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Russia Expels U.S. Diplomats in Tit-for-Tat Move: Official

By AFP

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The United States expelled 12 members of the Russian diplomatic mission to the UN in early March on charges of espionage. **Alexander Shcherbak/TASS**

Russia on Wednesday said it was expelling U.S. diplomats in retaliation for Washington's step to remove 12 of Moscow's representatives to the UN based in New York.

"On March 23, a note with the list of the American diplomats declared 'persona non grata' was handed to the head of the American diplomatic mission who was summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs," the ministry said in a statement.

The decision was taken in response to the expulsion by Washington of Russian diplomats at the UN in New York, the source said.

"The U.S. side has been given firm notice that any hostile action by the United States against Russia will be met with a resolute and appropriate response," the statement added.

A U.S. State Department spokesperson confirmed it had received the list from Moscow.

"This is Russia's latest unhelpful and unproductive step in our bilateral relationship. We call on the Russia government to end its unjustified expulsions of U.S. diplomats and staff," this official said.

"Now more than ever, it is critical that our countries have the necessary diplomatic personnel in place to facilitate communication between our governments."

The United States expelled 12 members of the Russian diplomatic mission to the UN in early March amid an open crisis with Russia over Ukraine on charges of espionage.

"The U.S. has informed the Russian Mission that we are beginning the process of expelling 12 intelligence operatives from the Russian Mission who have abused their privileges of residency in the U.S. by engaging in espionage activities that are adverse to our national security," the spokeswoman for the U.S. mission to the UN, Olivia Dalton, announced in a statement.

The Russian ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Antonov, denounced it as a "hostile move" by the United States, stressing that the actions were a cause of "deep disappointment and absolute rejection" in Moscow.

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