

# Bout Jury Hears Recordings About Weapons Deal

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NEW YORK — An informant for the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration testified that Russian businessman Viktor Bout seemed fully engaged in an effort to sell weapons to an anti-American group in a hotel in Thailand before his 2008 arrest.

The Guatemala-born informant, Carlos Sagastume, testified about the meaning of Bout's words heard by jurors in a New York court on dozens of taped conversations made during the DEA sting operation.

Bout, charged with multiple counts of conspiracy, was brought to the United States last year to face trial on charges that he agreed to sell weapons to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC. The weapons plan was actually a ruse created by the DEA to entice him to leave Russia for Bangkok, where he was arrested on March 6, 2008.

Just before the trial ended for the week Wednesday, the government began playing tapes containing conversations between Bout, two accomplices and two informants in a hotel conference room shortly before his arrest.

On one tape, a DEA informant can be heard saying: "We want to knock down those American sons of [expletive]."

"Kill them, and kick them out of my country," the informant says. "They don't care where they go anymore. They go here, they go there. They go wherever they want. Why?"

Bout is quoted as saying on the tapes: "Yes, yes, yes. They act as if ... as if it were their home."

Bout has pleaded not guilty and said he is a legitimate businessman. If convicted of conspiracy charges, he could face life in prison. His lawyer said during opening statements last week that he played along with the men posing as members of FARC so he could try to sell them two planes he had left over from when he operated a transport business before the United Nations restricted his travel in 2004.

During testimony over two days, Sagastume repeatedly testified that Bout spoke about the sale of weapons during conversations prior to his arrest. He said Bout was writing a list of weapons he could provide on a sheet of paper in the conversation before his arrest. He said he saw the list because he tried to copy it.

Sagastume said it was obvious that Bout understood the situation in Colombia when he arrived at the meeting, which was designed to close a deal for Bout to provide rocket-propelled grenade launchers and guns, among other weapons, that could be used to fight American pilots.

Sagastume said Bout told the meeting that he had to convince the defense minister of an unidentified third country to provide documents that would allow the weapons sale to go through.

Bout said the "mission is speaking well of the FARC."

Assistant U.S. Attorney Brendan McGuire asked Sagastume: "What did you understand him to mean by that?"

He replied: "I understood he meant the mission in Russia."

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