



Huntsman's experience makes his a good fit for Moscow

By Frank Shatz March 15, 2017

By all indications, [Jon M. Huntsman Jr.](#), the twice elected governor of Utah, a candidate for the 2012 Republican presidential nomination and U.S. ambassador to Singapore and to China from 2009 to 2011, will serve as President [Donald Trump](#)'s envoy to Moscow.

According to foreign policy experts, such as Michael A. McFaul, ambassador to Russia during the Obama administration, taking on this diplomatic assignment would be challenging in the best of times, but is more so now, given the questions swirling around the Trump administration and its links to Russia.

Indicative of whether Huntsman is the right choice for this assignment, was the introduction of him as the keynote speaker at the Williamsburg conference of the Coalition for International Education in 2014, by Colin Campbell, then-president and CEO of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

"It would take a mighty struggle to find a better example of citizenship writ large – fulfilling ideals of participation, wisdom and commitment — than Jon Huntsman Jr.," he said.

In an interview with the Gazette, I asked Huntsman what qualities he looked for as governor and ambassador when he chose advisers and assistants.

"The key word is 'keen learners,'" he replied. "People who are not just professionals using the knowledge they have learned, but who are willing to learn constantly and adjust to changing circumstances,"

As ambassador to Russia, under President [Vladimir Putin](#)'s rule, Huntsman will need the advice of 'keen learners' to navigate the choppy waters of the U.S.-Russian relationship. One of those to whom he should listen is Stephen Hanson, vice provost for International Relations at the College of William Mary and director of the Reves Center for International Studies.

Hanson was instrumental in bringing the three-day conference of the Coalition for International Education to Williamsburg, where he met Huntsman. Hanson is a nationally recognized expert on Russia and Eastern Europe

I asked Hanson, whether he thinks one of the major triggers prompting Putin to move against Ukraine was his fear that the new government in Kiev may not just extend economic ties with the West but would eventually take Ukraine into NATO.

He replied: "The sudden collapse of Viktor Yankovych's government no doubt led Putin and his entourage to believe that Ukraine might be entirely 'lost' to the West without dramatic and immediate action. The problem is that Putin now sees the situation in Ukraine entirely in zero-sum-terms – as a territory that either will 'belong' to the Russian sphere of influence or instead become anti-Russian."

Considering that President Trump vowed to defrost the relationship with Moscow, Ambassador Huntsman's mission would be to build a bridge to span the divide between the U.S. and Russia over the Ukrainian crisis.

According to Hanson, the U.S. should forge a united stand with its European allies in the design of targeted economic sanctions against Putin's elite, work with authorities in Kiev to help create a broadly inclusive government that reaches out to Russia and the Russian-speaking population of Eastern Ukraine, and try to restore Ukraine to economic health.

In the words of Dimitri K. Simes, the president of the Center for National Interest, a Washington-based research organization, Hunstman has experience dealing with an authoritarian regime based on his work in China. "He worked in a country with which the United States also has complex relationship."

After a recent visit to Moscow, Simes reports, "What Russian officials like about him is that he was a former ambassador to China, he is independently wealthy, and he will have access to the president."