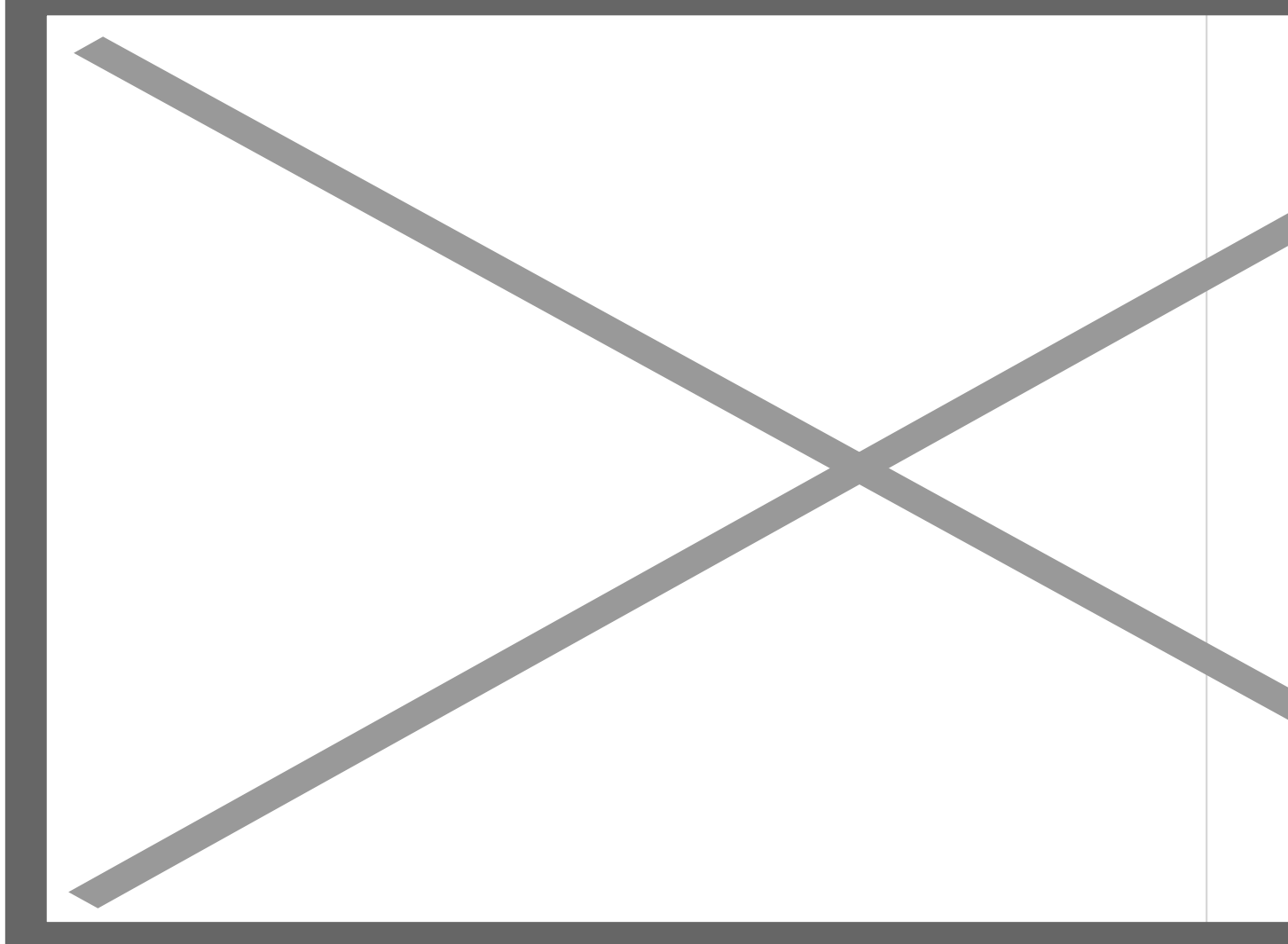


Russian envoy says the U.S. asked him to defect and condemn Putin's actions

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Anatoly Antonov, Russia's ambassador to the United States

Washington, June 8 (RHC)-- In a startling disclosure, Russia's ambassador to Washington says U.S. authorities tried to persuade him to denounce his motherland and condemn the Kremlin's military operation in Ukraine.

Speaking to Russia's state TV on Wednesday, Anatoly Antonov said the U.S. spy agency was encouraging defections among Russian diplomats and that he had received a letter asking him to denounce his country and criticize President Vladimir Putin's actions in neighboring Ukraine.

"I recently received a letter by mail, with a call to denounce my motherland and condemn the Russian president's actions," he said. "And I was recommended to make an inquiry to the office of U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman if I am ready to accept the proposal."

Antonov, however, said he had rejected the "provocative" advance from the US State Department. The Russian diplomat said that no such thing ever happens in his nation regarding U.S. diplomats in Moscow.

"When I see U.S. media publications calling upon Russian servicemen and diplomats to betray their homeland, I have no words to describe my rejection of such moves," he asserted. He also said that Russian embassy staffers were invited to "communicate with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

On the same TV program, Antonov also admitted that political dialogue between the Kremlin and Washington was at an unprecedented low level, as the trust had been undermined between the two sides. "Trust is undermined, cooperation is collapsing even on issues of obvious mutual interest," he said.

Antonov hastened to add that the dialogue was "limited to the discussion of technical issues," between the two sides. Despite the long history of diplomatic tensions between Moscow and Washington, relations between the two have sharply deteriorated since President Putin declared a military operation in Ukraine on February 24.

In a further ratcheting up of Washington's offensive against Moscow over its military action against the Kiev government, the administration of US President Joe Biden announced fresh sanctions on Russia.

Russia launched a military operation in Ukraine in late February, following Kiev's failure to implement the terms of the Minsk agreements and Moscow's recognition of the breakaway regions of Donetsk and Luhansk.

At the time, Russian President Vladimir Putin said one of the goals of what he called a "special military operation" was to "de-Nazify" Ukraine.

The United States and its Western allies have supplied heavy weaponry to Ukraine and shared intelligence with the government in Kiev in the last four months while imposing unprecedented sanctions on Russian officials and entities.

Moscow has repeatedly warned that Western support would indefinitely prolong the war in Ukraine.

In separate remarks on Wednesday, the US ambassador to Moscow, John Sullivan raised concern about the crisis in diplomatic relations between the two sides, saying on Monday that the two world powers "preserve the ability to speak to each other."

Speaking to Russian state news agency TASS, Sullivan said that Washington and Moscow should not break off diplomatic relations.



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