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U.S. Drastically Reduces Visa Services in Russia After St. Petersburg Consulate's Closure

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Employees remove the national flag of the United States from the building of the US Consulate General in St Petersburg **Dmitri Lovetsky / AP / TASS**

The United States has reportedly drastically reduced visa services in Russia after its consulate in St. Petersburg was ordered to close after a deterioration in bilateral relations following the poisoning of a former Russian spy in Britain.

Moscow ordered the closure of the U.S. consulate in St Petersburg and the expulsion of 60 U.S. diplomats last Thursday as ties worsened over the poisoning of Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia. Last week, U.S. President Donald Trump closed Russia's consulate in Seattle and expelled 60 Russian diplomats from the country.

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The staff downsizing and the St. Petersburg consulate's closure have dramatically reduced visa services, the RBC business portal cited U.S. Embassy in Moscow spokeswoman Andrea Kalan as saying Monday.

Kalan replaced Maria Olson as embassy spokeswoman after the latter was reportedly listed among the 60 diplomats to be expelled, the state-run TASS news agency cited an unnamed diplomatic source as saying.

Late last week, the U.S. State Department confirmed that the closure of the consulate and the expulsions of 58 U.S. diplomats in Moscow and two consulate officials in Yekaterinburg would "certainly" affect visa and consular operations.

The U.S. Embassy temporarily suspended processing non-immigrant visas in August 2017 after Russia expelled U.S. diplomats following new sanctions over suspected interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections, before resuming visa services in December.

Reuters contributed reporting to this article.

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