# Moscow calls Obama's human rights bluff

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If ever there was a case of the pot calling the kettle black, the Obama administration's indicting of Moscow for human rights violations is it.

It is entirely fitting that the government of Vladimir Putin responded to Washington's issuance last Friday of the so-called Magnitsky *persona non grata* list with its own black list, which included just a few of the many Grade A war criminals who have held high positions in the US government over the past two decades.

There is no small irony in the creation of the Magnitsky list, which is named for a previously obscure accountant and auditor who died in a Russian jail after working for Hermitage Capital. The CEO of this firm, Bill Browder, was the grandson of the former leader of the Stalinist Communist Party USA, Earl Browder.

Russian authorities have accused Browder of attempting to illegally purchase some $3 billion in shares in the former state-owned energy firm Gazprom.

It is the contention of the US government that Magnitsky was persecuted for uncovering embezzlement and corruption by Russian officials, leading to his death in prison.

Lost in this narrative of Magnitsky's death is that fact that at the time of his arrest, he was working for a financial firm that had become one of the most lucrative in the world based on its connections and dealings with the Russian oligarchs. The fortunes of this obscenely wealthy and criminal social stratum were derived entirely from the wholesale theft of state assets, which took place with Washington's full support during the restoration of capitalism in the former Soviet Union.

Whatever the circumstances of Magnitsky's death—it is alleged that he died either from a lack of medical treatment in jail or from a beating—the US intervention is entirely cynical and two-faced. When it has suited its interests, Washington has been more than willing to look the other way and lend its support to far greater crimes, as when Boris Yeltsin in 1993 ordered the bombardment of the Russian White House, the seat of the country's parliament, killing over 1,000 people.

The human rights card is played when it serves Washington's interests in confronting a geo-strategic rival. Magnitsky is really not the issue. In any event, what the US alleges in his case happens on a daily basis in the US itself. The United States has the largest prison population of any country in the world and records on average some 7,000 deaths in custody every year, many of which lead to similar charges of medical neglect and outright brutality.

In issuing its own blacklist, Moscow included two former US officials, David Addington, who was chief of staff of US Vice President Dick Cheney, and John Yoo, an ex-assistant US attorney general in the Office of Legal Counsel. Both have been charged with committing war crimes by providing a legal justification for the torture of prisoners at the US prison camp in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, as well at US military and secret CIA sites around the world.

Two others placed on the Russian list are retired Army Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Miller, who was the commander not only of the Guantanamo prison camp, but also the infamous prison at Abu Ghraib in Iraq, and Rear Admiral Jeffrey Harbeson, who was also a Guantanamo commander and has since become an advisor to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on political and military matters related to Russia.

The torture and criminality that the name Guantanamo evokes all around the world continues to this day. Last Saturday, military guards used force, including firing rubber bullets, to force detainees on hunger strike from the communal housing where they have been held for years into solitary confinement cells.

The hunger strike, which began on February 10, is a

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protest against daily brutality and the grotesque injustice of being imprisoned for 11 years with no prospect of being charged or tried, much less released. Physical violence and forced feeding have been used to break the strike.

Samir Naji al Hasan Moqbel, a Yemeni who has been held at Guantanamo since 2002, recounted his fate in a phone call with his lawyers, the contents of which were published by the *New York Times* on Monday. He described how twice daily a squad of eight military police in riot gear breaks into his cell and straps his arms, legs and head to a chair so that a feeding tube can be forced up his nose and into his stomach, causing excruciating pain.

"The situation is desperate now," he said. "All of the detainees here are suffering deeply. At least 40 people here are on a hunger strike. People are fainting with exhaustion every day. I have vomited blood.

"And there is no end in sight to our imprisonment. Denying ourselves food and risking death every day is the choice we have made."

At least nine inmates have died in custody at Guantanamo, some of them as the direct result of torture, others driven to suicide. It appears that this number is about to climb.

When Barack Obama was elected president in 2008, he vowed to close Guantanamo within his first year in office. More than four years later, the prison not only remains open, but its criminal operations have been codified into US law.

The ongoing operation of Guantanamo is emblematic of the Obama administration's continuation and deepening of all the crimes carried out under Bush, from aggressive war and torture to the vast expansion of the drone assassination program and its extension to US citizens.

If the principles enunciated by the Nuremberg trials of the Nazi leadership were upheld today, those named in Russia's blacklist as well as their superiors (left off out of diplomatic considerations)—Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Rice, Powell and Tenet—would be in the dock for their crimes. Instead, these crimes not only go unpunished, they continue.

Under these conditions, for the Obama administration to sit in judgment of the Russian regime on the issue of human rights is a case of unmitigated hypocrisy.

The entire episode only underscores the corruption and fraud that are at the heart of Washington's so-called human rights policy. It is an instrument used selectively by US imperialism to justify wars of aggression or destabilize those regimes seen as obstacles to US geo-strategic ambitions and to advance the profit interests of US-based banks and corporations.

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