

On Trump's New Man in Russia, Jon Huntsman, Moscow Says 'Wait and See'

The former China envoy is facing a tough crowd

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The appointment of reported 'hardliner' Jon Huntsman as the United States' new Ambassador to Russia met with mixed reactions in Moscow on Wednesday.

"It's too early for labels," Speaker of the Federation Council Valentina Matviyenko was cited as saying by the state-run [TASS](#) news agency. "[We have to] judge him by his actions."

Matviyenko described Huntsman as "an experienced diplomat," adding "and that's already good."

The White House [confirmed](#) on Wednesday its pick of the former envoy to China and two-time Utah governor as a replacement for outgoing Ambassador John Tefft. Before Huntsman moves to Moscow, the appointment will have to be confirmed by the U.S. Senate.

The choice came as no surprise. As early as March, it was widely assumed that Huntsman would be Washington's preferred candidate. In Moscow, those reports elicited a tepid response.

Alexei Pushkov, the former head of the State Duma international affairs committee, now a senator, told the RBC news outlet: "Trump has surrounded himself with people who don't want to improve relations with Russia," adding Huntsman was "certainly no dove."

Presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov took a softer approach, saying Moscow would "welcome any ambassador who will be a fervent supporter of the idea of restoring relations" between the United States and Russia.

The Kremlin did not comment on the news of the White House's appointment on Wednesday.

In the Russian state media, the news received little coverage, but the tone was generally skeptical.

First Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee on International Affairs Dmitry Novikov told the Life.ru tabloid: "The fact that they've appointed Huntsman, who once again does not belong to the cohort of peacekeepers, shows that Trump is still playing to the mood of the U.S. establishment, and that mood is not to Russia's benefit."

Other outlets focused largely on Huntsman's track record as former U.S. president Barack Obama's envoy to China or his Mormon roots.

"The United States wants to be closer to China, than China and Russia are to each other," Alexander Domrin, a Higher School of Economics professor was cited as saying by state television channel Vesti.ru. "That's why they appointed Huntsman."

Commenting on the likely new ambassador's Mormon roots, he added: "This is a religious movement with many signs of being a totalitarian sect. Of course [Huntsman] will be loyal first and foremost not to Washington but to his own sect."

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