

Washington Asks Moscow to Approve John Tefft as new U.S. Ambassador, Report Says

By [Ivan Nechepurenko](#)

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John Tefft served as ambassador to both Ukraine and Georgia in the past decade, and as a top diplomat in Moscow in the 1990s.

Washington has requested Moscow's formal approval of its appointment of John Tefft as U.S. ambassador to Russia, a source in the Foreign Ministry told The Moscow Times on Monday. Tefft served as ambassador to both Ukraine and Georgia in the past decade, and as a top diplomat in Moscow in the 1990s.

"They have agreed on this candidate in Washington and have sent us a request for approval — I cannot say whether we have agreed or not," the source said.

Unlike his predecessor Michael McFaul, a political science professor at Stanford, Tefft has more than 40 years of experience in the foreign service.

He served as U.S. ambassador to Ukraine between 2009 and 2013, and to Georgia between 2005 and 2009. His time at the helm of the U.S. Embassy to Georgia included the five-day war between Russia and Georgia over South Ossetia in 2008. Between 1996 and 1999 Tefft served as deputy chief of mission in Moscow .

He will be expected to convey a no-nonsense message to Moscow as part of the U.S. strategy of minimizing cooperation between the two countries after Russia and the West locked horns over Ukraine earlier this year, Kommersant reported earlier on Monday.

"The White House has finalized its new policy toward Russia. There will be no new reset, and in the remaining 2 1/2 years Barack Obama's administration will be trying to minimize the cooperation with Russia," Kommersant reported, quoting a source in the U.S. State Department.

But despite a shifting U.S. policy and Tefft's high-profile stints in former Soviet states that have drifted out of Moscow's orbit, he is likely to gain Russia's approval, Kommersant reported.

He will not promote any ambitious policies designed to achieve a breakthrough in relations, said Fyodor Lukyanov, head of Russia's Council on Foreign and Defense Policy, a think tank with close ties to the Foreign Ministry.

"Tefft will execute Washington's policy and unlike MacFaul, who was sent by U.S. President Barack Obama to pursue a 'reset' — his signature foreign policy, Tefft will have no mission at all," he told The Moscow Times by telephone.

Still, the appointment process will likely drag as Republicans in the U.S. are presently occupied with trying to torpedo all of Obama's foreign policy initiatives, Lukyanov said.

"The process will be tedious, but today it does not make much of a difference, as Obama does not have a major policy toward Russia," he said.

Since McFaul's departure last February, Sheila Gwaltney — who was deputy head of mission during McFaul's tenure — has been filling in as top U.S. diplomat in Moscow.

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Contact the author at i.nechepurenko@imedia.ru

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