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Putin Personally Granted Asylum to Syria's Assad, Kremlin Says

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President Vladimir Putin personally granted asylum to ousted Syrian president Bashar al-Assad and his family, the Kremlin said Monday.

"Such decisions can't be taken without the head of state. It was his decision," Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters, according to the state-run TASS news agency.

Peskov declined to comment on Assad's current whereabouts and said Putin was not scheduled to meet him at the moment.

"As for President Assad's whereabouts, I've got nothing to tell you," Peskov told journalists, adding: "What happened [with Assad's toppling] has surprised the whole world and, in this case, we are no exception."

On Sunday, Russian news agencies cited anonymous Kremlin sources as saying that Assad and his family were in Moscow after Islamist-led rebels entered Damascus, ending almost six

decades of his family's rule.

Related article: Bashar al-Assad And Family Are in Moscow – Russian News Agencies

Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's envoy to international organizations in Vienna, later confirmed the reports.

"Russia does not betray its friends in difficult situations," Ulyanov wrote on X after midnight Monday.

Russia and Iran are Assad's key allies, with the Russian military entering the Syrian civil war in 2015 to help Assad crush the opposition and the Islamic State terrorist group.

Russia said it was not involved in Assad's decision to flee and order a peaceful transfer of power to the rebels.

Kremlin spokesman Peskov said Monday that the future of Russia's Hmeimim airbase and Tartus naval facility would be subject to discussions with Syria's new rulers.

Russia has requested a closed-door UN Security Council session on Syria for Monday afternoon.

"The depth and implications of the recent developments in Syria have yet to be understood," Dmitry Polyansky, Russia's first deputy permanent representative to the UN, wrote on Telegram.

AFP contributed reporting.

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