

Thai court rejects U.S. extradition request for 'Merchant of Death'

updated 12:19 p.m. EDT, Tue August 11, 2009

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Thai court rejects U.S. extradition request for alleged arms dealer Viktor Bout
- U.S. government claim Bout has sold weapons to Colombian rebels
- Bout widely believed to be inspiration for Hollywood film "Lord of War"

[Next Article in World »](#)

TEXT SIZE - +

BANGKOK, Thailand (CNN) -- A Thai court on Tuesday rejected the extradition of a man dubbed the "Merchant of Death", whom the U.S. government accuses of selling millions of dollars in weapons to Colombian rebels.

ADVERTISEMENT



Viktor Bout gives the victory sign after a Thai court rejects the extradition request by the U.S.

In rejecting the extradition request, the court said the case of Viktor Bout was politically motivated. U.S. authorities have 72 hours to decide whether to appeal. In the absence of an appeal, Bout will walk out of jail a free man.

The United States "will be consulting with the Thai government about an appeal," U.S. Justice Department spokesman Dean Boyd said Tuesday.

"We're disappointed," Boyd said in a written statement. "We continue to believe that the facts of the case, relevant Thai law, and the terms of the bilateral extradition treaty clearly support the extradition of Viktor Bout to the United States to stand trial on serious terrorism charges."

Bout was arrested in Bangkok in March 2008 after a dramatic sting operation led by agents of the U.S.

drug Enforcement Agency, posing as members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Widely regarded as a prolific arms dealer, Bout, has been in Thai custody since.

He is accused of supplying weapons to war zones around the world -- from Sierra Leone to Afghanistan.

The United States charged Bout last year with agreeing to sell surface-to-air missiles, armor-piercing rocket launchers, "ultralight" airplanes, unmanned aerial vehicles, and other weapons to FARC. Justice Department officials have sought his extradition since then.

Federal authorities accused Bout of four terrorism offenses: conspiracy to kill U.S. nationals, conspiracy to kill U.S. officers or employees, conspiracy to acquire and use an anti-aircraft missile, and conspiracy to provide material support or resources to a designated foreign terrorist organization, the designation given to FARC by the U.S. State Department.

Don't Miss

- ['Most-wanted' arms dealer arrested](#)
- [Read the complaint \(PDF\)](#)
- [U.S. sanctions target Syria group](#)
- [U.S.: Afghan drug trade funds Taliban](#)

Bout has repeatedly said he has not broken any laws and the allegations against him are lies. Former U.S. Attorney General Michael Mukasey singled out Bout as a leading example of a new breed of organized crime leaders who operate across international boundaries to amass wealth without regard to political ideology.

A former Soviet air force officer, Bout allegedly began building his arms business as the Soviet Union disintegrated in the early 1990s. He spoke six languages, acquired surplus Soviet planes and, according to the U.S.

Treasury Department, started shipping arms and ammunition to various conflict zones.

It is widely believed that he inspired the character of Yuri Orlov, the arms dealer played by Nicholas Cage in the 2005 film "Lord of War." [E-mail to a friend](#) | [Mixx it](#) | [Share](#)

CNN's Kocho Olarn and Dan Rivers in Bangkok, Thailand, contributed to this report.

EMAIL SAVE PRINT

► From the Blogs: Controversy, commentary, and debate

Top News



Senators 'troubled' after Rice meeting



Bergen: Senseless Benghazi obsession