

Edward Snowden's open letter sparks asylum debate in Brazil

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An “Open letter to the Brazilian people” issued by Edward Snowden Tuesday has sparked a debate within Brazil on offering asylum to the fugitive former National Security Agency contractor.

Snowden's exposure of NSA operations in the Brazil and internationally have won him considerable support among the Brazilian people, even as the Workers Party (PT) government of President Dilma Rousseff has shown little stomach for standing up to Washington on questions of fundamental democratic rights.

Reports first aired by the Brazilian media last September cited NSA documents made public by Snowden proving that the NSA had hacked into the personal and office phones, computers and emails of Rousseff and had conducted extensive economic espionage against the Brazilian state energy giant Petrobras and the government's Ministry of Mines and Energy.

Snowden, who has received requests for assistance from both a Brazilian parliamentary committee investigating NSA espionage in Brazil and the country's federal police, expressed in the letter his desire to aid in exposing the agency's crimes, but cited Washington's continuous efforts to silence him. He pointed in particular to the international gangsterism of the Obama administration in orchestrating the forcing down of Bolivian President Evo Morales' airplane in Austria last July, on suspicion that Snowden might have been traveling on it to Latin America.

“The NSA and other spying agencies tell us that for our own ‘safety’ — for Dilma's ‘safety,’ for Petrobras' ‘safety’ — they have revoked our right to privacy and broken into our lives,” Snowden wrote. “And they did it without asking the public in any country, even their own.”

Pointing to the real impact of this spying in the lives

of Brazilians, he continued: “Today, if you carry a cell phone in Sao Paulo, the NSA can and does keep track of your location: they do this 5 billion times a day to people around the world. When someone in Florianopolis visits a website, the NSA keeps a record of when it happened and what you did there. If a mother in Porto Alegre calls her son to wish him luck on his university exam, NSA can keep that call log for five years or more. They even keep track of who is having an affair or looking at pornography, in case they need to damage their target's reputation.”

Snowden denounced the NSA for operating “programs of dragnet mass surveillance that put entire populations under an all-seeing eye and save copies forever.” He pointedly added that, “These programs were never about terrorism: they're about economic spying, social control, and diplomatic manipulation. They're about power.”

The letter was first posted on the Facebook page of David Miranda, the partner of the Rio de Janeiro-based US journalist Glenn Greenwald, who, based on classified documents provided by Snowden, has written many of the stories exposing the NSA's massive US and international spying operations.

Miranda, who was himself held incommunicado for nine hours and had his belongings seized at London's Heathrow Airport last August under Britain's anti-terrorism law, has initiated a petition calling on Rousseff to grant Snowden asylum in Brazil. Some 50,000 people had signed it on the web site Avaaz in the first 24 hours.

Rousseff issued her first direct response to these appeals on Wednesday. “I don't think that the Brazilian government should express an opinion on something that an individual did not make clear for us,” she told reporters. “Nothing was directed to us. They

didn't ask me for anything. I give myself the right to not take a position on something I didn't receive. I am not going to interpret a letter."

Citing unnamed Brazilian Foreign Ministry officials, the daily *Folha de Sao Paulo* was blunter: "The Brazilian government is not interested in investigating the NSA (National Security Agency) and, for that reason, it will not grant asylum to Edward Snowden ... in an information exchange that would meet this goal."

The Foreign Ministry, the newspaper said, stressed that the Brazilian government was not interested in "payback" for the crimes carried out by the NSA. One ministry official added that Brasilia "has no interest in doing this kind of interference in the sovereignty of other countries," and "it will not do to them what they did to us."

Folha reported that the Foreign Ministry had also changed the story it gave out last July, when Snowden was stranded in the Moscow international airport seeking asylum wherever he could find it. At that time, it said that it was not responding to Snowden's request for asylum in Brazil. Now it claims he never made such an official request, on the technical grounds that the request was made by fax and did not include a valid signature.

If the Rousseff government is unwilling to grant Snowden asylum, it is not only because of its submission to the considerable pressure exerted by US imperialism. Like the Obama administration, the PT government in Brasilia represents and defends a wealthy financial and corporate aristocracy under conditions of staggering social inequality. It conspires against the masses of Brazilian workers just as the Obama administration conspires against working people in the US and, no doubt, fears that Snowden's revelations may touch on its own crimes and police state measures.

Snowden still faces grave threats from the US government and has by no means found secure refuge in Russia. The government of President Vladimir Putin has granted the former NSA contractor only a temporary refugee visa, which runs out in August of 2014. Moscow has repeatedly stressed that he will not be allowed to work against "American interests" while in the country.

The Obama administration this week dismissed suggestions that it could grant amnesty to Snowden in

return for a guarantee that he would stop further leaks of NSA files. "It remains our view that Mr. Snowden is accused of leaking classified information and that he faces felony charges here in the United States," said White House spokesman Jay Carney. He added that Snowden would be granted "full due process," which is meant to deflect fears that he could be subjected to military detention, torture or internment at Guantanamo Bay.

Figures close to the US intelligence apparatus were more bloodthirsty in their approach to the question. Former CIA director James Woolsey called talk of amnesty "idiotic," adding: "He should be prosecuted for treason. If convicted by a jury of his peers, he should be hanged by his neck until he is dead."



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