

Pressure grows on government to act over Russia's alleged killing of Oscar Jenkins

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The Albanese government is facing intensifying calls to expel Russia's ambassador over the alleged killing of Australian soldier Oscar Jenkins, who was captured while fighting in defence of Ukraine.

The government has not confirmed that Jenkins has died but a foreign soldier who trained the Australian to fight with the Ukrainian army said he was mourning the death of his close friend who he alleged had been executed by Russian forces.



Oscar Jenkins with his friend and fellow soldier “Gump” in Ukraine (right) before he was taken as a prisoner of war by Russia (left). Jenkins is reported to have died.

Kateryna Argyrou, co-chair of the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations, called for the government to respond with “strength, conviction and moral clarity” if Russian troops had killed Jenkins after taking him prisoner.

“The Russian ambassador should be expelled and ordered to leave on the first available flight, as should all Russian diplomats and spies. The Russian embassy should be closed, along with the Russian consulate in Sydney,” Argyrou said.

If Jenkins' death is confirmed, he would be the first Australian prisoner of war to be killed this century.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said Australia would hold Russia accountable if it was confirmed that Jenkins, a former teacher from Melbourne, had been killed after being captured by the country's troops.



Kateryna Argyrou, co-chair of the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations, has urged the government to expel Russia's ambassador if Oscar Jenkins' death is confirmed. *Credit: Alex Ellinghausen*

"We will await the facts to come out," Albanese told reporters in Tasmania on Wednesday. "But if there has been any harm caused to Oscar Jenkins, that is absolutely reprehensible and the Australian government will take the strongest action possible."

Foreign Minister Penny Wong said the government held "grave concerns for Mr Jenkins' welfare" and was "making urgent inquiries following [the reports of his death](#)".

Opposition Leader Peter Dutton said Russian ambassador Alexey Pavlovsky "should be sent packing" if Jenkins had been 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, we wait for confirmation – there should be a strong reaction from the prime minister," Dutton said.

It is extremely rare for Australia to expel senior foreign diplomats. Australia expelled Syria's most senior diplomat at the time, the chargé d'affaires, in 2012 in response to a massacre of civilians while Fiji's high commissioner was expelled in 2009 as a reciprocal move.

A foreign soldier, who served alongside Jenkins in Ukraine's 66th mechanised brigade, said he had been told on January 9 that Jenkins had been executed and that the news was confirmed by fellow soldiers a day later.

"He wasn't here for money or glory," the sergeant, who spoke on condition he only identified by his military call sign Gump, said of Jenkins.

"He was here to help Ukraine. If I can say one thing about Oscar, he was the first one in and the last one out. "

Speaking by telephone from Ukraine, the sergeant said he had met Jenkins, [who had no previous military experience](#), in March 2024 and trained him to serve on the battlefield in Ukraine.

"I took him under my wing, helped him with everything I could, made sure he was on his team," he said.

He said Jenkins was a generous person who had bought supplies for his fellow soldiers who could not afford them.

The sergeant provided a photo of himself and Jenkins serving in Ukraine. He said fellow soldiers had confirmed that Jenkins had died while in Russian custody.

"He has been executed," a fellow soldier said in a group text message. "His body has been recovered. It is unknown right now where it is."

The sergeant said he believed the Russian military had adopted a policy of torturing and executing foreigners fighting in Ukraine rather than holding them as prisoners of war.

"They tortured him for days to make an example of him," he said. "The Russian troops don't care for laws, morals, nothing, they're just there to kill."

The sergeant continued: "I don't want him to be dead in vain. I want him to be remembered as a hero.

"My only goal now is to get through this last deployment, leave and get to Australia to take care of his family and help honour him.

"Out of everyone I have been in the military with, Oscar is the closest person I have been with. I can't get over the fact he is dead."

Jenkins' plight came to light when footage began circulating online on December 22, showing him with his hands tied being paraded before a camera by Russian soldiers who slapped him across the face.

He was the first Australian known to have been captured by Russia.

Jenkins attended Melbourne Grammar School, studied biomedical sciences at Monash University, and had been working as a lecturer at a Tianjin college in China.

Maurice Clayton, who played cricket with Jenkins for over a decade in Melbourne, said he was holding out hope for his former teammate.

"Everyone who knows Oscar is just hoping that the reports are false and that he is still alive and that he can reunite with his family," Clayton said.

"It's a horrible situation for him and his family to have to go through."

A report by United Nations monitors issued at the end of last year found widespread examples of Russian troops torturing and executing prisoners of war in Ukraine, noting an escalation in the crimes since August 2024.

In a rare admission last month, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said 43,000 Ukrainian soldiers had been killed since Russia's invasion in February 2022, and claimed 198,000 Russian soldiers had been killed.

Wong said she was thinking of Jenkins' family in Australia. "They've lived with the fear and uncertainty of a loved one in the middle of a foreign war for many months," she told ABC radio on Wednesday morning.

Matthew Sussex, a visiting fellow at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at Australian National University, said expelling senior Russian diplomats was "about the only thing left" that Australia could do to diplomatically punish Russia, given it had already applied heavy sanctions.

He said Russia would inevitably respond by expelling Australian diplomats in Moscow which could make it difficult for Australians in Russia to access consular support.

But he said the bilateral relationship might have become so toxic that it was time to shift the Australian embassy to a country such as Kazakhstan.

Ukraine's ambassador to Australia, Vasyl Myroshnychenko, said Ukrainian authorities were urgently trying to confirm whether Jenkins had been killed.

The Russian embassy in Canberra pointed to comments by Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, who said at a December 25 press conference in Moscow that Russian officials were seeking information on Jenkins.

Official government advice urges Australians not to travel to Ukraine. “Foreigners have been killed and may be targeted,” the DFAT advice says. “Your safety is at the highest risk if you engage in active combat.”