

U.S. State Department Mulls Extending Magnitsky List

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The U.S. State Department is considering adding more Russian officials to the U.S. "Magnitsky list" after a Moscow court found late lawyer Sergei Magnitsky and former Hermitage Fund chief William Browder guilty of tax evasion, but Russia's Foreign Ministry has warned of a harsh response.

Former State Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland on Friday called the ruling "a parody of justice" and said the possibility of adding new names to the list was being looked into, Interfax reported.

Nuland made her statement in response to a question from Senator John McCain in which he slammed the verdict handed down by the Tverskoi District Court on Thursday.

The court found that Magnitsky and Browder fraudulently stole more than \$15 million in budget funds by way of an illegal tax break scheme using two of Hermitage Capital's

subsidiaries in the Kalmykia republic, Dalnaya Step and Saturn Investments between 1997 and 2002.

Browder, a British citizen, was tried in absentia on tax evasion charges as the British government refused to extradite him.

The State Department's current spokesperson, Jen Psaki, said at a briefing Thursday that Washington was disappointed with Thursday's "unprecedented ruling" against Magnitsky and that the trial had discredited attempts to bring the case to justice.

Magnitsky was imprisoned on tax evasion charges in 2008 soon after accusing officials of stealing \$230 million in state funds, and he died in prison a year later. His imprisonment and death prompted an international outcry as many believed he had been falsely charged for the very same crime he discovered had been committed by officials.

Last year, the United States passed a law named after Magnitsky that targeted Russian human rights violators, including those implicated in the Magnitsky case, with asset freezes and visa bans. In April, the U.S. Treasury Department published a list of 18 Russians subject to the sanctions.

The Magnitsky scandal has contributed to tense relations between Russia and the United States. In December, Russia passed a controversial law prohibiting the adoption of Russian children by U.S. families in what many saw as retaliation to the Magnitsky law.

On Friday, Alexander Lukashevich, the foreign ministry's official spokesman, reacted to Nuland's earlier statement.

“We have explained time and time again, that the 'war of the blacklists' started by Washington is inevitably a dead end, dooming U.S.-Russian relations to a futile standoff. But if the U.S. administration is actually led by the nose by rabid Russophobia, such as that of senators John McCain and Ben Cardin, and continues in the direction indicated by Nuland and Bayer, we have no choice but to give back a harsh response,” Lukashevich said in a statement.

“Especially as there are plenty of candidates for inclusion on our current 'Guantanamo list,' with due account for the recent high-profile revelations of massive violations by U.S. intelligence agencies, sanctioned by U.S. Congress, and done all over the world with confidential telephone conversations and correspondence, violations which include infringements on the corresponding rights of Russian citizens. We call on the U.S. administration to act reasonably and refrain from taking steps that would worsen bilateral relations,” the statement said.

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