

Russian Diplomat Says Putin Would Win Wrestling Match With Australia's Prime Minister

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Russia's Prime Minister Vladimir Putin (top) attends a judo training session at Top Athletic School in St. Petersburg in this December 18, 2009 file photo.

A Russian diplomat on Tuesday dismissed the Australian prime minister's threat of a physical confrontation with the Russian president as immature, warning that Vladimir Putin is a judo expert.

Prime Minister Tony Abbott intends to have a one-on-one meeting with Putin on the sidelines of a summit of the world's 20 biggest economies in Brisbane next month to demand Russian cooperation with a Dutch-led investigation into the shooting-down of a Malaysian airliner in Ukraine by Russian-backed separatists with the loss of 298 lives in July.

Abbott told reporters on Monday that he was "going to shirtfront Mr. Putin," using an

Australian Rules Football term for a head-on shoulder charge to an opponent's chest aimed at knocking the opponent backward to the ground.

Abbott is an athletic 56-year-old former amateur boxer who famously punched his Treasurer Joe Hockey unconscious when they were both Sydney University students decades ago. Putin is a 62-year-old former KGB officer and judo black belt.

Alexander Odoyevski, third secretary of the Russian Embassy in Canberra, described Abbott's threat as unhelpful.

"We consider the recent statements tough talk. We consider it immature," Odoyevski told Australian Associated Press.

"Hopefully there's no fight. Well, definitely we admire the Australian prime minister. He's very fit, but the Russian president, he's a professional judo wrestler," Odoyevski told Ten Network television.

Odoyevski did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Tuesday.

Abbott's threat was hyperbole. But the embassy's rare public response underscored a deepening bilateral rift.

Abbott toned down his language on Tuesday, failing to directly answer questions about whether he would carry through with his threat against Putin or whether he regretted making it.

I am "absolutely determined to have a very robust conversation with the Russian president," Abbott told reporters.

"We've all seen the impact of Russian policy on the innocent people on board Flight MH17. I think the very least I can do, speaking for Australia's dead and speaking for the families of Australia's dead and indeed speaking for the world's victims, is to have a very robust conversation with President Putin," he said.

Odoyevski said Putin was preparing to only attend the multilateral meeting of government leaders.

"There has not been a request for bilateral meetings between Russian and Australian leaders, so we are not exactly sure where and when Prime Minister Abbott would like to shirtfront President Putin," he said.

Abbott explained that no request for a bilateral meeting had been made yet because his program had yet to be finalized.

"But I certainly expect that while he's a guest of Australia, he will undertake to have a conversation with the Australian prime minister," Abbott said.

A senator for the influential Palmer United Party, Jacqui Lambie, said in a statement that Abbott and opposition leader Bill Shorten, who has called on Putin to pull out of the G20 summit, should "stop acting like hormone-affected schoolboys trying to out-macho each

other" and keep lines of communications open with Russia.

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