

US issues threats to China, Russia over Snowden

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NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden, who arrived in Moscow on Sunday from Hong Kong, appears to be still in Russia after reports that he failed to board a flight to Cuba on which he was booked on Monday.

Ecuadorian foreign minister Richard Patiño confirmed at a press conference in Vietnam on Monday that his government was considering an asylum request from Snowden and was in discussions with Russian authorities.

No details of Snowden's whereabouts have been made public. Dmitry Peskov, a spokesman for Russian President Vladimir Putin, told the media that he had no information about the situation surrounding Snowden. The Russian Foreign Ministry has not responded to requests for comment.

The Obama administration is stepping up its threats and bullying in a bid to press the Russian government to hand Snowden over for trial on charges of espionage for exposing the NSA's vast electronic surveillance operations inside the US and internationally.

Speaking from New Delhi, US Secretary of State John Kerry warned Moscow that there would be "without doubt ... consequences" if Russian authorities did not give up Snowden. "They are on notice with respect to our desires. It would be deeply disappointing if he was wilfully allowed to board an aeroplane," he declared.

Kerry's appeal for Russia "to live by the standards of the law" was utterly hypocritical given that Snowden has revealed through his actions massive and illegal spying operations on the population of the United States and the world.

Responding to American demands, Alexei Pushkov, head of a Russian parliamentary foreign relations committee, told the media, "Ties are in a rather complicated phase, and when ties are in such a phase, when one country undertakes hostile action against another, why should the United States expect restraint and understanding from Russia?"

While Pushkov did not spell it out, Snowden's revelations of the extent of American international electronic spying, including on rivals such as Russia and China, has undoubtedly further heightened tensions over the US-led regime change operation against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, which directly impacts on Russian interests.

While demanding Moscow hand over Snowden, the Obama administration reserved its full venom for China for permitting the NSA whistleblower to leave Hong Kong. The authorities in Hong Kong issued a statement on Sunday announcing Snowden's departure, saying that the US extradition request had "failed to comply with the legal requirements under Hong Kong

law.”

Speaking at a news conference yesterday, White House spokesman Jay Carney bluntly declared: “We are just not buying that this was a technical decision by a Hong Kong immigration official. This was a deliberate choice by the government to release a fugitive despite a valid arrest warrant, and that decision unquestionably has a negative impact on the US-China relationship.”

It is no doubt the case that the decision to allow Snowden to leave Hong Kong was taken at the top level in Beijing, but that reflects anger in China and Hong Kong over the US espionage operations. Snowden provided information to Hong Kong’s *South China Morning Post* showing that the NSA had hacked into hundreds of civilian computers in Hong Kong and China since 2009, including Hong Kong’s Internet Exchange.

While the Chinese government is yet to comment on the latest US threats, the state-owned press has hit back. The Chinese Communist Party newspaper *People’s Daily* declared that the decision to let Snowden leave Hong Kong was “consistent with the law and entirely defensible.” Referring to the NSA’s huge theft of data, it called on the US to stop the “hypocrisy of a thief shouting ‘stop thief!’” and to account for US intelligence agencies infiltrating Chinese computer networks.

The *Wall Street Journal* has also reported that Washington is exerting pressure on Latin American countries not to provide sanctuary to Snowden. “Diplomats and law enforcement officials from the United States warned countries in Latin America not to harbour Mr Snowden or allow him to pass through to other destinations,” it stated. In the case of Ecuador, the newspaper suggested that US lawmakers could retaliate by refusing to renew preferential trade arrangements, or that Washington might withdraw its ambassador to the country.

During his press conference in Vietnam, Ecuadorian foreign minister Patiño provided details of Snowden’s request for asylum. Snowden argued that he was at “risk of being persecuted by the government of the United States and its agents in relation to my decision to make public serious violations on the part of the government of the United States of its Constitution, specifically its Fourth and Fifth Amendments, and of various treaties of the United Nations that are binding on my country.”

Snowden noted that “prominent members of Congress and others in the media have accused me of being a traitor and have called for me to be jailed or executed.” He also pointed to the “cruel and inhumane” treatment of Bradley Manning for having revealed US war crimes and the secrecy surrounding his trial. Snowden concluded that “it is unlikely that I would receive a fair trial or proper treatment prior to that trial, and face the possibility of life in prison or even death.”

In defending Ecuador’s actions in considering asylum for Snowden, Patiño made the point: “The word treason has been batted around in recent days, [but] we need to ask who has betrayed who?... Is this [Snowden’s revelations] betraying the citizens of the world, or betraying some elites that are in power in a certain country?”

The simple truth is that what Snowden has exposed is a conspiracy by the Obama administration, the US intelligence agencies and other arms of the state apparatus against the democratic rights of the American people and humanity as a whole. That is the reason

why a vast international legal, police and diplomatic operation is under way to track Snowden down and, in one way or another, silence him.

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