

U.S. expels 15 Cuban diplomats over mysterious health ‘attacks’ on Americans in Havana

The State Department ordered 15 Cuban diplomats Tuesday to leave the United States from its Washington embassy, a move prompted by the mysterious illness affecting U.S. diplomatic personnel and family members in Havana.

The U.S. last week decided to cut its own embassy staff in Havana by similar numbers “to minimize the number of diplomats at risk of exposure to harm.”

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said he ordered the expulsion of Cuban embassy personnel “due to Cuba’s failure to take appropriate steps to protect our diplomats.” Tillerson was referring to the unexplained ailments in Havana that have afflicted at least 22 U.S. government workers and their families.

The expulsion comes as President Trump is cutting back on closer ties with the communist government of Cuba that President Barack Obama instituted two years ago to improve relations between the longtime enemies.

Obama and Cuban President Raul Castro restored diplomatic ties, reopened embassies in both countries for the first time in a half-century and eased and travel and commerce restrictions. Trump has reversed some Obama policies but has kept the broad rapprochement in place.

Trump’s actions will deliver a heavy blow to the Cuban economy, which has benefited from a spike in visits by Americans.

The State Department warned on its website last week that American citizens should avoid travel to Cuba because of the identified source of “attacks” on embassy employees and concerns that “U.S. citizens may also be at risk.”

Nearly a year ago, a series of unexplained health problems surfaced among some diplomats and their families, including hearing loss, dizziness, tinnitus, balance problems, visual complaints, headache, fatigue, cognitive issues and difficulty sleeping, the State Department said.

After a lengthy lull, the U.S. noted renewed attacks in August, the State Department said.

The Cuban government insists that it has played no role in the attacks and is working U.S. investigators to determine the cause of these ailments.

The FBI and other agencies that searched homes and hotels where incidents occurred found no devices. And clues about the circumstances of the incidents seem to make any explanation scientifically implausible.

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