

McFaul and State Department Respond to Attack

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McFaul speaking to students at the Higher School of Economics Friday

U.S. Ambassador Michael McFaul and the U.S. State Department responded Wednesday to blistering criticism from the Foreign Ministry, saying they were surprised by the harsh reaction to the ambassador's comments to university students last week.

"As a proponent of better U.S.-Russian relations, I was surprised by the official reaction to my talk at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow," McFaul wrote on his [LiveJournal blog](#) Wednesday.

"The central thesis of my presentation was how much U.S.-Russia officials have accomplished in the last 4 years with the 'reset' in our relations," he wrote, pointing out that then-President Dmitry Medvedev said during a March meeting in Seoul that the "last three years of the U.S.-Russia relationship have been the best period in U.S.-Russia relations in history."

The Foreign Ministry said Monday that it was "utterly shocked" at McFaul's remarks during the talk with the students. In a transcript of the discussion on the school's website, McFaul suggested that Russia "bribed" Kyrgyzstan to close the Manas air base, which the United States has used since 2001 to support military operations in Afghanistan.

"The point of my digressions into past historical practices was not to 'spread blatant falsehoods,' but rather to illustrate precisely how much we have overcome by abandoning these outmoded ways of diplomacy from previous eras," McFaul wrote, addressing the ministry's criticism.

"Maybe I shouldn't have spoken so colorfully and bluntly. On that, I agree and will work harder to speak more diplomatically," the former Stanford professor added.

State Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland answered questions about the diplomatic spat at a [daily news briefing](#) Tuesday.

"He was making the point that with regard to Kyrgyzstan and the importance of the Manas transit center, that we are very transparent ... we ask for the same information and the same support from Russia. So it's no longer this sort of secret competition that you had in the Soviet era," she said.

The "irony" of the presentation, she added, is that it was "all about the benefits that the reset in U.S.-Russian relations has brought for Russia, for citizens, for groups across the country and for the United States."

In his blog, McFaul echoed Nuland's statement.

"As one of the architects of [the reset] policy and as President Obama's representative here in the Russian Federation, it is natural that I would give a talk applauding the results of the reset."

In a [copy of the presentation](#) posted on his blog, McFaul outlines the history of the reset, as well as positive results of the policy for business, diplomacy, society, and security and military cooperation.

Nuland reiterated U.S. support of the ambassador.

"As one of the architects of the president's reset policy, he's in a position not only to really understand the benefits, but also to try to continue to advance them. So from that perspective we considered him an extremely strong ambassador."

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