

# 'Not Electing a Pope' — Why Was Smoke Coming Out of Russia's San Francisco Consulate?

September 02, 2017



**Screenshot Twitter**

Plumes of black smoke coming out of Russia's San Francisco consulate on Friday fueled rumors that Russian diplomats were burning documents after being forced to leave the property.

The U.S. State Department on Thursday ordered Russia to vacate its San Francisco consulate and scale back activities at annexes in Washington D.C. and New York by Saturday.

Russia's Foreign Ministry [said](#) Friday that U.S. security services were planning on searching the San Francisco premises, including diplomats' living premises, calling it a violation of diplomatic immunity guaranteed by the Geneva Convention.

A day before the deadline, black smoke was seen coming out of the chimney at the San

Francisco building, setting off theories that consulate staff was burning paperwork.

**Embed:**

Fire coming from top of [#russianconsulate](#) In Sf. What you guys burning ?  
[pic.twitter.com/YcEwkjEYnQ](https://pic.twitter.com/YcEwkjEYnQ)

— Robert Humphrey (@RobertCHumphrey) [September 1, 2017](#)

In a tweet, the San Francisco fire department said “everything is okay,” adding the building — which it referred to as an embassy — “had a fire alarm NOT A FIRE.”

**Embed:**

MEDIA! The Russian embassy had a fire alarm NOT A FIRE everything is okay and we are clearing Thank you [pic.twitter.com/q3O9Knfa65](https://pic.twitter.com/q3O9Knfa65)

— San Francisco Fire (@sffdpio) [September 1, 2017](#)

Maria Zakharova, Russia’s Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, [slammed](#) the reports of a fire at the embassy calling it part of an anti-Russian information campaign, going “beyond sadism.”

The smoke was the result of activities to “preserve the building,” including “closing the windows, lowering the curtains, cutting off the water, turning off the lights, closing the doors, throwing away the garbage,” among other activities, she said.

Reports of the fire quickly led social media users to [share](#) an official picture of the San Francisco consul general Sergei Petrov, sitting next to a smoldering fireplace.

**Embed:**

Petrov's official photo, so yeah, why not <https://t.co/TiHsAHeQKX>  
[pic.twitter.com/tqAMPbGaC2](https://pic.twitter.com/tqAMPbGaC2)

— Scott Rose (@rprose) [September 1, 2017](#)

CNN also [cited](#) a Russian official as saying: “No need to worry. They are not electing a Pope.”

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2017/09/02/not-electing-a-pope-why-was-smoke-coming-out-of-russias-san-francisco-consulate-a58836>