



Written by [William F. Jasper](#) on May 28, 2009

“Merchant of Death” Trial Still Looms

Since his March 2008 arrest in Bangkok, Thailand, in an elaborate U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration sting, Viktor Bout has been in Bangkok’s Klong Prem Special Prison awaiting trial. The U.S. Department of Justice has been seeking his extradition, while the Russian government has been trying to block Bout’s extradition to the United States.



On April 30, the Russian news service RIA Novosti reported that Bout’s lawyers had received permission from the Thai court to enter testimony from Richard Ammar Chichakli, a U.S. citizen of Syrian extraction who, according to various reports, was Bout’s accountant and business adviser. Federal agents raided Chichakli’s Richardson, Texas, home and accounting business in April 2005, seizing his computers, records, and assets. He was not arrested, and the charges against him have remained secret. Chichakli and his family were allowed to leave the United States and move to Russia, where they now live in Moscow.

Chichakli claims on his website (www.chichakli.com) that he is being persecuted by the U.S. government and is innocent of any wrongdoing. According to his website, he and Bout first met “about 14 years ago, in August of 1995, in the state of Sharjah, one of the seven states in the United Arab Emirates.” At that time, the website account continues, Chichakli “was an employee of the government of Sharjah, serving as the commercial manager of Sharjah Airport International Free Zone and Victor Bout was one of the hundreds of investors who were interested in setting up a business in that free zone.”

Chichakli claims that in his capacity as manager he simply reviewed Bout’s business plan for his new air cargo company, Aircess, the same as he did for any other Sharjah Free Zone applicant. After leaving his Free Zone management position in 1996, he says he performed a 10-day consultation for Bout in 1998, when Bout was moving Aircess operations from the UAE to South Africa. All very innocent and legal — according to Chichakli.

Likewise, Viktor Bout claims he is innocent. Like many other alleged crime bosses, drug lords, and mafia kingpins, he has adopted Al Capone’s famous line: “I’m just a businessman giving people what they want.” Some news accounts refer to Bout as a “former KGB” officer who became an entrepreneur in the lucrative arms trade. However, the evidence argues strongly that he never left the Kremlin’s service, his multiple air cargo companies merely operating as shell companies for the KGB/FSB and/or the GRU, the Soviet military intelligence service that has kept the same name (and many of the same operatives) under the current Russian government.

The businessman cover might have been more convincing if Bout’s tracks weren’t continually intersecting with his old Kremlin taskmasters’. Like most of the other death merchants flooding Third World countries with Soviet weapons, Viktor Bout is closely tied to Vladimir Putin’s “Siloviki,” a Russian word variously translated as “force” or “power base,” referring to the huge coterie of KGB/FSB operatives appointed by Putin throughout the entire Russian government and state-owned enterprises.

Bout’s Benefactors

The KGB never disappeared under Gorbachev and Yeltsin, and there is no question that the intelligence services have received a huge boost during the Putin regime. Even the so-called mainstream press began catching on to that fact over the past couple of years. “KGB influence ‘soars under Putin’” was the title of a December 13, 2006 BBC story, which noted: “Four out of five political leaders and state administrators in Russia either have been or still are members of the security services.” Meaning roughly 80 percent of Russia’s top echelon are “siloviki,” probably a far higher percentage than any time during the Soviet era.

Viktor Bout’s ties to the siloviki structure run right to the top. According to press reports, he is a longtime friend and associate of



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Igor Sechin, Putin's veteran right-hand man. Back at the beginning of the 1990s, Sechin served as chief of staff to Putin, who was then deputy mayor of St. Petersburg (previously Leningrad). In 1998, Putin was appointed head of the FSB (the renamed KGB) and Sechin followed as his assistant. When Putin assumed the presidency of Russia, Sechin went along as his first deputy chief. In 2004, Putin appointed Sechin chairman of Rosneft, the giant oil and gas company (worth \$70 billion), catapulting him to near the top of the Kremlin economic and political food chain. In 2008, Putin moved over to become prime minister, making room for his handpicked successor, Dmitry Medvedev, to become president. President Medvedev then appointed Sechin to be deputy prime minister under Putin.

According to the private intelligence service Stratfor.com, "One of Russia's current deputy prime ministers, Igor Sechin, was the USSR's point man for weapons smuggling to much of Latin America and the Middle East." Sechin and Bout apparently met in the 1980s in Mozambique, which was then one of the Soviet Union's top African client states, under the brutal reign of Marxist thug Joaquim Chissano and the ruling Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) party. Bout, who was trained as a linguist at the Soviet Military Institute of Foreign Languages in Moscow, was in Mozambique as a translator.

Investigative reporter Witold Gadowski, writing in the Polish magazine *Gazeta Polska*, quotes an unnamed source of his, whom he says is knowledgeable concerning the Russian special services. The source told Gadowski: "Igor Sechin, now one of the most important people of the top [Russian] leadership, ... knows very much about Bout's business. Sechin (a former KGB officer) was an interpreter of Portuguese language in Mozambique, where he met a fellow-interpreter, Victor Bout."

The Sechin connection would certainly explain Bout's charmed existence for so many years while allegedly running arms to the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Abu Sayaff terrorists in the Philippines, dictator Charles Taylor in Liberia, and the forces responsible for the brutal carnage in Rwanda, the Congo, and Sierra Leone. With his fleet of 40 to 60 Russian Antonov cargo planes and easy access to a virtually unlimited supply of Russian arms, Viktor Bout ran a constantly shifting complex of shell companies operating out of Belgium, Bulgaria, the UAE, the Central African Republic, South Africa, Liberia, Swaziland, and Equatorial Guinea. But after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, Bout ran for cover in his old sanctuary: Russia.

Witold Gadowski is among those following Bout's activities who believe his Kremlin protectors finally decided to dump him, since his international notoriety had turned him into more of a liability than an asset. "Officially, Bout fell into a trap arranged by American special services," writes Gadowski. "But in fact he had been 'pointed for a shot' in Thailand by the FSB [the Russian Security Service]."

Bout is not the only formerly protected asset to be dumped. Similar fates have befallen his fellow arms-smuggling "lords of war" Semyon Mogilevich, Leonid Minin, Monsar al-Kassar, and Andrei Smulyan (aka Andrew Smulian). Apparently, with the changeover from known KGB/FSB chief Putin to his fresh-faced protégé Medvedev, the Kremlin leadership decided it would make good sense to clean up some of the old dirty laundry that might spoil the new image.

Witold Gadowski writes: "According to the official version, Bout, looked for in the whole world, fell into the hands of the Thai special services ... and was arrested with his accomplice, Andrew Smulian, when he tried to strike a deal to sell weapons to the Colombian FARC.... But there is also another, closer to the truth version of Major Bout's give-away. Somebody in the Kremlin has decided to wind up a protective umbrella over the most wanted international criminals. Mogilevich and Bout, used before in many actions, became useless ballast to the new "tsarevich" — Medvedev."

Polish analyst David Dastych, in an article entitled "Did the FSB Betray Victor Bout?" appearing in the Swiss paper *Nachrichten Heute* on March 22, 2008, observed: "Under the rule of the former President Vladimir Putin, Mogilevich and Bout were safe in Moscow. Now, when the President-elect Dmitry Medvedev is getting ready to do some 'face-saving' in Russia, the old 'kings' of the criminal underworld, serving the Kremlin as useful agents, are being dumped while new, still unknown replacements will take their place."

Curious Conflict

Nevertheless, Putin and Company would certainly prefer that Bout not be extradited to the United States, where untidy facts revealing the inner workings of the Kremlin's ongoing ties to global terrorism might leak out during a trial. Thus Russia's providing of protected status to Bout's "brother and friend" Richard Chichakli, and the vigorous defense on Bout's behalf. However, Bout may not have too much to worry about from the U.S. extradition threat anyway. As *The New American* has reported in a previous article on Bout, there has been a curious conflict between forces in the Justice, Defense, and State Departments on whether or not to prosecute him. This conflict has probably carried over from the Bush administration into the Obama administration.

There are several reasons why some forces in our government do not want to see Viktor Bout on trial in the United States. For one thing, it would very likely cause a prominent resurfacing of the fact that the Bush-Cheney Pentagon paid Bout millions of dollars to fly arms, supplies, and troops into Iraq in 2004-2005, at a time when he was supposedly on our "most wanted" list of bad guys. Douglas Farah and Stephen Braun, co-authors of the Bout bio *Merchant of Death*, note: "While the State Department remained committed at



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least in principle to shutting down Bout's global air transport operation, the Defence Department was enriching it with government contracts and American taxpayer funds."

Obviously, fully airing this information could prove highly embarrassing to many people formerly and currently in high places. It might even open some of them up to criminal charges. But the larger reason for opposition to pursuing legal action against Bout is that his extradition and trial could cause a setback to globalist "convergence" plans, which call for Russia and the United States to join more intensively in joint efforts to combat terrorism, piracy, and global organized crime.

"Whatever Bout's past misdeeds," Farah and Braun write, "even his deals with the Taliban, Bush officials felt they were not worth jeopardising the chance to build a counter-terrorism alliance with Russia. The perception within the intelligence community at the time was that Bout was protected by senior Russian officials, possibly even Putin himself."

As we have noted in previous articles in *The New American*, this "counter-terrorism alliance with Russia" includes the high-level global security panel appointed by Vladimir Putin and co-chaired by former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and former Russian Prime Minister Yevgeniy Primakov. The 80-year-old Primakov, Russia's most senior "statesman," is the former head of the KGB and for many years was the Kremlin's chief terror master in the Middle East. It is inconceivable that Primakov was not fully aware of (if not actively involved in) Viktor Bout's extensive and long-running arms-for-terror operations. Embracing Primakov, Putin, Medvedev, Sechin, and other KGB/FSB siloviki as our "partners" and "allies" against terrorism is utterly mad and suicidal.

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