

EXCLUSIVE

Ukraine urges against repeat of Taipan helicopter farce

[Ben Packham](#), The Australian, 22 August 2024



An Australian Army M1A1 Abrams main battle tank fires a .50 calibre machine gun during an exercise at the Puckapunyal Military Area, Victoria. Picture: Defence

A decorated Ukrainian commander has pleaded with the Albanese government to donate the army's soon-to-be retired [M1A1 Abrams tanks](#) to his country's fight against Russia, saying they could play a "crucial role" in turning the tide against Vladimir Putin's forces.

Major Andrii Berezovskyi urged the government to avoid a repeat of [its decision to junk 45 military helicopters](#) rather than provide them to Kyiv, as new footage emerged online revealing Australian Bushmaster vehicles were used by Ukraine in its retaliatory invasion of Russia.

The 28-year-old veteran of some of the bloodiest battles of the war said the US-made tanks were far superior to those operated by Russia.

"They are more manoeuvrable and have new technologies for protection against antitank missile systems, which provides better protection for both personnel and the equipment itself," Major Berezovskyi told The Australian.

He lamented the Albanese government's 2023 refusal to donate the army's MRH-90 Taipan helicopters as "not wise and not acceptable".

“If Australia had made a positive decision for us regarding those helicopters, they would have been extremely valuable and would have greatly assisted us in conducting medevacs for wounded soldiers,” Major Berezovskyi said.

“I would like to emphasise for the Australian government that today Ukraine is fighting for democracy and freedom, not only for Ukraine but for the rest of the civilised world.”



Major Andrii Berezovskyi, a former battalion commander who participated in the liberation of Kherson region and the battle of Bakhmut, has issued a plea for Australia to donate its soon-to-be retired M1A1 tanks to Ukraine. Picture: Supplied

Major Berezovskyi, who is in Australia to raise money for Ukraine’s war effort, lauded the Bushmaster protected vehicles provided by Australia under successive aid packages as “great and powerful support”.

“When I first saw the Bushmaster with my own eyes, I felt like, “Yes, we can move forward with them;” he said.

Ukrainian-captured footage broadcast in recent days shows a destroyed Bushmaster in Russia’s Kursk region which had been operated by Ukraine’s 80th Air Assault Brigade.

Retired major general Mick Ryan said it was unsurprising to see the vehicles being used in Ukraine’s audacious incursion into Russia.

“They’re a fantastic vehicle that moves quickly, is easy to move and maintain, and protects soldiers well. So why wouldn’t they want to use them?” he said.

Mr Ryan lashed the Albanese government's decision to scrap the army's MRH-90 helicopters despite Ukrainian pleas for the aircraft, calling for Ukraine to be given first option on any military equipment slated for disposal.

"We just arrogantly assumed that they wouldn't want them or they couldn't use them," he said.

"If we were to provide those tanks to the Ukrainians – that's a whole tank battalion. That would be a big deal for the Ukrainians."



A destroyed Australian-supplied Bushmaster vehicle, used by Ukraine's 80th Air Assault Brigade during its push into Russia's Kursk region. Picture: Ukrainska Pravda

The Australian Defence Force has 59 M1A1 tanks, which are due to be replaced in 2025 with next-generation M1A2s.

Ukrainian ambassador Vasyl Myroshnychenko has lodged multiple requests for the vehicles, but the government has refused to say what it will do with them.

Opposition defence spokesman Andrew Hastie challenged the government to respond to Ukraine's latest request.

"The Defence Minister should explain why the gifting of M1A1s is not on the agenda," he said.

While the US would have to approve the donation of the tanks to Ukraine, the Biden administration has already given 31 of the vehicles to Kyiv.