

Australian Parliament - Senate Inquiry – The Australian support for Ukraine

Submission 29 April 2024

My name is Narelle Anderson and I am making this submission in my capacity as a private Australian citizen. Having spent a good portion of my career working overseas in various countries with different political systems, I strongly value our democratic system of government. I believe as a strong democracy we should support other countries who share our democratic values. It is with this in mind that I have made this submission. Ukraine is a democratic country fighting to keep its democratic independence, in the face of Russia's illegal invasion of its sovereign territory. Ukraine, a young democracy, needs our help to defeat this invasion and continue on their democratic path.

In addressing the specific Terms of Reference of the inquiry into: Australian support for Ukraine:

a) Whether the support is timely, coordinated and comprehensive

Australia's initial support for Ukraine in 2022 was very positive. In particular, the initial delivery of 90 **Bushmaster protected mobility vehicles** committed by the Morrison Government, was extremely promising. These vehicles were used, and continue to be used successfully by the Ukrainian military, to the extent that Ukraine has on numerous occasions requested additional vehicles. Ukraine is desperately short of IFVs, MRAPs and PMVs. The additional delivery of 30 Bushmaster vehicles by the Albanese Government was welcomed, but the shortage remains. Australia has the capacity to deliver many more of these vehicles. We also have the ability to manufacture more of these vehicles at the Thales factory in Bendigo. Bushmasters are uniquely designed to provide protection against IEDs; Russia has mined large swathes of occupied territory and Ukrainian soldiers desperately need vehicles to provide decent protection. The unanswered question is - why has Australia not committed to supplying Ukraine with a more comprehensive, substantial number of the vehicles? It is within our capability to do so.

Australia is in a unique position with regard to supply of urgently required key military capabilities to Ukraine. Of particular note:

- **F/A 18 A/B fighter jets** - it is reported that Australia has 43 fighter jets in storage, and in serviceable condition. Ukraine desperately needs increased air capability to defend their cities, citizens and infrastructure from Russian missile attacks. Australia has already received and is operating our replacement F-35 jets. The Australian F/A 18 A/B jets could be provided, perhaps in conjunction with a country such as Finland, who currently still operate and maintain F/A 18 A/B jets whilst awaiting their F-35 replacements. No reasonable explanation has been given as to why the provision of these jets is not possible, especially given the jets are no longer under a contract of sale. The provision of fighter jets cannot be seriously considered as controversial or 'escalatory', given the commitment of F-16 jets by some other countries.
- **Taipan helicopters** – despite Ukraine's request for these helicopters upon Australia's decision to retire them, these helicopters are in the process of being scrapped due to purported safety issues. The request by Ukraine was denied due to these purported safety issues. Ukraine is fighting a war, and it should be their risk assessment as to whether the Taipans are suitable or not, not ours. Our risk threshold as a country not

fighting a war is not the same as Ukraine's, who desperately need helicopters to transfer wounded soldiers for treatment.

- **M1A1 Abrams tanks** – these tanks are currently due for replacement in 2025. No explanation has been given as to why these cannot be provided to Ukraine, who have expressed interest. Ukraine currently has a small number of Abrams tanks in use. These tanks would not be a new capability that Ukraine would have to learn how to use. They are already in operation.
- **Other equipment and gear for soldiers** – it is extremely disappointing to continue to see excess machinery such as Unimogs, and excess items such as winter jackets and medical supplies, for sale on Pickles auction site. Ukraine needs all of these items. Why were these items not allocated to Ukraine, given they are surplus to Australia's needs?
- **Operation Kudu** – this ongoing successful operation to train future Ukrainian soldiers must continue until it is no longer needed. Australia has the capacity to provide this training, in conjunction with partners. Ukraine will mobilise thousands of additional soldiers this year – they need training and it is not clear why Australia cannot contribute substantially more to this operation.

- b) Whether support is appropriately coordinated on a whole of government and whole-of-country basis:

An explanation should be sought from the Australian Department of Defence as to why excess equipment continues to be sold at Pickles auctions, when such equipment could well be of use to Ukraine. Where is the coordination between the departments handling the Ukrainian assistance requests, and those designating surplus equipment for auction? Ukraine should be given the option to evaluate this equipment for their use, before sending the surplus equipment for sale.

Australia has contributed much to Ukraine, but we are no longer the largest non-NATO contributor of aid to Ukraine. Our contribution has fallen substantially from 2023 onward. Yet Australian public support for Ukraine aid remains high. It should not be controversial that Ukraine be given the choice of our decommissioned, surplus, or about to be decommissioned equipment.

Thank you for the opportunity to put forward this submission. I hope it will be considered in the Senate inquiry.