

Why wasn't Kyiv offered the MRH-90s?

The Daily Advertiser

Monday 22nd January 2024

549 words

Page 11 | Section: OPINION

216cm on the page



Why wasn't Kyiv offered the MRH-90s?

EDITORIAL

TO SAY Ukraine's war fighters have been blindsided by Australia's refusal to even consider letting Kyiv have the ADF's unwanted MRH-90 Taipan fleet would be the understatement of the century.

The Ukrainians are in a war for survival after being invaded by Russia just under two years ago. They are desperately short of modern military equipment; a shortage expected to become even more desperate with Western nations now scaling back initial pledges to stay the course "for as long as it takes". Helicopters are very close to the top of the Ukrainian wish-list, a point made strongly by Stefan Romaniw in an article in *The Kyiv Post* on January 11.

Mr Romaniw, the co-chair of the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Associations and the first vice-president of the Ukrainian National Congress, was scathing in his criticism of the Albanese government's decision to strip and bury the 47 MRH-90s that had cost the taxpayer an estimated \$3 billion and which reportedly have many years of life left. "The Kafkaesque episode of the disposal of the MRH-90s is one of many we have seen play out in the ADF over the last two decades and one that should have politicians and the public asking for some real explanations - not contrived excuses," he wrote.

The latest attempt to explain the decision by acting Defence Minister Pat Conroy last Thursday raised more questions than it answered. Mr Conroy said none of the aircraft were now in a flying condition and that it was not feasible to return them to an "operational state". Kyiv's response would best be translated as "bollocks". Mr Romaniw had already addressed this issue: "Donating the MRH-90 fleet, remaining spare parts, documentation and support equipment [would] not incur any future financial or support obligations for Australia".

The MRH-90 is a locally tweaked variant of the NH-90 helicopter which is in service with nine of Ukraine's European allies. In the event Australia signed over its unwanted choppers and their associated goods and chattels on an "as is, where is" basis Kyiv and its friends in NATO could take it from there.

Mr Romaniw said that should the cost of transporting the machines to Ukraine prove too much for the Australian government other allies could do the heavy lifting. He, and other pundits, say given the widespread use of the type by NATO forces it would be much easier to return the MRH-90s to operational readiness in Europe than it would be here. While Mr Romaniw's accusation that by scrapping the MRH-90s Australia is effectively aiding Russia in its "genocidal campaign" to conquer Ukraine is offensive and should be withdrawn, the frustration that prompted it is understandable. The Ukrainians can't get their head around claims the Taipans are "unsafe" and not fit to be sent into a combat zone - even after being refurbished by experts.

Kyiv's legacy helicopter fleet, a motley collection of Cold War-era relics, has been decimated since February 2022. The Taipans are light years ahead of what it has now. As the Lowy Institute's Mick Ryan has said, they would start saving lives the minute they appeared on the frontline.

The Ukrainians are in the fight of their lives. Why not give Kyiv the tools it needs to finish the job?