



Putin says Comey is welcome to claim asylum in Russia like Edward Snowden

By Damien Sharkov | Jun. 15th, 2017

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Russian President Vladimir Putin has compared ex-FBI director James Comey to fugitive Edward Snowden and joked he would offer him political asylum.

Speaking on his annual Direct Line program, in which he answers screened questions from viewers all over Russia live on [all major state TV channels](#), Putin weighed in on the rift between Comey and U.S. President Donald Trump.

“I do not know the details of Comey’s testimony but some things are clear to me,” Putin said, referring to the ex-FBI director’s address to the U.S. Senate in which he spoke of awkward encounters with Trump. Among those mentioned by Comey included Trump demanding loyalty from the FBI director and expressing hope Comey would stop investigating compromising links between the president’s appointees and the Russian government.

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Comey was fired because Trump was not happy with the ongoing investigation, which he has called a [“made up” story](#) even as his former national security adviser Michael Flynn admitted to misleading the White House about past contacts with the Russian ambassador. Attorney General Jeff Sessions had to recuse himself from the investigation for a similar reason.

Putin has argued the Russian ambassador did nothing wrong as it is his job “to meet with people.” Perhaps in a show of good faith on Thursday he said Comey could find shelter in Russia if ever he needed, just like Snowden, a former U.S. intelligence contractor-turned-whistleblower.

“Comey said he kept record of a conversation with the president and then gave it to the press. Well this already is odd. How then is the FBI director different from Snowden,” he added, referring to the huge leak of classified information by Snowden. “Then he is a rights defender.”

The legal difference that Putin, a former spy himself, did not mention is that Comey leaked the memo after being dismissed from his role and a private citizen and the information was about a conversation he had personally, and was not classified. Snowden had leaked classified information about U.S. intelligence and surveillance activities.

Regardless, Putin’s arms, at least rhetorically, are wide open as he said if Comey were to face political persecution, Russia “is ready to accept him too.”

Russian Senator Alexey Pushkov was quick to congratulate Putin on his [“brilliant trolling.”](#) “I can imagine former FBI director Comey’s face, when he learned that Moscow was ready to grant him asylum as it did to Snowden.”

