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Russia 'Ready' to Issue Visas to U.S. Embassy Staff – Diplomat

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Russia and the U.S. are embroiled in a visa spat. **Sergei Kiselev / Moskva News Agency**

Moscow is ready to issue visas to new U.S. Embassy employees, a senior Russian diplomat said Thursday, after the Russian ambassador in Washington decried tight visa-issuing procedures for Russian employees.

Alexander Bikantov, the Foreign Ministry's deputy spokesman, said Russia is "open for dialogue" despite what he described as Washington's "unconstructive approach."

"We're ready to take into account American concerns, in particular to promptly issue visas to new employees of the U.S. diplomatic mission in Moscow," the state-run RIA Novosti news agency quoted Bikantov as saying.

His comments came after the U.S. and Russia clashed over staffing at their respective embassies this week.

Russia's Ambassador in Washington Anatoly Antonov deplored what he called "persistent and

creative" three-year limits on diplomatic visas for Russian nationals.

State Department spokesman Ned Price described Antonov's remarks as "inaccurate," saying the diplomats were free to apply for extensions.

But Price also reiterated U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken's complaint over the weekend that Russia had forced the U.S. to lay off nearly 200 local employees at U.S. diplomatic missions in the country due to a new hiring ban.

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