

## U.S. VISA SANCTIONS UNDER SECTION 7031(C)

Under a recurring provision in annual U.S. appropriations laws, the U.S. government (USG) has the authority—often referred to as [Section 7031\(c\)](#)—to impose visa restrictions against foreign officials involved in “significant corruption” or “a gross violation of human rights” anywhere in the world.<sup>1</sup>

These visa restrictions are in some ways more limited in scope and impact than the Global Magnitsky sanctions program. They do not impose an asset freeze or block financial transactions; they set slightly more restrictive standards for sanctionable abuse or corruption, are sometimes imposed confidentially, and directly cover only government officials. On the other hand, the State Department can use Section 7031(c) sanctions independently of other agencies, the sanctions can be used against the immediate family members of perpetrators, and there is no time limit within which the sanctionable offenses must have occurred. Additionally, the imposition of these sanctions by the USG is generally required, not just allowed, when sufficient evidence of sanctionable acts is presented.

### History

In the 2008 annual appropriations law, Congress established a new visa restriction [authority](#) directing the State Department to restrict entry of foreign officials engaged in corruption related to natural resources. Since then, successive appropriations laws have contained (often at Section 7031(c)) more expansive versions of this authority. In 2012, the authority grew to cover foreign officials involved in “significant corruption” in relation to any type of public or private assets. Since 2014, the authority has also covered involvement in “a gross violation of human rights.” Additionally, since 2015, Section 7031(c) has permitted the State Department to name sanctioned individuals publicly, a rare feature among U.S. visa restriction authorities.<sup>2</sup>

### Legal Criteria

#### Human Rights Abuses

These sanctions can be imposed on current or former officials of any foreign government who have been “directly or indirectly” involved in a “gross violation of human rights,” as well as their immediate family members.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Most recently, Section 7031(c) of the [Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024](#), as carried forward by the Continuing Appropriations Act, 2025.

<sup>2</sup> See Congressional Research Service, “FY2020 Foreign Operations Appropriations: Targeting Foreign Corruption and Human Rights Violations,” [April 17, 2020](#).

<sup>3</sup> Sec. 7031(c)(1). U.S. government practice suggests that “immediate family members” includes only a sanctioned person’s spouse or children. Such family members can be sanctioned regardless of their own conduct.

The similar term “gross violations of internationally recognized human rights,” which appears to be the standard the State Department applies through this program, is defined elsewhere in U.S. law to include:

- “Torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment”; “prolonged detention without charges and trial”; enforced disappearances; and “other flagrant denial of the right to life, liberty, or the security of a person.”<sup>4</sup>

In practice, this is a more restrictive standard than the standard that the Global Magnitsky program and many other programs use (“serious human rights abuse”), in part because the USG [generally interprets](#) “human rights violation” to refer exclusively to acts committed by government officials acting in their official capacity and within their national territory.

Recent versions of Section 7031(c) emphasize that the wrongful detention of locally employed staff of a U.S. diplomatic mission, or of a U.S. citizen or national, may also qualify as a sanctionable violation.

### **Corruption**

These visa restrictions can be imposed on officials of any foreign government who have been “directly or indirectly” involved in “significant corruption,” as well as their immediate family members.<sup>5</sup>

- “Significant corruption” is not further defined, but U.S. practice suggests the corruption must involve an improper exchange or provision of a benefit involving government actors or entities.
- The “significant” qualifier indicates a higher threshold than the corruption standard under Global Magnitsky and likely excludes smaller corrupt schemes, though local-level officials have been targeted as well as national ones.
- “Corruption related to the extraction of natural resources” is listed as an illustrative example.

### **Timing Requirements**

For either human rights abuse or corruption, Section 7031(c) sanctions can be imposed for acts that occurred longer ago than the five-year recency timeframe that the Treasury Department generally requires for the Global Magnitsky program. In fact, these sanctions have been [imposed](#) for acts that occurred over 40 years before the sanctions.

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<sup>4</sup> 22 U.S.C. § 2340(d)(1).

<sup>5</sup> Sec. 7031(c)(1). As noted in footnote 3, this term includes a sanctioned person’s spouse or children, who can be sanctioned regardless of their own conduct.

## **Modes of Liability**

A government official can only be sanctioned if they “have been involved, directly or indirectly,” in the human rights violation or corruption. The statute does not define what it means to be “involved,” although past practice has shown that both those who directly commit the offenses and those connected through a theory of command responsibility can qualify.

## **Process and Implementation**

**Penalties:** These sanctions impose visa restrictions, which means that designated persons generally cannot obtain or keep a U.S. visa. They do not include an asset freeze or other financial penalties.

**Implementation:** The State Department implements these visa restrictions. By law, these measures are not discretionary; the USG *must* ban the entry of those who meet the above criteria, though there are four exceptions. The Secretary of State can waive restrictions if there is “a compelling national interest,” or if circumstances causing the ban “have changed sufficiently.”<sup>6</sup> Persons whose entry “would further important U.S. law enforcement objectives” may also be exempt, as are those visiting New York on United Nations business.<sup>7</sup> It is not clear what procedures the State Department has in place to ensure the timely review of potential visitors under these standards.

**Publicity:** Unlike most visa sanctions, the U.S. government can—but does not have to—publicly identify individuals it designates under Section 7031(c).

**Congressional oversight and involvement:** The State Department is required to report to Congress all visa restrictions imposed, publicly or confidentially, as well as any exceptions used, or waivers issued. It posts the public designations in periodic [reports](#) and submits the other information in classified reports. As currently designed, the Section 7031(c) authority only applies to a single fiscal year at a time and would expire if Congress does not renew it.

**NGO consultation:** The State Department has accepted recommendations from civil society groups for this program, which can be submitted in tandem with sanctions recommendations for consideration under Treasury-led programs like Global Magnitsky. An NGO or other party may be able to trigger a mandatory review by submitting credible information about an alleged perpetrator, e.g., in advance of their traveling to the United States.

## **Patterns of Past Use**

**Overall use:** As of August 1, 2025, 583 individuals from 65 countries have been publicly designated under Section 7031(c). Of this total, 361 persons have been designated in connection with corruption, 215 for human rights abuses, and 7 for both.

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<sup>6</sup> Sec. 7031(c)(3).

<sup>7</sup> Sec. 7031(c)(2).

**Confidential use:** The State Department generally does not disclose information about the individuals it has designated confidentially, but a recent report to Congress revealed that the USG had imposed an additional 119 visa bans confidentially between December 2020 and December 2024.

**Covered acts:** U.S. practice suggests that it prioritizes targeting similar acts under this program as under Global Magnitsky. Sanctions for human rights abuses often targeted violent acts (e.g., extrajudicial killing, torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, enforced disappearances) and arbitrary imprisonment, while corruption sanctions frequently targeted bribery and misappropriation of state assets.

**Perpetrators:** The USG has publicly designated 321 perpetrators for their own sanctionable acts, and 262 additional individuals who are immediate family members of the perpetrators.

**Region:** Public designations have targeted actors in nearly all regions, with the greatest number in Europe and Latin America. Recently disclosed data shows that designations in the Middle East/North Africa and East Asia/Pacific have been the most likely to be kept confidential.

**Pace and timing:** The USG did not issue its first public designation under this program until 2018. Since then, the number of annual public designations has ranged from 32 to 109.

## Examples

### Human Rights Abuse

**Cuba:** In 2019, [Raul Castro](#), First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, and two [other](#) senior Cuban officials were designated for their involvement in gross human rights violations in Venezuela, including torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. Two of the three were also [designated](#) for their involvement in arbitrary arrests and detentions in Cuba, including of political prisoners.

**China:** In December 2022, the USG publicly designated [Zhang Hongbo](#), the director of the Tibetan Public Security Bureau, for his involvement in the arbitrary detention of Tibetans, highlighting that Section 7031(c) can cover imprisonment as well as more violent abuses.

**Suriname:** In April 2024, the State Department designated former Surinamese President [Desiré Delano Bouterse](#) and six former Surinamese military officials for their roles in the extrajudicial killings of political opponents known as the “December Murders” of 1982. These designations were imposed for conduct that occurred over 40 years prior, showing that the State Department does not apply the same temporal constraints as the Treasury Department. Four family members were also sanctioned.

**Israel:** In July 2024, the USG publicly designated [Elor Azaria](#), formerly a sergeant in the Israeli Defense Forces, for an extrajudicial killing in the West Bank eight years earlier. Azaria’s designation stems from a 2016 incident in which he shot a wounded Palestinian civilian. Azaria was convicted of manslaughter and served nine months in prison. This designation represents a [rare](#) public use of this authority against an official of a close U.S. ally, albeit at a very junior rank.

**Uzbekistan:** In December 2024, the State Department sanctioned three government officials from Uzbekistan, [Yulduz Khudaiberganova](#), [Anvar Kuryazov](#), and [Aybek Masharipov](#), for their involvement in gross violations of human rights committed against children at a state-run orphanage, including human trafficking, physical abuse, and sexual assault. The Treasury Department concurrently imposed sanctions under the [Global Magnitsky](#) program against these officials.

## **Corruption**

**Latin America:** In January 2024, the USG designated former Guatemalan President [Alejandro Eduardo Giammattei Falla](#) for his involvement in significant corruption, namely the acceptance of bribes. In March 2025, the USG designated former Argentinian President [Cristina Elisabet Fernandez de Kirchner](#), as well as a former minister, for their roles in “multiple bribery schemes involving public works contracts.”

**Moldova:** [Vladimir Plahotniuc](#), former Moldovan official and oligarch, was designated in 2020 for his involvement in “corrupt acts that undermined the rule of law and severely compromised the independence of democratic institutions in Moldova.” Three family members were also sanctioned. This State Department action took place nearly three years before the Treasury Department placed financial [sanctions](#) on Plahotniuc on similar grounds.

**Serbia:** In January 2023, the USG designated former Serbian National Assembly Representatives [Verica Radeta](#) and [Petar Jojić](#) for their involvement in significant corruption. Radeta and Jojić were designated for bribing and intimidating witnesses scheduled to appear before the UN’s war crimes tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. The sanctionable acts appear to have taken place [at least nine years](#) before the designation.

**Ukraine:** In December 2022, the State Department sanctioned [Pavlo Vovk](#), a senior Ukrainian judge, for “soliciting bribes in return for interfering in judicial and other public processes.” Within days, the Ukrainian legislature [passed](#) long-stalled legislation to reform the notorious court that Vovk chaired.

**Uganda:** In May 2024, the USG publicly designated Ugandan Speaker of Parliament [Anita Among](#) and three other officials for “significant corruption related to conduct that misused public resources and diverted materials from Uganda’s neediest communities.” The designation appears to stem from the [alleged diversion](#) of parliamentary funds, though Among claimed the sanctions were retaliation for her support of a widely-condemned anti-LGBTQI+ law.