

Russia Reacts to New Sanctions With Hostility

After President Donald Trump announced he will sign into law the Iran, North Korea and Russia sanctions bill, it seems all three wanted to make a statement.

While North Korea and Iran, neither of which have direct diplomatic relations with the U.S., launched test missiles in response, Russia announced it was expelling 755 American diplomats from its soil. It also took back two properties that were being used by U.S. consular staff.

In a statement over the weekend, the Russian Foreign Ministry stated the move was merely “equalizing” the diplomatic presence of the two countries in their respective territories in the face of American “aggression”:

On July 28, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov had a telephone conversation with U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson.

Sergey Lavrov emphasized that the decision to even out the number of employees in U.S. and Russian diplomatic missions and to suspend the use of two properties by the U.S. Embassy is the result of a series of hostile steps by Washington. Such actions include illegal anti-Russian sanctions and slanderous accusations against Russia, the mass expulsion of diplomats and expropriation of our diplomatic property.

The Minister emphasized that Russia did all it could to improve relations and showed restraint in response to U.S. provocations. However, recent events demonstrated that U.S. politics have been captured by the Russophobic forces that have been pushing Washington toward the path of confrontation. The limited and absolutely adequate measures we took are not an “eye for an eye” response, but a forced step that is fully consistent with international practice

and is aimed at protecting lawful Russian interests in the hope that the U.S. side will finally reflect on the adverse consequences of its policies.

Sergey Lavrov reaffirmed that Russia still stands ready to normalize bilateral relations with the United States and cooperate on major international issues. However, this is only possible on the basis of equality, mutual respect and a balance of interests.

The officials agreed to continue contacts on all issues of Russian-U.S. relations.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson did not directly respond to the Russian statement. Instead, he spoke in general about the sanctions against all three countries in a very short statement:

The near-unanimous votes for the sanctions legislation in Congress represent the strong will of the American people to see Russia take steps to improve relations with the United States. We hope that there will be cooperation between our two countries on major global issues, and these sanctions will no longer be necessary. We will work closely with our friends and allies to ensure our messages to Russia, Iran and North Korea are clearly understood.

Vice President Mike Pence, who is currently visiting the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, reassured U.S. allies that the Trump administration remains committed to their security and the NATO alliance. Like the president, he also took to Twitter to comment on the situation, both extensively and repeatedly.

He also addressed the matter in a speech given Monday in Estonia:

In these times of widening threats and provocations, we must stand together in defense of our alliance and all that we

hold dear. Russia continues to seek to redraw international borders by force and undermine the democracies of sovereign nations. Under President Donald Trump, the U.S. will continue to hold Russia accountable for its actions. We call on our European allies and friends to do the same.

In a sign of our commitment, very soon, President Donald Trump will sign legislation to strengthen and codify the U.S.'s sanctions against Russia. Recent diplomatic action taken by Moscow will not deter our commitment to our security, our allies and freedom-loving nations.

U.S. Permanent Ambassador to the United Nations Amb. Nikki Haley responded directly to the Iranian missile test, which not only violated UN Security Council resolutions, but also the "spirit" of the so-called Iran Nuclear Deal. She said there remains a high degree of mistrust with the Islamic Republic:

Iran's widespread support for terrorists tells us we can't trust them. Iran's breaking its obligation on missile testing tells us we can't trust them. Yesterday's launch proves that yet again.

Under this administration, the United States will not let Iran off the hook for behavior that threatens our interests and our allies. We will not simply trust Iran's word that they are in compliance with international obligations. We will continue to impose consequences until Iran stops its provocations and complies fully with Security Council resolutions.

It seems the U.S. is most immediately focused on North Korea. Tillerson condemned Friday's test launch of an ICBM, which was a direct violation of UN Security Council resolutions. He said all nations should take "a strong public stance" against the Hermit Kingdom, singling out Russia and China as its chief "enablers."

In a statement, he said:

As the principal economic enablers of North Korea's nuclear weapon and ballistic missile development program, China and Russia bear unique and special responsibility for this growing threat to regional and global stability. The United States seeks the peaceful denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the end to belligerent actions by North Korea. As we and others have made clear, we will never accept a nuclear-armed North Korea nor abandon our commitment to our allies and partners in the region.

Haley said there will be no effort at the Security Council to seek a new diplomatic solution:

There is no point in having an emergency session if it produces nothing of consequence. North Korea is already subject to numerous Security Council resolutions that they violate with impunity and that are not complied with by all UN Member States. An additional security council resolution that does not significantly increase the international pressure on North Korea is of no value. In fact, it is worse than nothing, because it sends the message to the North Korean dictator that the international community is unwilling to seriously challenge him. China must decide whether it is finally willing to take this vital step. The time for talk is over. The danger the North Korean regime poses to international peace is now clear to all.

The president had the most harsh comments for China in a series of tweets he sent out over the weekend. In them, he essentially blamed China for allowing North Korea to continue to get away with its missile testing:

I am very disappointed in China. Our foolish past leaders have allowed them to make hundreds of billions of dollars a year in trade, yet they do NOTHING for us with North Korea, just talk. We will no longer allow this to continue. China

could easily solve this problem! {eoa}