

State Department Sends Mixed Message on Rights Bill

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The administration of U.S. President Barack Obama, pictured above speaking with President Dmitry Medvedev at a conference last month, said it supports the goals of the Magnitsky bill. **Pete Souza**

The U.S. State Department says it is in favor of punishing Russian officials implicated in human rights abuses, but does not necessarily support a congressional bill designed for that aim.

Asked if the department encouraged or discouraged the so-called "Magnitsky bill," spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said late Tuesday that "we do support the goals of the legislation," according to the state department's website.

Nuland also said it was wrong to link the bill to a repeal of the Jackson-Vanik legislation, something that is pitting President Barack Obama against a number U.S. lawmakers.

The bill is motivated by the death of Sergei Magnitsky, whose supporters say he was tortured to death in jail.

It was resubmitted to the House of Representatives last week, prompting Moscow's Ambassador to the United States Sergei Kislyak to warn that it would significantly hurt ties with Washington.

When the bill was first presented to the Senate last year, the State Department suggested that it was unnecessary as a travel ban had already been imposed on a number of Russian officials.

On Tuesday, Nuland reiterated that there are "programs already in place to ensure that we are sanctioning those who are responsible for human rights abuses."

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