

ARREST AIDS PURSUIT OF  
WEAPONS NETWORK

HON. TONY P. HALL

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, February 26, 2002*

Mr. HALL of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I commend your attention and that of our colleagues to a report in today's Washington Post, "Arrest Aids Pursuit of Weapons Network."

This article is part of reporter Douglas Farah's continuing exposé of the role conflict diamonds are playing in funding terror in Africa and terrorist attacks on America. Today's page-one story details significant progress in our intelligence agencies' effort to cut off the flow of sophisticated arms to Al Qaeda, the Taliban, Abu Sayyaf, and rebel groups in Africa. It notes that United Nations investigators working independently have documented the shipment of "hundreds of tons of arms to UNITA rebels in Angola, the government of President Charles Taylor in Liberia and several factions involved in the civil war in Congo." And, of particular interest to this House, it spells out the role that conflict diamonds play in an underground network that funds those weapons.

Mr. Speaker, at a hearing this month before a Senate Government Affairs Committee panel, Chairman DICK DURBIN and Senators MIKE DEWINE, RUSS FEINGOLD, JUDD GREGG, SUSAN COLLINS, and GEORGE VOINOVICH focused on the role conflict diamonds are playing in undermining the United States' efforts to freeze Al Qaeda's assets. As a witness from the State Department testified, "reports that terrorists may be buying and hoarding diamonds are cause for immense concern." I share this concern.

As you know, ending the trade in conflict diamonds has been a priority for me and Congressman FRANK WOLF, since we first met some of the victims of Sierra Leone's war over diamonds in 1999. Last year, we joined CHARLIE RANGEL and AMO HOUGHTON in pressing Congress to act against this blood trade and were proud to see the House approve our Clean Diamond Trade Act by an overwhelming margin.

Today, I commend the U.S. and Belgian authorities who are working to stop what probably is "the biggest weapons-trafficking network in the world." I salute Mr. Farah, who first broke this important story last year and has pursued it doggedly. And I urge everyone working on the problem of conflict diamonds to redouble their efforts. For the sake of the African victims of this blood trade, on behalf of Americans who deserve any protection from future terrorist attacks that our government can provide, and to ensure the legitimate industry is not penalized by the 10–15 percent of diamonds that are tainted by this scourge—this work must be finished.

ARREST AIDS PURSUIT OF WEAPONS NETWORK  
(By Douglas Farah)

U.S. and European law enforcement officials say they have scored an important advance in their efforts to disrupt what some officials describe as the biggest weapons-trafficking network in the world, responsible for supplying the Taliban and terrorist groups from al Qaeda in Afghanistan to the Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines, as well as rebel forces in Africa.

For the past three years, U.S. intelligence agencies have covertly been trying to thwart the sprawling arms empire of Victor Bout's, a former Soviet military officer whose operation is based in the United Arab Emirates, according to U.S. and European officials. Bout's network is unique, U.S., British and U.N. investigators said, because of its ability to deliver sophisticated weapon systems virtually anywhere in the world.

A suspected top associate of Bout's is under arrest in Belgium, and investigators say he is providing fresh, inside information on how the arms network functions.

While Bout has long been suspected of supplying weapons to the Taliban, U.S. and European officials said intelligence gathered in recent months in Afghanistan and elsewhere has provided new details about his flights and deliveries in the months before the Sept. 11 attacks on the United States. The intelligence suggests he was flying weapons into Afghanistan more recently than had been believed, according to U.S. and U.N. officials familiar with the material.

Bout specialized in breaking arms embargoes around the world, according to four separate U.N. Security Council reports on weapons trafficking that were issued between December 2000 and last month. His activities were also described in interviews with U.S., British and U.N. investigators. He traffics almost exclusively in weapons bought in the former Soviet bloc, chiefly Bulgaria and Romania, according to these officials.

"There are a lot of people who can deliver arms to Africa or Afghanistan, but you can count on one hand those who can deliver major weapons systems rapidly," said Lee S. Wolosky, a former National Security Council official who led an interagency effort to shut down Bout's operations during the last two years of the Clinton administration. "Victor Bout is at the top of that list."

U.S. and European officials said the suspected top associate of Bout, Sanjivan Ruprah, was arrested in Belgium earlier this month on charges of criminal association and using a false passport.

Before the arrest, Ruprah, a Kenyan, had secretly been in contact with U.S. officials in recent months, providing them with information about Bout, according to U.S. officials and Ruprah's attorney. The U.S. officials said they were given no warning Ruprah was about to be arrested by the Belgians.

U.S. officials also said they had made no deal with Ruprah. They said that since the arrest, Ruprah has divulged more information about Bout's suspected arms pipeline to the Taliban, which ruled Afghanistan until last November, and al Qaeda, which the Taliban had sheltered there.

"We are very, very interested in this case because we understand Ruprah is talking about the supply of weapons to al Qaeda and the Taliban," said a senior U.S. official. "His basic line with us was that, while he had done some bad things, he didn't deal with al Qaeda and he understood that being linked to that now would be very, very bad."

Ruprah was especially valuable to Bout, U.S. and U.N. investigators said, because he was tied to the illicit diamond trade in West Africa and arranged for Bout to be paid for his weapons deliveries with diamonds from Sierra Leone, Congo and Angola.

Al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations have used an underground network that stretches across Africa to trade in diamonds, weapons and other valuable commodities.

Last year both Bout and Ruprah were placed on a U.N. list of individuals banned from international travel because of their ties to Liberia and the Sierra Leone rebel movement known as the Revolutionary United Front, or RUF.

Johan Peleman, a Belgian weapons expert who has investigated Bout for several years on behalf of the United Nations and has spoken regularly to Ruprah in recent months, said Ruprah was knowledgeable about Bout's financial dealings, especially in the diamond trade. Belgium is interested because Bout's financial network was based in Antwerp, the center of the world diamond trade.

Ruprah's attorney, Luc de Temmerman, said in a written statement that his client engaged only in legal activities in Africa. While acknowledging that Bout and Ruprah knew each other, he said they were not in business together.

De Temmerman said Ruprah had recently been in touch with the FBI, the CIA, the United Nations and British intelligence officials to provide them with information in an effort to have the U.N. travel ban on him lifted. He denied Ruprah knew anything about arms shipments to al Qaeda or the Taliban.

The U.N. reports said Bout originally based his operations in Ostend, Belgium, in 1995, and moved to the UAE in 1997 when Belgian officials began investigating his air freight operations.

The reports, compiled independently by separate groups of U.N. investigators monitoring U.N. embargoes, document Bout's shipments of hundreds of tons of arms to UNITA rebels in Angola, the government of President Charles Taylor in Liberia and several factions involved in the civil war in Congo. All are under U.N. weapons bans.

Ruprah was identified in U.N. reports as a key intermediary between Bout and Taylor. A December 2000 report said Ruprah was issued a Liberian diplomatic passport in the name of Samir M. Nasr, and was identified as Liberia's deputy commissioner for maritime affairs.

Ruprah helped arrange for three flights to Liberia in July and one in August 2000, the report said, delivering two combat-capable helicopters, surface-to-air missiles, armored vehicles, machine guns and almost a million rounds of ammunition. The weapons originated in Bulgaria.

U.S. and U.N. investigators say they believe Bout has also run guns for the radical Muslim Abu Sayyaf guerrilla movement in the Philippines and has flown weapons for Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi.

"Victor Bout, as the largest player in the world in the illicit air logistics business, is a critical alder and abettor to criminal and terrorist organizations, rogue heads of state and insurgencies—whoever is able to pay," Wolosky said.

According to a U.N. Security Council report issued in April 2001, Bout is 35 years old. Bom in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, he is a graduate of Moscow's Military Institute of Foreign Languages and speaks six languages fluently, according to the report.

The report also describes Bout as a former air force officer who holds at least five passports. Investigators said Bout was known as the "Lone Wolf" because he operates by himself. They describe him as short, stocky and usually sporting a bushy mustache.

Telephone calls and faxes to Bout's offices in the UAE went unanswered. An associate of Bout's there said all of Bout's employees in the Emirates had left. The associate said he no longer knew where they were. Bout's brother Sergei, based in Islamabad, Pakistan, also did not return phone calls.

Bout has refused to talk to U.N. investigators or reporters.

He has a fleet of about 60 aircraft, including large Russian cargo planes, according to investigators. His operation is tied together by a complex web of overlapping airlines, charter companies and freight-forwarding operations that give him a global reach. His main company is registered as Air Cess.

In an effort to confound investigators, Bout continually changed the registration of his aircraft from one African country to another, all the while basing his air operations in Sharjah, one of seven emirates that make up the UAE.

Bout's alleged dealings with the Taliban and al Qaeda are the subject of an ongoing, classified U.S. operation that began in early 2000. "There was a concerted effort at the tail end of the Clinton administration, continued into the Bush administration, to put him out of business," said one former U.S. official.

U.N. and U.S. officials said Bout cut a deal with the Taliban in 1996 in UAE, one of only three countries in the world that recognized the regime.

The deal called for Bout's Air Cess to supply and service Afghanistan's Ariana Airways and the Afghan air force, both of which used Soviet-era aircraft. Another company that Bout had an interest in, Flying Dolphin, provided charter flights from Dubai to Afghanistan, the sources said, and soon there were several flights a week from Dubai to the Taliban stronghold of Kandahar.

U.N. investigators say they now believe many of those flights were loaded with weapons. When U.N. sanctions shut down Ariana in November 2000, Flying Dolphin obtained a U.N. waiver, for reasons that are not clear, and continued flying the Dubai-Kandahar route until being shut down by the United Nations in January 2001.

"Bout undoubtedly did supply al Qaeda and the Taliban with arms," Peter Hain, Britain's minister of European affairs and lead investigator into Bout's global arms trade, told the Associated Press on Feb. 19.

A 1998 Belgian intelligence report on Bout's activities, obtained by The Washington Post, says he made \$50 million in Afghanistan, selling heavy weapons to the Taliban. However, Peleman and other investigators said they had doubts that Bout had earned that much money from the Taliban and al Qaeda, in part because Bout also supplied weapons to anti-Taliban leaders, some of whom were his close friends.

Nonetheless, the United States launched an effort to disrupt Bout's arms trading, trying to freeze his assets and pressuring other nations, especially the UAE, to expel him. U.S. officials said they were limited in what they could do because they believed Bout had violated no U.S. laws. One of Bout's companies, Air Cess Inc., based in Miami, was dissolved on Sept. 19, according to public records, and its telephone number no longer works.

In late 2000 the Clinton administration asked the UAE at an "extremely high level" to shut down Bout's operation, a former U.S. official said. UAE officials repented that they had no evidence of criminal wrongdoing by Bout.

"We would have preferred they shut him down completely but they took helpful incremental steps that disrupted his operation," the source said, including imposing new and costly equipment requirements on his air fleet.

When President Bush took office, the Bout project received less attention, U.S. officials said. Then came the Sept. 11 attacks. "Suddenly, he was back on our radar screen in a very significant way," a senior U.S. official said. "His importance suddenly loomed very large."

## HONORING COMMON THREADS AWARD RECIPIENTS

### HON. GEORGE RADANOVICH

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 26, 2002

Mr. RADANOVICH. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Sharon Clauss, Patricia Hillman, Roxie Moradian, Agnes Pelous, and Alice Peters on the occasion of their being awarded the 2002 Common Threads Award. Common Threads is a joint venture of the Agricultural Education Foundation, California State University, Fresno's College of Agricultural Sciences and Technology, and AG ONE Foundation. The award is given to women in agriculture who have invested in their communities through community service and philanthropy. Honorees must live in Fresno, Kings, Madera, Merced, or Tulare County.

Sharon Clauss has been involved in dairy farming all her life. She and her husband, Richard, operate Clauss Dairy in Hilmar, California. Her support for agriculture and her community include active participation and financial contribution to numerous organizations including California Women for Agriculture, Agricultural Leadership Foundation, 4-H, Hilmar Covenant Church, and the American Jersey Cattle Association.

Pat (Heiskell) Hillman works with her family's farming businesses, Heiskell Family Farms and J.D. Heiskell & Co., in Tulare, California. She also volunteers with the World Ag Expo. Her involvement in her community spans six decades from co-founding of the Tulare County Symphony League in 1956 to being a founding docent of the Heritage Complex in 2000. Pat has also contributed to the Tulare Historical Museum and Society, First Congregational Church of Tulare, and Pro-Youth Tulare and Pro-Youth Visalia.

Roxie Moradian is a former owner of Penny-Newman Grain Company and has been involved in agriculture all her life. Her community service includes not only the Ag One Foundation at California State University, Fresno, with the founding of the Frank Moradian Foundation for Agriculture Scholarship for students, but also the Fresno County Library, Fresno Philharmonic Association, Saint Agnes and Valley Children's Hospitals, Salvation Army-Fresno, and many others.

Agnes Pelous began her ag life in Los Angeles County as the daughter of immigrant farmers from Italy. Agnes continued with farming when she married Alex Pelous and they relocated to Tulare County. She has been an active member in both the Orange County and Tulare County Farm Bureaus. Her other community involvement includes the Lindsay Hospital Guild, Las Madrasas Guild for Valley Children's Hospital, Parent Teacher Association, Tulare County Cotton Women, Tulare County 4-H, California Women for Agriculture, among many others.

Alice Peters and her husband, Leon, owned and farmed orchards in the Fowler, California, area for many years and owned Valley Foundry which was connected to agriculture throughout the world. Alice has been active in many community service organizations including the Fresno Philharmonic, Valley Public Radio, Fresno Metropolitan Museum, and Fresno City and County Historical Societies. The School of Business at California State University, Fresno named their auditorium in her honor.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Sharon Clauss, Pat Hillman, Roxie Moradian, Agnes Pelous, and Alice Peters for receiving the 2002 Common Threads Award. I invite my colleagues to join me in commending these outstanding women for their commitment to community service and agriculture and wishing them many more years of continued success.

## COMMEMORATION OF THE CHINESE NEW YEAR

### HON. DAVID E. BONIOR

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 26, 2002

Mr. BONIOR. Mr. Speaker, Chinese American communities across this nation have gathered to celebrate the Chinese New Year. This lunar new year celebration is a special and important time for all Chinese Americans.

China is a country rich in traditional and religious holidays, but none are comparable to the New Year festivities. The New Year is a time for celebration, reflection and most importantly, family. The renewal and strengthening of family ties during this important time is not only essential to the Chinese community, but to America as a whole. In a period that has been difficult for so many of us, I am particularly moved by the Chinese New Year's emphasis on peace and happiness. We should all be well served by following such a tradition.

Our country has been greatly enriched by the many Americans of Chinese descent who have brought with them such rich customs. Michigan is fortunate to have had thousands of Chinese Americans make our great state their new home.

Mr. Speaker, in the Year of the Horse, I join the Chinese American community in celebrating this most joyous New Year or Bainian. I salute all of them for the tremendous contributions to freedom and human dignity which they have made.

## PAYING TRIBUTE TO TONY FORTINO

### HON. SCOTT McINNIS

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 26, 2002

Mr. McINNIS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize an extraordinary man who embodies the spirit of my district in Colorado and whose contributions to society have been honored with his induction into the Pueblo Hall of Fame. Tony Fortino is a pillar of the Pueblo, Colorado community and has dedicated countless hours to the betterment of his beloved city. As Tony celebrates his achievement, I would like to commend him for his commitment to his fellow citizens and community.

Tony's service to the City of Pueblo began when Tony took it upon himself to promote Pueblo's Downtown business corridor and the city itself. He served in leadership positions in the Greater Pueblo Chamber of Commerce, the Pueblo Economic Development Corporation and the Pueblo Development Foundation. His hard work ethic pushes him to take the initiative and provide leadership on projects, as