

Opposition Leaders Brief McFaul

By [Jonathan Earle](#)

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A day after meeting Russian officials, new U.S. Ambassador Michael McFaul sat down Tuesday with opposition politicians and civil activists — who were videotaped by pro-Kremlin youth activists as they left the embassy.

McFaul, who arrived in Moscow on Saturday, said the United States was practicing a policy of "dual-track engagement" by meeting with government officials and the opposition. A participant in the closed-door talks said general issues had been discussed.

"Just as President [Barack] Obama did when he visited Moscow in July 2009, all senior U.S. officials visiting Russia make a point of meeting with both government officials and civil society leaders," McFaul [wrote](#) on his LiveJournal blog late Tuesday.

McFaul and Deputy Secretary of State William Burns, a former U.S. ambassador to Moscow, held two separate meetings with opposition politicians and civil activists, who briefed them on current affairs in different fields in Russia.

"We learned a lot from listening to these leaders," McFaul said.✘

The politicians included Boris Nemtsov, co-leader of the Party of People's Freedom; Yabloko party head Sergei Mitrokhin; and State Duma Deputies Ilya Ponomaryov and Oksana Dmitriyeva of A Just Russia and Leonid Kalashnikov of the Communist Party.

Among the civil activists were human rights champion Lev Ponomaryov; Lilia Shibanova, head of the Golos elections watchdog; Yelena Panfilova, chief of Transparency International's local office; Russian Federation of Motorists chief Sergei Kanayev; and environment activist Yevgenia Chirikova.

The discussion was about general political affairs and nothing specific, Nemtsov said in a telephone interview after the meeting.

Nemtsov, who said he first met McFaul back in the 1990s, noted that they didn't discuss the opposition's plans. He also said he wasn't expecting any drastic policy changes from the United States.

"The fact that McFaul did not organize his first meeting with Putin but with the opposition characterizes him in a positive light," Chirikova [wrote](#) on Twitter.

Chirikova said the activists were met by a group of Nashi youth activists waiting outside the embassy building with video cameras. She [posted](#) several pictures of them taking photos and filming videos through the windows of the embassy.

Nashi spokesman Maria Kislitsyna said the activists came to find out who attended the meeting. "We were curious who would show up at the meeting and why," Kislitsyna told Interfax.

On Monday, a U.S. public holiday, McFaul and Burns held meetings with senior government officials including Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Deputy Foreign Ministers Mikhail Bogdanov and Sergei Ryabkov, First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov, President Dmitry Medvedev's foreign policy adviser Sergei Prikhodko, Kremlin chief-of-staff Sergei Ivanov and Prime Minister Putin's foreign policy adviser Yury Ushakov, the U.S. Embassy said.

"Ambassador McFaul has worked closely with these officials for the last three years and was a key architect of the reset in relations between the United States and Russia over the past three years," an embassy spokesman said in a statement.

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