The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Syria's Assad Meets Putin in Unannounced Russia Visit

September 14, 2021



Syrian President Bashar Assad and Russian President Vladimir Putin in the Kremlin. **kremlin.ru**

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad met with his Russian counterpart and ally Vladimir Putin during an unannounced visit to Moscow, the Kremlin said Tuesday.

Putin congratulated Assad on his re-election to a fourth term this year after official results showed the Syrian leader winning 95% of the vote that foreign powers have dismissed as illegitimate.

"The results show that people trust you and, despite the difficulties and tragedies of past years, they still associate the process of recovery and return to normal life with you," Putin said.

Putin praised Assad for taking back 90% of Syrian territory and helping Russian-Syrian trade turnover grow 3.5 times this year, but lashed out at U.S.- and Turkey-backed troops that he said are preventing Assad from "consolidating the country and move along the path of reconstruction."

“The main problem in my opinion is that foreign armed forces are present in certain territories of the country without a UN decision or your approval, which clearly contradicts international law,” Putin said, according to a Kremlin transcript.

Russian backing has allowed Assad to recapture large parts of Syria from rebels and jihadists during the country’s bloody decade-long civil war that has killed around half a million people and displaced millions of Syrians.

Assad thanked Russia for its military support and humanitarian assistance, including food and medicine to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

“The only thing is that the political processes that we have been conducting have stopped for about three years,” he said, blaming “certain states” for economic sanctions and “destructive influence.”

The United Nations, whose mediation has failed to end the Syrian civil war, has in recent years focused its efforts on the work of a constitutional committee working toward a post-war basic law.

Original url:
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