

Putin warns Snowden not to hurt U.S.-Russian relations

Fugitive US leaker Edward Snowden will stay in the transit zone of the Moscow airport where he has been holed up for three weeks while Russian authorities process his asylum request, a lawyer helping him said Tuesday.

Doug Stanglin and Kim Hjelmgaard, USA TODAY 11:31 a.m. EDT July 17, 2013

The NSA leaker could leave his Moscow airport refuge in a week while awaiting word on his bid for asylum.



(Photo: Alexei Nikolsky, AP)

SHARE 165
CONNECT

66
TWEET

<https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http://usat.ly/16IGGYm&text=Putin%20warns%20Snowden>

Russian President Vladimir Putin says Edward Snowden, who may be able to leave his Moscow airport refuge within the week, has been warned that engaging in any activities harmful to U.S.-Russian relations would be "unacceptable."

The leaker of National Security Agency secret programs has been holed up in the airport transit area since June 23, when he fled Hong Kong as the U.S. stepped up pressure for his extradition.

The 30-year-old former defense contractor has been charged under the U.S. Espionage Act for revealing to reporters information about NSA surveillance and data-gathering networks in an effort to, in his words, "correct this wrongdoing."

Snowden, whose U.S. passport has been revoked, has been offered political asylum in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador, but has been unable to travel there.

RELATED STORY: [Will Obama still visit Russia?](#)

<https://presto.gannettdigital.com/View/Content/tabid/91/ctl/Edit/mid/477/contentid/2524085/mode/Edit/Default.aspx>

RELATED STORY: [Snowden applies for temporary asylum in Russia \(http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2013/07/16/edward-snowden-russia-asylum/2520131/\)](http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2013/07/16/edward-snowden-russia-asylum/2520131/)

Last week, he applied for temporary asylum in Russia.

His lawyer, Anatoly Kucherena, told RT.com (<http://rt.com/news/snowden-asylum-lawyer-interview-189/>) that Snowden would be able to leave the airport after he receives proper paperwork from the Federal Migration Service, even before a final decision is made on his case.

"The question of giving him temporary asylum won't take more than a week. I think that in the near future he will have the possibility to leave the Sheremetyevo transit zone," Kucherena was quoted as saying by Interfax.

The lawyer, who is assisting Snowden with his application, added that Snowden also expressed interest in staying in Russia and becoming a Russian citizen.

The United States wants him sent home to face prosecution for espionage, but Kucherena said there is no legal basis for deporting Snowden.

Kucherena, however, stressed that Snowden understands that he will have to curb his activities while in Russia so as not to hurt Moscow's relations with Washington.

On a visit to the Siberian city of Chita on Wednesday, Putin said "we have warned Mr. Snowden that any actions by him connected with harming Russian-American relations are unacceptable," according to Russian news agencies.

Granting Snowden asylum would add new tensions to relations already strained by criticism of Russia's pressure on opposition groups, Moscow's suspicion of U.S. missile-defense plans and Russia's resistance to sanctions against the regime of Syrian President Bashar Assad.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., told NBC News on Tuesday that the United States should consider boycotting the 2014 Winter Olympics, due to be held in Sochi, Russia, if Snowden is granted asylum in the nation.

"I love the Olympics, but I hate what the Russian government is doing throughout the world," he said.

Contributing: Associated Press

<https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http://usat.ly/16IGGYm&text=Putin%20warns%20Snowden%20not%20to%20hurt%20U.S.-Russia>