“IT WAS THE PRIVATIZATION OF WARFARE.”

I owe ROTL a hubcap, apparently, because while I’ve been distracted with the joy of moving in a historically bad housing market, the US won its long extradition battle over Viktor Bout.

Coincidentally, I actually found Douglas Farah’s book on Bout, Merchant of Death, half-read a few weeks ago, as I was packing up the house. So in the days before the Thai court agreed with the US extradition request, I picked up reading of Bout’s exploits during the Afghan and Iraqi wars. And reading the story at this distance, particularly given Russian efforts to prevent Bout’s extradition, I couldn’t help but think the US underplayed Russian involvement in Bout’s exploits.

Which one of the men who investigated Bout for years, Robert Eringer, seems to support.

> Former FBI counterintelligence Robert Eringer, who until recently headed the Monaco Intelligence Service, doesn’t think so. In 2002, Eringer investigated Bout’s money-laundering activities, which were allegedly facilitated through Monaco by US-registered company Pastor International. Eringer claims that Russian weapons merchants, including Bout, used the company to launder nearly one billion dollars in sales profits between 1996 and 2001. But Eringer claims to have made another discovery during his investigation: namely that Bout had been “co-opted by the Russian external intelligence service (SVR)” and had been offered shelter by the Russian Federal Security Service in Moscow, despite being named in an international arrest warrant issued by Interpol.

I guess we'll see whether there have been more formal ties between Bout and Russia (as well as what role Russian organized crime plays in the relationship) as his trial develops here in the states.

But the question is worth asking for what it might say about how countries enact foreign policy as globalization continues to erode the nation-state. In that model, ostensibly private arms dealers repeat the role our government (and Russia's) did during the Cold War, destabilizing countries in a fight over spheres of influence. Of course, as weapons proliferate, the danger of it all increases.

Here's what Farah had to say to NYT about the US' long pursuit of Bout.

> Mr. Farah said the United States began pursuing Mr. Bout in the 1990s after officials became alarmed that he was making conflicts more deadly by showering warring parties with weapons on an unprecedented scale, including weapons as sophisticated as attack helicopters.
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> "They became aware in the mid-1990s that he had fundamentally altered the way wars were being waged," Mr. Farah said. "He was flying in planeloads of this stuff. There was a lot of alarm that we were facing something new. It was the privatization of warfare."

Consider the irony, then, that a lawyer seeking a deposition from Erik Prince on a fraud suit had to go to Abu Dhabi yesterday–Bout's old stomping grounds–to get it.

> Blackwater private security firm founder Erik Prince was questioned on Monday in Abu Dhabi in connection with a fraud lawsuit filed by former employees that seeks millions of dollars in damages."Mr Prince did appear for his deposition" or questioning under oath, Susan Burke, the

> lawyer who questioned him, told AFP.
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> [snip]
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> Burke said it was too early to say exactly how much money the lawsuit is seeking. “My analysis is that by the time we reach the jury, we will be seeking hundreds of millions of dollars.”
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> Most would go to the US government, she said, adding that former Blackwater employees Brad and Melan Davis, who filed the suit in December 2008, would also receive a percentage.
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> Citing the Davis’ experiences, the suit alleges that Prince and companies he controlled defrauded the US State Department and Department of Homeland Security via “false records, statements, claims, and omissions,” according to court documents.

This, just days after Blackwater got a light slap on the wrist for the same kind of weapons trafficking for which we’re about to try Viktor Bout.

> The private security company formerly called Blackwater Worldwide, long plagued by accusations of impropriety, has reached an agreement with the State Department for the company to pay $42 million in fines for hundreds of violations of United States export control regulations.
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> The violations included illegal weapons exports to Afghanistan, making unauthorized proposals to train troops in south Sudan and providing sniper training for Taiwanese police officers, according to company and government officials familiar with the deal.

A key part of the settlement, of course, is that the company can continue to receive US contracts.

> The settlement with the State Department does not resolve other legal troubles still facing Blackwater and its former executives and other personnel. Those include the indictments of five former executives, including Blackwater's former president, on weapons and obstruction charges; a federal investigation into evidence that Blackwater officials sought to bribe Iraqi government officials; and the arrest of two former Blackwater guards on federal murder charges stemming from the killing of two Afghans last year.
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> But by paying fines rather than facing criminal charges on the export violations, Blackwater will be able to continue to obtain government contracts.

We're about to try Russia's version of Erik Prince for the same kinds of things we know Prince was doing. Meanwhile, Prince is hiding out where Bout once took refuge.

I suggest these twin legal proceedings ought to be viewed in tandem.