

Snowden gets asylum in Russia, has 'no plans' to leave

National Security Agency leaker Edward Snowden left transit zone of a Moscow airport and entered Russia after authorities granted him temporary asylum, his lawyer said Thursday. (Aug. 1)

Anna Aruntunyan and Doug Stanglin, USA TODAY 11:56 a.m. EDT August 1, 2013

His lawyer says the former NSA analyst is studying Russian. Snowden has left the airport and entered the country's territory.



(Photo: Associated Press TV)

SHARE **1484**
CONNECT

168
TWEET

<https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http://usat.ly/1edqjXD&text=Snowden%20gets%20asylur>

MOSCOW — National Security Agency leaker Edward Snowden has been granted temporary asylum in Russia for one year but has "no plans" to leave for another country, according to his lawyer.

The former defense contractor left the transit zone of Moscow's Sheremetyevo airport, where he has been holed up since June 23, and went by taxi to an undisclosed location, according to Anatoly Kucherena, Snowden's legal representative.

The lawyer told RT, a Russian television network, that the papers issued by the Russian Immigration Service allow him to live, work and travel in Russia for a year and can be renewed annually.

Snowden, who was blocked from travel after the U.S. revoked his passport and issued an international arrest warrant on espionage charges, has been offered permanent asylum by four Latin American countries — Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua and Ecuador.

In an interview today with Rossiya 24 television, however, Kucherena said Snowden had "no plans" to leave Russia. He noted that Snowden had been reading classic Russian literature and learning the language.

The Associated Press reported that Snowden left Sheremetyevo airport, where he had been holed up since arriving June 23 from Hong Kong.

Kucherena said Snowden left unaccompanied in a regular taxi, although WikiLeaks said Snowden was joined by Sarah Harrison, one of its activists.

"I watched him leave, he went to a safe place," RIA Novosti quoted Kucherena as saying.

He said Snowden's whereabouts will be kept secret.

"He is the most wanted person on earth and his security will be a priority," the attorney added. "He will deal with personal security issues and lodging himself. I will just consult him as his lawyer."

Kucherena said the former NSA systems analysts "is ready to talk to press, but he needs a day for adaptation."

Snowden even got a quick job offer from Russian entrepreneur Pavel Durov, founder of the social networking site Vkontakte, or VK, the Russian equivalent of Facebook.

"We invite Edward to St. Petersburg and will be glad if he joins our star team of programmers," Durov said on his profile at VK.com. Durov said he felt "pride" over Russia's decision to offer asylum to Snowden.

Snowden's father, Lon Snowden, said in remarks broadcast Wednesday on Russian television that he would like to visit his son. Kucherena said he is arranging the trip, the Associated Press reported.

The Snowden affair has created diplomatic strains between Moscow and Washington, which has requested his extradition.





The Kremlin has said it will not return Snowden to the U.S., but has gotten assurances from Snowden that he will not engage in activities harmful to the United States while he has temporary asylum.

President Obama plans to travel to the annual meeting of the Group of 20 nations in St. Petersburg in September and had added a side trip to Moscow to meet with Putin.

The New York Times reported (http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/19/world/europe/moscow-trip-for-obama-may-be-off-as-snowden-tensions-build.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0) two weeks ago that the White House was considering canceling the Moscow portion of the trip because of the Snowden affair.

But Yuri Ushakov, an aide to Russian President Vladimir Putin, says Russia is confident that the latest development in the case will not affect Obama's upcoming visit to Moscow.

"We are aware of the atmosphere being created in the U.S. over Snowden, but we didn't get any signals [regarding a possible cancellation of the visit] from American authorities," he told RIA Novosti.

The White House had no immediate comment on the latest twist in the case.

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., condemned Russia's actions as "a slap in the face of all Americans" and "a deliberate effort to embarrass the United States." He said it was time to "fundamentally rethink" U.S. relations with Russia. "We cannot allow today's action by Putin to stand without serious repercussions," he said.

Alexander Konovalov, president of the Moscow-based Institute of Strategic Studies and Analysis, in Moscow, said Snowden's presence in Russia creates "additional problems" in relations between the two countries.

He said Russia would lose face by handing Snowden over to U.S. authorities directly, "but to send him off somewhere eventually -- that would be in Russia's interests."

Snowden has been charged under the Espionage Act for leaking information to reporters about the NSA's worldwide surveillance and data-gathering networks.

The 30-year-old former defense contractor has said he did what he believes was right to go public with the information in order to "correct this wrongdoing."

WikiLeaks, the online group that publishes secret information, news leaks and classified media from anonymous sources, hailed Russia's decision on Twitter (<https://twitter.com/wikileaks>).

"We would like to thank the Russian people and all those others who have helped to protect Mr. Snowden," WikiLeaks said. "We have won the battle — now the war."

WikiLeaks also tweeted that Snowden would issue an "important statement" later Thursday in light of the conviction of Pfc. Bradley Manning for espionage and theft. The U.S. soldier was convicted Wednesday for massive leaks of classified material to WikiLeaks.

Contributing: Associated Press

SHARE **1484**
CONNECT

168
TWEET

<https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http://usat.ly/1edqjXD&text=Snowden%20gets%20asylum%20in%20Russia,%20has%20no%20pl>

SNOWDEN'S TI

SUP NEXT



National Security Agency leak
Russian lawyer says he has be



Boat crash survivor: It felt like we
hit a wall

men hold up since June to avoid a U.S. extradition request accusing him of espionage. His
temporary political asylum in Russia to escape extradition and is free to stay in the country until at least July 31, 2014.

Source: AP, USA TODAY Research
Kevin A. Kepple Jeff Dionise, Richard Wolf and Molly Vorwerck, USA TODAY