

## Anthony Albanese, Peter Dutton warn Russia of strongest action possible if Oscar Jenkins has been executed

[James Dowling](#), [Liam Mendes](#) and Joseph Olbrycht-Palmer



Australian man Oscar Jenkins was captured by Russian forces in Ukraine.

Peter Dutton and Anthony Albanese have presented a bipartisan threat of the “strongest possible action” against the Kremlin if [Australian foreign fighter Oscar Jenkins](#) is confirmed to have been executed by Russian forces, following his capture in eastern Ukraine.

Speaking at a press conference in Tasmania on Wednesday, the Prime Minister upped the ante after Foreign Minister Penny Wong asserted that “all options are on the table”, including the potential expulsion of Russian ambassador to Australia Aleksey Pavlovsky, should Mr Jenkins be dead.

“If there has been any harm caused that is absolutely reprehensible and the Australian government will take the strongest action possible,” Mr Albanese said.

“I spoke with the Ukrainian ambassador on Monday in my office. We call upon Russia to immediately confirm Oscar Jenkins’ status, we remain gravely concerned. We will await the facts to come out.”

The opposition leader, speaking at a press conference in Halls Gap, Victoria, urged Mr Albanese to send Mr Pavlovsky packing should diplomats prove Mr Jenkins was executed.

“We should send a clear message to Russia and to other similar minded regimes that Australians are sacrosanct, they deserve to be protected by their government and if they are harmed in this way and brutally executed as seems to be the suggestion in this case ... There should be a strong reaction,” Mr Dutton said.

“I would encourage the Prime Minister to be open and honest and transparent in relation to this matter. If it is the case that this Australian has been killed then Australia should respond in the strongest possible terms and that is our bipartisan position I’m sure.”

The capture of Mr Jenkins during his service to the [Ukrainian Foreign Legion](#) has threatened to further strain Russo-Australian relations during an enduring ebb, prompting insults of “obedience” to the “collective West” from Russian diplomats and fighting language from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Senator Wong earlier on Wednesday said the Australian government held “[grave concerns for Mr Jenkins’ welfare](#)” and was “making urgent inquiries following the reports of his death”.

“We do need to ascertain the facts, and we’re working very hard to do that,” she told the ABC.

Senator Wong said Mr Pavlovsky “has been called in” and that “Russia is obliged to treat all prisoners of war in accordance with international humanitarian law, this includes humane treatment and the right to a fair trial”.

“We will look at the facts when they have been ascertained,” she said.

“But I want to be clear, all options are on the table.”

[Ukrainian and Australian diplomats](#) on Tuesday were making urgent inquiries after reports that the 32-year-old former Melbourne Grammar boy had died, just weeks after he was captured by Russian forces in the Donbas region of Ukraine.

Mr Jenkins had been classified as a prisoner of war in diplomatic negotiations with his Russian captors, but Ukrainian ambassador to Australia Vasyl Myroshnychenko said he was now focused on finding out if the captured soldier was alive.

“We are now verifying this information to see if it is true ... For now we cannot verify whether this has happened,” Mr Myroshnychenko said.

The Australian understands the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade had not received any word of Mr Jenkins’ condition from Russian counterparts since his capture.

Government sources also said there were added complexities surrounding Mr Jenkins' whereabouts due to the fact he was enlisted and serving with the Ukrainian armed forces.

"The Australian government is making urgent inquiries following reports of Oscar Jenkins' death," a DFAT spokesman said. "These reports have not been verified, but we continue to have grave concerns for Mr Jenkins' welfare. At the Foreign Minister's direction, the Russian ambassador was called into DFAT on 13 January to seek information and reiterate Australia's expectations that Russia will comply with its obligations under international law. The Russian Federation is obligated to treat all prisoners of war in accordance with international humanitarian law."

It was the second time Russian ambassador has been hauled before DFAT over the capture of Mr Jenkins, with hostage negotiations raising the temperature of rhetoric between either side.

Mr Jenkins is the first Australian combatant reportedly captured by Russian forces in Ukraine. If confirmed dead, he would also be the first Australian killed in Russian captivity since the conflict began. Six other Australians have died on the front lines.

### **Russian forces reported to have tortured captured soldiers**

UN rapporteurs have repeatedly described "widespread and systematic" torture in Russian prisons housing PoWs.

Australia has not had consular access to Mr Jenkins, meaning it could not communicate with him during his imprisonment, and has instead tried to use the Ukrainian government as a go-between.

Channel 7 has reported Mr Jenkins was allegedly killed by execution, and that a body had been recovered but not identified, while ABC News previously reported DFAT had heard concerns for Mr Jenkins as early as November.

Opposition foreign affairs spokesperson Simon Birmingham called for the diplomatic expulsion of Mr Pavlovsky should reports be confirmed.



Russia's ambassador to Australia, Aleksey Pavlovsky. Picture: Gary Ramage

“If reports are true that Russia undertook an extrajudicial execution of a captured Australian citizen then the Albanese government should respond in the strongest possible terms,” Senator Birmingham said.

“Three years ago the then Labor opposition urged Russian diplomatic expulsions, yet in government Labor have undertaken no such action. If Russia has engaged in such an egregious and illegal action then it must now be a catalyst for action.

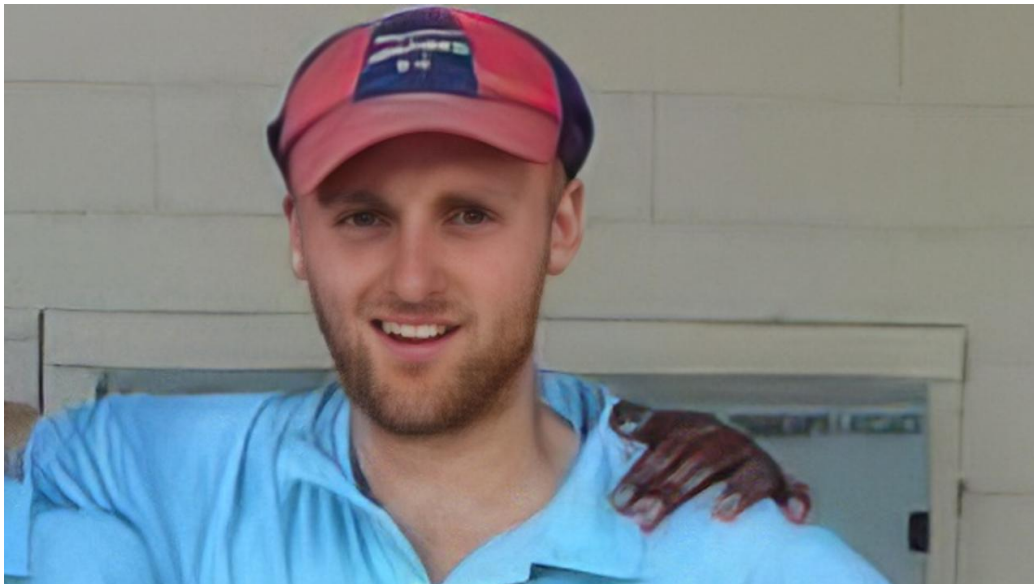
“Nothing less than the recalling of Australia’s ambassador to Russia and expulsion of Russia’s ambassador to Australia would be sufficient in such circumstances.”

Russian Foreign Affairs Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova last month said the Kremlin was “investigating” Mr Jenkins’ capture as she accused the Albanese government of being “Russophobic”.

“Efforts are currently under way to verify reports of the captured Australian citizen,” she said on December 26. “We are monitoring the situation alongside the relevant agencies. The Australian political establishment (has a) hostile stance towards Russia.

“Canberra obediently follows in the footsteps of the collective West, which pursues a Russophobic policy.”

Responding to the far more direct and derisive rhetoric deployed by the Kremlin, DFAT said Australia was simply acting on its national interests.



Captured Australian Oscar Jenkins. Picture: Instagram

“We reject the mischaracterisation of Australia as ‘Russophobic’,” a DFAT spokesman said at the time. “As the Prime Minister has said, we will always look after Australians.”

According to his LinkedIn profile, Mr Jenkins graduated from Melbourne Grammar School in 2010, before studying at Monash University and then moving to China in 2015.

Having fallen out of contact with many of his friends and loved ones in Australia, he was seen in a social media video being taken prisoner by Russian troops.

Video circulated by pro-Putin accounts on Telegram showed the Australian being aggressively interrogated as he tried to communicate in English, broken Ukrainian and French.

At one point, he was asked in Russian: “Do you want to live?” The Australian misunderstood the question, replying: “Live? I am in Kramatorsk, not far.” Mr Jenkins, looking shocked, was hit on the side of the head twice in the footage, with his interrogator telling him in Russian: “Don’t blame me for slapping you. Where are you from? Where are you from? Nationality? F..k, talk faster.”

Late last month Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus appealed to the Kremlin to treat Mr Jenkins humanely after the Russian video footage of him being beaten and abused. “The Australian government is making representations to the Russian government,” Mr Dreyfus said. “We urge the Russian government to fully adhere to its obligations under international humanitarian law, including with respect to prisoners of war.”

**Co-chair Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations Kateryna Argyrou** expressed her fear for Mr Jenkins on behalf of Australia’s Ukrainian community.

“If it’s true, it’s absolutely horrific. Every single member of our community feels sick to the stomach at the possibility,” she said. “We are waiting with the rest of Australia for more information and expect Russian authorities to immediately respond to the government’s inquiries.”