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Freed Arms Dealer Bout Says West Wants to 'Destroy' Russia

By AFP

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Viktor Bout **FSB / TASS**

Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout, who was freed in a prisoner swap with U.S. basketball star Brittney Griner, told Kremlin-run media on Friday that Western countries are seeking to "destroy" and "divide" Russia.

"The West believes that they did not finish us off in 1990, when the Soviet Union began to disintegrate... They think that they can just destroy us again and divide Russia," he told state-run channel RT, known previously as Russia Today.

Bout, dubbed the "Merchant of Death" was released Thursday in a prisoner swap in Abu Dhabi involving WNBA star Griner, who was jailed in Russia for possessing vape cartridges with cannabis oil.

The 55-year-old was accused of arming rebels in some of the world's bloodiest conflicts.

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He said in the interview that he had not encountered any "Russophobia" among his fellow inmates, adding that "basically almost all of my prisoner neighbors had some kind of sympathy for Russia."

He gave the interview to Maria Butina, a lawmaker in Russia's lower house of parliament who served 15 months in a U.S. prison for illegally acting as a foreign agent for Moscow.

Bout's notoriety inspired the Hollywood film "Lord of War," starring Nicolas Cage, in which the anti-hero escaped justice.

In the interview to RT, Bout criticized the film and said the U.S. film industry was responsible for producing pro-Washington propaganda.

"If they had come to me and asked, maybe they would have come up with a more interesting story. Hollywood these days — in my opinion — is just a propaganda department (of Washington)," he said.

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