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Russia Summons U.S. Envoy Over Protest 'Interference'

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U.S. Ambassador to Russia John Sullivan. **Karel Navarro / AP / TASS**

Russia has summoned the United States' ambassador to Moscow over a "demonstration alert" urging U.S. citizens to avoid protests in support of jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny, a move that Moscow called interference in its affairs.

Russia's Foreign Ministry signaled its anger over the U.S. demonstration alert ahead of Saturday's mass rallies that drew tens of thousands of demonstrators across more than 100 Russian cities. Western leaders have condemned what they called a harsh crackdown on protesters, calling for their immediate release.

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Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov informed U.S. Ambassador John Sullivan that Moscow considers the safety alerts to be "direct interference in the internal affairs of our country," Interfax reported Monday.

A U.S. mission spokeswoman, in response to earlier criticism from the Kremlin, told AFP that U.S. and other countries' embassies and consulates around the world routinely issue safety messages to their citizens abroad.

Russia's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman told state media that Moscow is also investigating "how American social media giants participate in the interference in our internal affairs," Interfax reported.

She accused the platforms of violating its own terms of services by failing to moderate "fake" posts related to the rallies.

Russia has stepped up accusations of U.S. meddling in its affairs in the wake of a U.S. intelligence assessment that Moscow mounted a social-media and fake-news campaign in support of former President Donald Trump in 2016.

Russia, which was recently blamed for a massive cyber breach of U.S. federal agencies, denies that it meddles in U.S. politics.

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