The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Bout Denies Knowing State Secrets

August 29, 2010



Alla Bout speaking about her husband's extradition in Bangkok on Friday. **Apichart Weerawon**

BANGKOK — Viktor Bout, the Russian businessman facing extradition from Thailand to the United States on arms trafficking-related charges, denied knowing Russian state secrets and accused the United States and international media of demonizing him as a major weapons dealer without proof.

An appeals court in the Thai capital, Bangkok, on Aug. 20 ordered Bout's extradition within three months to the United States, where he faces criminal charges that could put him in prison for life.

"I am not guilty of the crimes I am accused of, and I continue to believe that justice will prevail in my case," Bout said in a statement Friday read by his wife, Alla, at a news conference. He is in a high-security prison in a Bangkok suburb.

He denied speculation that he was close to senior Russian officials and held important information they would not like to see released. "I don't possess any secrets of the Russian state or its leaders," he said.

Bout, 43, was arrested in Bangkok in March 2008 after U.S. agents posed as arms buyers for the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, which Washington classifies as a terrorist organization.

After his arrest, Bout was indicted in the United States on terrorism charges for allegedly conspiring to sell millions of dollars worth of weapons to FARC, including more than 700 surface-to-air missiles, thousands of guns, and helicopters and airplanes outfitted with grenade launchers and missiles.

Bout has been accused of supplying dictators and warlords with weapons used in civil wars in South America, the Middle East and Africa. He has repeatedly denied being an arms dealer, though he acknowledges that the air transport company he once ran did carry legally authorized shipments of weapons.

"The U.S. is trying to create for me the image of an illegal billionaire and an illegal arms dealer," Bout said in his statement. "I have never traded in weapons; I have never sold weapons."

From 1993 to 2001, Bout said he owned a fully legal air transport business based in the United Arab Emirates, which he closed down when it became unprofitable.

"Many media organizations are disseminating information about me as the biggest arms dealer in the world," he said. "They do it without thinking of the fact that there is absolutely no proof of these allegations, and that proof just doesn't exist."

Bout's wife also slammed the media coverage of her husband. "You all understand that this is called informational warfare," she told journalists.

Alla Bout said her husband "is a strong man and he is not going to yield to the pressure; he is not going to quit. He will fight on." She said she doubted that he could get a fair trial in the United States, suggesting that a U.S jury "will actually not be seeing my husband, but they will be seeing the person built synthetically by media reports over a decade of time."

A Thai court in August last year originally rejected Washington's request for Bout's extradition, but after the ruling was reversed on Aug. 20, the United States moved to get him out quickly, sending a special plane to stand by.

The United States filed additional charges in 2009 against Bout — a step that is now slowing down his extradition. Bout cannot legally leave Thailand until he goes to court to hear the new charges of money laundering and wire fraud, said Sirisak Tiyapan, director of the international division at the prosecutor's office.

Washington has sought to drop those charges, but they remain stuck in the Thai bureaucracy.

"We'll have to see what the court decides," Sirisak said Friday. "Now everybody is just touting their versions of the story, which are all perceptions. Everything will become clear once the process reaches the court."

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2010/08/29/bout-denies-knowing-state-secrets-a959