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Outgoing U.S. Ambassador Reflects on Job With Russian Media

By Jennifer Monaghan

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U.S. Ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul, who on Tuesday announced his decision to quit his post. **M. Stulov / Vedomosti**

U.S. Ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul — who announced yesterday that he would return to California at the end of February — has opened up about his time on the job, lamenting his inability to quell concerns that the U.S. wants to incite revolution on Russian soil.

McFaul — who is moving back to the U.S. to spend more time with his family — said that he had earlier never dreamed of going into diplomacy, let alone becoming an ambassador, and that he only moved to Moscow because U.S. President Barack Obama had asked him to take up the position, Interfax reported.

His relocation to Russia in January 2012 came at a turbulent time, with mass protests against perceived electoral fraud in State Duma elections gripping the streets of Moscow. McFaul believes his willingness to engage with the opposition at this time led to the enactment of a

negative campaign against both himself and the U.S. by the state-controlled press.

"I can certainly say that some people in Russia want to use anti-American sentiment to discredit the opposition. I was part of their plan. It is obvious. And it has nothing to do with what I was doing or what I did." McFaul said, Kommersant reported.

President Vladimir Putin has previously accused the U.S State Department of encouraging the December and January 2011-2012 protests, and McFaul added that one of his greatest failures as ambassador was his inability " to completely destroy that myth that the U.S. only wants to organize a revolution in Russia and destabilize it ... it's bad for U.S.-Russia relations."

In a bid to change the perception of American people, McFaul has embarked on a campaign of public diplomacy during his time as ambassador — hosting jazz parties at the U.S. Embassy residence and communicating with the public via accounts on Twitter and Facebook. He says he will miss those aspects of the job.

McFaul will travel to Sochi on Thursday, one day ahead of the Winter Olympic Games' opening ceremony.

Contact the author at j.monaghan@imedia.ru

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