

Western Countries Urge Citizens to Leave Russia and Belarus

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Recently, the US Embassy in Moscow urged Russia-based Americans to leave the country as soon as possible. In the same vein, US residents outside of Russia were discouraged from traveling to the country. Washington's close allies, such as Canada and France, also joined the measure and issued notes recommending that their citizens leave Russia and Belarus.

The US diplomatic delegation in Moscow published a document on Feb. 12 advising Americans to leave Russia or avoid arriving there. According to diplomats, it is possible that Americans will suffer some kind of hostility in Russian territory due to the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine – and Washington's support for the Kiev's side. The Embassy stated that the ability of the American government to help citizens in Russian territory is extremely limited, which is why their stay in the Eurasian country would not be safe.

“Do not travel to Russia due to... the potential for harassment and the singling out of US citizens for detention by Russian government security officials, the arbitrary enforcement of local law, limited flights into and out of Russia, the embassy's limited ability to assist US citizens in Russia, and the possibility of terrorism”, the Embassy's document says, adding that “The US government's ability to provide routine or emergency services to US citizens in Russia is severely limited, particularly in areas far from the US Embassy in Moscow, due to Russian government limitations on travel for embassy personnel and staffing, and the ongoing suspension of operations, including consular services, at US consulates”.

Following the decision of American diplomats, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Canada also joined the provocation. In a declaration, the country's authorities said that Canadians should leave Russia while commercial flights are “still available”, suggesting that transport blockade measures will begin to be implemented soon. In the same sense, referring to Canadians unable to leave Russia, it was advised that they maintain a “low profile”, avoiding exposure.

“If you are in Russia, you should leave while commercial means are still available (...) [But] If you remain in Russia, maintain a low profile”, the statement says.

On the 13th, France also adopted similar guidelines, emphasizing, however, the need for its natives to leave Belarus. According to the French authorities, the geographical proximity of Belarus to the conflict zone and the close political partnership between Minsk and Moscow pose dangers to the stay of French people in the country. Therefore, they are encouraged to leave as quickly as possible, preferably via the routes of Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland – which are considered “safe” territories due to their ties to NATO.

“Amid the Russian army offensive in Ukraine and the closure of Belarus’ airspace, we strongly advise you to refrain from visiting Belarus (...) [If you are in Belarus now, we advise you] to leave the country immediately by motor transport across the borders with Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland”, the statement says.

In fact, this is not the first time this has happened. Western countries have repeatedly encouraged their natives to leave Russia and Belarus since the beginning of the special military operation. The last occasion on which the American Embassy in Moscow issued this type of alert was on September 28, 2022. As far as Belarus is concerned, on October 4, Washington’s State Department published an alert for Americans to leave the country. In practice, advising nationals of western states to leave Russia and Belarus has become commonplace.

The main arguments for these guidelines have been the alleged “dangers” of harassment, arbitrary detention, terrorism and other types of violence by Russians and Belarusians against foreigners, but there have also been rumors of forced mobilization of non-Russians with permanent residence in the country. Both arguments are absolutely unsubstantiated, considering that there is no report of violence against foreigners in Russia or Belarus, and that troops’ mobilization is obviously restricted to Russian nationals – in addition to taking place voluntarily, not by force.

However, it should be noted that this type of measure also sounds like a threat and blackmail for the residents of the countries in which the alerts are being issued. By discovering that foreigners are being evacuated, some Russians, Belarussians may believe that their country is really threatened, about to be bombed, which tends to generate collective panic.

In this sense, there seems to be a psychological operation that works in two directions: 1- against Western citizens, who begin to believe that they are actually threatened by Russia and Belarus and start to support NATO’s actions; 2- against Russians and Belarusians themselves, who see this type of action as a suggestion that an open war can start at any moment, with the enemy side trying to save their nationals from possible attacks.

The evident reality, however, contradicts any provocative narrative from the West. There is no danger for western people in Russia or Belarus. And the risks of escalation to an open conflict, although they exist, are not so high, depending exclusively on Western goodwill for them to cease to exist, considering that NATO is the provoking side. The best thing for the West to do is stop trying to generate collective panic among ordinary people and engage in effective proposals to reach a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

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