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Report: Bout to Be Extradited to U.S. on Wednesday

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Suspected Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout will be extradited from Thailand to the United States on Wednesday, a Thai newspaper reported Tuesday.

A Thai appeals court last week ordered Bout's extradition within three months to face four terrorism-related charges in the United States. Neither U.S. nor Thai officials have said when exactly he will be extradited or specified the bureaucratic steps required before that can take place.

But newspaper The Nation said Bout would be picked up Wednesday at a Bangkok military airport by a special jet sent from the United States. Fifty Thai commandos will accompany Bout during the trip from the maximum-security prison, where he is being held, to the airport, it said, citing a "well-informed" source.

Bout's wife, Alla, said her husband's transfer should be delayed because the United States earlier filed a second extradition request on fraud charges in case the first request was denied, Gazeta.ru reported.

The second request must be reviewed by a Thai court, which had scheduled to consider it in October, Alla Bout said.

U.S. authorities are expected to drop the fraud charges to pave the way for the extradition.

Bout, a 43-year-old former Soviet Air Force officer who is reputed to be one of the world's most prolific arms dealers, was arrested in March 2008 in Bangkok as part of an elaborate sting operation led by U.S. agents. He was held for nearly 2 1/2 years in the Bangkok Remand Prison.

Thai prison authorities moved him after Friday's verdict to the Bang Kwang Prison, a high-security facility on the outskirts of Bangkok.

"The prison Viktor Bout was staying in prior to the ruling is for those awaiting trial," said Chatchai Suthikolm, director-general of Thailand's Corrections Department. "Now that the court has ruled, he was transferred."

"This is also for his security," Chatchai said. "He is now just waiting to be extradited."

He said Bout was allowed visits by the Russian Embassy and was sharing a cell with other inmates, but that he did not have other details of Bout's living conditions.

Bout's wife complained that he was confined to a small cell and not allowed to take walks.

She also said her husband was determined to defend himself in court and suggested that he would not start talking to U.S. prosecutors.

"He says he will not make things easy for the Americans," she told Itar-Tass on Monday. "He intends to win the trial if it is a real trial, not a farce."

Bout could prove a goldmine of information to U.S. authorities. People in and out of the U.S. government who have watched Bout's operations from afar say an arms trafficker who assembled a fleet of cast-off Russian cargo planes and operated a transcontinental network for more than a decade would not have stayed alive, much less thrived, unless he had the blessing and support of influential Russian officials.

Russian officials had tried to block Bout's extradition, and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov called Friday's decision "unlawful and political."

Bout is accused of supplying weapons that fueled civil wars in South America, the Middle East and Africa, with clients including Liberia's Charles Taylor and Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi, as well as both sides of the civil war in Angola.

Bout has denied any involvement in illicit activities and claims that he ran a legitimate business. He faces up to life in prison if convicted.

(MT, AP)

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