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U.S. Halts Consular Services in Russia After Diplomatic Row

By AFP

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The U.S. embassy will stop offering routine services and issuing visas due to a drastic reduction of its staff following tit-for-tat sanctions. **AP / TASS**

The U.S. Embassy in Moscow from Wednesday suspended most consular services to its nationals and stopped issuing visas due to a drastic reduction of its staff following tit-for-tat sanctions.

In a statement posted earlier on its website, the embassy said it would from May 12 stop offering routine services to US citizens including passport renewals "for the forseeable future" and only process new visa applications in "life-or-death emergencies."

Russia earlier this year banned U.S. diplomatic missions from employing non-Americans, forcing the embassy to reduce its "consular workforce by 75%."

Related article: U.S. Embassy to Cut Staff, Most Visas for Russians as Moscow Bans 'Unfriendly' Hiring

Russia-U.S. relations have been in tatters with Washington accusing the Kremlin of interference in U.S. elections, a massive cyber attack and other hostile activity.

Joe Biden has increased pressure on Moscow since becoming U.S. president, and comments he made likening Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to a killer were met with fierce criticism in Moscow.

Washington in April announced a new round of sanctions including the expulsion of 10 diplomats and a restriction on U.S. banks trading in Russian government debt.

Moscow responded by expelling 10 U.S. diplomats, banning top U.S. officials from entering the country and prohibiting the U.S. Embassy from employing foreign nationals.

Moscow and Washington are however discussing a possible summit between Biden and Putin in June hosted by a third country.

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