



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on July 12, 2013

## Snowden Requests Temporary Asylum in Russia

[The Guardian](#) newspaper (U.K.) and other news outlets reported on July 12 that during a meeting with human rights activists at Moscow's Sheremetyevo airport, U.S. whistleblower [Edward Snowden](#) (shown) said he will request temporary political asylum in Russia. Tanya Lokshina of Human Rights Watch, who was at the meeting, said that Snowden would stay in Russia until he could win safe passage to Latin America.



Snowden has been waiting in the transit area of the Moscow airport — which is technically considered international territory — since June 23, awaiting approval of his asylum request from one of 20 countries he has applied to. Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Ecuador have offered to accept him. He left Hawaii for Hong Kong on May 20 before traveling to Moscow.

On June 14, U.S. federal prosecutors charged Snowden with espionage and theft of government property after he leaked to the press details of several top secret U.S. and British government mass surveillance programs. Snowden's prime contact was *The Guardian's* Glenn Greenwald. The United States has revoked Snowden's passport; however, no passport or visa is required to stay in an airport's transit zone, which is within the security/passport checkpoints.

Snowden sent an e-mail to human rights activists inviting them to the meeting, in which he accused the United States of conducting an "unlawful campaign" to deny him his "right to ... asylum," reported *The Guardian* and ABC News. Snowden's e-mail stated:

Unfortunately, in recent weeks we have witnessed an unlawful campaign by officials in the U.S. Government to deny my right to seek and enjoy this asylum under Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The scale of threatening behavior is without precedent: never before in history have states conspired to force to the ground a sovereign President's plane to effect a search for a political refugee.

This dangerous escalation represents a threat not just to the dignity of Latin America or my own personal security, but to the basic right shared by every living person to live free from persecution.

Those attending Snowden's meeting included Tanya Lokshina of Human Rights Watch, Sergei Nikitin of Amnesty International, Russian lawyer Henry Reznik, Russian MP Vyacheslav Nikonov (chairman of the Russian state Duma), and Vladimir Lukin, Russia's presidential human rights ombudsman. RT.com reported a statement from Lokshina that the reason for Snowden's request for temporary asylum in Russia is he "can't fly to Latin America yet."

As reported in our previous article "[South American Leaders Protest Rerouting of Bolivian Plane](#)," Bolivian President Evo Morales called a special summit of South American leaders on July 4 to protest the refusal by four European countries to grant airspace passage privileges permission to his plane during a return flight from Moscow. The Indian newspaper *The Hindu* reported that Morales had blamed the U.S. government for pressuring European countries to refuse to allow his plane to fly through their airspace, describing this action as a violation of international law.



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A reporter from *USA Today* quoted a statement made by Snowden to reporters: “No actions I take or plan are meant to harm the U.S.... I want the U.S. to succeed.”

The statement was an apparent answer to conditions imposed on Snowden by Russian President Vladimir Putin, who insisted that in return for granting him asylum, Snowden must refrain from releasing information that “damages our U.S. partners.”

A report from [ABC News](#) said that Snowden’s contact at *The Guardian*, Glenn Greenwald, told the U.S. network on July 11 that their work together is not even half done.

“The majority of it remains to be done, and that includes stories that are at least as significant, if not more significant than the ones we’ve already done,” Greenwald revealed.

Greenwald said that for the past six weeks he has carried around “for every second of every day” a highly encrypted electronic copy of the secret documents leaked to him by Snowden. The reporter for *The Guardian* said that he has duplicate copies of the documents in case anything should happen to the copy he carries around. As an additional safeguard, encrypted copies of the documents have also been given to other journalists for safekeeping.

In response to concerns raised by some that Russian intelligence might access the data Snowden carries with him, Greenwald offered Snowden’s expert cyber-intelligence expertise as reassurance. “This is a very sophisticated cyber operative,” he told ABC. “This is somebody who completely knows what he’s doing in terms of how to store material securely and what techniques are used by governments around the world, like the NSA, in order to gain access to places they don’t have authority to access.”

In an article about this latest turn in Snowden’s saga, the [Moscow News](#) shared a quote from Snowden that it said originated in a tweet from the *New York Times* reporter Ellen Barry, in which the whistleblower explained why he sought temporary asylum in Russia when several Latin American countries had offered him asylum: “I am only in a position to accept Russia’s offer because of my inability to travel.”

The logistics involved for Snowden to travel to any of the Latin American countries that offered him asylum are formidable. As the recent incident with Bolivian president Morales’ plane indicated, the United States might pressure its allied countries to refuse to allow any plane carrying Snowden to use its airspace. Additionally, should the plane stop to refuel in any country that has an extradition treaty with the United States, he might be seized while the plane is on the ground. His options include possibly taking a Russian flight from Moscow to Havana, and from there to his destination, or taking a series of flights through nations that would not honor the U.S. request for extradition. Other options, such as taking a private charter flight that would circumnavigate unsympathetic nations, would be extremely expensive.

Photo provided by Human Rights Watch shows Edward Snowden during July 12, 2013 press conference at Moscow’s Sheremetyevo Airport: AP Images

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