The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

How Hillary Clinton Got Back at Putin

By Eduard Lozansky

January 30, 2012



Ambassador Michael McFaul's first steps on arrival in Moscow were marked by a scandal in the State Duma, the media and elsewhere.

McFaul's record is well-known and pretty illustrious. He is one of the best Russia specialists in the United States. But as a diplomat, McFaul is responsible for acts and situations for which he would presumably hate to be held accountable for.

Yes, McFaul likes to meet with Russian opposition figures, however, meeting them on the second working day at his new post and in the middle of a highly emotional Russian presidential campaign is provocative any way you look at it.

After that ill-fated meeting, McFaul has been saying to all who will listen that he had nothing to do with it, that he was merely accompanying his boss, Deputy Secretary of State William Burns, that he kept silent throughout that meeting.

Burns is a highly qualified U.S. diplomat with extraordinary experience and background

in Russian affairs. Even if he had a high fever that day, he has better judgement than to provoke a conflict with the same Kremlin leaders with whom Washington would have to deal at least for the next six years.

That leaves Burns' boss, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who may have ordered the meeting with the opposition as a poke in Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's eye to get back at him for his claim on television that the recent rallies in Moscow were inspired and supported by Clinton.

These intrigues do not augur too well for McFaul's career in Moscow. New proof of this came with certain aspects of U.S. President Barack Obama's recent State of the Union address. McFaul had confidently predicted that in Obama's address, he would announce Russia's graduation from the infamous Jackson-Vanik amendment. This did not happen despite McFaul's strong recommendation — perhaps because Obama did not want to enter into another fight with Congress over this matter.

If McFaul's first week on the job is any indication of U.S.-Russian relations in the next few years, we may be in for a rough ride.

Edward Lozansky is president of the American University in Moscow.

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/01/30/how-hillary-clinton-got-back-at-putin-a12258