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Moscow Threatens Countermeasures If U.S. Impedes Russian Diplomats

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Embassy of the Russian Federation in Washington **Wikicommons**

Moscow will respond in kind if the United States impedes the work of Russian diplomats in that country, a top Foreign Ministry official said Tuesday.

"If the Americans decide to complicate the work of our embassies and consulates in the U.S., then the issue of retaliatory measures, including mirror measures, will be raised in all its magnitude and will loom large," Sergei Ryabkov, Russia's deputy foreign minister, was cited as saying by the state-funded TASS news agency.

The statement comes after Moscow ordered the United States to cut its diplomatic staff to 455 by Sept. 1, triggering a U.S. Embassy announcement last week that it would temporarily suspend issuing non-immigrant visas in Russia.

Ryabkov said Russian visa processing in the United States would continue as normal. "We would like American citizens' trips to Russia to be carried out with minimal obstacles," he said.

In an interview with the opposition-leaning Dozhd television channel on Monday, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova also said there would be no Russian response to the change in U.S. visa processing, saying retaliation would be tantamount to "the genocide of ordinary people."

She also said that the staff cuts had been Washington's decision, after Moscow had "proposed" the measure to "achieve parity," following the expulsion of dozens of Russian diplomats last year over alleged meddling in the U.S. presidential election.

Outgoing U.S. Ambassador in Moscow John Tefft on Monday called the move taken by then-President Barack Obama a "blunt instrument."

"But the choice the Obama Administration had was: do you want war with Russia? No one wanted that," he told the liberal Ekho Moskvy radio station.

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