

Outrage at McFaul's Undiplomatic Antics

Jan. 28—*The following commentary by Mikhail Leontyev was aired Jan. 18, during First Channel's prime-time news broadcast, the most widely viewed program in Russia. As an analyst, Leontyev is closely attuned to the history of imperial policies in Eurasia. In 2007, his series titled "The Great Game" cited "the British track in North Caucasus events [such as acts of terrorism], discovered by Russian counterintelligence," as marking a return by "the British lion . . . to Asia and the Caucasus."*

The new U.S. ambassador, Michael McFaul, has arrived in Moscow. The appointment of Obama's chief advisor on Russia, one of the fathers of the "reset," to this post is both a great honor for us, and the best way to characterize current American-Russian relations. The thing to know, however, is that McFaul is not a specialist on Russia. He specializes in a very specific type of democracy-promotion.

Speaking to Slon.ru [in June 2011], McFaul stated: "Most Russia-watchers are diplomats, or specialists on security and arms control. Or Russian culture. I am neither. I can't recite Pushkin [Russia's national poet] by heart. I am a specialist in democracy, anti-dictatorial movements, and revolutions. And when I came to the Soviet Union in 1989, it turned out to be the time of just such a movement. And while I was living in Moscow in 1990-1991, I became very close to the Russian democrats. This may have been the best time of my life."

That was when McFaul took a liking to Russia. Not to Pushkin, as he so delicately mentioned, but to prominent activists in the so-called democratic movement, whom he was financing, instructing, and bringing to power. In 1992, he was already the Russia representative of the National Democratic Institute, known for its close ties to U.S. intelligence agencies, which was working on "training political leaders for Third World countries." In 2010, one of the attendees at an NDI program at Yale, from the next generation of "democrats," was the Internet-Führer Alexei Navalny, a good acquaintance of McFaul. . . .

McFaul calls himself an advocate of dual-track di-

plomacy, such as was practiced under Reagan and Bush Sr. This means working with the authorities, while simultaneously doing a particular type of work with the opposition. McFaul should have no problems with the latter type of work, given his well-established ties with these people. Working with the authorities is another question.

Michael McFaul takes pride in having discerned in Putin a second Milosevic, back in 2000. McFaul has written hundreds of anti-Putin articles, as well as the book *Russia's Unfinished Revolution: Political Change from Gorbachov to Putin*, which came out back in 2001. Has Mr. McFaul perhaps come to Russia to work in his field of specialization? That is, to finish the revolution?

"To promote liberty requires first the containment and then the elimination of those forces opposed to liberty, be they individuals, movements, or regimes."—Michael McFaul. *Policy Review*, 2002.

McFaul's major work, *Revolution in Orange: The Origins of Ukraine's Democratic Breakthrough*, providing the money amounts, organizational structure, and quantitative breakdown of what was set into motion, demonstrates the causes of that breakthrough. American money paid for intensive work with Ukrainian youth. Incidentally, McFaul says that the funding was quite modest: barely more than \$18 million. On the eve of his appointment to Moscow, McFaul reported to the Senate: "In the pre-election period we spent \$9 million, which was a million more than in 2007-2008, to support free and fair elections."

That's insulting: cheaper than Ukraine by half! But we shouldn't get upset so easily: the real level of spending is not made public.

Foreign Policy writes, "As the U.S. Ambassador in Moscow, the very capable McFaul will have considerable opportunity not only to observe Russia's ongoing transitions, but hopefully to help shape it as well, in directions conducive to U.S. interests and the welfare of the long-suffering Russian people." But who caused the suffering of the "long-suffering Russian people"? Wasn't it the friends of Mr. McFaul on his first tour of duty? It may be hoped that his second tour of duty, as ambassador, will not be "the best time of his life" for Mr. McFaul.

'Not an Idiot'

Maxim Sokolov, a columnist for the daily "Izvestia," spoke on state television's Rossiya 24 channel, Jan. 19.

Michael McFaul, named U.S. Ambassador to Moscow, arrived at his new job last Saturday, Jan. 14, and has not yet become the ambassador in full measure.

An ambassador's tour of duty is traditionally measured from the moment he presents his diplomatic credentials to the head of the accrediting state.

Nonetheless, in this short period—only five days, including the weekend—the newly arrived diplomat has managed to land in the media of his host country, and the publications about him have been rather critical.

This is most likely because, in this short period of time, McFaul has managed to commit serious violations of two diplomatic customs simultaneously. First of all, in the period before the presentation of credentials, it is recommended that the ambassador make protocol visits to important persons in the host country and to his fellow ambassadors, rather than right off the bat to launch furious activity such as receiving civic activists of the host country as his guests.

Secondly, in the event that such activists are fairly exotic and extra-systemic—for example, if they intend immediately to dismantle the existing regime—there has existed for more than a century, the practice of using lower-ranking diplomats for such contacts, in order to be able to say that the ambassador or chargé d'affaires was not involved; that this was merely a press attache who was studying public opinion in the host country.

There are about 200 foreign embassies in Moscow, among which are the embassies of powerful, democratic nations, whose governments can hardly be said to agree completely with all the particular features of Russian domestic political life. Nonetheless, McFaul alone has become famous for such demonstrative violations of generally accepted diplomatic customs. . . .

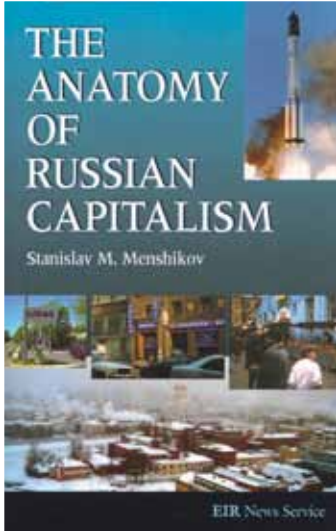
The unusual events, however, did not end there. They grew more intense, when the U.S. State Department intervened directly into the polemics about diplomatic customs and the personality of the new appointee. Official State Department spokesman Victoria Nuland stated, in reply to criticism of McFaul by several Russian media: "As the Russian Federation knows very well, and as he's tried to explain to the Russian people directly through his own Twitter and Facebook site, which I commend to all of you, he is one of the U.S. Government's top experts on Russia. He was and remains a key architect of the President's reset policy, [thanks] to which we've had a number of successes in deepening our cooperation with Russia."

One doesn't have to be a specialist in diplomatic customs to notice that the State Department here missed an excellent opportunity to remain silent. The official State Department spokesman was persistent in emphasizing that McFaul is a good guy and not an idiot, which

is already stated in his credentials, a copy of which McFaul presented to our deputy minister of foreign affairs, and the original of which he is to present to the President of Russia. It is not a good idea to keep repeating and explaining this notion so insistently. If someone keeps saying that he's not an idiot, people might begin to have doubts about that.

Beyond that general point, there are other, particular arguments to be made, once again from the realm of diplomatic custom. It is customary for ambassadors and ministers not to get involved in direct polemics with the press of the host country. The more so, they do not issue evaluations of that press. Even Soviet diplomacy rarely made official statements about anti-Soviet excesses in the press of some countries. That is because there were fairly literate people at Smolensk Square [the Foreign Ministry], who already knew the answer: "We have freedom of speech. People write what they want to, and it's not your business." That is precisely the answer our representatives received, when they tried to stop any excesses.

Sometimes one has the impression that all the impressions of this world are absolutely fresh for American diplomacy, and that everything is new, as for a little baby.



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