

# Setback for Bout's Defense

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NEW YORK — A U.S. judge overseeing the case of businessman Viktor Bout, charged with conspiring to sell weapons to a South American terrorist group, has expressed skepticism about defense claims that he is the victim of malicious U.S. prosecution.

In motions to dismiss the case, defense lawyers claimed that U.S. officials vindictively launched a 2008 sting operation against Bout in Thailand because the government was embarrassed by revelations that the United States had used Bout's cargo planes to deliver military supplies for reconstruction efforts in Iraq.

In a hearing Thursday, U.S. District Judge Shira Scheindlin said she had trouble finding evidence that the government had acted with malice. "Where's the proof he was selected for a vindictive motive?" the judge asked Bout's lawyers at one point.

After Bout's lead attorney, Albert Dayan, insisted that federal officials had pushed the sting operation in order "to annihilate him, take him out of the picture," prosecutor Brendan McGuire dismissed that line of argument as "sensational claims."

(AP)

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