

RELEASE IN FULL

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From: OpsNewsTicker@state.gov [mailto:OpsNewsTicker@state.gov]
Sent: Friday, June 29, 2012 10:29 AM
To: NEWS-Mahogany
Subject: Russian arms dealer jailed in U.S. will appeal (Reuters)

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout who was jailed for 25 years in the United States will appeal against his conviction, his lawyer said on Friday, in a case that has strained ties between Moscow and Washington.

Bout, subject of a book "Merchant of Death" and inspiration for a film "Lord of War" starring Nicolas Cage, was sentenced in April for agreeing to sell arms to U.S. undercover agents posing as Colombian guerrillas planning to attack American soldiers.

"We have agreed our next steps now," Bout's Russian lawyer Victor Burobin told a news conference in Moscow.

"First we will seek to appeal at an appeal court and then the Supreme Court and then turn to the U.S. president's commission for pardoning and then seek to bring Viktor Bout home to serve his sentence here."

Amnesty International says before his arrest in 2008, 46-year-old Bout was involved in embargo-busting arms deals to human rights abusers in Angola, Liberia, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The case has fuelled tensions between the White House and the Kremlin, which said it was politically driven. Moscow said it would continue to seek to return its citizen to Russia.

Bout's wife Alla said on Friday she did not hold out much hope for her husband's appeal.

DISPUTE

"Personally, I don't believe the appeal can get us anywhere as there is so much politics engaged in the case. It was a political order from Washington to get Viktor, so such an appeal will get us nowhere," she told the same news conference.

"What we need is a strong political will to return him to Russia. Otherwise all our efforts are just formalities," she said, adding her jailed husband was allowed to make two 10-minute calls per week and get 100 printed pages of reading material a month.

She and Burobin both expressed concern that another diplomatic dispute between Russia and the United

States, over a U.S. bill that would penalise Russian officials for human rights abuses, could hurt their case.

A U.S. Senate panel passed the Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act earlier this week. It was named after Russian anti-corruption lawyer Sergei Magnitsky who died in 2009 in pre-trial detention.

Russia expressed outrage at the decision and Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said it would have an "extremely negative" impact on relations between the two permanent members of the U.N. Security Council.

President Barack Obama's administration is unenthusiastic about the bill, fearing it could undermine a reset in relations with the Kremlin.

Bout was convicted in November on two counts of conspiracy to kill U.S. nationals and officers of the United States and one count each of conspiracy to sell anti-aircraft missiles and providing material support to a terrorist organisation.

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