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**T**he Albanese government's failure to respond to Ukraine's request for another urgent humanitarian shipment of thermal coal to help avoid major blackouts as Russian forces target energy infrastructure is a wasted opportunity to reassert Australia's support for the beleaguered nation.

The Ukraine war has slipped from international attention as the Middle East continues to unravel. Further, the possibility of a second Donald Trump presidency, coupled with Republican Party disquiet over US involvement, threatens the West's unity of purpose. Now Kyiv's Energy Minister German Galushchenko has turned to Canberra, seeking another coal shipment to stabilise power supplies when Ukrainian nuclear plants undergo maintenance this northern hemisphere spring.

Galushchenko told the *Herald's* Europe correspondent Rob Harris that Ukraine was fighting a second front when it came to shoring up electricity supplies for hospitals, critical infrastructure and residential areas, and the grid had so far held up, courtesy of air defence systems from Western allies, despite Moscow's military campaign to destroy power stations. "By spring and summer, we would need additional coal from abroad because of the huge destruction of the coal mines and the effects of these attacks," he said. "Any help received would be very welcome."

Next month marks the second anniversary of Russia's invasion, and outside of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

nations, Australia is one of the biggest contributors to Ukraine's resistance. The federal government estimates our helping hand at some \$910 million.

But Australia's largesse has had its limitations: the federal government rejected Ukraine's requests for retired RAAF F/A-18 fighter jets, 45 Taipan MRH-90 helicopters and Hawkei combat vehicles. Canberra held back on the Hawkei amid production and certification delays. The junked Taipan helicopters were prematurely retired last September following crashes and incidents, which prompted the Ukrainian request just before Christmas; however, the federal government preferred to sell them for spare parts rather than send them to fight Russians.

And even when we do donate to the war effort, we've risked damaging our reputation as an adroit practitioner of geopolitics. Last June, the Albanese government announced a \$110 million package including 28 M113 armoured vehicles, 14 special operations vehicles, 28 MAN 40M medium trucks and 14 trailers; a new supply of 105 millimetre artillery ammunition; and \$10 million to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for the Ukraine Humanitarian Fund, to assist in the provision of shelter, health services, water and sanitation. The M113 armoured personnel carrier is a Vietnam War relic currently being phased out of service. The perception that Australia is using Ukraine as a dumping ground for outdated military equipment suggests the government has misread the high public sympathy for the plight of Ukraine.

In August 2022, Australia sent almost 80,000 tonnes of coal at a cost of around \$30 million. Ukraine's ambassador to Australia, Vasyl Myroshnychenko, wrote to the government pleading for a second instalment of energy support on December 5 but he is yet to receive an answer.

A spokesman for Resources Minister Madeleine King said the government was "actively considering" the request for energy assistance, including if Australia was "best placed to provide that assistance and what form it might take".

Why such delay? The government's prevarication is unfathomable. It is not as though there is a shortage of coal in Australia. The Ukraine war grinds on and the decision to send our coal to Kyiv should be a no-brainer.