

Edward Snowden in limbo as US increases pressure on Russia

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The United States government has escalated its international campaign against whistleblower Edward Snowden in recent days, aiming its attacks at the Russian government and other groups for allowing Snowden to meet with human rights organizations at Sheremetyevo Airport on Friday.

The 30-year-old former NSA contractor has been kept in political purgatory at the Moscow airport for over three weeks. Snowden has been left isolated by an illegal US-led bullying operation aimed at denying him political asylum, extraditing him—or worse.

On Friday, White House Press Secretary Jay Carney derided the Russian government for allowing Snowden to appear in public: “Providing a propaganda platform for Mr. Snowden runs counter to the Russian government’s previous declarations of Russia’s neutrality.”

Carney then issued a flat-out lie, claiming that if Snowden is returned, he will “be granted full due process and every right available as a United States citizen facing our justice system under the Constitution.” But there is little doubt that if captured, Snowden would be treated much the same as WikiLeaks whistleblower Bradley Manning, who has been denied due process, tried under a military tribunal and subjected to years of cruel and unusual punishment for releasing evidence of US war crimes.

Threats from both Democrats and Republicans continued over the weekend. Republican Congressman Michael McCaul, chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, told Fox News Sunday that Russia is “making a mockery” of the US.

“I’m sure Russia loves this,” McCaul said. “I’m sure every day, they’re extracting more and more information from this man... They’re thumbing their nose at the United States.”

Last week, the *New York Times* cited a senior State Department official as saying that any country that aided

Snowden “would put relations in a very bad place for a long time to come.” The official also noted, “There is not a country in the hemisphere whose government does not understand our position at this point,” and that “if someone thinks things would go away, it won’t be the case.”

President Barack Obama called Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday in an attempt to pressure the Russian government into releasing Snowden. A White House statement released after the previously-scheduled call explained cryptically that “[t]he two leaders noted the importance of US-Russian bilateral relations and discussed a range of security and bilateral issues, including the status of Mr. Edward Snowden.”

In his first public statement on Snowden since Friday’s gathering at Sheremetyevo Airport, Putin said on Monday, “[Snowden] arrived on our territory without an invitation, he was not flying to us—he was flying in transit to other countries. But as soon as he got in the air it became known, and our American partners, in fact, blocked his further flight. They scared other countries. No one wants to accept him.”

Putin indicated that Snowden’s request for temporary asylum in Russia, as he attempts to arrange transport out of the country, might not be accepted. Referencing a previously stated condition that Snowden would be allowed to remain in Russia temporarily only if he refrained from releasing further information that might “harm our US partners,” Putin said that “[Snowden] is familiar with the conditions of granting political asylum, and judging by the latest statements, is shifting his position. The situation is not clear now.”

Although Snowden appeared to accede to Putin’s condition of no “political activity” on Friday, this condition plus Putin’s repeated references to “our US partners” make clear that the Russian government has no interest in defending Snowden’s democratic rights. Even

if he gets temporary asylum, his safety is not secure in the hands of the Russian ruling class.

But the US is attempting to exploit the Russian government's anti-democratic character for its own anti-democratic ends. To this effect, American media pundits have intensified attempts to paint Snowden as hypocritical for seeking asylum in Russia.

On Monday's CBS This Morning, program host Norah O'Donnell noted with incredulity that Snowden could claim to defend democratic rights "as he is applying for asylum in Russia (*laughter*)!"

The American political establishment has grown even more apoplectic in the wake of comments made by *Guardian* journalist Glenn Greenwald to Argentina's *La Nación* on Saturday.

"Snowden has enough information to cause more damage to the US government in one minute alone than anyone else has ever had in the history of the United States," Greenwald said.

Snowden has "literally thousands of documents...that includ[e] very sensitive, detailed blueprints of how the NSA does what they do," Greenwald added. These documents "would allow somebody who read them to know exactly how the NSA does what it does, which would in turn allow them to evade that surveillance or replicate it."

Noting that Snowden will in the future release information regarding "other domestic spying problems that have yet to be revealed," Greenwald referenced attempts to secure Snowden's life through the establishment of an agreement by which information would be made public if the government were to make an attempt on the whistleblower's life.

"It's not just a matter of, if he dies, things get released, it's more nuanced than that," Greenwald said. "It's really just a way to protect him against extremely rogue behavior on the part of the United States, by which I mean violent actions toward him, designed to end his life, and it's just a way to ensure that nobody feels incentivized to do that."



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