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EXCLUSIVE: FAA INVESTIGATES FOIA REQUESTER OF ALLEGED RUSSIAN ARMS DEALER VIKTOR BOUT



In Thailand today alleged Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout was brought to court to face additional charges related to allegations in the U.S. that he ran an illegal world-wide arms bazaar. The United States has been seeking the former Russian military officer's extradition from Thailand for over two years. A Thai court ruled today that a second set of charges brought by the U.S. must be heard before the Russian can be sent to the U.S.

Back here in the U.S., The Enterprise Report has learned that someone within the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) offices based in Oklahoma City, OK provided false personal information in an attempt to obtain an investigative study from a private U.S. based cyber-security firm last June. The study disclosed security problems in vetting foreign nationals who hold U.S. aviation licenses. Problems which may include Victor Bout and over a half a dozen of his business associates.

The company, (SBS) Safe Banking Systems LLC of Long Island, New York has been a continued thorn in the side of the FAA and Transportation Security Administration (TSA) since last year when the firm published information it had uncovered that showed convicted terrorists and others, who presented a clear security risk to aviation safety here in the U.S. and overseas were going undetected and were being allowed to maintain American aviation licenses issued by the FAA.

Media reports last year by ABC News and The New York Times and The Enterprise Report this year have continued to report on SBS's work in finding and revealing security risks to aviation that the TSA, FAA and other U.S. security agencies seem unable to detect or have chosen to overlook. The Department of Homeland Security Inspector General is currently conducting an on-going investigation into the issue. The probe was prompted by bipartisan calls from Senators Jay Rockefeller (D-WV) and Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) and others on the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee after the media reports were published.

On June 22, 2010 SBS submitted a Freedom of Information Act request to the FAA. The request was obtained by TER. The request sought records related to two FAA licensed pilots. The first was alleged

Russian arms dealer Victor Bout. The second another FAA licensed pilot associate with Bout's organization that is based in France. The request was denied and the FAA provided SBS with no documents.

The very next day, June 23, 2010 someone providing the name "JONES" logged onto the SBS website and attempted to download an investigative report dubbed "FAA Airman Registry Report". To receive the report a valid name and other information is required. TER has learned that SBS was able to detect the fake request based on the false ID information and fake email information provided. The company did not provide the report to the FAA based requester. SBS later determined that the attempt to obtain the report under a fake name came from a computer within the FAA's Mark Monroney Center in Oklahoma City. The Center is the FAA's main depository of records. Just who the person was that made the attempt is still unknown. FAA spokesman Lynn Lunsford reached by TER prior to publication of this story told TER he was actively pursuing a response to questions posed by The Enterprise Report in relation to this report. FAA spokesman Lunsford did not respond to TER's questions prior to publication of this story.

Sources tell TER that a possible connection to the case of suspected Russian arms-dealer Viktor Bout may provide clues as to why the FAA was so interested in SBS's investigative work. Bout, who was arrested in Thailand in 2008 by DEA agents was the primary subject of SBS's FOIA inquiry.

TER has also learned that another person of interest in the Bout case is a former FAA medical examiner who until recently was based in the same Belgium city as Bout in the early 1990's and served as Bout's personal doctor. That person, Johann Piret, a Belgian doctor was an FAA Designated Medical Examiner for nearly three decades until 2007.

Mark Zaid, a Washington, DC based lawyer and expert on FOIA law told TER that although there may be no direct illegality in the FAA investigating or looking into the background of people seeking records via FOIA from the agency that "the propriety of doing so is ill-advised". Zaid pointed out a case early this year published by the Associated Press where FOIA requestors were being subjected to backgrounding and review by the Obama Administration and requested records were being delayed for political reasons.



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