

U.S. State Department Defends McFaul's Twitter Use

March 29, 2012

The  Moscow Times

The United States Department of State defended U.S. Ambassador Michael McFaul's use of Twitter as a communications tool, a day after McFaul suggested in a message on the microblogging service that his email was being hacked and his phone tapped.

On Thursday, McFaul suggested on Twitter that his personal schedule was being leaked to the media, after journalists from a pro-Kremlin TV channel showed up at an unannounced meeting he attended with a human rights activist in Moscow.

"Everywhere I go NTV is there. Wonder who gives them my calendar? They wouldn't tell me," he wrote. "Press has right to film me anywhere. But do they have a right to read my e-mail and listen to my phone?"

At a media briefing by the U.S. Department of State on Thursday, deputy spokesman Mark Toner played down McFaul's message, saying it was a rhetorical question, not an accusation directed toward the media or the government. He also defended McFaul's and other U.S. ambassadors' use of Twitter as a tool for communicating with local citizens.

"These are ways for chiefs of mission to raise issues for discussion. They're directed at a broad number of followers to air these issues out, if you will. It's an informal way to communicate," Toner said, according to a transcript of the briefing.

McFaul took to Twitter on Friday morning apparently with this purpose in mind. He held an exchange in English with a user by the name @prostitutkamila in which he answered questions about his impromptu interview with NTV, which the channel aired Thursday. The U.S. ambassador said he had been nervous during the interview and misspoke "in bad Russian" when he had apparently called Russia "wild."

"Just watched NTV," McFaul wrote. "Did not mean to say 'wild country.' Meant to say NTV actions 'wild.' I greatly respect Russia."

In response to a question from @prostitutkamila about why he was nervous when speaking with NTV journalists, McFaul said there were also people in military dress present.

"[@prostitutkamila](#) Were not just journalists there. Were men in military uniform. People w/ posters. All strange for me. Learning," McFaul wrote.

Footage posted on the NTV website shows journalists approaching McFaul as he exited a car Thursday afternoon outside the office of the For Human Rights group headed by veteran activist Lev Ponomarev.

After answering repeated questions, the U.S. ambassador appeared to become irritated and accused NTV of trailing him everywhere he went.

"Your ambassador in our country always goes around without this disrupting his work," McFaul said, speaking in Russian. "Yet you're always at my house. That's interesting. Aren't you ashamed?"

An NTV spokesperson told Interfax that it was no surprise that the channel knew McFaul's schedule, since they have "a wide network of informers." The spokesperson said journalists dispatched to interview him were gathering footage for the channel's archive.

NTV, which is owned by the Kremlin-friendly Gazprom Media holding, is known for its exposés on opposition groups that use spliced-together clips. Earlier this month, the channel earned opposition wrath for a program called "Anatomy of Protest" that accused opposition demonstrators of taking money from the U.S. government in exchange for attending rallies.

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