of Congress and anti-Russian hysteria," Alexei Pushkov, the former head of the State Duma international affairs committee, now a senator, said on Twitter. "This is a new phase in the confrontation."

Top officials warned it will significantly impact Moscow's readiness to engage Washington.

"The news is quite sad in terms of Russian-American relations and the prospect of their development," Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told journalists. "It's no less depressing in terms of international law and international trade."

Link: Under the Trump Administration, Russia faces heavier sanctions than under President Obama

Franz Klintsevich, deputy chairman of the Federation Council's committee for defense and security, told journalists on Wednesday that fresh sanctions could make joint U.S.-Russian efforts to solve international issues, like terrorism, "extremely difficult, if not impossible."

"The world could enter into a new Cold War," he warned.

The new batch of sanctions could be the most significant to be placed on Russia since 2014. According to the bill, the sanctions target those involved in Russian cyber-attacks against the United States, human rights violations and corruption.

Russian senator Konstantin Kosachyov, the head of the Federation Council's international relations committee, said Russia would prepare a response to the bill, warning on Facebook it would be "painful" for the U.S.

"The further degradation of bilateral cooperation is becoming inevitable," Kosachyov wrote.

"The American political elite has become unhinged," Kosachyov went on. "It has chosen our country as a target or, more precisely, as a training wall."

Policymakers did not provide specifics on what the Russian response to new sanctions will be. But Leonid Slutsky, head of the State Duma's committee on international relations, cautioned against harsh retaliation that would "frighten the sensible forces which do exist in sufficient numbers in the United States."

Discussions on the response measures are already in progress in the State Duma and the

Federation Council, Slutsky said in an interview with Rossiya 24 channel.

“The response should be constructive and useful for Russia, for Russian-American relations, for global politics,” Slutsky said. “It should be a well-thought out position so that we don’t spoil matters for ourselves even more.”

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