

Complete 911 Timeline

Victor Bout

[September 1992: Charity Front Exposed as Illegal Weapons Pipeline, but No Action Taken Against It](#)

A secret weapons pipeline into Bosnia in violation of a UN arms embargo is exposed. Large transport planes have been arriving once a week for four weeks from Sudan to Maribor, Slovenia. The cargo is marked as humanitarian aid but in fact the planes are carrying tons of weapons, mostly from surplus stocks of old Soviet weapons. The planes are run by a company belonging to Victor **Bout**, a notorious illegal arms dealer who will later work closely with the Taliban in Afghanistan (see [October 1996-Late 2001](#)). [[Farah and Braun, 2007, pp. 50-51, 268-269](#)]

Such planes have been bringing weapons through Croatia bound for Muslim Bosnia, but due to deteriorating relations between Croatia and Muslim Bosnia, the Croatian government stops the flights and impounds 120 tons of weapons. At the same time, chartered Russian helicopters fly more weapons directly into Muslim Bosnia. Austrian government agents learn that the Third World Relief Agency (TWRA) is financing all of these shipments. They are working with Hasan Cengic, a radical imam who is also a Bosnian government official. The TWRA and Cengic switch to other routes.

The next year, the German government will stumbled across an illegal weapons deal being negotiated in Germany by Bosnian Muslims and Turkish arms dealers and arrest around 30. TWRA was the financial broker of the deal. But despite the exposure of TWRA as a charity front, no government takes any action against it and it will continue to be the main vehicle by which Muslim Bosnia gets illegal weapons. [[Washington Post, 9/22/1996](#); [Farah and Braun, 2007, pp. 50-51, 268-269](#)]

Bout and Cengic will apparently continue working together. A 2004 Bosnian intelligence report will say that “Victor **Bout** in collaboration with Hasan Cengic is transporting weapons to Chechnya” via a **Bout** front company. [\[Farah and Braun, 2007, pp. 50-51, 268-269\]](#)

1993-1995: Former US Intelligence Agent and Arms Dealer Victor **Bout** Develop Town that Becomes Hub for Al-Qaeda and the 9/11 Plot



Richard Chichakli. *[Source: Public domain]*

In the spring of 1993, Victor **Bout** moves to Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (UAE), and begins to use it as the central hub of expanding business empire. **Bout** is an ex-Russian military officer and is rapidly developing an international network to buy, sell, and transport illegal goods, mostly weapons.

The UAE is centrally located for his needs, and it has no money laundering laws, low taxes, and very lax banking regulations. Sharjah International Airport has almost no air passenger traffic at the time, being overshadowed by the popular airport in Dubai a short distance away. So the airport establishes a niche as an air cargo hub by offering tax incentives for cargo companies. In 1993, Richard Chichakli becomes friends and business partners with **Bout**. In 1995, Sharjah airport hires Chichakli to be the commercial manager of a new free trade zone now being heavily used by **Bout**.

Chichakli, a Syrian by birth, has an interesting background. He claims to have been friends with Osama bin Laden while studying in Saudi Arabia in the early 1980s. He will later claim that he used to “sit around and eat sandwiches and sing songs” with bin Laden and his siblings, back when “Osama was OK.”

In 1986, he moved to Texas, became a US citizen, and served in the US army until 1993, specializing in aviation, interrogation, and intelligence. He will later claim that he not only served in the US military, but also spent about 18 years working in intelligence (which, if true, would mean he was an intelligence agent when he was friends with bin Laden). Chichakli’s free trade zone is wildly successful. [[Center for Public Integrity, 11/20/2002](#); [Farah and Braun, 2007, pp. 53-56](#)]

In 2000, US investigators will learn that Chichakli is living in Texas again and is still working closely with **Bout**. [[Farah and Braun, 2007, pp. 53](#)]

However, no action will be taken against him until April 26, 2005, when US Treasury and FBI agents raid his home and business in Texas. They will seize his computer, documents, and over \$1 million in assets as part of an investigation into **Bout**’s financial empire, but they will not arrest him. Chichakli will not be stopped when he leaves the US several days later. He will move to Syria, where it is later suspected that he and **Bout** supply Hezbollah with weapons (see [July 2006](#)). [[Farah and Braun, 2007, pp. 247-248](#)]

Meanwhile, Sharjah and its airport will become a hub for al-Qaeda and the 9/11 plot. By 1996, there are daily flights between Afghanistan and Sharjah, and al-Qaeda uses Sharjah for drug and arms smuggling (see [Mid-1996-October 2001](#)).

9/11 mastermind Khalid Shaikh Mohammed will live in Sharjah in 1998 (see [July 8, 1999](#)), and 9/11 plot facilitator Mustafa Ahmed al-Hawsawi will be based in Sharjah in the months before the 9/11 attacks. Some of the 9/11 hijackers will pass through there and visit him (see [Early-Late June, 2001](#)).

Mid-1996-October 2001: Ariana Airlines Becomes Transport Arm of Al-Qaeda and Taliban

In 1996, al-Qaeda assumes control of Ariana Airlines, Afghanistan's national airline, for use in its illegal trade network. Passenger flights become few and erratic, as planes are used to fly drugs, weapons, gold, and personnel, primarily between Afghanistan, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Pakistan.

The Emirate of Sharjah, in the UAE, becomes a hub for al-Qaeda drug and arms smuggling. Typically, "large quantities of drugs" are flown from Kandahar, Afghanistan, to Sharjah, and large quantities of weapons are flown back to Afghanistan. [[Los Angeles Times, 11/18/2001](#)]

About three to four flights run the route each day. Many weapons come from Victor **Bout**, a notorious Russian arms dealer based in Sharjah. [[Los Angeles Times, 1/20/2002](#)]

Afghan taxes on opium production are paid in gold, and then the gold bullion is flown to Dubai, UAE, and laundered into cash. [[Washington Post, 2/17/2002](#)]

Taliban officials regularly provide militants with false papers identifying them as Ariana Airlines employees so they can move freely around the world. For instance, one flight on a Ariana small plane in 2000 lists 33 crew members. A former National Security Council official later claims the US is well aware at the time that al-Qaeda agents regularly fly on Ariana Airlines. (However, US intelligence will not learn of the widespread use of forged Ariana IDs until after 9/11.)

The CIA learns of **Bout's** connection to Ariana and the Taliban in 1998, but takes no action (see [1998](#)).

The US presses the UAE for tighter banking controls, but moves "delicately, not wanting to offend an ally in an already complicated relationship," and little changes by 9/11. [[Los Angeles Times, 11/18/2001](#); [Farah and Braun, 2007, pp. 139](#)]

Much of the money for the 9/11 hijackers flows through these Sharjah, UAE, channels.

There also are reports suggesting that Ariana Airlines might have been used to train Islamic militants as pilots. The illegal use of Ariana Airlines helps convince the United Nations to impose sanctions against Afghanistan in 1999, but the sanctions lack teeth and do not stop the airline. A second round of sanctions finally stops foreign Ariana Airlines flights, but its charter flights and other charter services keep the illegal network running. [[Los Angeles Times, 11/18/2001](#)]

About nine of the 9/11 hijackers work at the Kandahar airport in 2000, which is Ariana's main hub (see [Summer 2000](#)).

[October 1996-Late 2001: Arms Dealer Aligns with Taliban and ISI](#)



Victor **Bout**. [*Source: New York Times*]

Russian arms merchant Victor **Bout**, who has been selling weapons to Afghanistan's Northern Alliance since 1992, switches sides, and begins selling weapons to the Taliban and al-Qaeda instead. [[Los Angeles Times, 1/20/2002](#); [Guardian, 4/17/2002](#); [Los Angeles Times, 5/19/2002](#)]

The deal comes immediately after the Taliban captures Kabul in late October 1996 and gains the upper hand in Afghanistan's civil war. In one trade in 1996, **Bout**'s company delivers at least 40 tons of Russian weapons to the Taliban, earning about \$50 million. [[Guardian, 2/16/2002](#)]

Two intelligence agencies later confirm that **Bout** trades with the Taliban "on behalf of the Pakistan government." In late 2000, several Ukrainians sell 150 to 200 T-55 and T-62 tanks to the Taliban in a deal conducted by the ISI, and **Bout** helps fly the tanks to Afghanistan. [[Gazette \(Montreal\), 2/5/2002](#)] **Bout** formerly worked for the Russian KGB, and now operates the world's largest private weapons transport network. Based in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), **Bout** operates freely there until well after 9/11.

The US becomes aware of **Bout**'s widespread illegal weapons trading in Africa in 1995, and of his ties to the Taliban in 1996, but they fail to take effective action against him for years. [[Los Angeles Times, 5/19/2002](#)]

US pressure on the UAE in November 2000 to close down **Bout**'s operations there is ignored. Press reports calling him "the merchant of death" also fail to pressure the UAE. [[Financial Times, 6/10/2000](#); [Guardian, 12/23/2000](#)]

After President Bush is elected, it appears the US gives up trying to get **Bout**, until after 9/11. [[Washington Post, 2/26/2002](#); [Guardian, 4/17/2002](#)]

Bout moves to Russia in 2002. He is seemingly protected from prosecution by the Russian government, which in early 2002 will claim, "There are no grounds for believing that this Russian citizen has committed illegal acts." [[Guardian, 4/17/2002](#)]

The Guardian suggests that **Bout** may have worked with the CIA when he traded with the Northern Alliance, and this fact may be hampering current international efforts to catch him. [[Guardian, 4/17/2002](#)]

[1998: CIA Suspects Persian Gulf Royals and Arms Dealer Victor Bout Are Flying Heroin Out of Afghanistan](#)



A houbara bustard. [Source: Eric and David Hosking / Corbis]

In 1998, the CIA becomes interested in the links between arms dealer Victor **Bout**, al-Qaeda, and the Taliban. Michael Scheuer, head of the CIA's bin Laden unit, and some US counternarcotics officials are particularly intrigued by a pattern they see between the flight patterns of **Bout's** airplanes to and from Afghanistan and the hunting vacations of some Persian Gulf royals.

Many of the Persian Gulf elite are known to regularly go bird hunting in Afghanistan, sometimes meeting Taliban ruler Mullah Omar and/or Osama bin Laden during their hunting trips (see [1995-2001](#)).

US analysts notice that there is a surge of **Bout**-controlled flights to Afghanistan in February and March of each year, the same time many royal elite fly to Afghanistan on their private jets in time for the migration of thousands of houbara bustards through Afghanistan. Then, in early autumn, there is another surge of flights by both **Bout's** planes and the royal jets when the bustards migrate through the country again. Officials at the CIA's counternarcotics center suspect some of the royals are using the hunting flights as cover to export heroin. The **Bout** flights increase the suspicion, since he is a known drug trafficker as well as an arms dealer.

Scheuer will later comment, “They were very interested on the counternarcotics side about the patterns between **Bout**’s flights and the bustard-hunting season.” British intelligence is interested in the same thing, and at one point they approach United Arab Emirates (UAE) officials for permission to sneak a team of agents aboard one of **Bout**’s flights to search for Afghan heroin. However, they are unable to get permission, and the CIA also does not act on these suspicions. [[Farah and Braun, 2007, pp. 141](#)]

[1998: CIA Discovers Links between Arms Dealer Victor Bout, Al-Qaeda, and Taliban](#)

In 1998, CIA analysts realize that ground crews for illegal arms dealer Victor **Bout** are performing maintenance chores for Ariana Airlines planes flying to and from Afghanistan. **Bout**’s air fleet is based in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (UAE), at the time, and in fact **Bout** has been working with the Taliban since about 1996 (see [October 1996-Late 2001](#)). The CIA has also been gathering intelligence that al-Qaeda operatives are frequently moving between Afghanistan and the UAE. Ariana, Afghanistan’s official airline, is the only airline making flights between the Middle East and Afghanistan. Therefore, Michael Scheuer, head of the CIA’s bin Laden unit, concludes that Ariana is being used as a “terrorist taxi service.” Scheuer concludes that **Bout** is assisting al-Qaeda. He will later comment that when al-Qaeda operatives would travel through the UAE, “it was almost always through Ariana flights. Since **Bout**’s operation was working with Ariana, they were part of the same set of concerns.” The CIA also notices an increasing number of **Bout**’s own planes flying to and from Afghanistan. Scheuer will later say, “Our human intelligence said it was mostly small arms and ammunition, going to Kandahar and occasionally to Kabul.” [[Farah and Braun, 2007, pp. 138-140](#)]

However, while intelligence reports on **Bout**’s ties to the Taliban continue, interest in his activities in Afghanistan fades by the end of 1998. Scheuer will later claim that he tried to raise concern about the **Bout** flights with National Security Council officials, but saw little interest. “I never got a sense that he was important. He was part of the problem we had with the terrorist infrastructure in Afghanistan, but there were so many parts we were dealing with.... [N]o one was going to fall on their sword to get Victor **Bout**.” [[Farah and Braun, 2007, pp. 143](#)]

After 9/11, evidence will emerge that about nine of the 9/11 hijackers worked in the Kandahar airport heavily used by **Bout**'s airplanes (see [Summer 2000](#)).

January 1998-April 2001: Arms Dealer Victor **Bout** Sells Airplanes to Taliban

Arms dealer Victor **Bout** secretly sells twelve heavy-duty cargo planes to the Taliban. They are given false registries as civilian aircraft belonging to Ariana Airlines, Afghanistan's national airline. The planes enable the Taliban to buy and transport more weapons and move al-Qaeda and Taliban figures more easily. The Taliban usually purchase the additional weapons from **Bout** as well.

When US forces take control of Afghanistan in late 2001, they will discover huge caches of munitions that had been flown into the Kandahar airport before 9/11 and generally hidden in storerooms near the airport.

Al-Qaeda and Taliban share the caches, and likely use remnants of them in fighting the US in late 2001, 2002 and beyond. Apparently, US intelligence does not notice the airplane purchases until after 9/11. [[Farah and Braun, 2007, pp. 126-129, 279](#)]

1999: Al-Qaeda Linked Philippine Militants Involved in Drug Trade



A group of Abu Sayyaf militants photographed on July 16, 2000. [*Source: Associated Press*]

In the book “Dollars for Terror” published this year, investigative journalist Richard Labeviere claims that the Philippine drug trade is worth billions of dollars a year and that Muslim militants connected to al-Qaeda have a role in it. “Admittedly, the Islamists do not control all of these flows, but the Abu Sayyaf group plays a big part. Its mercenaries look after the protection of transport and the shipping of cargoes via jungle airports in the [southern Philippines.]

By the same air channels, and also by sea, weapons are delivered for the group’s combat unit. This supply chain is managed by Pakistani intermediaries who are trained directly in the Afghan camps around Peshawar” in Pakistan. He does not give his source for this information. [*Labeviere, 1999, pp. 365*]

Perhaps not coincidentally, a Pakistani believed to be connected to the drug trade is suspected of helping to fund the Bojinka plot (see [January 6, 1995](#)), which was planned in the Philippines with the help of the Abu Sayyaf (see [December 1994-April 1995](#)).

Victor **Bout**, the world's biggest illegal arms dealer, is said to use his network to ship weaponry to the Abu Sayyaf, though details have not been reported. **Bout**'s network also delivers weapons to the Taliban (see [Mid-1996-October 2001](#)). [*New York Times*, 2/27/2002; [Strategic Studies Institute of the US Army War College, 9/1/2005](#)]

There are many reports on the Abu Sayyaf's involvement with illegal drugs. For instance, in 2002 a Philippine newspaper will note that the region dominated by Abu Sayyaf has become such a notorious drug center that it is sometimes nicknamed "Little Colombia." [[Manila Times, 3/13/2002](#)]

[Early Spring 1999-2000: US Officials Realize Importance of Arms Dealer Victor **Bout**. Create Team to Catch Him](#)



Witney Schneidman. [*Source: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars*]

In 1999, State Department official Witney Schneidman is collecting information on the many civil wars and conflicts raging in Africa. He notices that the name of Victor **Bout**, a Russian arms dealer, keeps popping up in many conflicts. Sometimes **Bout** is even supplying both sides of a civil war.

In early summer 1999, an NSA official gives Schneidman a "drop dead" briefing about **Bout**, based mostly on communications intercepts the NSA has on him. Photos show dozens of airplanes parked in an airport in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, all of them owned by **Bout**. Schneidman begins mobilizing other officials. By early 2000, he and National Security Council adviser Lee Wolosky create a team to apprehend **Bout**. While

Bout remains little known to the general public, for many US officials he becomes the most wanted criminal in the world, aside from Osama bin Laden and his top aides. National Security Council official Gayle Smith will later comment, “You want to talk about transnational threats? We had [al-Qaeda’s bombing in] East Africa, global warming, and Victor **Bout**.” No other arms dealer has an operation anywhere near the size of **Bout**’s, and his links to the Taliban and al-Qaeda are a special concern (see [1998](#)).

But **Bout** is not doing any business in the US and is breaking no US laws, so the team cannot gather enough evidence to issue an arrest warrant for him. Counterterrorism “tsar” Richard Clarke considers targeting **Bout** for rendition, which is a very rare practice before 9/11. But when the Bush administration takes power in early 2001, **Bout** is deemed a less important priority, and ultimately no effective action is taken against him prior to 9/11 (see [Early 2001-September 11, 2001](#)). [[Farah and Braun, 2007, pp. 1-7](#)]

[Summer 2000: Some 9/11 Hijackers Allegedly Work as Airport Security Staff in Afghanistan](#)

Under interrogation after 9/11, al-Qaeda leader Khallad bin Attash will claim he met some of the 9/11 hijackers at Kandahar airport in Afghanistan in the summer of 2000. Although he will not be able to recall all of them, he will say the group includes Satam Al Suqami, Waleed and Wail Alshehri, Abdulaziz Alomari, Hamza Alghamdi, Salem Alhazmi, and Majed Moqed. He will say he was closest to Saeed Alghamdi, whom he convinced to become a martyr and whom he asked to recruit a friend, Ahmed Alghamdi, to the same cause. However, doubts will later be expressed about the reliability of such statements from prisoners like bin Attash, due to the methods used to obtain them (see [June 16, 2004](#)) [[9/11 Commission, 7/24/2004, pp. 233-4](#)]

Al-Qaeda’s division of passports and host country issues is based at the airport and it alters passports, visas and identification cards. Some people involved in the plot will later be reported to have altered travel documents (see [July 23, 2001](#)). [[9/11 Commission, 8/21/2004, pp. 56](#)]

9/11 hijacker Ahmed Alnami and would-be hijacker Mushabib al-Hamlan are also said to be at the same Kandahar camp, Al Farooq, and are assigned to guard the airport. [[9/11 Commission, 7/24/2004, pp. 526](#)]

By the late 1990s, the Kandahar airport will become the main logistics lifeline for al-Qaeda and the Taliban to the outside world. One Ariana pilot will later recall, “I would see Arabs with [satellite] phones walking around the terminal, in touch with the Taliban at the highest levels.” On one occasion, he sees Taliban ruler Mullah Omar meeting in the middle of the airport with a rebel leader from Tajikistan, surrounded by aides. “There they were, cross-legged on their mats, chattering into cell phones.” [[Farah and Braun, 2007, pp. 140](#)]

At this time, the Kandahar airport is being mainly used by Ariana Airlines, which has been completely co-opted by al-Qaeda and the Taliban, and aircraft companies controlled by international arms dealer Victor **Bout** (see [1998](#)).

Early 2001-September 11, 2001: Bush Administration Loses Interest in Apprehending Taliban-Linked Arms Dealer Victor Bout



Lee Wolosky. [Source: Center for American Progress]

By the end of the Clinton administration, an effort by some US officials to arrest international arms dealer Victor **Bout** is gathering steam (see [Early Spring 1999-2000](#)). National Security Council (NSC) adviser Lee Wolosky has been gathering evidence of **Bout's** airplanes being used to smuggle weapons and possibly drugs for the Taliban. Shortly after the Bush administration takes office, counterterrorism “tsar” Richard Clarke, Wolosky, and other NSC deputies hold a briefing about **Bout's** activities for Condoleezza Rice, the new national security adviser. Rice appears interested, and authorizes the NSC team to continue to pursue an attempt to get an arrest warrant for **Bout** strong enough to secure a conviction.

[\[Farah and Braun, 2007, pp. 186-187\]](#)

However, Rice focuses on diplomatic solutions and does not allow any actual covert action against **Bout**. The FBI also does not have an open investigation into **Bout** and does not appear particularly interested in him. “Look but don’t touch,” is how one White House official will later describe Rice’s approach. [\[New York Times Magazine, 8/17/2003; Farah and Braun, 2007, pp. 193\]](#)

In late spring 2001, Wolosky briefs Deputy National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley about **Bout** and global organized crime. He receives a go-ahead to present a full briefing to President Bush on the topic, but no

specific date is set. Wolosky is still trying to arrange a date when the 9/11 attacks occur. The Bush administration's interest in **Bout** was already fading before 9/11, and after 9/11 the remaining interest in him is lost, despite **Bout's** ties to the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Wolosky soon quits. "We knew we were being phased out," he will later say. [[Farah and Braun, 2007, pp. 193-194](#)]

Bout moves to Russia not long after 9/11, but Rice decides that Russia should not be pressured about arms trafficking in general and **Bout** in particular. One source who talks to Rice claims that she reasons the US has "bigger fish to fry." [[New York Times Magazine, 8/17/2003](#)]

[January 19, 2001: UN Sanctions on Taliban Do Not Stop Illegal Trade Network](#)

New United Nations sanctions against Afghanistan take effect, adding to those from November 1999 (see [November 14, 1999](#)). The sanctions limit travel by senior Taliban authorities, freeze bin Laden's and the Taliban's assets, and order the closure of Ariana Airlines offices abroad. The sanctions also impose an arms embargo against the Taliban, but not against Northern Alliance forces battling the Taliban. [[Associated Press, 12/19/2000](#)] The arms embargo has no visible effect because the sanctions fail to stop Pakistani military assistance. [[9/11 Commission, 3/24/2004](#)]

The sanctions also fail to stop the illegal trade network that the Taliban is secretly running through Ariana. Two companies, Air Cess and Flying Dolphin, take over most of Ariana's traffic. Air Cess is owned by the Russian arms dealer Victor **Bout** (see [Mid-1996-October 2001](#)), and Flying Dolphin is owned by the United Arab Emirates' former ambassador to the US, who is also an associate of **Bout**. In late 2000, despite reports linking Flying Dolphin to arms smuggling, the United Nations will give Flying Dolphin permission to take over Ariana's closed routes, which it does until the new sanctions take effect. **Bout's** operations are still functioning and he has not been arrested. [[Los Angeles Times, 1/20/2002](#); [Gazette \(Montreal\), 2/5/2002](#)]

Ariana will essentially be destroyed in the October 2001 US bombing of Afghanistan. [[Los Angeles Times, 11/18/2001](#)]

Shortly After September 11, 2001: Arms Dealer Victor **Bout** Allegedly Switches Sides, Works with US Against Taliban

In 2007, Los Angeles Times journalist Steven Braun, coauthor of a book on arms dealer Victor **Bout**, will claim, “We now know that one of **Bout**’s pals approached an American intelligence agent soon after the [9/11] attacks, suggesting that the US use his operation in arming the Northern Alliance against the Taliban and al-Qaeda. We don’t know for sure if the US accepted, but European intelligence officials believe a relationship blossomed. Within two years, **Bout** was flying for us not only in Iraq, but also in Afghanistan.” [[Harper's, 7/26/2007](#)]

The **Bout** associate Braun refers to is Sanjivan Ruprah. In November 2001, Ruprah contacts an FBI agent and offers a deal. He and **Bout** will secretly help the US arm the Northern Alliance in its fight against the Taliban, and help the US gain information on al-Qaeda and other militant groups. He and **Bout** would provide and deliver many millions of dollars’ worth of weapons that the Northern Alliance has already told **Bout** that they need. It is unclear if the deal ever goes through, and some experts and officials doubt it. However, one European official will later say, “We know **Bout** had his aircraft near Afghanistan and made them available to the US efforts almost immediately. They needed him and he had the only airlift capacity in the region.... The deal was, if he flew, the US would leave him alone.” Richard Chichakli, a close associate of **Bout**’s, will later boast that **Bout** organized three flights carrying US personnel to Afghanistan. (He will later withdraw the claim.) Ruprah twice flies to the US for secret talks with the FBI about such deals, despite being on a UN travel ban list. Such contacts are kept secret from US officials attempting to arrest **Bout**. Ruprah will be arrested in Belgium in February 2002, and documents found in his possession are the only reason anything is known about his secret talks with the FBI. Two months later, he is freed on bail and immediately skips the country. He is soon arrested in Italy, then curiously freed on bail again, and then escapes again. He has not been rearrested since. [[Farah and Braun, 2007, pp. 194-202](#)]

Prior to 9/11, **Bout** was the main arms dealer for the Taliban, greatly assisting al-Qaeda in the process. He had been supplying weapons to the Northern Alliance until about 1996, but switched sides once the Taliban gained the upper hand in the conflict (see [October 1996-Late 2001](#)).

But despite these alleged US ties, in 2002 it will be reported that **Bout** has recently been helping al-Qaeda and the Taliban transport gold (see [Summer 2002](#)).

He will work for the US military in Iraq in 2003 (see [Late April 2003-2007](#)).

Late February 2002: US Allegedly Helps Arms Dealer Victor Bout Escape Arrest

In February 2002, the Belgian government secretly indicts Victor **Bout**, the world's biggest illegal arms dealer, on charges of money laundering and illegal weapons trafficking. For the first time, he can be legally arrested and Interpol issues a secret arrest warrant for him anywhere in the world. Later that month, solid intelligence indicates **Bout** is going to be on a flight from Moldova to Greece. An encrypted message is sent by British intelligence field agents once the plane takes off, alerting their superiors in London that they are preparing to arrest **Bout** in Athens. But shortly after the message is sent, **Bout's** plane veers away from its flight plan and disappears off radar screens into mountainous terrain. It reappears on radar about ninety minutes later and lands in Athens. British special forces raid the plane, but find it empty except for the pilot and a few passengers. One European intelligence official familiar with the operation will later say, "There were only two intelligence services that could have decrypted the British transmission in so short a time. The Russians and the Americans. And we know for sure it was not the Russians." [[Farah and Braun, 2007, pp. 202-203](#)]

It has been alleged that the US began secretly working with **Bout** shortly after 9/11, despite his previous connections to the Taliban (see [Shortly After September 11, 2001](#)).

[Summer 2002: Arms Dealer Victor Bout Helps Taliban and Al-Qaeda Ship Gold to Sudan](#)

In September 2002, the Washington Post reports that European, US, and Pakistani investigators believe that al-Qaeda and the Taliban have secretly shipped large quantities of gold from Pakistan to Sudan in recent weeks and months. Disguised boxes of gold are taken by small boat from Karachi, Pakistan, to Dubai, United Arab Emirates, or Iran, and then flown to Khartoum, Sudan. European officials claim that some of the chartered planes used to fly the gold and other commodities are linked to Victor **Bout**, the world's largest illegal arms dealer. [[Washington Post, 9/3/2002](#)]

Bout worked extensively with the Taliban before 9/11 (see [October 1996-Late 2001](#)), but reportedly began working with the US after 9/11 (see [Shortly After September 11, 2001](#)).

So if these various allegations against **Bout** are true, it means he would be working with the US and the Taliban and al-Qaeda at the same time. European and US intelligence sources say Sudan may have been chosen because Osama bin Laden used to live there and still retains business contacts there. The Taliban kept most of their money in gold when they ruled Afghanistan. Large amounts of gold were also apparently shipped out of Afghanistan shortly before the Taliban were driven from power there in late 2001. [[Washington Post, 9/3/2002](#)]

The US learned of bin Laden's extensive financial network in Sudan several years before 9/11, but apparently never shut it down, even after 9/11 (see [December 1996-January 1997](#) and [March 16, 2000](#)).

[Late April 2003: Al-Qaeda Linked Arms Dealer Victor Bout Begins Flying Supplies to Iraq for US Army](#)

In late April 2003, the first civilian cargo planes begin arriving in Baghdad, Iraq, after US-led forces took over the city. As many as sixty civilian flights and seventy military flights arrive at Baghdad International Airport, all of them filled with supplies to replenish the US military effort and for Iraq's reconstruction. The US military officers in charge of the airport, such as US Air National Guard Major Christopher Walker have no idea how private supply contracts were made or with whom, but they note that most of the pilots appear to be from Russia and various Eastern European countries, flying rugged Russian-made aircraft.

On May 17, 2004, the Financial Times reports that many of the planes delivering supplies to US troops in Iraq are actually owned by a Russian named Victor **Bout**, the world's biggest illegal arms dealer. The United Nations has placed a ban on all dealings with **Bout**, due to his links to the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and many other militant and rebel groups around the world. Walker has never heard of **Bout**, but he is tasked to look into the allegations by his superiors. He quickly concludes that many of the planes flying into Baghdad daily are owned by **Bout's** front companies, and that such **Bout** flights have been taking place ever since the US reopened the airport. **Bout's** companies have contracts flying in tents, food, and other supplies for US firms working for the US military in Iraq, including a large contract to fly supplies for Kellogg, Brown, and Root, a subsidiary of Halliburton, the company once run by Vice President Cheney. **Bout's** companies also fly for US Air Mobility Command. Walker is reluctant to stop the flow of vital supplies, and leaves the issue to US military contracting officials to hire planes not linked to **Bout**. [*Financial Times*, 5/17/2004; [Farah and Braun, 2007, pp. 214-224](#)]

However, the US military does not stop hiring and using **Bout's** planes until about 2007 (see [Late April 2003-2007](#)). Walker will later speculate, "If the government really wanted him bad they could have come up with a pretext and seized his planes. But I guess they looked at Victor **Bout** and figured this guy's an asshole, but he's our asshole, so let's keep him in business." [[Farah and Braun, 2007, pp. 251](#)]

[Late April 2003-2007: US Military Repeatedly Hires Victor Bout Companies for Iraq Supply Flights, Despite Sanctions and Media Reports](#)

Beginning in late April 2003, when the first civilian cargo planes begin arriving in Baghdad (see [Late April 2003](#)), through at least 2007, Victor **Bout** front companies fly supplies into Iraq for the US military. **Bout** is the world's biggest arms dealer, with links to the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and other militant and rebel groups around the world. The United Nations has banned all business dealings with his companies since before 9/11. Around October 2003, the CIA apparently learns that **Bout's** planes have been flying into Iraq, but this warning does not lead to any action to stop such flights.

[[Farah and Braun, 2007, pp. 232](#)]

[Bout Flights Exposed by Media](#) - Starting in May 2004, various newspapers occasionally report on how **Bout** front companies are supplying the US military. Some actions are eventually taken against him. For instance, on July 22, 2004, President Bush signs an executive order declaring **Bout** a "specially designated person," permanently freezes his assets, and bans all US business with his companies. *[[Farah and Braun, 2007, pp. 225, 237](#)]*

[Continued Collaboration](#) - But the US military continues to hire **Bout's** companies for Iraq supply flights. One **Bout** front company alone is estimated to make about 1,000 flights into US controlled air bases in Iraq by the end of 2004. *[[Farah and Braun, 2007, pp. 225](#)]*

A Pentagon spokesman will later confirm that the US military gave at least 500,000 gallons of free airplane fuel to **Bout's** pilots. US government contractors pay **Bout**-controlled companies roughly \$60 million to fly supplies into Iraq. *[[ABC News, 3/6/2008](#)]*

Journalist Stephen Braun will later claim, "The US military insisted they had no responsibility for **Bout's** hiring, because, as [Deputy Defense Secretary] Paul Wolfowitz said, he was a 'second-tier contractor'-in other words, hired by, say, [Kellogg, Brown, and Root] or FedEx, not directly by the Army or the Marines. But there were other reports of direct contracts. [The Defense Department] made no effort to put **Bout** on a no-fly list early on, and made

only perfunctory follow-up efforts to find out the backgrounds of the companies flying for them.” [[Harper's, 7/26/2007](#)]

Bout Flights Continue - In early 2006, it will be reported, “The New Republic has learned that the Defense Department has largely turned a blind eye to **Bout**’s activities and has continued to supply him with contracts, in violation of [Bush’s] executive order and despite the fact that other, more legitimate air carriers are available.” [[New Republic, 1/12/2006](#)]

In 2008, Douglas Farah, who co-wrote a 2007 book with Braun about **Bout**, will tell ABC News that **Bout** may have worked on behalf of the US government as recently as 2007. [[ABC News, 3/6/2008](#)]

Outrage - Gayle Smith of the National Security Council will comment in 2007: “It’s an obscenity. It’s contrary to a smart war on terror. Even if you needed a cut-out (to transport supplies) why would you go to the one on the bottom of the pile, with the most blood on his hands? Because he worked fastest and cheapest? What’s the trade-off? Where’s the morality there?” National Security Council adviser Lee Wolosky, who led a US effort to apprehend **Bout** before 9/11, will similarly complain, “It befuddles the mind that the Pentagon would continue to work with an organization that both the Clinton and Bush White Houses actively fought to dismantle.” [[Farah and Braun, 2007, pp. 237](#)]

Theories - Some officials and experts believe the US military is simply being incompetent by repeatedly hiring **Bout**. Others suggest there was some kind of secret deal. For instance, one senior Belgian Foreign Ministry official involved in efforts to try to arrest **Bout** comments: “Not only does **Bout** have the protection of the US government, he now works for them as well. It’s incredible, amazing. It has to be the only reason why he is still around and free.” [[Farah and Braun, 2007, pp. 224-225](#)]

In 2006, **Bout**’s companies will supply weapons to Hezbollah in Lebanon (see [July 2006](#)) and an al-Qaeda linked militant group in Somalia (see [Late July 2006](#)).

Bout will finally be arrested by US agents in Thailand in March 2008 (see [March 6, 2008](#)).

August 17, 2003: Arms Dealer Victor **Bout** Hints He Has Numerous Government Connections



Victor **Bout** in 2003. *[Source: James Hill / Contact Press]*

The New York Times Magazine publishes an article based on an interview with Victor **Bout**, the world's biggest illegal arms dealer. **Bout** worked extensively with the Taliban in the years before 9/11, and because of this, he claims, "I woke up after Sept. 11 and found I was second only to Osama," in terms of being a wanted criminal. But he hints that he has powerful connections. "My clients, the governments... I keep my mouth shut." He also points to the middle of his forehead and adds, "If I told you everything I'd get the red hole right here."

When asked about his possible ties to Russian intelligence, he says, "Until now you've been digging in a big lake with small spoons. There are huge forces..." He breaks his sentence, and explains to the reporter that he cannot explain too much about what the report calls "the triangulated relationship between him, governments, and his rogue clients." An unnamed British arms investigator claims, "**Bout** is encouraged by Western intelligence agencies when it's politically expedient." **Bout**, a Russian, is interviewed in Moscow, where "he lives in plain sight... under the apparent protection of a post-Communist system that has profited from his activities as much as he has." *[[New York Times Magazine, 8/17/2003](#)]*

It will later be alleged that **Bout** began working with US intelligence shortly after 9/11, if not before, despite being the main arms dealer to the Taliban (see [Shortly After September 11, 2001](#)).

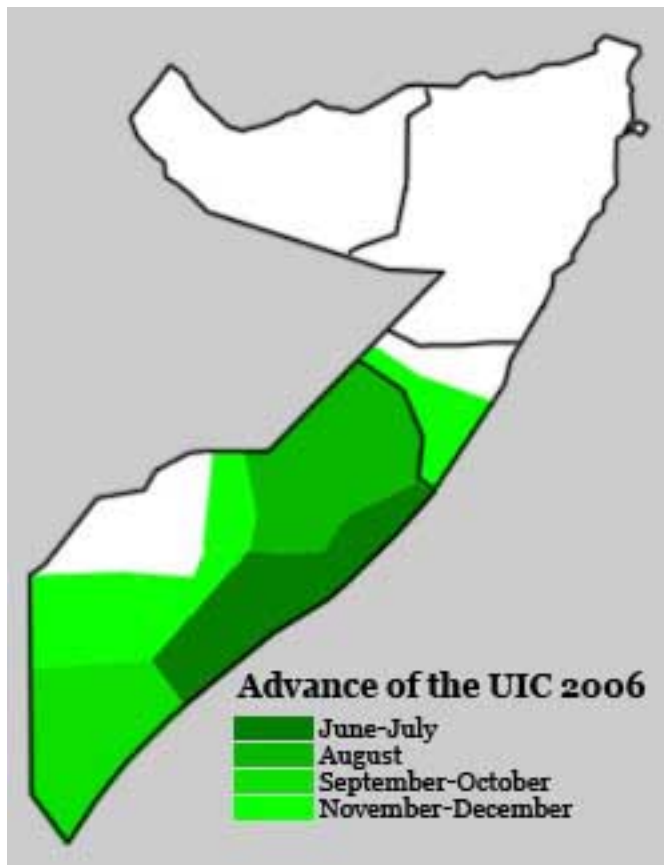
July 2006: Western Intelligence Agencies Learn Victor Bout Is Supplying Weapons to Hezbollah

In July 2006, fighting breaks out in southern Lebanon between the Israeli military and Hezbollah. Western intelligence officials soon learn that Victor **Bout**, the world's biggest illegal arms dealer, has been spotted in a Hezbollah military building in Lebanon. Officials also discover that Richard Chichakli, **Bout**'s longtime business partner, has recently moved from the US to Damascus, Syria. Israeli officials suspect that **Bout** arms Hezbollah with sophisticated Russian-made armor-piercing antitank missiles. [[Farah and Braun, 2007, pp. 254](#)]

Bout's role is not confirmed at the time. But in 2008, journalist Douglas Farah, co-author of a 2007 book on **Bout**, will tell ABC News that recent intelligence indicates **Bout** did supply the armor-piercing missiles to Hezbollah. [[ABC News, 3/6/2008](#)]

In 2006, **Bout**'s network is also supplying the US military in Iraq (see [Late April 2003-2007](#)).

Late July 2006: Islamist Militant Group Conquers Capital of Somalia with Help from Arms Dealer Victor **Bout**



A map of the 2006 advance of the Islamic Courts Union in Somalia.
[Source: Public domain / James Dahl]

In late July 2006, the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), an Islamist militant group, conquers the Somali capital of Mogadishu. Somalia has long been divided by various warlords and factions, but the ICU soon takes over much of the country.

Within days of taking Mogadishu, a number of large Russian-made cargo planes begin landing in Mogadishu's newly reopened airport, bringing in weapons for the ICU. US military officials order an investigation as to who is supplying the ICU, and within weeks US intelligence concludes that the planes are owned by companies linked to Victor **Bout**, the world's biggest illegal arms dealer. Soon, intelligence confirms that **Bout** is working closely not only with Islamist militias in Somalia, but also their allies in nearby Eritrea. [[Farah and Braun, 2007, pp. 254-255](#)]

The ICU will lose control of Mogadishu and much of Somalia in December 2006 after Ethiopia invades the country (see [December 24, 2006-January 2007](#)), but the group continues fighting. **Bout**'s flights will continue into 2007. In July 2007, a Sunday Times reporter posing as a middleman for the ICU will arrange an arms deal with Alexander Radionov, who runs a front company linked to **Bout**. Had the reporter paid, Radionov would have parachuted eight tons of ammunition into Somalia. [[Sunday Times \(London\), 7/15/2007](#)]

Bout had previously worked with other al-Qaeda linked Islamist groups, including the Taliban (see [Summer 2002](#)), but he has also been supplying the US military in Iraq since war began there in 2003 (see [Late April 2003](#)).

[March 6, 2008: US Agents Arrest Al-Qaeda-Linked Arms Dealer Victor Bout in Thailand](#)



Victor **Bout** in handcuffs in Thailand on the day of his arrest. [*Source: Associated Press*]

Victor **Bout**, the world's biggest illegal arms dealer, is arrested in Thailand. The US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) had set up a sting operation to nab **Bout**. For months, DEA agents posed as members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), a militant group linked to drug trafficking and organized crime. DEA agents and Thai police meet **Bout** at the five-star Sofitel Silom Hotel in Bangkok, supposedly to finalize an arms deal, and immediately arrest him and his bodyguards.

According to a Thai police officer, **Bout** does not resist arrest but merely says, "The game is over." A relatively new DEA task force is behind **Bout's** arrest, even as news reports indicate **Bout's** fleet of aircraft has been shipping supplies to the US military in Iraq in recent years. The DEA agents posed as arms dealers working for FARC but went after **Bout** because of evidence that he had been involved in drug smuggling as well.

Bout faces up to 10 years in prison in Thailand for taking part in illegal weapons deals there. US officials are also seeking **Bout's** extradition to the US so he can face more charges. **Bout** is a Russian citizen and has been based in Russia in recent years, but the Russian government has decided against seeking his extradition.

Mother Jones comments, "Willing to work for anyone, **Bout's** business divorced itself from any political, philosophical, or moral constraint. It delivered military cargo with equal enthusiasm to terrorists, guerrilla insurgents, rebel warlords, embattled dictatorships, legitimate businesses, humanitarian aid groups, and sovereign governments, including the United States" (see [Late April 2003-2007](#)).

He also worked with the Taliban and al-Qaeda-linked groups (see [Summer 2002](#) and [Late July 2006](#)).

Experts note that **Bout's** network has been unique in providing a full range of smuggling services and it is unlikely it will survive without him. [[Mother Jones, 3/16/2006](#)]

November 16, 2010: Arms Dealer Victor **Bout** Extradited to US to Stand Trial



Victor **Bout** being escorted by Drug Enforcement Administration agents as he is extradited to the US. [*Source: Drug Enforcement Administration*]

Accused arms dealer Victor **Bout** is extradited from Thailand to the US on terrorism charges. **Bout** was arrested in Thailand in early 2008 (see [March 6, 2008](#)).

He will be tried in the US on a variety of weapons dealing charges. For many years, **Bout** had a public reputation as the world's most influential and notorious illegal arms dealer. **Bout** is Russian, and the Russian government strongly condemns the extradition. Russia's Foreign Ministry issues a statement blaming "unprecedented political pressure" by the US on Thailand for **Bout's** "illegal extradition." The ministry also says that his guilt is unproven. [[CNN, 11/16/2010](#)]

November 2, 2011: Arms Supplier Victor Bout Guilty of Colombian Rebel Group Deal



Victor **Bout** during his trial. [Source: Agence France-Presse]

Victor **Bout** is found guilty on conspiracy charges to kill US citizens and officials, deliver anti-aircraft missiles, and provide aid to a terrorist organization (see [September 1992](#), [1993-1995](#), [Mid-1996-October 2001](#), [October 1996-Late 2001](#), [1998](#), [1998](#), [January 1998-April 2001](#), [1999](#), [Early 2001-September 11, 2001](#), [January 19, 2001](#), [Shortly After September 11, 2001](#), [Late February 2002](#), [Summer 2002](#), [Late April 2003](#), [Late April 2003-2007](#), [August 17, 2003](#), [July 2006](#), [Late July 2006](#), [March 6, 2008](#), and [November 16, 2010](#)).

In the the trial, which began on October 12, **Bout** was accused of agreeing to deliver 100 surface-to-air missiles, 20,000 high-powered weapons, and 10 million rounds of ammunition to rebels in Colombia sometime in 2008. **Bout** will be sentenced on February 8, 2012. The BBC's Laura Trevelyan will note: "This was a potentially risky case for the US government. **Bout** was caught in a sting operation by informants working for the US Drug Enforcement Administration, the so-called Farc rebels were actually former criminals and might have had their evidence discredited." [[BBC, 11/2/2011](#)]

http://www.historycommons.org/timeline.jsp?timeline=complete_911_timeline&other_al-qaeda_operatives=complete_911_timeline_victor_bout

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