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McFaul Leaves Post as U.S. Ambassador to Russia

By Christopher Brennan

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Michael McFaul is leaving his post as U.S. Ambassador to Russia on Wednesday. **Sergei Porter**

U.S. Ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul will leave his post in Moscow on Wednesday and head back to California.

McFaul, who took up the position in early 2012, has been posting messages about his departure on his Twitter account over the last few days. On Wednesday he shared a photo of him handing over control of the U.S. mission to deputy chief Sheila Gwaltney.

McFaul announced in early February that he would be leaving the U.S. State Department to spend more time with his family and return to his teaching position at Stanford University after the Sochi Olympics.

The U.S. has not yet decided on a replacement for McFaul, who was an unusual choice given his background as in academia, but daily newspaper Kommersant reported Wednesday that

a shortlist of possible candidates has been drawn up.

The shortlist reportedly contains the names of three career diplomats — John Tefft, Steven Pifer and Carlos Pascual — all of whom have served in various U.S. missions from Moscow to London to Mexico. They have also served as U.S. ambassador to Ukraine at some point, a fact that was widely reported in Russian media.

The fourth supposed candidate is Rose Gottemoeller, a nuclear security expert who currently works as under secretary of state for arms control and previously directed the Carnegie Moscow Center, where McFaul has worked as a senior associate.

An unidentified person close to the State Department said that the appointment will be made in the coming days, the report said.

Despite a "reset" in U.S.-Russia relations announced at the beginning of the administration of U.S. President Barack Obama, McFaul's tenure in Moscow has coincided with increasing tensions between the two countries including disagreements over military action in Syria and Russia's decision to grant asylum to U.S. intelligence leaker Edward Snowden. In an interview after his departure announcement, McFaul said that one of his failures as ambassador was an inability to counteract allegations that the U.S. wanted to organize a revolution in Russia.

U.S. ambassadors must be approved by the Senate in a process that can take several months. Kommersant reported that the State Department would like to see a new ambassador in Moscow before Obama travels to Sochi for a Group of Eight summit in June.

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