



PUTIN MUST BE HELD TO ACCOUNT

By SIMON BIRMINGHAM

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Tyrannical bullies are emboldened by weakness in others. Australia must do its part in standing up to them

Wweak or strong? Given the choice, sane people choose strength. Strength comes in many forms. Standing up to bullies is one of them.

Vladimir Putin is the world's leading bully. Bully is too polite a word. He is a murderous, oppressive and destructive autocrat, responsible for the deaths of thousands and ruining the lives of millions.

Disturbingly, we are not doing enough to defeat Putin. By we, I mean Australia, but also some of our fellow liberal democracies, with signs of fatigue, disinterest or even worse.

Ukraine's fight is our fight because they are the canary in the coal mine. Russia isn't the only bad guy in the world and, if Ukraine falls, Putin and other autocrats will sniff weakness and come after others.

The next conflict may not be the day after Ukraine. It may not be a kinetic war such as Ukraine. But one way or another, emboldened autocrats will seek to undermine global rules and the sovereignty of nations such as Australia, should we and our allies be seen to be weak.

Ukraine is far from weak. Brave Ukrainians have withstood Russia's military for two years. That's nearly two years longer than many military experts predicted. But they cannot win alone.

Countries such as Australia have helped. Two years ago the Morrison Government positioned Australia as the leading non-NATO contributor to Ukraine. We gave military, financial, humanitarian and energy help. We made visas available for those fleeing and we sanctioned Russia, Putin and his cronies.

While the Albanese Government has made piecemeal announcements, Australian support has slipped. Labor declined to give Hawkei



SIMON BIRMINGHAM

FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SHADOW MINISTER

military vehicles, claiming issues with roadworthiness.

Our army is retiring a fleet of Taipan helicopters but is destroying rather than gifting them to Ukraine. Again, safety was cited. Have the people coming up with these excuses not realised that Ukraine is at war? Mr Albanese should show some leadership and reverse these decisions, just as he should immediately agree to Ukraine's requests to continue coal shipments, while joining our allies in reopening an embassy in Kyiv.

It is also time to look at other ways of making Putin pay. Initial sanctions had economic impacts on Russia, but this has been undermined as some nations threw Russia alternative lifelines. It's time we stopped playing nicely by only freezing the assets of murderers and human rights abusers, when the seizure and sale of those assets could sharpen the punishment and fund assistance for the oppressed.

Ukraine's resistance shows freedom-loving nations can still work together to resist an aggressor.

If we are to gift future generations the same freedoms we enjoy and too easily take for granted, then we must redouble our efforts to make Ukraine's victory a demonstration that together we are strong.