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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Associate of Russian Arms Smuggler Viktor Bout Gets 5-Year Sentence

By The Moscow Times

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Viktor Bout has been accused of supplying military-grade weaponry to conflict zones around the world.

A U.S.-Syrian citizen was sentenced to five years in prison on Thursday for conspiring with Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout to buy aircraft in violation of sanctions imposed on them by the U.S. government.

Richard Chichakli, 55, was also ordered by U.S. District Judge William Pauley in New York to pay $1.77 million in forfeitures and restitution after a jury last year found him guilty of conspiracy and wire fraud charges.

He faced up to nine years in prison under federal sentencing guidelines. While Pauley said he did not deserve that much time, the judge said Chichakli "warped perspective of right and wrong."

"These crimes, sir, are serious," Pauley said.

Prosecutors said Chichakli deceived a Florida aviation company about his identity in an effort to sidestep a presidential executive order prohibiting him from conducting business with U.S. companies because of his alleged ties to Bout.

In 2007, prosecutors said, Chichakli tried to acquire Boeing Co planes for a Tajikistan-based company, Samar Air, that he and Bout operated together.

Bout, the subject of the book "Merchant of Death," and the inspiration for Nicholas Cage's character in the 2005 movie "Lord of War," supplied military-grade weaponry to conflict zones around the world, according to prosecutors.

He is serving a 25-year prison sentence for conspiring to sell arms to people that he thought were Colombian rebels who intended to kill U.S. soldiers.

His case has strained relations between Washington and Moscow, which demanded the return of the onetime Soviet air force officer.

Chichakli was arrested in Australia in January 2013, where authorities said he was living under an assumed name, and extradited to New York the following May. He denies wrongdoing and plans to appeal.

"I don't think I ever intended to violate the president's order," he said during Thursday's hearing.

Bout, 47, in November said he would seek a new trial and had hired the law firm of former U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft to help him pursue his case. A formal motion on the request is due Jan. 1.

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