

More than three-quarters of Australians back Ukraine support



By [Anthony Galloway](#), Sydney Morning Herald, July 23, 2023

More than three-quarters of Australians support either maintaining current levels of support for Ukraine or increasing support, as a divide emerges inside the federal government and Defence over the level of assistance being given to the country.

An exclusive poll shows only 9 per cent of Australians want to decrease or withdraw support for Ukraine, while 45 per cent back maintaining the current level and 31 per cent favour an increase.



Australia has continued sending Bushmaster vehicles to Ukraine, but Kyiv has called for more assistance. *CREDIT: FAIRFAX MEDIA*

The findings in the Resolve Political Monitor conducted for this masthead comes after Australia knocked back Ukraine's [request for Australian designed and built Hawkei armoured vehicles](#).

The Albanese government said it was unable to send the vehicles to Ukraine in the near future because of braking issues and a lack of spare parts.

This is despite [photos emerging](#) last week of Hawkeis being used in the Talisman Sabre war games being conducted by Australia, the United States and other countries in Queensland.

Mick Ryan, a retired major general who served in the ADF for more than 35 years and was commander of the Australia Defence College, said Defence's publicly stated reasons for not sending Ukraine the vehicles did not make sense.

"They actually put out a media release a couple years ago saying that the brakes issue had been fixed," Ryan said.

“They’re deploying it on Talisman Sabre – we’ve seen on official Defence media that they’re out there – so clearly, these things are usable. If they’re usable on an exercise, they’re definitely usable in a war.

“And if there are any problems, I think the issue then becomes, one, the Ukrainians are good at solving problems. And, two, why can’t we as a country fix the brakes on a car?”

Ukraine has been desperate for more armoured vehicles, and members of the Ukrainian-Australian community have been running a #freetheHawkei campaign on social media and holding rallies across the country.

On three trips to Ukraine last year this masthead visited [multiple frontline positions](#) where soldiers complained of a lack of armoured vehicles and being forced to drive between different battle points in four-wheel-drive vehicles with no armoured protection.

After meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at the NATO summit in Vilnius, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese this month announced Australia would send an additional 30 Bushmaster armoured vehicles – taking the total commitment of Bushmasters to 120.

When asked about not sending Hawkeis, Albanese hit out at the “people sitting in armchairs, people who have retired from positions they’ve held, making judgments without talking to the Australian Defence Force”.

But multiple government ministers have told this masthead there is a divide emerging within the government over support for Ukraine.



[Play video](#)

[1:34](#)

[PM pledges Ukraine aid after NATO summit](#)

Prime minister Anthony Albanese is back in Australia after attending the NATO summit and promising more aid for Ukraine.

One source said they suspected “fatigue” had set in among some ministers over Ukraine’s requests for more assistance, while others said the government should be pushing back against Defence’s advice.

Multiple sources within Defence, who were not authorised to speak publicly, said the government’s failure to guarantee replenishment of capabilities sent to Ukraine had resulted in the department adopting a risk-averse approach.

A spokesperson for Defence Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles said Australia was providing the appropriate level of support for Ukraine.

“As the deputy prime minister has said, Australians can feel confident that Australia stands very proudly in the level of support that it’s providing Ukraine,” the spokesperson said.

Ryan said there should be a continuous provision in the budget for support, rather than one-off commitments, which would force Defence to lift its game.

“The defence procurement system is slow, risk-averse and getting slower in an era where change in technology is speeding up,” he said.

“So you’re getting an even greater divergence, as years go by, between what Defence can do and what the world expects of us.”

Ryan said the poll conducted for this masthead reflected positively on the Australian people at a time when they are dealing with rising inflation and the cost of living.

“At the moment, what Ukraine is defending is the right to be a sovereign nation and not be invaded and tortured and murdered ... I think Australians think that is a right that’s worth defending everywhere,” Ryan said.

Resolve director Jim Reed said the poll showed Australians are still solidly backing Ukraine.

“Despite increased commitments from the prime minister in recent days, most still want this support to continue or increase,” he said.

“Many people are struggling to make ends meet right now, so it says something that more people want Australia’s financial commitment to Ukraine to increase rather than decrease. This is a rarity when many would like government spending decreased in other areas.”

Strategic Analysis Australia director Michael Shoebridge said Australia should be using the Ukraine conflict to test its ability to quickly replenish its domestic defence stocks so that it is better prepared for a future war.

Along with Bushmasters and Hawkeis, Shoebridge said Australia should be sending anti-drone systems and loitering munitions.

“It seems a mystifying way of not taking the opportunity to supply things we produce here that we could get battle-tested and feedback that improves how they operate, and also scale up our current production,” he said.