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AP

Russia bans entry to US officials in retaliation

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Russia has banned entry to U.S. officials allegedly involved in killings and abductions, a strong response to Washington's blacklisting of Russian officials involved in the prison death of a whistleblower.

The Foreign Ministry said in a statement Saturday it was blacklisting unspecified U.S. officials it claims were involved in the abductions of alleged terrorism suspects, the torture of inmates at Guantanamo prison, the killings of civilians in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the abductions or abuse of Russians in the United States. It did not say how many U.S. officials were affected.

The action was in response to the U.S. State Department's decision in July to ban entry to dozens of unidentified Russian officials allegedly involved in the death of lawyer Sergei Magnitsky.

The list supposedly includes some 60 officials, including relatively senior figures in the Russian Interior Ministry, as well as judges, prosecutors and prison officials that were named by Magnitsky's colleagues.

Magnitsky died in 2009 at age 37, when the pancreatitis he developed in jail was left untreated. He spent almost a year in pretrial detention on charges of tax evasion that were filed by the same police officials he had accused of illegally taking over the assets of an investment fund he worked for and fraudulently using them to reclaim \$230 million in taxes from the state.

Although Russian President Dmitry Medvedev fired several top prison officials over Magnitsky's death and has pledged a full investigation, no one has been prosecuted in the case.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said it will expand the list of banned officials if the U.S. keeps pushing for the prosecution of those involved in Magnitsky's death.

"We're talking about an attempt of direct pressure on our government institutions that has nothing to do with neither human rights protection or an intention to find out the circumstances of what happened," the Russian statement said.

In December, the European Parliament urged the EU's 27 nations to freeze assets of the officials involved in Magnitsky's death in a nonbinding resolution.

(This version CORRECTS Corrects that number of officials affected is not known, clarifies circumstances of death. This story is part of AP's general news and financial services.)