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US Expulsion of Russian Diplomats 'Banal Revenge' – Ambassador

By AFP

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The Embassy of Russia in Washington D.C., the United States. **Imago/Xinhua**

Washington's decision to expel two Russian diplomats in retaliation for a similar expulsion of US diplomats is "banal revenge," Russian ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said Saturday.

In a statement on Telegram he said that at a meeting with the US side, "I asked my interlocutors to explain what exactly our comrades were accused of and I received no arguments... Thus, this is, in fact, banal revenge, which does not do credit to American diplomacy."

On Friday, the United States said it was expelling two Russian diplomats in response to Moscow kicking out two Americans last month.

Moscow said they were expelled for liaising with a Russian citizen who had formerly worked

at the US consulate in the far eastern city of Vladivostok, Robert Shonov.

After a previous reduction of diplomats, Shonov started working as a contractor and the United States says he was hired for routine monitoring of publicly available Russian media.

But Antonov said the two US diplomats expelled "were essentially interfering in internal affairs and attempting to undermine Russia's national security".

Relations between the United States and Russia have deteriorated sharply since Moscow's invasion of Ukraine last year. The United States has said it sees no point in senior-level talks except on isolated issues such as arranging prisoner swaps.

Even before the war, the US diplomatic presence in Russia had been sharply reduced after a decree by President Vladimir Putin limiting the hiring of local staff, with Russians seeking US visas often obliged to go to embassies in third countries.

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