

Files Show Bout's Libyan Ties

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WASHINGTON — Records found in Moammar Gadhafi's former intelligence headquarters in Tripoli show that British officials apparently warned the Libyan regime in 2003 about its dealings with Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout, who was convicted by a U.S. jury on conspiracy charges.

☒ The documents indicate that Bout had been trying to expand his operations in Libya. They add new intrigue to questions of whether he played a role in the Gadhafi regime's rush to bolster weapons caches in the years before it was ousted last month by a national insurrection.

☒ American officials and allied governments have sent teams of weapons specialists into Libya in recent weeks to scour for loose, Russian-made, anti-aircraft missiles and other dangerous munitions. Arms experts and investigators said learning more about the source of those weapons would aid in knowing what to look for and assessing their threat.

☒ "We know there are a lot of conventional weapons floating around Libya now, and an important question to pursue is how they got there," said Lee Wolosky a former Clinton administration national security deputy who headed U.S. scrutiny of contacts between Bout's

network and the Gadhafi regime in 2000. "Viktor Bout's operation in Tripoli would be a good place to start."

✘ U.S. prosecutors revealed evidence before Bout's three-week trial that the Russian air transportation executive had sought in 2008 to sell a Russian-made missile system to an unidentified Libyan client. Last Wednesday, a federal jury convicted Bout on charges of conspiring to kill Americans and U.S. officials, deliver anti-aircraft missiles and aid a terrorist organization. He was arrested in Bangkok as he negotiated a weapons deal worth at least \$15 million with South American narco-terrorist officials who turned out to be U.S.-paid undercover informants.

✘ Documents found by human rights activists in a former Gadhafi regime office in Tripoli indicate that in late September 2003, British intelligence officials told then-Libyan intelligence chief Musa Kusa that Bout had a "considerable commercial presence in Libya" and aimed to expand his interests there. The documents do not include any response from Kusa, who later became Gadhafi's foreign minister until he defected earlier this year.

✘ The documents, copied by Human Rights Watch officials in the regime's external security building in Tripoli, show that Kusa was apparently warned about Bout during a phone conversation with Mark Allen, then-counterterrorism director for MI6, the British spy service. An aide to Allen then followed up with faxes to Kusa outlining Bout's Libyan business interests and alerting him to concerns that Bout planned to transfer a major air cargo maintenance operation to Tripoli.

✘ In one fax, referring to Bout by his known alias of "Viktor Butt," a British intelligence official asked Kusa for more information about the Russian's reported plans to travel to Tripoli. At the time, Bout was targeted by a UN international travel ban and subject to arrest. "We should be most grateful for any confirmation of any attempt by Mr. Butt to visit your country," wrote a person who identified himself as Allen's assistant.

✘ Allen, who is now an adviser to LSE IDEAS, a London-based international affairs group, did not respond to e-mails requesting comment. British intelligence officials would not confirm or deny the authenticity of the documents. The officials also declined to confirm Allen's dealings with Kusa.

✘ Similar documents made public in recent weeks by the Human Rights Watch team from Kusa's office led to a spate of media accounts about the British government's apparent involvement in the forced rendition to Tripoli of opponents of the Gadhafi regime. Peter Bouckaert, the Human Rights Watch official who led the document search, criticized both British intelligence and the CIA for working with the Gadhafi regime's "abusive intelligence services."

✘ Bouckaert said the Bout documents came from faxes sent to Kusa and his aides from the CIA and MI6. ✘ U.S. intelligence officials had been aware of Bout's operations in Libya as early as 2000, Wolosky said. National security officials learned that summer that a plane leased from one of Bout's transport companies was chartered by Gadhafi and flew a team of Libyan hostage negotiators to the Philippines to aid in the release of hostages held by Abu Sayyaf, a regional terror group whose leaders were trained in Libya. Reportedly flown by a Bout crew, the plane returned with six freed hostages, briefly boosting Gadhafi's international standing.

✘The British intelligence faxes pointedly warned Kusa in 2003 that one of Bout's primary air cargo front companies, Jetline, was headed by a Libyan who also directed a Tripoli-based business, Sin-Sad. That company leased planes "frequently chartered by the Libyan government." The faxes also noted that Bout "had a considerable involvement with the former Taliban regime in Afghanistan and his aircraft regularly flew there while the country was under embargo."

✘The faxes also warned Kusa that British officials learned Bout intended to transfer a United Arab Emirates-based maintenance operation for Russian cargo planes to Tripoli. The documents do not confirm that move, but a U.S. official who insisted on anonymity to discuss ongoing inquiries into Bout's dealings said much of the maintenance operation apparently remained in the UAE.

✘Federal prosecutors revealed before Bout's trial that seized Skype Internet messages showed he laid plans in early 2008 to sell a Russian-made Kornet missile system to an unidentified Libyan client. The deal was aborted by his arrest, but the missiles could have been used, prosecutors said, to destroy tanks and helicopters.

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