

NSA whistleblower targeted by Obama

# Snowden escapes Hong Kong ahead of US dragnet

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NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden arrived in Moscow Sunday, eluding an extradition demand issued by the Obama administration to the government of Hong Kong. Snowden was a passenger on board Aeroflot flight SU213, leaving just before noon and arriving in Moscow about 5 p.m. local time.

The governments of both China and Russia indicated they would not accede to Washington's demands that he be detained wherever authorities found him and then turned over to US custody.

In both cases, the governments cited legal technicalities rather than openly defying the US demands. Hong Kong officials declined to execute an extradition warrant, claiming that it did not conform to the requirements of the law in the Chinese special administrative area, whose legal system contains many leftovers from British colonial rule.

There is no question that the Hong Kong action was not an independent one, but was coordinated with Beijing, which has full control over Hong Kong's relations with foreign powers, including the United States.

In the case of Moscow, the Russian government allowed Snowden to land though his passport has been revoked by the US State Department and he had no Russian visa. He did not pass through customs and thus did not technically enter the country, taking a hotel room for the night inside the transit zone of Sheremetyevo international airport.

The Ecuadorian ambassador to Russia visited the transit zone Sunday and reportedly conveyed his government's willingness to accept Snowden's bid for asylum as a political refugee. Snowden is clearly the target of political persecution for his exposure of US

government crimes like systematic telecommunications monitoring of the American population and spying on the Internet communications of virtually the entire human race.

Russian media reports said that Snowden would fly from Moscow to Havana on Monday. From Cuba he would make his way to another Latin American capital, most likely Quito, Ecuador, although some reports suggested he was bound for Caracas, Venezuela.

The whistleblower organization WikiLeaks said that it had helped organize Snowden's travel from Hong Kong to Moscow, that the final destination was Ecuador, and that at least one WikiLeaks activist, Sarah Harrison, was accompanying Snowden on the trip.

According to a statement issued by WikiLeaks Sunday, Snowden "is bound for the Republic of Ecuador via a safe route for the purposes of asylum, and is being escorted by diplomats and legal advisors from WikiLeaks. Mr. Snowden requested that WikiLeaks use its legal expertise and experience to secure his safety."

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, in a statement issued from the Ecuadoran embassy in London, where he sought asylum as a political refugee a year ago, denounced the US decision to charge Snowden with espionage. In an appropriately sarcastic reference to US President Obama, he said, "It is getting to the point where the mark of international distinction and service to humanity is no longer the Nobel Peace Prize, but an espionage indictment from the US Department of Justice."

The legal director of WikiLeaks is former Spanish Judge Baltasar Garzón, who was vilified by the British, Spanish and Chilean governments for his efforts to

bring former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet to justice for mass murder. Pinochet was ultimately returned to Chile by the British Labour government of Tony Blair, while Spanish officials organized a witchhunt against Garzón that led to his removal from office and a ten-year suspension from the courts.

Garzón issued a statement underscoring the fundamental democratic rights threatened by the prosecution of Snowden and Assange: “The WikiLeaks legal team and I are interested in preserving Mr. Snowden’s rights and protecting him as a person. What is being done to Mr. Snowden and to Mr. Julian Assange—for making or facilitating disclosures in the public interest—is an assault against the people.”

The reference to “protecting him as a person” is particularly significant. Snowden quite correctly is concerned that he could face execution in the event that he is captured and tried. There have also been suggestions that the NSA whistleblower could be targeted for assassination, under the Obama doctrine that the president of the United States may authorize the murder of any person, including a US citizen, merely by designating them as “enemy combatants.”

Snowden’s uncontested departure from Hong Kong—the local government blandly declared, “there is no legal basis to restrict Mr. Snowden from leaving Hong Kong”—clearly shocked and enraged US officials, as did his uneventful arrival in Moscow.

On Sunday television interview programs, both Democratic and Republican legislators denounced Russia and China. Republican Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina said, “I hope we’ll chase him to the ends of the Earth, bring him to justice and let the Russians know there will be consequences if they harbor this guy.”

Even more strident was liberal Democratic Senator Charles Schumer of New York. “What’s infuriating here is Prime Minister Putin of Russia aiding and abetting Snowden’s escape,” he said. “I think it will have serious consequences for the United States-Russia relationship.”

Schumer linked Putin’s refusal to seize Snowden and turn him over to Washington to Russian opposition to US policies in the Middle East. “Allies are supposed to treat each other in decent ways,” he said, “and Putin always seems almost eager to put a finger in the eye of the United States, whether it is Syria, Iran, and now, of

course, with Snowden.”

There is reason to believe that the Chinese government stalled on US demands for Snowden’s extradition because of widespread popular support for the NSA whistleblower and his courageous public denunciation of US government cyber-spying both against the American people and internationally.

The *South China Morning Post*, a major Hong Kong newspaper, reported over the weekend that Snowden had provided new information about US hacking of Chinese mobile telephone companies and one of the country’s leading colleges, Tsinghua University.

A report on the *New York Times* web site Sunday acknowledged, “The basic issue for Beijing was that public opinion in Hong Kong and mainland China was clearly shifting toward protecting him from the United States. Mainland Chinese officials ‘will be relieved he’s gone—the popular sentiment in Hong Kong and China is to protect him because he revealed United States surveillance here, but the governments don’t want trouble in the relationship,’ the person said.”

US officials are clearly concerned that Snowden has much more information to release that could produce political damage both at home and abroad. Senator Dianne Feinstein, speaking on the CBS program “Face the Nation” Sunday, said that Obama administration officials had told her “he could have over 200 separate items” that have not yet been made public.



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