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Who Paid for Russia's Coronavirus Aid to the U.S.?

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The U.S. said it paid for the medical gear from Russia, while the Kremlin described its shipment as humanitarian aid. **Angela Weiss / AFP**

Russia sent a military plane carrying protective gear and ventilators to the United States on Wednesday to help the country battle the deadly coronavirus outbreak.

Shortly after, the U.S. said it purchased the medical supplies from Russia, the State Department said Wednesday, contradicting the Kremlin's initial description of the shipment as humanitarian aid.

Who really paid for the coronavirus aid?

What Russia says:

On Thursday, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said that the U.S. had paid for half of the plane's cargo, while Russia donated the other half.

The Kremlin previously described the full shipment as "humanitarian aid."

What the U.S. says:

“As a follow-up to the March 30 phone call between President Trump and President Putin, the United States has agreed to purchase needed medical supplies,” the State Department said in a statement Wednesday.

It said the equipment was handed over to the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in New York City, which has seen 47,439 coronavirus cases and 1,374 deaths.

“This is why the U.S. agreed to purchase urgently needed personal protective equipment from Russia to help FEMA respond in New York City,” Secretary of State Mike Pompeo tweeted.

Earlier this week, Trump said that "Russia sent us a very, very large planeload of things, medical equipment, which was very nice."

Neither the U.S. nor Russia specified how much was paid for the medical equipment. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said this week that Putin hoped the U.S. would return the gesture if the coronavirus pandemic struck Russia on a similar scale.

“Both countries have provided humanitarian assistance to each other in times of crisis in the past and will no doubt do so again in the future,” the State Department said. “This is a time to work together to overcome a common enemy that threatens the lives of all of us.”

What others say:

Observers have said that the supplies, which the Kremlin said Trump had accepted “gratefully,” amounted to a public relations coup for Putin.

Russian opposition activists criticized Moscow’s shipment of medical gear to the U.S., pointing to Russia’s own shortages of masks and medical equipment at hospitals across the country.

“An incredible story with the sale to the United States of a huge batch of medical supplies, the total lack of which is straining all of Russia outside Moscow,” said Leonid Volkov, a close aide to prominent Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny. “This, of course, is a modern remake of exporting grain from the U.S.S.R. ‘for hard currency’ in the midst of the 1932-33 famine which claimed millions of lives.”

“We raise money all over the country to buy protection for doctors, and our authorities sell personal protective equipment to the U.S. What a mockery,” the Doctors’ Alliance, an independent trade union linked to Navalny, tweeted.

Russia has reported 3,548 coronavirus cases and 30 deaths. The U.S. reported more than 215,300 coronavirus cases and 5,112 deaths.

Russia previously sent Italy a military convoy carrying coronavirus aid last week. Critics decried the aid as a propaganda stunt and unnamed officials told Italian media that most of the supplies were “useless.”

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