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U.S. Diplomatic Staff in Russia Could See Another Major Cut

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Vedyashkin Sergey / Moskva News Agency

The Russian Foreign Ministry has not eliminated the possibility of reducing U.S. diplomatic staff by another 150 or more personnel, the state-run news agency RIA Novosti reported Wednesday.

In an interview with Georgy Borisenko, head of the ministry's North America Department, reporter Maria Kiseleva asked whether Russia is ready to respond to the closure of the Russian consulate in San Francisco. Borisenko said that Moscow is "not excluding any options, including the actual parity in diplomatic staff numbers."

After Washington strengthened sanctions against Russia, Moscow ordered the United States to reduce its diplomatic and technical staff in Russia to 455 employees. The figure was intended to mirror the total amount of Russian diplomats in the United States, but also included Russians working at the United Nations Headquarters.

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"We basically gave the Americans a head start, went for a compromise," Borisenko said. "Since they don't appreciate this, we have every right to subtract the amount that directly corresponds to the number of employees in our permanent mission from this figure of 455," he told RIA.

Borisenko added that such cuts "would drop the number of American personnel in Russia to the level of 300 people or lower."

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