The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Senior Deputy Compares Bout to Magnitsky

By Jonathan Earle

November 19, 2012



Viktor Bout being escorted to a Bangkok court in 2010 ahead of his extradition and conviction in the United States. **Sukree Sukplang**

The government needs to do more to protect the rights of Russians abroad, including convicted arms dealer Viktor Bout, the head of the State Duma's International Affairs Committee said Monday.

Alexei Pushkov told a Duma round table dedicated to rights abroad that "Bout did not commit any crime" and was convicted in the U.S. "based on fabricated, forged documents," Interfax reported.

The comments appeared as lawmakers mulled a response to the U.S. House of Representatives' passage Friday of the Sergei Magnitsky Act, aimed at punishing Russian officials implicated in the whistle-blowing lawyer's 2009 death in pretrial detention.

Over the weekend, Pushkov raised the prospect of a retaliatory "Bout List" against U.S. officials linked to the prosecution of the Russian arms dealer sentenced to 25 years in prison by an American judge in April.

Others at the round table also expressed support for Bout, saying he is innocent, and they pledged to continue to press for his release.

"We're not leaving this case. We're going to work on it actively," said Konstantin Dolgov, the Foreign Ministry's human rights envoy.

The U.S. Justice Department recently turned down a request to have Bout extradited to Russia, citing the seriousness of his 2011 conviction of conspiring to sell weapons to a terrorist group, RIA-Novosti reported earlier this month.

Bout was arrested in Bangkok after attempting to sell weapons to U.S. agents posing as representatives of the Colombian rebel group FARC. He was extradited from Thailand to the United States in 2009.

The Foreign Ministry and individual lawmakers have promised "retaliation" for the Magnitsky legislation, and harsh words continued to fly Monday, with a senior United Russia official accusing opposition leader Mikhail Kasyanov of treason for supporting the bill.

Sergei Neverov said Kasyanov, co-leader of the People's Freedom Party, or Parnas, was putting the interests of "a few American politicians" over Russia's national interests, according to a statement on the ruling party's website.

Pushkov also said Russia needed to fight for the rights of ethnic Russians in Estonia and Latvia, encouraging Russian human rights organizations to take up the cause.

Meanwhile, Magnitsky's lawyer, Nikolai Gorokhov, complained that authorities investigating the death passed sensitive documents to Interior Ministry officials under investigation, Hermitage Capital, formerly Magnitsky's client, said in a press release Monday.

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