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U.S. to Expel More Russian Diplomats, Moscow Says

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The Russian Embassy in Washington, DC. **Aaron Siirila (CC BY-SA 2.5)**

The United States will expel at least 54 more Russian diplomats next year, Russia's ambassador to Washington said Sunday as worsening relations have left both countries' embassies and consulates badly understaffed and unable to provide routine services.

Ambassador Anatoly Antonov said 27 Russian diplomats are scheduled to leave the U.S. with their families by Jan. 30, with an additional 27 expected to leave on June 30.

"We are facing a serious staff shortage," Antonov told the Soloviev Live YouTube channel.

More than 100 Russian diplomats with families had been expelled from the U.S. since 2016, when Washington's accusations of Moscow's interference in that year's presidential elections battered U.S.-Russian ties, according to a Reuters tally.

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Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova has previously said that 55 Russian diplomats and staff will be expected to leave the U.S. “in the coming months.”

Following several rounds of tit-for-tat diplomatic expulsions, the United States employees around 120 people at its Russian missions, far down from 1,200 in 2017, while Russia has some 230 people in the United States, excluding those posted in New York for its UN mission.

Amid a continuing dispute over how many diplomats each side can post in the other's country, Russia has placed the U.S. on a list of "unfriendly" countries requiring approval to employ Russian nationals.

The U.S. State Department has warned that the U.S. Embassy in Moscow could stop performing most functions in 2022. Last month it added Russia to a short list of countries where “the political or security situation is tenuous or uncertain enough" to prevent consular staff from processing immigrant visa applications.

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