



## Putin Offers Snowden Asylum, With Condition

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Russian President Vladimir Putin offered Edward Snowden asylum on July 1, saying he can stay in Russia if he wants to, but only on condition — that he stop revealing "damaging secrets" about the United States. Speaking to press at the Forum of Gas Exporting Countries, Putin said, "There is one condition if he wants to remain here. He must stop his work aimed at damaging our American partners," then adding, "as odd as it may sound from me." Putin said that Snowden considers himself "a fighter for human rights," even likening him to Andrei Sakharov, saying that it seemed unlikely that he is going to stop leaking American secret data (thus not accept Putin's offer). It was also being reported today that Snowden had met with Russian authorities and given them a list of 15 potential countries that he would go to, after Ecuador essentially denied his request.

Putin assured both Obama and Snowden that extradition was off the table. "Russia has never extradited anyone and is not going to do so. Same as no one has ever been extradited to Russia," he added, with a veiled Cold War reference. "At best," he noted, Russia exchanged its foreign intelligence employees detained abroad "for those who were detained, arrested and sentenced by a court in the Russian Federation."

Putin reiterated that Snowden "is not a Russian agent", and that he (Snowden) was not working with Russian intelligence services. Indicating that he would rather not be in this position, Putin urged Snowden to choose his final destination and go there, but added that he has no idea when that is going to happen. "If I knew, I would tell you now," he told the press.

Speaking from Tanzania, Obama confirmed that "high-level discussion" between U.S. and Russian security services were underway to "resolve" the Snowden issue. Reflecting the sting of Snowden's latest revelations, Obama offered that, "Obviously, we're allies (Europeans), we don't spy on each other. If I want to know what Merkel thinks, I call Merkel," etc. He further gave a "Benghazi-like" response, saying, "I've asked my team to get together and look at this article, figure out what they (Spiegel, Guardian) may or may not be talking about, and communicate with our allies appropriately."

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