
Opinion

'You will send more?' Ukrainians want Australia's Bushmasters

Ordinary Ukrainians have become skilled in military weaponry and which Western country is supplying what in the war against Russia.

Misha Zelinsky

Columnist

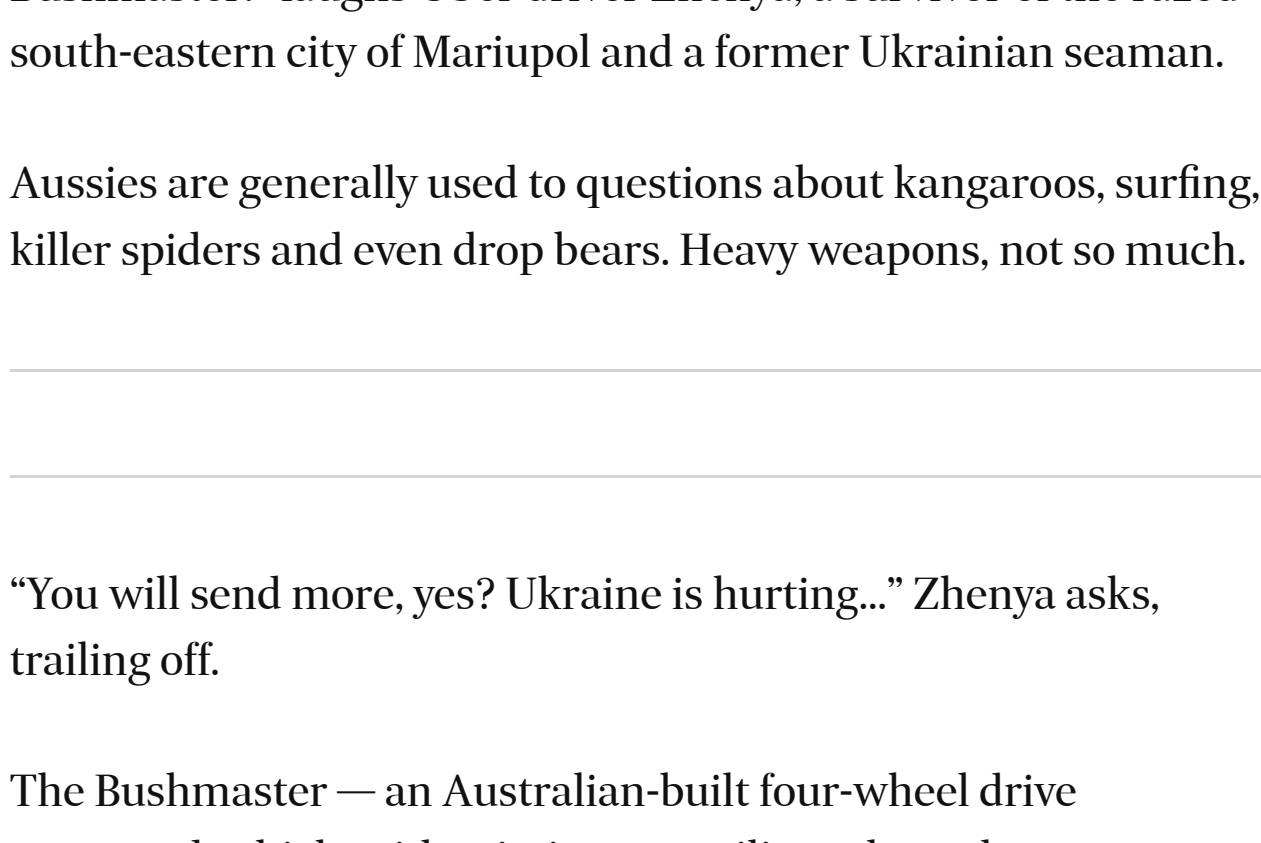


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Kyiv | One of the saddest parts of Russia's invasion is how fluent ordinary Ukrainians have become in military weaponry.

Rather than complaints about Taylor Swift tickets, inside Ukraine you'll find citizens debating the merits of F-16 fighter jets, ATACMS missile systems or Abrams tanks, and which countries have available stock.



An Australian Bushmaster in action on the outskirts of Bakhmut. **Julian Knysh**

Ukrainians are extremely grateful for the West's contributions, but with their homeland being destroyed, they're understandably keeping score of the help given in their darkest hour.

"We used to think of your Crocodile Dundee, now we say: Bushmaster!" laughs Uber driver Zhenya, a survivor of the razed south-eastern city of Mariupol and a former Ukrainian seaman.

Aussies are generally used to questions about kangaroos, surfing, killer spiders and even drop bears. Heavy weapons, not so much.

"You will send more, yes? Ukraine is hurting..." Zhenya asks, trailing off.

The Bushmaster — an Australian-built four-wheel drive armoured vehicle with mission versatility — has taken on legendary status in Ukraine.

Julian Knysh, an Australian-Ukrainian filmmaker who rushed to Ukraine last year, has been embedded with the 80th Airborne Assault Brigade near Bakhmut.

"I've seen how these Australian vehicles are saving lives. It makes you proud," Knysh says.

Importantly, Aussie Bushmasters are doing what they were developed for, halting enemy troops.

"These are very effective war machines," says Major Uliana, whose 80th Assault Brigade is using Bushmasters extensively.

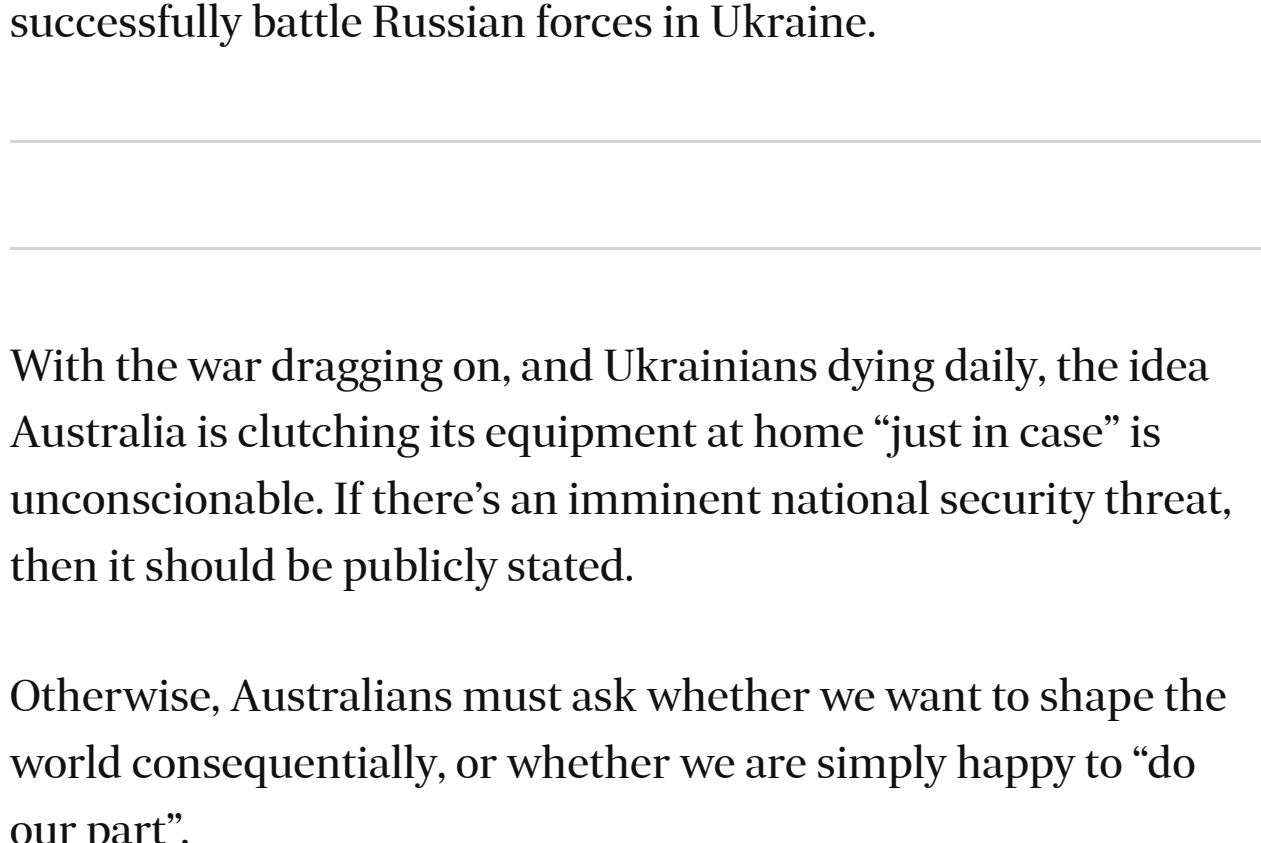
According to Uliana, Bushmasters have directly saved Ukrainian soldiers on a "large number" of occasions particularly from "shrapnel during shelling and being blown up by Russian mines".

With Bushmasters extensively deployed in the summer counteroffensive, "we need more", she says.

Ukraine's Defence Minister Oleksii Reznikov says that in providing Bushmasters, "Australia has made a great investment in the victory of Ukraine and the security of the whole world".

While Bushmasters provide "speed and mobility", Reznikov is equally effusive about Australia's other domestically built vehicle, the Hawkei.

Ukrainians are too polite. But to say they are disappointed with our latest offer of assistance — [\\$110m worth of redundant clunkers](#) — is understating it.



The government announced a new \$110 million package to Ukraine last week - but no Bushmasters. **Julian Knysh**

I don't for a second doubt Anthony Albanese, Richard Marles or Penny Wong's commitment to the Ukrainian cause. But it's difficult to understand why they are dispatching Vietnam-era vehicles and not more of our top armoured carriers.

Having already sent 90, Australia has roughly 1100 Bushmasters already made, while we have received nearly all the ordered 1100 Hawkeis. Given Australia makes both domestically, it can't be potential shortages worrying the government.

And with Australia's budget surplus surging to \$19 billion, it's surely not the cash.

If Defence and Foreign Affairs are arguing against deploying more Bushmasters and Hawkeis to Ukraine, then it's time to know the reasons.

If the vehicles are needed here for training purposes, then perhaps send three-quarters of what we have and build more. Perhaps logistical hurdles are the problem. If that's the case, we could learn to resupply Aussie equipment a long way from home, given that's how wars are typically fought.

Those who disagree with the Defence Strategic Review's recommendation to deprioritise heavy vehicles for Australia's military can prove their argument by sending Aussie vehicles to successfully battle Russian forces in Ukraine.

With the war dragging on, and Ukrainians dying daily, the idea Australia is clutching its equipment at home "just in case" is unconscionable. If there's an imminent national security threat, then it should be publicly stated.

Otherwise, Australians must ask whether we want to shape the world sequentially, or whether we are simply happy to "do our part".

With democratic freedom on the line, it's a distinction worth contemplating.

Australia is a nation of 25 million people in a region that in large part doesn't share our values. Australia simply cannot exist in a world where big autocracies swallow smaller democracies nearby.

While the Donbas might feel distant, the best way to prevent conflict ever reaching Australian shores is to help stop Vladimir Putin and teach other dictators that invasions don't pay. That makes sending weapons to Ukraine a national security imperative rather than charity.

History shows wars are determined by industrial bases as much as they are by fighting.

Without US President Roosevelt driving the Lend-Lease Act through a hostile US Congress during WWII — laws allowing for exports of US armaments — Britain would have likely fallen.

However, unlike Winston Churchill's United Kingdom, Ukrainians are not asking us to fight alongside them in the battle for freedom.

Ukrainians are begging for our weapons to stop Russia while we support them from the couch at home. How can we possibly say no?



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