Rising Diplomatic Expulsion

What is the issue?

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- The current string of expulsions of Russian diplomats from many countries is indeed massive and calls for a historic analysis of such actions.
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- While expulsion of diplomats as a sign of protest is indeed very stressful for them, it is one of the least disruptive ways to express outrage.
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What are the laws governing diplomatic expulsions?

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- Currently, according to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic relations, 1961, diplomats enjoy immunity from law enforcement authorities of the host country.
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- Hence, if a diplomat commits an offence in a personal or official capacity, the host country declares them as persona-non grata, which mandates their immediate expulsion.
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How is expulsion effective?

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- It is the most effective bloodless punishment, as the person concerned is removed from the scene, never to return.
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- Additionally, rulers have historically also expelled court diplomats if tensions break out between their host and home countries.
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- Significantly, the diplomat concerned may not be guilty of omission or

commission or even aware of the reason for being expelled.
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- The diplomat hence becomes a mere pawn (a pledge/security/guaranty) in international disputes.
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- S/he may even be a victim of a symbolic protest or a reciprocal action.
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What is the current case of Russian diplomatic expulsions?

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- Russia may well be the country whose diplomats have perhaps suffered the largest number of expulsions.
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- The recent coordinated expulsion of over 100 Russian diplomats by more than 20 countries (US and many EU countries) is huge even by Cold War standards.
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- This is done by countries to express solidarity with UK.
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- It is due to the alleged Russian involvement in the attack on a former spy who worked for UK.
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- Importantly, Russia has denied any involvement in the murderous attack that took place in UK soil.
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- Russia has accused UK of a baseless and false campaign.
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- As multiple countries expelled its diplomats, Russia retaliated with a symmetrical response.
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- Generally, this is the maximum build up and the diplomats will slowly but steadily return to their seats in the host countries over time after negotiations.
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- Notably, Austria did not join the other EU members in the expulsion, stressing that some communication channels should be kept open during the crisis.
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- China and India had called for more concrete evidence about Russian complicity, and hence have called for a more patient approach.
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How has India handled diplomatic expulsions?

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- India takes recourse to expulsion of diplomats only in extreme circumstances when it has clear evidence of wrongdoing.
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- When it expels diplomats, it does expect reciprocal action.
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- In most cases, it informs its personnel in advance for a possible retaliatory expulsion.
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- Notably, India has expelled Soviet diplomats to express annoyance on certain issues even when Indo-Soviet friends weren't particularly bad.
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- Russian sponsored military coup in Fiji caused a spike in tensions and even the Indian head of mission was expelled (although after 2 year of strain).
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How does the future look?

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- While the diplomats will eventually be called back, the current episode of expulsions clearly marks the emergence of a new Cold War in world affairs.
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- The rise of an ambitious China and versatile strongmen like Putin in Russia, Salman in Saudi and Erdogen in Turkey are bound to strengthen these trends.
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Source: The Hindu

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