

Bolivia accuses US of forced landing of presidential plane

Peter Symonds
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The Bolivian government is planning a formal protest to the United Nations over the illegal actions of European countries in forcing the plane of President Evo Morales to make an emergency landing in Austria on Tuesday. The aircraft was brought down on suspicion that National Security Agency (NSA) whistleblower Edward Snowden was on board.

Morales was returning to Bolivia after an energy summit in Moscow, when Portugal, Italy, Spain and France all denied his plane access to their airspace. An unnamed Austrian official told Associated Press that the plane had requested permission to land in Vienna because there was “no clear indication” that it had enough fuel to continue its flight.

Bolivia’s ambassador to the UN, Sacha Liorenti Soliz, told the media: “The decisions of these countries violated international law. We are already making ready procedures to denounce this to the UN secretary general ... We are talking about the president on an official trip, after an official summit, being kidnapped.”

Liorenti bluntly accused the Obama administration of instigating the forced landing. “We have no doubt that it was an order from the White House,” he said. “By no means should a diplomatic plane with the president be diverted from its route and forced to land in another country.”

After initial US denials of any involvement, State Department spokesman Jen Psaki admitted on Wednesday: “We have been in contact with a range of countries that had a chance of having Snowden land or travel through their countries.” But she refused to name the countries, or divulge when the discussions took place.

Washington was unquestionably behind the reckless actions of its European allies, in what was a coordinated effort to force the Bolivian plane to land.

The incident demonstrates that the Obama administration will go to any lengths to silence Snowden, who has exposed the NSA’s vast electronic surveillance of the American people and the world’s population.

The US has been engaged in a concerted campaign to force Snowden’s return to the US, where he has been indicted on espionage charges and faces a heavy prison sentence or the death penalty. American officials have been bullying countries not to grant Snowden asylum and they are continuing to press Russia to hand him over. Snowden is reportedly still in the transit area of Moscow’s Sheremetyevo airport.

Amnesty International director of law and policy, Michael Bochenek, this week condemned the Obama administration’s actions. “The US attempts to pressure governments to block Snowden’s attempts to seek asylum are deplorable,” he stated. “It is his unassailable right, enshrined in international law, to claim asylum and this should not be impeded.”

Bochenek declared that no one should be returned to a country where there was a serious risk of ill-treatment. “We know that others who have been prosecuted for similar acts [in the US] have been held in conditions that not only Amnesty International but UN officials considered cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment in violation of international law,” he said. The remarks were an obvious reference to Private Bradley Manning, who allegedly leaked material exposing US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, and Washington’s diplomatic intrigues around the world.

Bochenek added: “It appears that he [Snowden] is being charged by the US government primarily for revealing its—and other governments’—unlawful actions that violate human rights. No one should be charged under the law for disclosing information of human

rights violations.”

Bolivian President Morales was eventually allowed to leave Vienna after Austrian authorities determined that Snowden was not on board. He arrived back in La Paz late on Wednesday and was greeted by crowds of cheering supporters. Protests against the actions of the European countries have taken place in Bolivia and Argentina.

Having provoked international outrage over their actions, the European countries involved are seeking to downplay and deny their involvement in the US plot. The Bolivian government has rejected the various excuses and apologies. On his return, President Morales stated: “Some governments apologised, saying it was an error, but this is not an error.”

Bolivia and Venezuela have both received extradition requests from the US for Snowden, which have been rejected. Bolivian authorities described the approach as “strange, illegal and unfounded”, explaining that President Morales did not meet Snowden in Moscow and the whistleblower was not on Bolivian territory.

President Morales hosted a meeting yesterday in Cochabamba of Latin American officials, including the presidents of Ecuador, Venezuela, Argentina, Uruguay, and Suriname, which condemned the actions of the US and its European allies, and declared its solidarity with Bolivia.

While certainly expressing, and seeking to capitalise on, the widespread public outrage over Morales’ treatment, these Latin American leaders have been unwilling to jeopardise relations with Washington by offering asylum to Snowden. Morales indicated in Moscow that he would consider an application for asylum, but Bolivian officials claim to have received no request.

A number of countries including France, Germany, Italy and India have already slammed the door on Snowden’s requests for asylum. Russia offered Snowden sanctuary on condition that he cease leaking information that damaged US interests—a condition that the NSA whistleblower turned down.

Moscow is clearly intent on getting Snowden out of the country as quickly as possible. In comments to the media yesterday, Russian deputy foreign minister Sergei Ryabkov declared that “he [Snowden] needs to choose a place to go.” Ryabkov added that Russia “cannot solve anything for him”, and the situation

should now be resolved “one way or the other”.

Snowden is in considerable danger for his courageous actions in exposing the criminal activities of US imperialism. Under conditions in which no government is willing to uphold his right to political asylum, his defence must be taken up by workers and youth in the US and around the world. This must include the demand in every country that he be granted immediate sanctuary.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and Socialist Equality Party are waging a campaign to defend Edward Snowden. For more information and to get involved, click here.



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