

## NATIONAL REVIEW

### Microscopic Dots. Let's Look at Them.

By Jay Nordlinger

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Stuart E. Eizenstat has written a big book on the Carter presidency. (Eizenstat was Carter's chief domestic-policy adviser. He also had a substantial hand in foreign affairs.) I have reviewed the book for the forthcoming NR. Eizenstat tells the story of a meeting between President Carter and Andrei Gromyko, the Soviet foreign minister. Carter brought up the case of Anatoly Shcharansky, the "refusenik" in the Gulag. (He would later be known as Natan Sharansky, in Israel.) Gromyko expressed bewilderment at this. With all the issues lying before the USSR and the USA, the president is talking about one guy, one zek (prisoner)? Gromyko dismissed Shcharansky as "a microscopic dot."

I like that phrase: "microscopic dot." I don't think I will forget it. These microscopic dots are pretty much the most important things in the world.

Last week, I went to Guatemala to visit three microscopic dots in prison. They are a family named Bitkov — Igor and Irina and their daughter, Anastasia. The Bitkovs also have a young son, six years old, who is in the care of guardians (after a brutal experience in an orphanage).

The Bitkovs built an excellent company in Russia, from the ground up. But the state — Putin's oligarchs — wanted in on the action. They wanted their cuts, big-time. The Bitkovs would not oblige. They thought they could remain independent. They were wrong.

Anastasia, then 16, was kidnapped and raped. Igor paid a ransom. With the threats increasing, the Bitkovs fled Russia. The oligarchs then swooped in to gobble up the Bitkovs' company. They got it after all. The family, with few options, fled to Guatemala.

For a while, they lived normally, relatively speaking (and only relatively). But then the Russians pursued charges against them in Guatemala — financial charges. These went nowhere, being absurd. Then the Bitkovs were arrested for passport fraud, essentially. Their sentences? Igor got 19 years in prison and his wife and daughter got 14 years each. For passport fraud.

The sentence for rape is between eight and twelve years. Murderers almost never get what the Bitkovs got. I could go on.

And I do in a piece published today on the homepage, here. As I say in that piece, the Bitkovs deserve an entire book, or a movie. What has happened to them is revolting, and instructive, too. The U.S. Congress really ought to know about this case. There is a hearing before the U.S. Helsinki Commission on Friday.