

Snowden drops Russia asylum request

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Edward Snowden will have to stop leaking US secrets if he wants to stay in Russia. Meanwhile, President Barack Obama said high level discussions continue between the US and Moscow over Snowden's extradition. (Ju

Anna Arutunyan and Kim Hjelmgaard, USA TODAY 11:01 a.m. EDT July 2, 2013

Snowden has requested asylum from 21 countries.



(Photo: Sergei Grits, AP)

MOSCOW — NSA leaker Edward Snowden's prospects for political asylum abroad narrowed rapidly Tuesday after he withdrew his request to Russia and almost half of the 21 countries on his request list have turned him down.

The former National Security Agency contractor abandoned his request for asylum in Russia after President Vladimir Putin said Monday that he must stop his anti-American activity.

Russian news agencies Tuesday quoted Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov as saying that Snowden, unhappy with the conditions Russia has set, had taken back his application to Moscow.

"It's true, Snowden did express a request to remain in Russia. But having found out yesterday about Russia's position, voiced by President Putin, about the conditions for theoretically doing so, he rejected his intention and request to stay in Russia," RIA Novosti quoted Peskov as saying.

Putin said Monday that Snowden would have to stop leaking U.S. secrets if he wanted to be granted asylum in Russia, where Snowden has been hiding out for eight days since his arrival from Hong Kong. Putin said that while Moscow "never hands over anybody anywhere," Snowden needed to stop harming Russia's "American partners."

Peskov added Tuesday that "handing over Snowden to a country like the U.S., where the death penalty can be applied, is not possible."

Snowden fled to the Chinese territory of Hong Kong in May with top-secret documents and court orders on government surveillance operations. He has also signaled his intention to leak more of those documents at a later date.

The U.S. government has revoked his passport and issued an arrest warrant on charges of violating the federal Espionage Act.

From Snowden's initial list of 21 countries, at least 10 have either turned him down flatly or said his request was invalid because he was not physically on their territory.

Snowden broke almost a week of silence on Monday by issuing a statement on the WikiLeaks website that said his "continued liberty has been owed to the efforts of friends new and old, family, and others who I have never met and probably never will."

That was followed Tuesday by a statement detailing the number of countries, in addition to Russia, to which he had applied for asylum: Austria, Bolivia, Brazil, China, Cuba, Finland, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Norway, Poland, Spain, Switzerland and Venezuela.

Brazil and India have turned him down. Austria, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Norway, Poland, Spain and Switzerland said a request would be invalid because it was not made from their own territory.

"We haven't received a visit or any sort of application from Snowden," Valentina Anufrieva of the Embassy of Switzerland in Moscow told USA TODAY.

She added that Swiss asylum claims can only be filed from within Switzerland itself.

"Only when the person's life is in danger can we make an exception," she said, "but that doesn't appear to be the case here."

Ecuador, which has given asylum to WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange at its embassy in London, has been giving mixed signals about offering him shelter, and increasingly distancing itself from the case.

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, who is visiting Moscow, said Tuesday that Snowden had "done something very important for humanity" and deserved the "world's protection." But Maduro said that Venezuela had not received a request from Snowden for asylum.

Earlier, a Russian security official said that Russia's Federal Security Service and the American FBI were in talks over Snowden.



"Of course they (President Obama and Putin) don't have a solution that would suit both sides, that is why they have ordered FSB Director (Alexander) Bortnikov and FBI Director (Robert) Mueller to be in contact and look for options," RIA Novosti quoted Russia's Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev as saying Monday.

Kim Hjelmgaard reported from London; Doug Stanglin in McLean, Va.; Michael Scaturro in Berlin

Edward Snowden revealed details of top-secret surveillance conducted by the United States' National Security Agency.*(Photo: Getty Images)*