

Public submission with regards to “Australian Support for Ukraine”, as presented for review by the Senate representatives of the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Reference Committee.

I hope this submission finds those Senators undertaking this committee well – I thank you for the opportunity to provide a public submission towards this inquiry.

I am an ex-service member and was involved in events that supported those involved in the recovery of the souls lost in the tragedy that was Malaysian Airlines flight MH17. I acknowledge I have a very opinionated view on the current conflict in Ukraine and note that my closeness to this event colours my mindset.

This conflict affects our democratic values, our morale standing as global citizens and has significant implications regarding the preparedness of our defence force against the threats seen in this war.

As part of my submission, I intend to discuss all four elements in order.

(a) whether the support is timely, coordinated and comprehensive;

As it stands, I feel that our support does not come across as being particularly timely, coordinated or comprehensive to the public. Our initial flurry to support Ukraine seems to have been more in the way of a “show of solitude” using what we could afford to siphon off from the ADF, rather than a more detailed approach.

Thankfully, our commercial sector has stepped up with some significant inroads such as the SYPAQ cardboard drones and the EOS Slinger light air defence/ Counter drone chain gun system. The Australian government could do more to help these organisations provide even more capability to our Ukrainian partners.

Whilst I appreciate the need for security about specifics provided, it would be nice to have at least more understanding of how our government is providing what Ukraine really needs in ways that are truly useful for its immediate purposes.

(b) whether support is appropriately coordinated on a whole-of-government and whole-of-country basis;

There does not appear to be much noted coordination, at least within the public domain.

This question is answered in a self-evident manner as I previously mentioned in part A that support does not come across as timely, coordinated or comprehensive. Through better achieving the outcomes of part A, part B will inherently be improved.

(c) efforts to hold Russia to account, including by addressing mis- and dis-information in Australian public debate and the region; and

Thankfully there appears to be little time given to those who espouse the nonsensical misinformation alluded to by the Russian government and Russian actions since such as ‘taking up residence’ on the land taken back from them for their embassy has only made them a laughingstock to most Australians.

However, as mentioned earlier, the actions of Russia in Ukraine should be made more public and more thoroughly denounced. The best way to address misinformation is not to provide an “equal opportunity” to conduct discourse in this instance, but to outright address the crimes perpetrated, with the associated evidence and hold those responsible accountable for their actions.

Many of these crimes, if not given details of who committed them, would look as if they were from the history pages of either a retelling of Axis power activities during the second world war or more recently the barbaric actions of ISIS/ ISIL in the Middle East.

The horrific Russian actions in Bucha, the under-reported incidents of sexual assault and other outright war crimes being perpetrated with the tacit approval of the Russian government by groups such as Wagner Group, the Kadyrov brigades and the subsequent Russian military prisoner/storm battalions should be reason enough to provide significant support to the people of Ukraine.

Of particular concern should be Russia’s ongoing “management” of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant – if the destruction of the Kakhovka Dam 2023 is a sign of things to come, then there is a very high chance that Russia will attempt to make the reactors present a major radiation risk. I strongly believe Russia would sabotage the nuclear plant, if they haven’t already done so and would attempt to demolish reactors to generate a localised radiation risk if they believe the plant will be lost to a counter-offensive – regardless of the risk of crossing a NATO declared ‘red line’ in that instance.

Our South Pacific partners should note that the Russian federation is an autocratic nation that is allied with other regional powers who also have less democratic outlooks on personal freedoms and governing processes – and that they also have claims against other national territories that could result in armed conflicts if such claims are reinforced through military adventurism.

(d) any related matters.

The Australian Defence Force is currently going through a major transitional phase, with numerous military vehicle designs being replaced by next generation counterparts.

Many of the systems we own that are being replaced would still be of considerable value to our Ukrainian partners. **The ASLAV series**, further **M113AS4’s** (preferably modified locally into the ‘utility’ variant to provide further armoured logistics vehicles for the UAF) and our famed **Bushmaster Mine-Resistant Vehicle** are great candidates for provision to the UAF.

Abrams tanks although being replaced, are not the best candidates as it would be better to allow the US military to source the vehicles from European stocks and our platforms instead return to the US/ kept locally for further refurbishment/use as training and spares etc.

However, a coming replacement that I feel allows Australia to have a golden opportunity to show our support in a definitive manner is our future **armed helicopter program**.

Noting our intent to replace the Tiger ARH with the AH-64E Apache the opportunity now exists for Australia to provide a truly capable warfighting platform to our Ukrainian partners with no loss to our own resources – as the platform was already due for dismissal from service.

Noting the issues that have caused the Tiger to be removed from ADF service, the platform will likely work better in Ukraine as it will be operating in the cold, dry European weather environs that the design was originally developed for and will be closer to main sources of parts and repairs.

Noting European resolve strengthening to support Ukraine, it is likely Australian overtures for assistance in supporting our old fleet (if offered) could be agreed to with minimal concerns.

Ammunition for the ARH's weapon systems is already available to Ukraine through both European and US partners (*30mm cannon ammunition, 70mm rockets, 'Precision Kill' laser guided rockets and HELLFIRE anti-tank missiles*).

As the ARH platform has been in service for several years, I suspect that any 'sensitive' equipment that was built into these designs could be sanitised within an acceptable level of military sensitivity and with minimal discussion and modification (if required) on behalf of our European and American allies the platform could be further sanitised if required.

As a final note regarding the helicopters, the ability to train Ukrainian aircrew in use of the Tiger ARH would also be a significant public relations win for the government of the day, showing our solidarity in a concrete and absolute way – whether that training is done in Australia or via our partnership with the United Kingdom and sending our assets and qualified army aviators to teach as part of OP KUDU.

Outside of the support to Ukraine, I feel the ADF is attempting to “avoid the elephant in the room” by focusing on larger, more noticeable purchases as part of the current defence cycle.

As a citizen with some military understanding, I believe that the ADF does not seem to have appreciated the lessons coming from this war – we are essentially watching what would happen if a major conventional conflict were to occur between two equally matched forces – something that most analysts suggest will be of great concern in the next decade in our region.

The military needs to take a more focused look at what is happening and not only invest into spending of billions on a few nuclear submarines and 'golden bullet' extreme precision missiles that are decades away or going to be available only in sufficient numbers to last a few weeks of fighting at best – but also consider the 'cheap and cheerful' mass commercial drone threats and large volume 'dumb' artillery fire supported by 'brilliant' sensors.

As we can see on Youtube, even the largest high-end weapons can be destroyed by a few light drones brought off e-bay that are essentially light loitering bombers or loitering anti-tank missiles, and that the most dangerous threats are from sensor-aimed “dumb” artillery, or relatively cheap rocket rounds fired from (comparatively) low-tech and inexpensive artillery cannons and multiple launch rocket systems – again, a major risk of small UAVs providing recon and weapon guidance.

Outside of limited air defence using advanced guided missiles, we have zero genuine air defence of our wider army, our military bases, or any of our 'strategic assets' that is comparatively cheap and easy to manufacture such as air defence guns. Investment in gun-based immediate kill technologies is possible and is a solid investment in Australian industry if done right.

Designs such as the EOS 'Slinger' and a refocus on the development of the 'Metal Storm' system as a point-defence Counter-drone “kinetic kill” system using rubber bullets would allow the ADF to have a short-range air defence system that could complement our missile-based air defence.

Further research into the use of tactical UAVs as complimentary support assets such as Field Of View via 'umbilically linked' power/hardwired datalinks into parent vehicles could help to provide a wider situational awareness for ADF military forces.

Research into such platforms as combined recon and immediate pop-up attack drones (using laser guided light rockets or larger anti-tank missiles) would help to generate force-overmatch using limited expenditure for ADF vehicles like Bushmaster.

The ADF also needs to considerably invest in artillery systems as our current M777 towed howitzers have proven to be at risk of counter-battery fire and drone strikes, one just needs to look at the various videos on the internet for proof that towed weapons are dead weapons if they are seen.

We must invest in a lighter weight gun system such as an *Archer* or *Ceasar* system to support our intent to purchase heavy self-propelled guns and HIMARS rocket launch systems and provide survivability to our army gunners.

It should be noted that Germany is building Ukraine the *RCH-155*, a wheeled artillery system that is designed to work on the Boxer wheeled vehicle – the same Boxer wheeled vehicle Australia is now producing for the German army – it is a ready fit for the ADF which is already set up to support the Boxer chassis and could even be produced almost entirely using Australian assets.

Finally, rapid assembly systems such as lightweight drones (ie SYPAQ cardboard drones), or rapid machining of artillery/ rocket assemblies through 3d printer assemblies should be considered as a future mass-production capability for enhancing ADF ammunition stockpiles.

I appreciate this submission is of considerable length and hope it has been of some value and insight to just why this conflict is important.