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U.S. Tells Fans to 'Think Twice' Before Going to World Cup in Russia

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Alexander Avilov / Moskva News Agency

The United States has advised its football fans to "think twice" before traveling to Russia for the 2018 FIFA World Cup amid strained relations between the countries.

Global football body FIFA said last week that, with 16,642 tickets bought, American fans were the biggest foreign buyers out of almost 400,000 tickets sold in the most recent sales period. The United States men's national team failed to qualify for the tournament, which Russia hosts in June-July, for the first time in three decades.

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"We won't have the same ability to protect our citizens or even just deal with the regular consular affairs," The Daily Telegraph quoted an unnamed senior U.S. administration official as saying Sunday.

The official said the U.S. and U.K. diplomatic corps have been "decimated" in the wake of the nerve agent poisoning of Russia's former double agent in Britain last month. London blames Moscow for the March 4 poisoning of ex-spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in Salisbury, which Russia denies and which has resulted in a wave of mutual expulsions of Russian and Western diplomats.

The Russian Embassy in Washington seized on the latest warning on Monday, coupling it with the recent refusal to grant Russian wrestlers U.S. visas for a competition and the State Department's latest advisory system urging Americans to reconsider travel to Russia.

"There sure is a threat. This threat is that a significant part of the population in the West will stop believing the everyday anti-Russia propaganda," the Russian embassy wrote on Facebook.

The diplomatic mission ascribed the travel warnings to "concern that a great number of Americans and the English will enjoy Russia, our cities and the Russian people."

"Despite the active anti-Russia campaign in the leading American media, and maybe because of it, the interest for our country is growing," it added.

"Welcome to Russia, Americans!" the embassy wrote.

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