

Bout's Attorney Declares Case Is 'Pure Speculation'

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NEW YORK — The lawyer for Russian businessman Viktor Bout told a New York federal jury in his closing argument that the U.S. government's case against his client was "pure speculation" and that Bout had never intended to sell any weapons.

"He knew these guys were full of baloney," defense attorney Albert Dayan told the jury. "He knew at this point that these guys aren't FARC."

In a sting operation by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, U.S. informants posed as arms buyers from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, known as FARC, and met with Bout in Thailand to buy an arsenal of military weaponry, which prosecutors said he agreed to provide.

Two DEA informants who posed as FARC leaders testified against Bout at the trial. A former Bout business associate, Andrew Smulian, also testified for the government after pleading guilty to participating in the FARC deal.

But Dayan told jurors on Monday that Bout had dangled false promises of delivering 100 advanced portable surface-to-air missiles and about 5,000 AK-47 assault rifles only in order to con the purported FARC representatives into buying two of his old cargo planes.

The government was to have an opportunity to present a rebuttal against the defense Tuesday. U.S. District Judge Shira Scheindlin will then instruct the jury on legal matters before they begin deliberations.

Dayan spoke after U.S. prosecutors wrapped up their case against Bout on Monday, telling the jury that he was "ready, willing and able" to sell arms to people he thought were Colombian militants intent on attacking American soldiers.

Bout was arrested in Bangkok in 2008 after the DEA sting operation and extradited to New York in November.

"There were millions [of dollars] at stake for a long-term relationship with a 10,000-person strong terrorist organization that ordered 100 tons of weapons," said assistant U.S. attorney Anjan Sahni, referring to Bout's eagerness to complete the weapons deal with a notorious Colombian guerrilla group.

Facing charges that include conspiracy to kill U.S. nationals and conspiracy to provide help to a terrorist group, Bout's trial in Manhattan federal court opened three weeks ago. He faces 25 years to life in prison if convicted.

Bout was charged only in connection with the suspected arms deal, but U.S. authorities have said he has been involved in trafficking arms since the 1990s to dictators and conflict zones in Africa, South America and the Middle East.

Prosecutors said the informants told Bout that the weapons would be used to attack U.S. pilots assisting the Colombian government, to which, at one meeting in Bangkok, Bout responded: "We have the same enemy."

Washington classifies the FARC, a Marxist-inspired guerrilla army, as a terrorist organization and says it is deeply involved in the cocaine trade.

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