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N.Y. Trial for Viktor Bout Is Delayed Until October

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NEW YORK &mdash The conspiracy trial of a former Soviet military officer charged with trying to sell weapons to a terrorist group was delayed until October after his new lawyers asked Thursday for additional time to prepare their case.

Viktor Bout will be tried beginning Oct. 11 after U.S. District Judge Shira Scheindlin decided a series of pretrial motions in which his lawyers will seek to toss out charges or evidence he faces. Bout was originally scheduled to start trial in September.

The 43-year-old Bout was extradited from Thailand last year and has pleaded not guilty to conspiracy charges. He was arrested in March 2008 in a Bangkok hotel, where U.S. authorities say he had met with informants who posed as officials of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, also known as FARC, in a sting operation run by the Drug Enforcement Administration.

The U.S. accused him of agreeing to smuggle missiles and rocket launchers to FARC, classified by Washington as a narco-terrorist group, and conspiring to kill U.S. officers or employees. If

convicted, he could face a mandatory minimum of 25 years in prison. He has pleaded not guilty.

After Bout's extradition, the Russian government complained that it was unlawful and politically motivated.

His new lawyer, Albert Y. Dayan, declined to discuss his defense strategy outside court Thursday.

He said he was pleased Scheindlin had asked prosecutors to report to her within a week on their efforts to persuade prison officials to make it easier for Bout to meet with his attorneys and otherwise was helping to "modify Mr. Bout's harsh incarceration conditions."

Dayan said a sheet of glass separates him from his client, forcing him to hold each page of documents up to the window so Bout can see them.

Outside court, Bout's wife, Alla, complained that he was being held in solitary confinement, was being fed poorly and was not receiving all the privileges he was entitled to, such as a monthly 15-minute phone call to relatives.

"It's impossible to maintain one's health under these conditions," she said, expressing concern that his health will deteriorate before the trial.

Bout listens to the radio as his "only contact with the outside world" and has begun learning how to draw, she said.

Andrew Harkuscha, a family consultant who translated Alla Bout's words for reporters who did not speak Russian, said Alla Bout visited with her husband for several hours each Monday. At other times, he said, Bout occupies his time by studying languages, listening to classical music and reading books.

Bout has been accused of supplying weapons that fueled civil wars in South America, the Middle East and Africa, with clients including Liberia's Charles Taylor, Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi and the Taliban government that once ran Afghanistan. He was the inspiration for an arms dealer character played by Nicolas Cage in the 2005 film "Lord of War."

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