

The Magnitsky Act against Russia: Washington Accuses Moscow of Soviet Style “Czardom” for Opposing US Dominance on the Global Stage

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If Russia is more supportive of the West in terms of its pursuit of dominance on the global stage or takes the initiative to shrink its nuclear weapons pool, it wins Western praise. The US Senate approved on Thursday the Magnitsky Act against Russia, with US President Barack Obama expected to sign the bill by the end of this year. It paves the way for Russian officials accused of human rights violations to be slapped with visa bans and have their assets in the US frozen. Moscow says the bill will force it to pass retaliatory legislation accordingly.

The bill is named after Sergei Magnitsky, who the Western media claim was an anti-corruption lawyer punished by Russia for tax evasion. He was jailed after uncovering bureaucratic fraud totaling \$230 million. He was reportedly severely beaten while in jail, and died in 2009.

His death caused quite a stir both in Russia and other countries. Russia consequently investigated Magnitsky’s death, with the Kremlin labeling it “a tragedy,” yet a “Russian affair.”

Magnitsky’s death sparked controversy in Russia and drove a wedge between Russia and the West. Every country makes mistakes, and deaths in custody occur worldwide. Magnitsky’s case became a global affair due to sensationalizing by the Western media.

Russia has witnessed profound democratic reform since adopting the competitive presidential election model of the West, but the country under President Vladimir Putin’s leadership has never curried favor with the West.

On the contrary, the West views modern day Russia as suffering a hangover of the Soviet model that warrants criticism.

Putin, who was democratically voted into power, is still seen as a “dictator.” The country’s strides toward democracy, however, have received no acknowledgement from the West.

It seems that there is no real connection between the West’s view on Russia and Moscow’s actual democratic efforts. Public opinion on Russia is largely framed in regards to relations between Russia and the West. If Russia is more supportive of the West in terms of its pursuit of dominance on the global stage or takes the initiative to shrink its nuclear weapons pool, it wins Western praise.

Russians don’t want to see their country split again in its democratic era, while Putin still

tries to maintain domestic cohesion. “Political strongmen” like Putin arise in Russia periodically, as people in the country pin their hopes to someone who embodies a sense of security and political authority. On the basis of this, Russia and the West can never become a “family.”

In the 1990s, Russia tried to make inroads with the West, although today it is criticized by the latter for being a “czardom.”

This offers a valuable lesson for China. The difference between China’s political system and that of the West’s is far greater; it’s too idealistic for China to expect praise from the West.

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