The Sydney Morning Herald

THE AGE
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‘Of course you shouldn’t’: Albanese under fire over possible Putin photo

Matthew Knott and **Natassia Chrysanthos**, Sydney Morning Herald/The Age, November 16, 2026

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese is facing calls from across the political spectrum and the Ukrainian diaspora to boycott posing for a photo alongside Russian President Vladimir Putin at this week’s APEC leaders’ summit in China.

Albanese and Canadian counterpart Mark Carney have indicated they are open to posing for a “family photo” with Putin and other leaders to avoid offending their Chinese hosts.

This is despite Foreign Minister Penny Wong and like-minded counterparts opposing a group photo with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov last month at a G20 meeting in Atlanta, Georgia.

The Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations said it was alarmed that Albanese had not ruled out posing alongside Putin. The Russian president ordered the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

“Vladimir Putin is not just another world leader attending an international summit. He is an indicted war criminal and the architect of a brutal war against Ukraine – a war that has brought death, destruction and unimaginable suffering to millions of people,” federation chair Kateryna Argyrou said.

“How can it possibly be acceptable for Anthony Albanese, the leader of a democratic country which has stood alongside Ukraine for nearly five years, to willingly take part in a photograph with the man responsible for this war?

“Standing and smiling beside Putin ignores Russia’s gross violation of international law, and normalises an indicted war criminal’s presence among world leaders as his forces continue to murder Ukrainian civilians, destroy cities and deliberately target civilian infrastructure. Prime Minister Albanese should not be in that photo.”

Albanese did not rule out appearing in an APEC leaders' photo with Putin on Thursday if that was the wish of China as the host country. "But we will make very clear our views about Russia's invasion of Ukraine," Albanese said on Sunday.

Carney was more definitive, saying: "Yes, I will participate in the photo out of respect for the host. We're in Asia."

Argyrou said that Putin, who has not attended an APEC summit since 2017, "will use every moment at APEC, every handshake, every camera angle, to present himself as a normal leader, while waging an illegal war against Ukraine".

"The prime minister should not help him tell that story," she said.

Albanese has also endorsed the historic trilateral meeting due to take place between Putin, US President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping in China, even as critics expressed concern it would legitimise Russia as a great power and allow the leaders to carve up spheres of influence.

Albanese was otherwise talking up the strength of middle powers as he arrived at ASEAN in Manila on Monday, which is taking place before APEC. The South-East Asian conference was rearranged to accommodate Trump's travel schedule, allowing him to attend both events.

Albanese will meet Trump at a Quad meeting with India and Japan on Tuesday evening, when the president arrives in Manila for less than 24 hours before heading to Shenzhen.

Putin rarely travels to global summits because the International Criminal Court has issued an arrest warrant for alleged war crimes relating to deportation of children. China is not a member of the court, meaning Putin is not liable for arrest on Chinese soil.

Greens leader David Shoebridge said he found it remarkable Albanese was entertaining the idea of a photo with Putin.

"Of course you shouldn't be seen in a photograph with Vladimir Putin," he said.

Shoebridge said this was "a moment for the prime minister to show some kind of ticker and principle, and I hope he steps out when the camera's on".

Shoebridge has been criticised by Labor and the Coalition for his stance that Australia should not give military aid to Ukraine.

Vasyl Myroschnychenko, Ukraine's ambassador to Australia, said: "We hope that the PM will continue to be guided by Australia's very prominent pro-Ukraine stance.

"Substance matters more to Ukraine than style."

Liberal frontbencher Andrew Bragg said he was unsettled by the prospect of Albanese posing for a photograph with Putin.

“I don’t know that we want to encourage our prime minister to be having photos with people who have been running wars against humanity over the last few years,” he said.

“Now, if we have to engage with people for economic and diplomatic reasons, fine, but I don’t think he should be going out of his way to hang out with Vladimir Putin.”

Fellow frontbencher Andrew Hastie disagreed, telling the ABC he was not especially troubled by the prospect of Albanese appearing in a photo with Putin.