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Putin Says Russia Held Back on Counter-Sanctions for a 'Long Time'

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Russia held back on introducing sanctions "for quite some time," but lost hope after Washington's "unprovoked move," President Vladimir Putin said in a state television broadcast on Sunday.

The interview with prominent presenter Vladimir Solovyov on state television Rossia-1 came two days after news broke that Russia would take counter-measures in response to new sanctions passed by the U.S. Senate, which the White House has said President Donald Trump intends to sign.

The number of American diplomatic personnel in Russia will be slashed by 755 people by September. Moscow will also close off access to two U.S. diplomatic facilities in Moscow.

Putin told Solovyov that the measures were in response to the U.S. taking "an unprovoked step towards worsening Russian-American relations."

In late 2016, Obama expelled 35 Russian diplomats and toughened economic sanctions already in place over Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, in response to alleged Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election.

"We have offered to work together with the Americans many times," said Putin during the broadcast. "But instead of constructive work, we only hear unfounded accusations about interference in the domestic affairs of the United States."

Last week, U.S. Congress voted to codify the sanctions against Russia. That will make it difficult for President Donald Trump to lift them without first gaining broad political support.

"As you might have noticed, we waited quite some time in the hope things would change for the better," Putin said. "We hoped that the situation would change, but judging by everything, if it is going to change, then it won't be soon."

"I consider we have to show that we will not let this go unanswered."

Putin added there was still cooperation between Russia and the U.S. in many spheres, including on cyber security, nuclear disarmament and the fight against terrorism. Should the situation worsen further, "we could consider other ways of responding," he said.

"But I hope it won't come to that," he added. "As of today, I'm against [further measures.]"

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