

US pressures Russia to extradite Snowden, vowing “he will not be tortured”

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As the US government aggressively pursues Edward Snowden’s extradition from Russia, it was reported in Moscow Friday that representatives of the Russian state security service, the FSB, are in discussions with the American FBI on the fate of the National Security Agency contractor-turned-whistle-blower.

A spokesman for Vladimir Putin indicated that the discussions were over how the Russian security services would make good on the Russian president’s insistence that Snowden would not be allowed to “harm our US partners” by disclosing further information about the secret and illegal domestic spying operations conducted by the NSA. The spokesman added, however that, “the situation may develop further.”

The Obama administration intends to put Snowden on trial for “willful communication of classified communications to an unauthorized recipient,” “unauthorized communication of national-defense information,” and “theft of government property.”

It was also revealed Friday that on July 23, Attorney General Eric Holder Jr. sent an extraordinary letter to Moscow reassuring the Russian leadership that Snowden will not be executed or tortured upon return to the US. That such assurances are necessary—Snowden will not be tortured, Snowden will receive a real trial complete with his own lawyer—speaks volumes about the decayed state of American democracy.

Holder wrote, “First, the United States would not seek the death penalty for Mr. Snowden should he return to the United States.” Holder continued, “Mr. Snowden will not be tortured. Torture is unlawful in the United States.”

“If he returns to the United States, Mr. Snowden would promptly be brought before a civilian court convened under Article III of the United States Constitution and supervised by a United States District Judge . . . Mr. Snowden would be appointed (or if he so chose, could retain) counsel.”

While torture is banned by the 8th Amendment to the US Constitution, which bars “cruel and unusual punishment,” US government agents have carried out systematic torture in the so-called “Global War on Terrorism.” “Enhanced interrogation techniques,” which clearly amount to torture, have been deployed at the prison camp at Guantanamo Bay and at numerous “black sites” run by US intelligence around the world.

Private First Class Bradley Manning, who leaked footage of American pilots committing war crimes, was subjected to a variety of cruel and unusual punishments during the lead-up to his trial, including solitary confinement for 23 hours per day, forced nudity, and sensory and sleep deprivation.

Holder’s letter further asserts that “despite the revocation of his passport on June 22,” Snowden is technically “able to travel” because he remains eligible for a “limited validity passport good for direct return to the United States.”

“The United States is willing to immediately issue such a passport to Mr. Snowden,” Holder wrote.

Holder claims that taken together with the assurances against torture, the US offer of this “limited validity passport” invalidates Snowden’s claim “that he should be treated as a refugee or granted asylum, temporary or otherwise.”

Such methods highlight the cynical and thuggish mentality that pervades the top echelons of the US ruling elite. According to this logic, Snowden is “free to travel” because he has been offered a one-way ticket into the hands of a government which seeks to make an example out of him for revealing its illegal, unconstitutional spying programs.

Washington is carrying out a worldwide manhunt and campaign to intimidate would-be supporters of Snowden. Last week, US Secretary of State John Kerry stated that the US will attempt to force down any flight it suspects is

carrying Snowden. This week, all 30 members of the Democratic-led Senate Appropriations Committee voted unanimously to impose economic sanctions on any government that dares offer asylum to Snowden.

Snowden's father, Lon Snowden, voiced his unequivocal support for his son's actions on NBC's "Today" show Friday, saying: "I think my son, when he takes his final breath, whether it's today or 100 years from now, [will] be comfortable with what he did. He did what he knew was right. He shared the truth with the American people. What we choose to do with it is up to us as a people."

In a letter to President Obama, Lon Snowden wrote, "We thus find your administration's zeal to punish Mr. Snowden's discharge of civic duty to protect democratic processes and to safeguard liberty to be unconscionable and indefensible." The letter, posted at *MSNBC Online*, continued, "We are also appalled at your administration's scorn for due process, the rule of law, fairness, and the presumption of innocence as regards Edward."

Attorney Bruce Fein, who has been hired to represent Lon Snowden, has referred to Holder's letter as "laughable."

"The president of the United States calls him a hacker. At least four members of Congress called him a traitor. The president has said nothing about presumption of innocence," Fein said to *USA Today*. "A majority of Americans are concerned and he [Holder] thinks it's a concession that he says he would not execute him."

Speaking to *Reuters*, Fein quipped, "Wow, that's a real concession, they won't torture him and send him to the guillotine." Fein further stated that Snowden has no chance of receiving a fair trial in the current political climate.

The Russian government, for its part, is unwilling to accept the deterioration of its relationship with Washington that would follow from a principled defense of Snowden. While Snowden was granted a certificate this week allowing him to leave the transit area of the Sheremetyevo Airport, where he has been trapped for more than a month, his departure was then blocked by Russia officials on bureaucratic pretenses. Temporary asylum in Russia will be granted to Snowden only so long as he ceases all "political activity," Russian President Vladimir Putin has said.

Putin regime spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Friday that Russia will not extradite Snowden. "We have never surrendered anyone and we will never do so in the future," Peskov said, while also asserting that Putin has

"demonstrated strong resolve" in his efforts to prevent the issue from damaging US-Russian relations.

Snowden, isolated and trapped in an airport thousands of miles from home, has been hunted like a dog for his courageous actions. Vladimir Volokh, a top official with the Russian Federal Migration Service, said that the Russian government is taking measures to protect Snowden, who is in mortal danger: "He is under protection in the transit area for his safety," Volokh said. "He is an individual being pursued and his life is in danger."

The House rejected an amendment this week which would have placed limited constraints on the NSA's mass domestic spying programs, which were revealed by Snowden. Despite the play-acting and posturing as opponents of the police state carried on by some representatives, the Congressional leadership of both parties has been thoroughly informed about the NSA programs from the outset.

Popular hostility to NSA surveillance is on the rise. A *Washington Post-ABC News* poll released Wednesday showed that 75 percent of Americans think the NSA spying is in violation of Fourth Amendment protections against unwarranted searches and seizures. More than 50 percent said that the domestic spying does not protect the US against terrorism.

Wherever Snowden ends up, whether it is the United States, one of four Latin American states that made verbal offers of asylum, or Russia, he will be subject to a bourgeois regime whose class character renders it incapable of mounting a consistent defense of democratic rights. The international working class is the only remaining constituency for democracy on the planet, and as such the only social force capable of defending Snowden from the vengeful wrath of the American police state.



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