

Russia Calls on U.S. to Beef Up Understaffed Moscow Embassy

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The U.S. Embassy in Moscow. **Vladimir Gerdo / TASS**

Russia is calling on the United States to send embassy staff to Moscow in order to resume U.S. visa services, senior Russian diplomats [said](#) Tuesday.

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov issued the invitation after the U.S. Embassy in Moscow [stopped processing](#) immigrant visas, requiring Russians to travel to the Embassy in Warsaw to apply. The U.S. State Department has [warned](#) that the U.S. Embassy in Moscow could stop performing most functions in 2022.

Related article: [U.S. Warns Moscow Embassy Could Stop Functioning Due to Visa Row](#)

“We call on the U.S. to strengthen its presence in Moscow and send new employees so that at least consular services in Russia are provided in a more or less normal volume,” Ryabkov said as quoted by the state-run RIA Novosti news agency.

Speaking at the annual Fort Ross Dialogue in Washington, Ryabkov noted that U.S. diplomatic presence in Russia has been reduced to a level that no longer allows it to provide basic consular services.

Russia's Ambassador in Washington Anatoly Antonov called for a “reciprocal reset of all restrictions on diplomatic presence,” according to RIA Novosti.

The change in tone comes after the State Department added Russia to a short list of countries where it has no consular representation or where “the political or security situation is tenuous or uncertain enough” to prevent consular staff from processing immigrant visa applications.

Most countries on that list have poor or no direct relations with the U.S., including Cuba, Iran, Syria, Yemen and Venezuela.

Successive rounds of tit-for-tat diplomatic expulsions by the two countries have left embassies and consulates badly understaffed, playing havoc with normal services.

Amid a continuing dispute over how many diplomats each side can post in the other's country, Russia has placed the U.S. on a list of “unfriendly” countries requiring approval to employ Russian nationals.

Russia on Aug. 1 barred embassies from hiring Russian or third-country staff, forcing the United States to lay off more than 200 locals at missions across Russia, according to the State Department.

A senior U.S. official warned last week that the understaffed U.S. Embassy in Moscow could be unable to perform functions like sending diplomatic cables without more staff.

The United States complains of a lack of reciprocity with Moscow counting local staff in its tally of U.S. diplomats while Washington only factors in Russian nationals in its limit on numbers.

The United States has around 120 people at its Russian missions, far down from 1,200 in 2017, while Russia has some 230 people in the United States, excluding those posted in New York for its UN mission.

AFP contributed reporting.

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