

U.S. Said to Choose New Ambassador to Russia

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John Tefft is a career diplomat who previously served as ambassador to Ukraine, Georgia and Lithuania.

Amid increasingly chilly relations between the U.S. and Russia, Washington has chosen a new ambassador to Russia who will convey a no-nonsense message as part of a strategy of isolating Moscow from the international community, two media reports said.

The U.S. mission to Russia will be led by John Tefft, a former U.S. Ambassador to Lithuania, Georgia and Ukraine who is known for his critical stance on the Russian government, The New York Times and Kommersant reported. The reports did not say when the White House was expected to announce the appointment, and the U.S. State Department could not be reached for comment about the reports on Monday due to the Easter holiday.

The ambassadorial post has been vacant since February, when former Ambassador Michael McFaul left the job for personal reasons. The job has acquired additional importance in recent weeks due to the high-stakes negotiations between the U.S., Russia, the European Union and

Ukraine over the crisis in eastern Ukraine.

“The U.S. needs a tough representative of its new policy on Russia, which is quote confrontational and antagonistic,” said Fyodor Lukyanov, head of Russia's Council on Foreign and Defense Policy, a think tank with close ties to the Foreign Ministry. “Tefft is a very tough and principled diplomat who has never concealed his critical stance with regard to Russia.”

According to Lukyanov, the Obama administration will attempt to further isolate Russia regardless of the outcome of the ongoing political and economic turmoil in Ukraine. The role of the new ambassador to Moscow will be to pursue this policy in a pragmatic and effective way, he said.

“Tefft's appointment would be a good reflection of the current state of the Russia-U.S. relationship,” Lukyanov said by telephone. “The U.S. does not need a political person in Moscow today, it needs a professional diplomat.”

Former Ambassador MacFaul, who now serves as a professor of political science at Stanford University, said on Twitter that he could not confirm Tefft's appointment but added: “He would be a fantastic ambassador. One of the best ambassadors around. Perfect choice.”

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