

Russian and U.S. Officials Discussed Restoring Embassy Staff, Direct Flights at Istanbul Talks

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The Russian delegation leaves the U.S. Consul General's residence in Istanbul. **Kirill Zharov / TASS**

Russian and U.S. diplomats held talks Thursday in Istanbul on restoring regular operations at their embassies, as well as the possible restoration of direct flights between the two countries, officials from both sides said.

The discussions, which lasted over six hours, were held at the U.S. Consul General's residence and came days after U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met in Saudi Arabia.

In attendance were Sonata Coulter, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Russia and Central Europe, and Alexander Darchiyev, head of the North Atlantic Department at Russia's Foreign Ministry.

“The United States raised concerns regarding access to banking and contracted services, as

well as the need to ensure stable and sustainable staffing levels at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow,” the U.S. State Department [said](#) in a statement late Thursday.

In November, the business newspaper Kommersant [reported](#) that Russia had tapped Darchiyev as its next ambassador to the United States. Russia has not had an ambassador to the U.S. since Anatoly Antonov returned to Moscow in October.

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On Friday, Russia’s Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said officials in Istanbul “agreed on joint steps to ensure the uninterrupted financing of diplomatic missions in both countries and to create appropriate conditions for diplomats to carry out their duties effectively.”

Specifically, Moscow is seeking the return of six Russian-owned properties seized between 2016 and 2018, Zakharova said. Russian diplomats also proposed the restoration of direct flights between the United States and Russia, which were [suspended](#) shortly after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Zakharova described the discussions in Istanbul as “constructive and businesslike,” adding that both sides had agreed to continue dialogue through diplomatic channels.

The U.S. State Department, in its turn, said the two sides plan to hold a follow-up meeting “in the near term” but did not provide additional details.

Russia and the United States have engaged in multiple rounds of diplomatic expulsions over the past decade, significantly reducing their respective embassy staffing levels.

In 2016, the Obama administration [expelled](#) 35 Russian diplomats and closed two Russian compounds in response to alleged Russian interference in the U.S. presidential election.

Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine [triggered](#) further diplomatic reductions, leaving embassies struggling to operate with minimal staff.

Since taking office last month, U.S. President Donald Trump has sought to reset relations with Moscow, initiating high-level talks with Kremlin officials for the first time in more than three years.

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