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Russia Accuses U.S. of Building 'Visa Wall' After Bolshoi Dancers Denied Entry

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Olga Smirnova **Vyacheslav Prokofyev / TASS**

Russia said on Saturday the United States was trying to fence off Russians with a "visa wall" after two Bolshoi ballet dancers were refused visas to perform in New York.

The Foreign Ministry expressed regret over the United States' decision to refuse visas to Russian prima ballerina Olga Smirnova and soloist dancer Jacopo Tissi, who were due to perform at a Lincoln Center gala.

"This did not happen even during the Cold War," the ministry said in a statement on its website.

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"But today, influential forces in the USA, preoccupied with trying to pressure Russia hard, do

not stop at anything... They are trying to fence off Americans from Russians with a visa wall, as we've said before, making trips of our citizens to the USA practically impossible," it said.

Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre said it could not comment because it did not organise the tour and had no information on the visa applications.

"Since the work visa was also not issued on time for Jacopo Tissi, an Italian national, we would like to think that this was related to procedural formalities and not to the current political tensions," its press office said in emailed comments.

The U.S. Embassy in Moscow did not immediately respond to an emailed request for comment.

On Friday, Kremlin said the United States was deliberately making it difficult for Aeroflot crews to obtain U.S. visas, after the Russian foreign ministry said it could not rule out the possibility that flights between the two countries might have to be halted because of the situation.

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