

Moscow's American Center Moves to U.S. Embassy From Library

By [Daria Litvinova](#)

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The U.S. Embassy in Moscow

A month after news broke about the American Center sponsored by the U.S. Embassy being shut down in Moscow's Library of Foreign Literature, the embassy announced its resurrection — this time inside the embassy.

“The American Center will continue its work at new premises in the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. Visitors will be offered a wide range of cultural and educational events, as well as access to print and online outlets devoted to the United States,” said a statement posted Sunday on the embassy's Facebook page.

“We are developing our program calendar and preparing our new home to accommodate visitors,” said a statement on the center's website.

The news that the American culture center sponsored by the U.S. Embassy in Moscow was

closing down after 22 years rattled Muscovites in late September.

Ambassador John Tefft was the first to break the news in a statement published on the embassy's website, warning that the Kremlin was eroding ties that the two countries had managed to preserve even during the Cold War.

The administration of the Library of Foreign Literature said back then that the center would continue to work, and insisted that voiding the agreement with the embassy was just a technicality and that a new contract would be agreed.

The library had offered the Americans the chance to work out a "new scheme of contract relations," Vadim Duda, the library director, said at the time, adding that the library was "willing to support [the center's] activity even without financing from the American side."

When it voided the agreement with the embassy, the library eliminated the embassy's role in leading the center's activities, replaced the American director of the center, and eliminated the agreement that allowed for embassy financial support of the center and its staff, embassy spokesman Will Stevens told The Moscow Times in written comments Monday.

"The U.S. Embassy tried to negotiate with the library to continue supporting cultural and educational programs in the center and drafted a new agreement, but the library did not accept this agreement," he said.

The library canceled the agreement with the embassy just five months after the embassy had completed an extensive renovation of it, Stevens added.

"As a gesture of goodwill from the people of the United States to the people of Russia, the embassy donated to the library all of the books, materials, furnishings and much of the equipment that had been a part of the American Center," worth a total of about \$500,000, he said.

Duda, the library's director, was unavailable to comment on Monday.

The library's website currently has a section devoted to the Center of American Culture. "The Center of American Culture provides library and information services and is also a space for cultural programs," the center's page on the library website says.

"The Center of American Culture dates back to 1993," it says, without mentioning any connections to the embassy.

Contact the author at d.litvinova@imedia.ru

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