

Accused Bout Associate Detained in Australia

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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CANBERRA, Australia — A man accused of being an international fugitive and being an associate of notorious Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout was arrested in Australia, authorities said Friday.

Richard Ammar Chichakli, 53, appeared briefly in court in Melbourne on Thursday after being identified while applying to become a government security officer, police and judicial officials said.

"The man was found to be a person of interest through a routine background check and was not offered a job," a Victoria state police spokesman said.

He had apparently entered the country using a false identity. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency says Chichakli is a close associate of Bout, who is known as the "Merchant of Death."

Chichakli, an accountant and a dual U.S.-Syrian citizen, has been on the run since April 2005 over allegations of money laundering and fraud and his attempt to purchase two aircraft to ship weapons for Bout. He denies the accusations.

He is thought to have escaped raids on his home near Dallas by U.S. FBI agents, fleeing first to Syria and then to Moscow. He is charged by U.S. authorities with being a money man for Bout.

Among those said to have bought weapons from the pair was former Liberian strongman Charles Taylor, who was sentenced last year to 50 years in prison for crimes against humanity. Other reputed clients include regimes in Sudan, Libya and Angola.

Bout, a former Soviet military officer, was arrested in Thailand in 2008 and extradited to the United States in 2010.

In April, he was sentenced to 25 years after being convicted of conspiring to sell weapons to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia for use against U.S. counter-narcotics agents and advisers.

Chichakli faces nine charges in the United States, each carrying a maximum 20-year prison term. A spokesman for the Victoria state legal department said Chichakli did not face any charges there.

He did not apply for bail after appearing briefly in the Melbourne Magistrates Court, the spokesman said, and he was remanded into custody until Thursday to allow U.S. authorities to apply for his extradition from Australia.

U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration administrator Michele Leonhart said in a statement that Chichakli had worked with Bout "to ensure they could ship weapons and conduct illicit business around the world."

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