



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on April 15, 2013

## Russia Bans 18 Americans in Human Rights Controversy

The Russian government announced Saturday that 18 Americans, including former high-level officials of the George W. Bush administration, are banned from entering Russia, after the Obama administration imposed visa bans and asset freezes on the same number of Russians. Each country has claimed human rights violations as the reason for its action.



The 18 Americans include four that the Russian Foreign Ministry said were linked to “the legalization and application of torture.” Former Justice Department legal advisor John Choon Yoo and David Addington, the chief of staff to former Vice President Dick Cheney are named in that category, along with two former commanders of the U.S. military detention centers at the U.S. Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Retired Major General Geoffrey D. Miller, a commander at Guantanamo under President Bush, was also an in Iraq as an advisor on interrogations at the infamous Abu Ghraib prison. Also named was Rear Admiral Jeffrey Harbeson, a Guantanamo commander during President Obama’s first term.

“Under pressure from Russophobic members of the U.S. Congress, a powerful blow has been dealt to bilateral relations and mutual trust,” the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement released one day after the Obama administration announced the names of the Russians banned from the United States. “The war of lists is not our choice, but we have no right not to respond to blatant blackmail,” the ministry said. “It is high time for politicians in Washington to finally realize that it is futile to build relations with a country like Russia in a spirit of mentoring and outright diktat.”

The U.S. list includes 16 people linked to the case of Sergei Magnitsky, a Russian who died in a Moscow jail in 2009. Magnitsky is regarded as a “whistleblower” who his colleagues say was arrested and charged with tax evasion by the same officials he had accused of stealing \$230 million from the Russian government through fraudulent tax rebates. His death has been officially ascribed to heart failure, but Moscow’s human rights council has voiced suspicion that he was beaten to death. The reputed whistleblower had repeatedly claimed he was denied medical treatment in jail. The Moscow regime has put Magnitsky on trial posthumously over the outraged protests of lawyers and relatives, who claim the trial is illegal.

“The right response by Russia to the international outcry over Sergei Magnitsky’s death would be to



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conduct a proper investigation and hold those responsible for his death accountable, rather than engage in tit-for-tat retaliation,” said a U.S. State Department spokesman quoted by Reuters. President Vladimir Putin and other Russian officials have countered by saying U.S. violations of human rights leaves Washington in no position to lecture other countries on the subject. Their list, the foreign ministry said, includes Americans “involved in the legalization and application of torture and the indefinite detention at the Guantanamo special prison, and in arrests and abductions of Russian citizens in third countries.”

Yoo was the Justice Department official who authored what has been called the “Torture Memo,” which made the legal argument for applying waterboarding, sleep deprivation, exposure to hypothermia, and other “enhanced interrogation techniques” used by the U.S. military and CIA in the questioning of suspected terrorists. He now teaches at the school of law at the University of California at Berkeley. Addington, as counsel and later chief of staff to Vice President Cheney, is believed to have played a role in shaping the interrogation policy. He argued against recognizing rights of captured terror suspects under the Geneva Convention.

The action taken by the Obama administration follows the enactment of the [Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act](#), passed by Congress and signed by the president last December 14. Five days later, the Russian Duma passed a ban on the adoption of Russian children in the United States, citing the 2008 death of a young Russian child by heatstroke resulting from neglect by his adoptive American father.

The Obama administration has been charged, both here and abroad, with human rights violations that include targeted killings by drone attacks on civilians, including U.S. citizens, suspected of terrorist activities or of giving support to terrorist organizations. Critics of Obama’s policy toward whistleblowers have noted that the administration has been aggressive in dismissing or demoting federal employees who have exposed wrongdoing by government agencies and officials. Last year the Obama reelection campaign [boasted](#) that the first-term president and his Justice Department had authorized more prosecutions under the World War I-era Espionage Act than all previous administrations combined.



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