

— **Exclusive**

# Unwanted Aussie choppers '1000 times safer than Soviet rubbish'

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A former Ukrainian army pilot has rubbished the Albanese government's justification for not providing retired Taipan helicopters to Kyiv, [<https://www.afr.com/link/follow-20180101-p5ey6g>] saying they are still better than the Soviet-era "rubbish" the Ukrainian military is relying on now.

The government has come under fire for a decision to break up the Taipan helicopters for spare parts and bury the rest of the airframes, rather than donate them to the Ukrainian war effort against invading Russia.



Former Ukrainian military pilot Oleg Prystupa.

Defence Industry Minister Pat Conroy last week said it would take a “huge investment” of taxpayers’ funds to get the 45 helicopters up to flying condition. Even then, their safety was still questionable after the fleet was retired early following a fatal crash in the Whitsundays last year.

Oleg Prystupa, who now lives in Melbourne and was a former helicopter pilot, said the Taipans would be an improvement on the Soviet MiG choppers now in use in Ukraine, which he estimated were 1000 times less safe.

Mr Prystupa said perceptions about safety were different during wartime. Ukraine’s MiG helicopters dated back to the 1970s, were rusty and some had bullet holes in them, including propellers that had holes patched with epoxy resin. He had been involved in a crash when the propeller fell off. Because of the hostilities, it was impossible to get spare parts from Russia, whereas it would be easy to tap into European supplies for the Taipan, as that was where it had been designed and produced.

Mr Prystupa said Ukraine’s national guard already uses a smaller version of the Taipan and it would take about a month for air crews and technicians to be trained to operate Taipans. He estimated it would take a professional crew little time to reassemble the dismantled helicopters.

“Aviation is very dangerous. All pilots understand that,” Mr Prystupa said.

“But the Taipans are far safer, especially in defence conditions compared to the helicopters flying now. You can't imagine what kind of rubbish we are flying.”

Mr Prystupa said he was campaigning on behalf of his former colleagues, including his 60-year-old father, who remains a frontline military pilot.

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