

RELEASE IN FULL

From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>
Sent: Sunday, May 29, 2011 8:27 AM
To: H
Subject: Fw: Policy Adviser to Become U.S. Ambassador to Russia (NYT)

From: OpsNewsTicker
Sent: Sunday, May 29, 2011 07:58 AM
To: NEWS-Mahogany; NEWS-Russia
Cc: SES-O_Shift-II; SES-O_OS; SES-O_SWO
Subject: Policy Adviser to Become U.S. Ambassador to Russia (NYT)

By PETER BAKER

WASHINGTON — President Obama has decided to send the architect of his so-called Russia reset policy to Moscow as the next United States ambassador there, seeking to further bolster an improved relationship as both countries head into a potentially volatile election season.

Mike McFaul, left, the administration's top Russian expert, Gen. Jim Jones, National Security Advisor, and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, are seen during a photo opportunity with President Barack Obama and Russian president Dmitry Medvedev before their bilateral meeting at the Prague Castle in Prague on April 8, 2010.

Mr. Obama plans to nominate Michael McFaul, his top White House adviser on Russia policy, for the post, according to administration officials who declined to be identified before the formal announcement. Mr. Obama told the Russian president, Dmitri A. Medvedev, of his choice during a meeting in France last week, officials said.

In selecting Mr. McFaul, Mr. Obama is breaking with recent tradition in Moscow, where all but one of eight American ambassadors over the last 30 years have been career diplomats. But in choosing someone from his own inner circle, Mr. Obama underscored his determination to keep Russian-American relations a centerpiece of his foreign policy after his early push to reset the relationship following years of growing tension.

“Mike, as the guy who really helped the president establish the reset, is the perfect person to go to Moscow to make sure there’s no lapse in momentum in the relationship,” one of the administration officials said.

Since Mr. Obama took office, the two countries have signed the New Start arms control treaty, finalized a civilian nuclear cooperation pact, agreed on tougher sanctions against Iran and greatly expanded the American supply route to Afghanistan through former Soviet territory. After meeting with Mr. Obama in France last week, Mr. Medvedev shifted his public stance on the crisis in Libya and agreed that Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi “has lost his legitimacy” and “must leave.”

But the relationship is moving into a new and complex stage, particularly on efforts to forge cooperation on missile defense in Europe and to admit Russia into the World Trade Organization, goals that have eluded the two sides for many years. Moreover, some analysts have questioned whether the enthusiasm for warmer

relations has diminished American pressure on the Kremlin over the state of Russian democracy and intimidation of former Soviet states like Georgia.

Mr. McFaul has become known in Washington as a passionate defender of Mr. Obama's policy, arguing that the United States can speak out on democracy and Georgia while still seeking cooperation with Moscow in other areas.

Although not a diplomat, Mr. McFaul, 47, is widely considered one of the foremost American voices on Russia, with deep contacts in Moscow. He was a Rhodes scholar who first traveled to the Soviet Union in 1983 and lived there at several points over the next decade. A Stanford University professor and Hoover Institution fellow, he is the author or editor of more than 20 books, establishing a reputation as a vocal advocate of Russian democracy and sharp critic of Prime Minister Vladimir V. Putin's crackdown on dissent.

Mr. McFaul's friendly ties with neoconservatives at times have generated suspicions among his fellow Democrats, but since joining the White House he has also occasionally been at odds with fellow democracy advocates who have been critical of the reset policy.

Should the Senate confirm him to succeed the departing ambassador, John Beyrle, Mr. McFaul's charge will be to make sure that the thawing relations do not just turn out to be a brief seasonal shift. One test may be the negotiations over the Russian supply route to Afghanistan. When Mr. Obama took office, virtually no American military supplies traveled to Afghanistan through Russia. But an agreement to open Russian airspace has raised that to roughly half, and given the uncertainty of relations between the United States and Pakistan, Washington may come to depend on Russia even more.

Another test will come next year as both Russia and the United States hold presidential elections. Mr. Obama will have to decide next year how much he will criticize what Americans expect to be a tightly controlled Russian election at the risk of souring the relationship he has nurtured. And the approach of the American election could freeze any effort to advance policies that could be seen as beneficial to Russia.

NewsTickers alert senior Department officials to breaking news. This item appears as it did in its original publication and does not contain analysis or commentary by Department sources.