

# *Russia expels 60 US diplomats and closes US consulate in St. Petersburg*

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Moscow, March 29 (RHC) Russia will expel sixty US diplomats and close the US consulate in St. Petersburg, in a response mirroring the mass expulsion of Russian diplomats initiated by the United States and the United Kingdom, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.

Russia Today reported that in a press conference after meeting UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, Lavrov said that US ambassador to Moscow, Jon Huntsman, was summoned to the Foreign Ministry and told the news by deputy FM Sergey Ryabkov.

The diplomats should be out of the country by April 5th.

On Monday, Washington expelled 48 Russian diplomats from the bilateral mission and 12 more from the UN mission, and shut down the Russian consulate in Seattle. Canada, Australia and a number of US allies in Europe have followed up by expelling over 90 Russian diplomats.

In addition to the mirror response to the US, Moscow will expel the equal number of diplomats from those countries, Lavrov said.

The expulsions began on March 14, when the UK declared 23 Russian diplomats personae non grata, claiming that Moscow was “highly likely” behind the alleged poisoning of former spy Sergey Skripal and his

daughter Yulia with the chemical agent “novichok.” Russia has denied the allegations and requested the British government to provide evidence. So far, there has been none.

Meanwhile, Russia will convene an extraordinary session of the Executive Council of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) over the case of the poisoning of former Russian military intelligence Colonel Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia.

"To achieve a normal conversation and establish the truth, we have formally suggested convening an emergency session of the OPCW Executive Council on April 2, where we will submit specific questions, which were asked more than once, but we will do that in a generalized form," Lavrov said.

"I hope our Western partners will not shun an honest conversation. Otherwise, that will be another confirmation that everything that is going on is a gross provocation."

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