The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Snowden at Moscow Airport, No Aeroflot Flight Booked for Days

June 26, 2013

A screen showing whistleblower Edward Snowden at a cafe in Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport on Wednesday. **Sergei Karpukhin**

A former U.S. spy agency contractor sought by Washington on espionage charges appeared on Wednesday still to be in hiding at Sheremetyevo Airport, and Russia's national airline said he was not booked on any of its flights over the next three days.

Edward Snowden fled to Hong Kong after leaking details of secret U.S. government surveillance programs, then flew on to Moscow on Sunday, evading a U.S. extradition request. President Vladimir Putin said Tuesday that he was in the transit area of the airport and that Russia had no intention of handing him to Washington.

"They are not flying today and not over the next three days," an Aeroflot representative at the transfer desk at Sheremetyevo said when asked whether Snowden and his legal adviser, Sarah Harrison, were due to fly out on Wednesday.

"They are not in the system."

Snowden has not been seen in public, but Russian officials say he is at the airport, awaiting a response to an appeal for asylum in Ecuador. The logical route to be taken — and one for which he at one point had a reservation — would be an Aeroflot flight via Havana.

The choice of alternative public flights, while the U.S. presses other countries not to take him in or to arrest him on arrival, would be limited.

WikiLeaks said Wednesday that former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden was "safe and well," a brief statement that gave no indication of how the information was obtained and did little to clear up the mystery concerning his whereabouts.

The group, which says it is helping Snowden to seek asylum, has declined to reveal details about Snowden's plans, citing security concerns.

Putin denied Snowden was being interviewed by Russian intelligence and said any U.S. accusations that Moscow was aiding him were "ravings and rubbish."

That prompted a new extradition demand by Washington, which said there was a "clear legal basis" to do so.

The row threatens to further fray ties between the United States and Russia, which have argued over human rights and Putin's treatment of opponents in a year-old third term and have squared off over the Syrian conflict in the UN Security Council.

Relations between the U.S. and Ecuador are also under threat as the South American nation considers Snowden's request for asylum, a process that the Ecuadorean foreign minister said Wednesday could take months to complete.

Speaking during a visit to Malaysia's main city, Kuala Lumpur, Ecuadorean Foreign Minister Ricardo Patino compared Snowden's case to that of Julian Assange, the founder of anti-secrecy group WikiLeaks, who has been given asylum in the Ecuadorean Embassy in London.

"It took us two months to make a decision in the case of Assange, so do not expect us to make a decision sooner this time," Patino told reporters.

Asked if Ecuador would provide protection to Snowden while considering his request for asylum, Patino said through a translator that if Snowden "goes to the embassy, then we will make a decision."

Patino refused to say what criteria Ecuador would use to decide, but added that his government would "consider all these risks," including concerns that helping Snowden would hurt trade with the U.S. and damage his country's economy.

In another development in the Snowden story, Spanish judge Baltasar Garzon said Wednesday that he had decided not to represent the leaker. A statement from his law firm provided no further explanation.

Garzon, who has fought on WikiLeaks' behalf, became famous for indicting former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet in 1998 and trying to put him on trial for crimes against humanity. He was suspended from office in Spain for overstepping his powers by starting

an investigation into killings committed on behalf of former Spanish dictator Gen. Francisco Franco.

Material from The Associated Press is included in this report.

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