

Kremlin Shoots Itself in the Foot Again

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The investigation into the death of lawyer Sergei Magnitsky adds new, tragic and absurd details every day.

On Monday, State Attorney Dmitry Bokov asked a Moscow court to acquit Dmitry Kratov, former deputy head of the Butyrka pretrial detention center, who was accused of negligence that led to Magnitsky's death.

But Bokov did not find a direct link between Kratov's negligence and Magnitsky's death. "Poor medical care was not the direct cause of death," Bokov said.

The Magnitsky Act will impose sanctions against Russian judges, prosecutors, investigators and other officials implicated in Magnitsky's pretrial incarceration and death. Meanwhile, the Kremlin claims that the U.S. is interfering in Russia's internal affairs by passing the legislation. Authorities say they properly investigated all officials linked to Magnitsky's death. "We do not need the West to tell us what to do" has been the standard line.

What are the results of three years of "investigation?"

If Kratov is indeed acquitted, it would appear that no one is guilty in Magnitsky's death. The case against the doctor at Butyrka, Larisa Litvinova, was closed in April because the statute of limitations had expired, prosecutors said.

The authorities' conspicuous inaction in the Magnitsky case has caused deep concern both in Russia and abroad. But until recently, few in Moscow believed that U.S. lawmakers and the president would put human rights above pragmatism by passing the Magnitsky Act.

In and of itself, visa denials and the freezing of assets of 60 officials under the Magnitsky Act do not particularly concern the Kremlin. But Russia's elites fear that the list will be expanded and that similar legislation could be adopted by European countries as well. If that happens, they, too, could be denied access to their favorite vacation spots, second homes and bank accounts.

This is why the Kremlin has reacted so erratically to the Magnitsky Act. Russia's symmetrical and asymmetrical responses quickly turned into an angry and contemptible display of anti-Americanism, culminating in an all-encompassing ban on U.S. adoptions of Russian children.

But far from piquing Washington and demonstrating the strength of Russia's sovereignty, the Kremlin once again shot itself in the foot. The ruling elite proved that preserving Russia's "prestige" and instigating another round of confrontation with the U.S. are more important than the rights of Russians.

This comment appeared as an editorial in Vedomosti.

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