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U.S. Senator Rand Paul Invites Russian Lawmakers to Washington

By Reuters

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Rand Paul/ Gage Skidmore/ Wikimedia Commons

U.S. Senator Rand Paul on Monday invited Russian lawmakers to visit Washington after holding talks in Moscow with parliamentarians and pledging to obstruct new sanctions against Russia.

The Republican senator and ally of U.S. President Donald Trump said he had traveled to the Russian capital to encourage diplomacy amid tense relations between Moscow and Washington.

U.S. intelligence agencies say Russia interfered in the 2016 U.S. presidential election to try to tilt the race in Trump's favor, an assertion Moscow rejects, and the two countries are also at odds over Syria and Ukraine.

"I am pleased to announce that we will be continuing this conversation," Paul said after

meeting Konstantin Kosachyov, chairman of the upper house of parliament's foreign affairs committee, and former Russian ambassador to the United States Sergei Kislyak.

"We have agreed and we have invited members of the foreign relations committee of Russia to come to the United States to meet with us in Washington. I think this is incredibly important. And those who believe in either country that we should not have diplomacy are greatly mistaken."

Paul's visit is the second time a U.S. political delegation has visited Russia within a month.

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He said he opposed new sanctions legislation against Russia that was backed by a bipartisan group of U.S. lawmakers last week, but said he represented a minority voice, Russian news agencies reported.

"There is sanctions hysteria in the United States at the moment. I represent the minority. All the Democrats are now happy that new sanctions are being introduced," Paul was quoted as saying by the RIA news agency.

"I can tell you I will try not to allow them to do this with ease," he was cited as saying.

Paul was expected to meet Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov during his visit.

The senator was one of Trump's most vocal supporters in Washington last month when the U.S. president came under fire for his handling of a summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

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