

Granting Assad Asylum Would Be Easy - Putin

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Russian President Vladimir Putin (R) shakes hands with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad during a meeting at the Kremlin in Moscow, Russia, Oct. 20, 2015.

Granting Syrian President Bashar Assad asylum in Russia would be much easier than sheltering U.S. intelligence leaker Edward Snowden, President Vladimir Putin said in a recent interview, noting that it was premature to discuss this idea.

“You know, it's premature to discuss this,” Putin said in an interview with the German newspaper Bild, answering a question on whether Russia would grant asylum to the Syria's leader if he does not win a future election.

“We gave asylum to Snowden and that was more difficult than granting shelter to Assad [would be],” Putin said, according to the transcript of the second part of the interview published Tuesday on the Kremlin's website.

Former National Security Agency employee Edward Snowden was given asylum by the Russian government in 2013. Snowden fled to Russia after he leaked thousands of highly

classified documents to the media.

Before discussing the possibility of sheltering Assad, it is necessary to allow the Syrian population to speak up in an election, Putin said, adding that “If this is done in a democratic way, maybe he won't have to go anywhere. And it won't matter whether he remains the president.”

Putin, who is supporting Assad through a bombing campaign launched in September, acknowledged that the Syrian leader had made “a lot of mistakes” during the course of the conflict in Syria.

However, the situation would not have escalated so quickly without outside actors providing money, arms and fighters, he said.

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