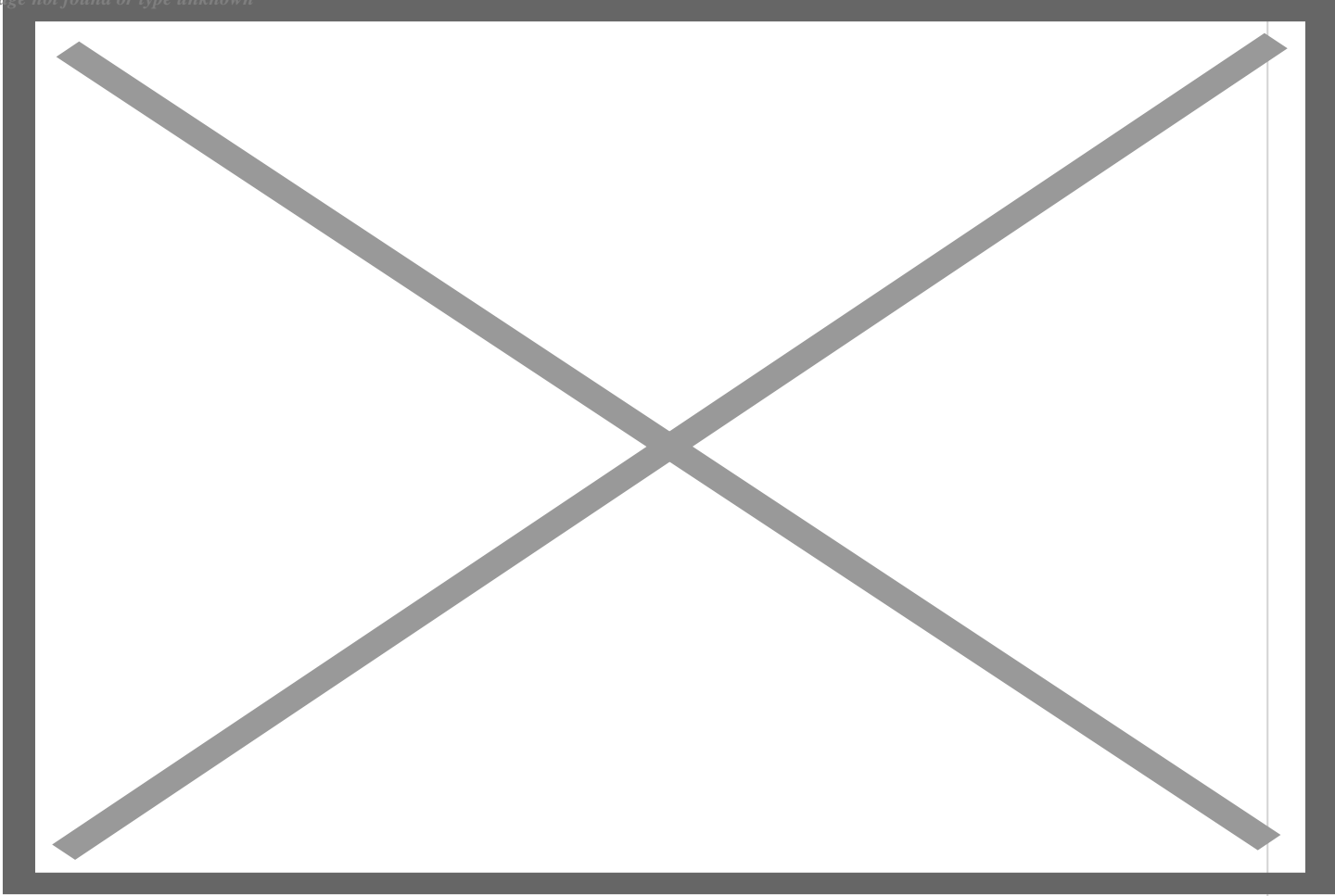


U.S. to shutter its two remaining consulates in Russia

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The U.S. Embassy in Moscow will be the only American diplomatic outpost in Russia. (Photo: Press TV)?

Moscow, December 19 (RHC)-- The Donald Trump administration has informed Congress of its plan to shut down the two remaining US consulates in Russia amid heightened tensions with Moscow. The State Department will shutter its consulate in Vladivostok and suspend operations at one in Yekaterinburg. The closures would leave the U.S. embassy in Moscow as Washington's only diplomatic outpost in Russia.

According to the congressional notice, 10 US diplomats working in the consulates will be reassigned to the embassy in Moscow and the 33 locally employed staff will be laid off. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo consulted with Ambassador John Sullivan before deciding to implement the changes.

A State Department spokesperson said the move is part of Washington's "ongoing efforts to ensure the safe and secure operation of the US diplomatic mission in the Russian Federation." "The resulting realignment of personnel at US Embassy Moscow will allow us to advance our foreign policy interests in Russia in the most effective and safe manner possible."

According to the notice, the State Department views the closures as a tit-for-tat response to a 2017 decision by Moscow to impose a personnel cap on the U.S. mission and the pursuant visa impasse with Russia. It is not known when the State Department will complete the closures or whether they will be finalized before President-elect Joe Biden takes office in January.

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