

The Griner-Bout Exchange



by Gary Fouse

As a former DEA agent, I have rather mixed feelings about the prisoner exchange with Russia involving Brittney Griner and convicted arms trafficker Viktor Bout. On the one hand, the 9-year sentence handed down to Griner for having cannabis residue in her luggage at Moscow airport was clearly excessive under any standard. I am glad she is free, but I just hope she has changed her attitude about her country and will now be proud to stand for her National Anthem.

As for Viktor Bout, it is just another example of what happens when democracies trade prisoners with dictatorships. We get the short end of the stick. Viktor Bout has been described as arguably the world's largest arms trafficker. He was lured to Bangkok in 2008 in an undercover operation conducted by DEA, where he was arrested and sent to the US. He was serving a 25-

year sentence when the prisoner exchange took place this week.

Many, like myself, feel that we should have insisted that Paul Whelan, a former Marine held in Russia on spying charges since 2018, be included in the deal. He has been in Russian custody considerably longer than Griner, but his ordeal continues as Griner is now back home.

Derek Maltz is a retired DEA agent who was head of operations for the agency prior to his retirement. He is a leading voice on the dangers of Fentanyl in the US. He has spoken out against the release of Viktor Bout and points out the hypocrisy of the Biden administration's push for gun control while sending Bout back home to Russia-especially at a time when Russia is involved in its war against Ukraine and is struggling. Can Bout help revitalize the arms supply for this unjustified invasion? We shall see. Lest we not forget, there were DEA agents who risked their lives undercover to capture this man. I can only wonder how they are feeling now.

Even if Bout doesn't resume his role as a major international arms trafficker, the symbolism behind the deal is enormous. Rest assured the next time there is a mass shooting in the US, Biden and his minions will step up to the microphone and bemoan the lack of action on gun control. Hopefully, there will be someone in the press pool who will raise their hand and ask, "But what about your release of Viktor Bout?" Of course, that would have to be Peter Doocy of Fox News, the nemesis of White House mouthpiece, Karine Jean-Pierre. I don't see anyone else doing it. No doubt Jean-Pierre is preparing her talking points about how serious this president is on curbing gun violence.

It would seem to me that we should insist that prisoner exchanges involve prisoners who committed roughly equal "offenses." This clearly does not fit that definition. Of course, I seriously doubt that we have any Russian citizens serving hard time in the US for simple possession of cannabis.

Lacking that, I don't really know who we could have sent to Russia in place of Viktor Bout that Putin would want.

Peter Strzok?