

In Sochi, Obama Aide Pushes for Closer Ties

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WASHINGTON — U.S. President Barack Obama's national security adviser told a security conference in Sochi that nations needed to work together better to combat money laundering and other crimes that send arms, drugs and other deadly weapons across international borders.

James Jones said such cross-border crimes are a growing U.S. security threat. He expressed concern that criminal syndicates could collaborate with terrorists seeking to acquire weapons of mass destruction.

His push for greater cooperation came as a Bangkok court removed a key legal obstacle to the extradition of suspected Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout.

Bout has been a symbol of American concerns about cross-border criminal organizations dating back to Bill Clinton's administration, but he eluded authorities until U.S. narcotics agents arrested him in a sting operation in Bangkok in March 2008. Russia says he is innocent and wants him returned to his homeland.

Jones did not mention the Bout case in his remarks Tuesday, and senior U.S. officials said his speech, made available in Washington, should not be interpreted as a message to Russia, noting that the Bout case is strictly a judicial matter.

Instead, the retired Marine general spoke broadly about the increased efforts by the United States and Russia to work together — on arms control, violent extremism and the Afghanistan war — and called for cooperation on a new front.

"This lethal nexus of organized crime, narco-trafficking and terrorism is a threat that the United States, Russia and all of us share and should be working together to combat," he said.

"Today, right now, we have an opportunity for cooperation not just between the United States and Russia, but among all nations represented here today. It's up to us to seize the moment at this important conference," he said.

Jones and other U.S. officials have warned that international crime syndicates are expanding and acquiring more powerful weapons. Using the drug trade as an example, he said opium and heroin from Afghanistan fund the Taliban, as well as insurgents and criminal groups in Central Asia, the Caucasus and Russia.

Earlier this year, Dennis Blair — then-director of National Intelligence — told a Senate committee that there is a growing connection between organized crime, government and intelligence figures in Russian and Eurasian states. That trend, he said, risks undermining competition in gas, oil, aluminum and precious metals markets.

In Moscow, Foreign and Defense ministry officials were not immediately available for comment on Jones' speech.

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