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Submission to the Senate inquiry into Australia's support for Ukraine

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Introduction

Minister for Foreign Affairs Penny Wong said on 9 April 2024 that the Ukrainian “people continue to heroically fight for their homeland against Russia’s flagrant breach of the UN Charter. Australia is resolute in our support for Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.”¹ And yet there is much more that Australia could do to defend the rules-based international order and assist Ukraine repel Russia’s full-scale invasion. To pursue these goals, Australia should more actively use a broader range of diplomatic, intelligence, trade, and military tools.

Policy recommendations

Among other options to further support Ukraine and defend the rules-based international order, Australia should:

1. **Exert more pressure on China** to reduce its assistance to Russia’s defence industry. Australia should **impose targeted sanctions on Chinese companies** that export dual-use products that are essential for Russia to manufacture weaponry and other forms of defence materiel.² Canberra should also use stronger public and private diplomacy to push Beijing to live up to both its responsibilities as a great power and its long-held commitments to the principles of state sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-aggression.³
 - Despite repeated assurances that China is not providing Russia with defence materiel⁴, Chinese exports remain critical to the Russian war effort. Each

¹ Penny Wong, “Speech to the ANU National Security College ‘Securing our Future’,” Minister for Foreign Affairs, 9 April 2024, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/speech/speech-anu-national-security-college-securing-our-future>.

² For an indication of the importance to Russia’s defence industry of China’s dual-use exports, see Demetri Sevastopulo, Guy Chazan, and Sam Jones, “US says China is supplying missile and drone engines to Russia,” *Financial Times*, 13 April 2024, <https://www.ft.com/content/ecd934b6-8a91-4b78-a360-9111f771f9b1>.

³ Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is clearly inconsistent with China’s long-held view of how international relations should be conducted. See, for example, Xi Jinping, “Speech: Carry Forward the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence To Build a Better World Through Win-Win Cooperation,” Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Republic of Namibia, 1 July 2014, http://na.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/sgxw/201407/t20140701_6719087.htm.

⁴ See, for example, Finbarr Bermingham, “Emmanuel Macron thanks Xi Jinping for ‘commitment’ not to sell arms to Russia,” *South China Morning Post*, 7 May 2024,

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month, China exports “over [US]\$300 million worth of dual-use products identified ... as ‘high priority’ items necessary for Russia’s weapons production.”⁵ These include many items that “Russia lacks the capacity to produce domestically, such as microelectronics, machine tools, telecommunications gear, radars, optical devices, sensors, and other products.”⁶ This warrants Australia putting more diplomatic pressure on China and joining US, EU, and UK sanctions on Chinese companies that are aiding Russia’s defence industry.

2. Establish an interdepartmental taskforce to **examine Australia’s downstream supply chain exposure to Russia’s defence industry**. Even if Australia does not directly support Russia’s defence industry, it is possible that Australian resources, including critical minerals and other valuable inputs, are being used by third countries to manufacture dual-use products that are then sold to Russian companies. The Albanese government should also explore the feasibility of **imposing requirements on trade partners to not use imports from Australia to produce dual-use goods that assist Russia’s defence industry**.
 - For both moral and practical reasons, Australia should seek to reduce the chance that Australian exports indirectly support Russia’s ability to wage war against Ukraine. If successfully implemented, such measures would avoid Australia’s unintentional support for the Russian war effort, while also providing extra incentives for Australian trade partners to distance themselves economically from Russia.
3. **Elevate the defence of Ukraine and concerns about Russia’s aggression in Australia’s regional diplomacy** to complicate Moscow’s plans to deepen diplomatic, trade, and military ties with key Indo-Pacific countries. Australia should impress upon its regional partners the dangers of the precedent set by Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine. For example, India’s and Vietnam’s cautious responses to Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine undermine their own efforts to call out China’s maritime and territorial encroachments.⁷
 - Russia’s economy depends on access for its energy, resources, and agricultural exports to large Indo-Pacific markets, including in China, India, Vietnam, and elsewhere.⁸ These countries also provide a measure of support

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/3261649/emmanuel-macron-thanks-xi-jinping-commitment-not-sell-arms-russia>.

⁵ Nathaniel Sher, “Behind the Scenes: China’s Increasing Role in Russia’s Defense Industry,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 6 May 2024, <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2024/05/behind-the-scenes-chinas-increasing-role-in-russias-defense-industry?lang=en>.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ See, for example, Niha Masih, “U.N. resolution to end Ukraine war: How countries voted and who abstained,” *The Washington Post*, 24 February 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/02/24/un-ukraine-resolution-vote-countries/>.

⁸ See, for example, Nuriya Kapralou, “Russia aims to widen trade with India as energy ties boom,” *Nikkei Asia*, 3 April 2023, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/Trade/Russia-aims-to-widen-trade-with-India-as-energy-ties-boom>; Francesco Guarascio, “Vietnam irks EU by delaying meeting ahead of possible Putin visit,” *Reuters*, 9 May 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/vietnam-delays-meeting-with-eu-sanctions-chief-ahead-possible-putin-visit-2024-05-09/>; “China-Russia 2023 trade value hits record high of \$240 bln - Chinese

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for Russia in diplomatic fora and are valuable customers for Russian defence companies.⁹ Australia alone is unlikely to be able to persuade these countries to isolate Moscow diplomatically or wind back their military and trade ties with Russia. But Canberra should seek to dissuade them from further deepening relations with Moscow, while also underscoring the dangers for every country of an international system in which states are able to annex their neighbours.

4. **Increase intelligence sharing** between Australian agencies and their Ukrainian counterparts to improve Kyiv's understanding of the Moscow-Beijing relationship and Russia's Indo-Pacific statecraft. Such intelligence sharing should include assessment agencies like the Office of National Intelligence and the Defence Intelligence Organisation, as well as collection agencies like the Australian Signals Directorate and the Australian Secret Intelligence Service.
 - Australia's intelligence agencies are likely to be of limited use to their Ukrainian counterparts vis-à-vis developments on the battlefield or within the Russian leadership. However, Russia's ability to prosecute its war depends on deep and enduring diplomatic, trade, and military ties with key Indo-Pacific states, including China, India, and Vietnam, among others. Australia's considerable intelligence capabilities in the region could assist Ukraine better understand and thereby complicate Russia's Indo-Pacific statecraft.
5. **Furnish Ukraine with additional military hardware** to improve its ability to defend itself. Platforms that Ukraine has requested, and that Australia should provide, include **additional Bushmaster vehicles, Hawkei vehicles, Taipan helicopters, and Abrams M1A1 tanks**. These platforms are suitable for donation for a range of reasons: Australia possesses large numbers of them (Bushmaster and Hawkei vehicles), they will soon be retired (Abrams M1A1 tanks), and they are no longer used by the Australian Defence Force (Taipan helicopters). Australia should also provide extra deliveries of **artillery munitions, drones, medical kits**, and other equipment.
 - The provision of this additional military hardware is, of course, complicated by the ongoing disposal of the Taipan helicopters and the safety concerns associated with the Hawkei vehicles.¹⁰ These issues might entail legal complexities for Australia. Yet these challenges should be weighed against the existential threat faced by Ukraine and the urgent moral and practical reasons for assisting the Ukrainian struggle for survival. The Albanese government should therefore establish the appropriate policy and legal mechanisms to facilitate the transfer to Ukraine of Hawkei vehicles and the remaining parts of the Taipan helicopters. The provision of defence materiel would entail additional costs for Australia and reduce its military inventory.

customs," *Reuters*, 12 January 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/china-russia-2023-trade-value-hits-record-high-240-bln-chinese-customs-2024-01-12/>.

⁹ Masih, "U.N. resolution to end Ukraine war: How countries voted and who abstained."

¹⁰ Andrew Probyn, "Grounded Taipan helicopters already stripped for parts, Australia tells Ukraine," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 January 2024, <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/grounded-taipan-helicopters-already-stripped-for-parts-australia-tells-ukraine-20240118-p5eycj.html>.

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However, the grim global implications of a Russian victory in Ukraine and Australia's large supplies of defence materiel make such military donations both advisable and feasible.

6. **Reopen the Australian Embassy in Kyiv** to demonstrate Australia's ongoing commitment to Ukraine, provide the Australian government with better situational awareness, and deepen and broaden bilateral ties.¹¹ **Australia should also open a Defence Attaché (DA) office in Kyiv** staffed with experienced military officers. The establishment of a DA office would provide Australia with a better understanding of Ukraine's battlefield challenges, facilitate additional coordination with the United States and Australia's North Atlantic partners, and allow Canberra to tailor its military assistance more closely to Kyiv's needs.
 - A rigorous risk assessment and the implementation of suitable security safeguards would need to precede the reopening of the Australian Embassy and the establishment of a DA office. But given Australia's experience operating diplomatic posts in challenging security environments, including in Kabul, Bagdad, Beirut, and elsewhere, the risks associated with reopening the Australian Embassy and establishing a DA office would be manageable.

Conclusion

The measures proposed above will alone not secure Ukraine or persuade Russia to end its war of aggression. These policy options also entail risks for Australia, including the possibility of retaliatory measures from Beijing if Canberra imposes sanctions on Chinese companies that are aiding Russia's war effort. And yet the moral gravity of Russia's crimes in Ukraine and the damage to the rules-based international order are clear. The Albanese government should therefore do more to help protect the people of Ukraine and defend the values that Australia holds dear.

Author biography

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¹¹ Michael Fullilove, "Australia's embassy should move back to Kyiv," *The Australian Financial Review*, 26 April 2024, <https://www.afr.com/policy/foreign-affairs/australia-s-embassy-should-move-back-to-kyiv-20240416-p5fk4g>.