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Russia says it will consider extending asylum to leaker of US spying bids

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Russian officials have expressed their willingness to consider extending political asylum to former American NSA spy agency employee Edward Snowden amid major US efforts to seek his extradition from Hong Kong.

“If we receive such a request, we will consider it,” said Russian Presidential Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov as cited Tuesday by the nation’s business daily *Kommersant*.

The 29-year-old Snowden, who has worked for two of the largest American spy agency, the CIA and the National Security Agency (NSA), faces prosecution in the US following his recent intelligence leaks, revealing a secret NSA program that conducts massive surveillance of electronic communications on tens of millions of American.

The Kremlin spokesman is further cited as saying that if Snowden sends a 'proper request,' Russian authorities would consider it.

This while top US spy official, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper has insisted that Snowden's leak of NSA's secret surveillance programs has done "grave damage to our intelligence capabilities," calling on the nation's Justice Department to conduct a criminal investigation with possible "state treason" charges.

Moreover, reports out of the White House say that top US officials view Snowden as a criminal, view his case with utmost seriousness, and will actively seek his extradition from Hong Kong, which has an extradition treaty with Washington.

US analysts, however, argue that China will likely bar Hong Kong from turning Snowden to American authorities in response to numerous previous cases in which Washington has granted asylum to Chinese opposition figures.

They further warn that if China refuses to extradite Snowden to US, a major rift in Washington-Beijing ties would be likely.

Meanwhile, American press reports indicate that Snowden has disappeared from the hotel in which he was staying in Hong Kong following reports of active US measures to seek his immediate extradition.

Iceland has also been cited by media reports as another likely country that Snowden will ask for asylum.

"The only thing I can do is sit here and hope the Hong Kong government does not deport me," Snowden reportedly told British daily *The Guardian*. "My predisposition is to seek asylum in a country with shared values. The nation that most encompasses this is Iceland."

He further reiterated that although he knew the US would seek to prosecute him, he disclosed secret NSA documents in response to America's systematic surveillance of innocent citizens.

Snowden has also been cited as insisting that he was willing to sacrifice his comfortable life in the US "because I can't in good conscience allow the US government to destroy privacy, internet freedom and basic liberties for people around the world with this massive surveillance machine they're secretly building."

"I don't want to live in a society that does these sorts of things... I do not want to live in a world where everything I do and say is recorded," he added.