

M1 Abrams Tanks in U.S. Inventory Have Armor Too Secret to Send to Ukraine

BY THE DRIVE

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A group of M1 Abrams tanks sit in a holding area after being offloaded from the freighter ship “Resolve” at the port of Antwerp April 24.

As the [U.S. government](#) is now preparing to send dozens of M1 Abrams tanks to the Ukrainian military, much attention has been given to concerns about how their complex electronic components and especially their gas turbine propulsion systems could make them particularly difficult to operate and maintain. Though it’s not yet clear what specific variant of the Abrams Ukraine’s military is set to receive, the tanks will have to be in a unique export configuration. This is largely due to the highly classified armor packages found specifically on U.S. military versions, which contain depleted uranium, and that are not readily exportable even to major allies. In other words, the U.S. can’t just send its M1s to Ukraine.

President Joe Biden formally announced plans to send 31 M1 tanks to the [Ukrainian armed forces](#) today. The U.S. government will acquire the Abrams through the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI). USAI provides funds to purchase weapon systems and other equipment, as well as training and other support services, on behalf of the Ukrainian military to support its longer-term needs. While the exact delivery schedule is not yet known, American officials have

made clear the process will take months, not weeks. The first tanks may not arrive until late this year or even early next year.

In addition, it's not immediately clear whether the M1s for Ukraine will be entirely new production tanks or if they will come through some other source. The U.S. Army has thousands of older Abrams in storage that a contractor could be hired to refurbish to a like-new condition or that could be used as donors to help with the construction of tanks that use a mixture of new and remanufactured components.

No matter what, they will need to be an exportable configuration before heading to Ukraine. So a big part of whatever that process ultimately entails will center on their armor package.

Starting in the late 1980s, many new-production M1A1s for the U.S. military began to feature composite armor packages that include depleted uranium (DU), a metal known for its high density, and other materials. Armor packages that incorporated DU were included on subsequent A2-series variants, as well. Many older American M1A1s were later upgraded with the newer armor and other improvements, including hundreds that were eventually brought up to the A2 standard.