

Russian Army's Use of Donkeys in Ukraine Underscores a Staggering Equipment Shortage

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March 03, 2025



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Russian soldiers appear to be using [horses](#) and [donkeys](#) to transport supplies to and from the front lines in Ukraine as high losses and insufficient production have created acute equipment shortages.

Meanwhile, the Russian army has resorted to using civilian vehicles for attacks on Ukrainian positions, reducing combat effectiveness, increasing casualties and slowing their advance.

As U.S. President Donald Trump pushes for a negotiated end to Russia's three-year war, many analysts [warn](#) that any peace agreement allowing Russia to hold on to occupied territories would be unstable, potentially leading to renewed aggression against Ukraine or even an [attack](#) on NATO countries.

While these diplomatic efforts hum along, there are questions about the state of the Russian military and its ability to recover from losses after three years of intense fighting — especially after pro-Russian Telegram channels circulated photos of donkeys being used at the front lines last month.

Pro-war blogger Kirill Fedorov [claimed](#) that the Defense Ministry had sent a donkey to his unit due to a shortage of vehicles. More evidence of Russian soldiers using donkeys, horses and even [camels](#) to transport supplies emerged soon after.

Lieutenant General Viktor Sobolev, a member of the Russian State Duma's Defense Committee, [said](#) the army's use of pack animals was a "normal" practice.

Since the beginning of the war, Russian troops have relied on civilian vehicles for logistical support, often purchasing them with their own money or through volunteer fundraising. These vehicles are used for transportation in the rear, delivering supplies and troop reinforcements.

However, in recent months, there have been increasing cases of Russian soldiers launching assaults on Ukrainian positions in ordinary civilian cars.

One [video](#) captured by a Ukrainian drone shows a column of civilian vehicles being struck by mortars and FPV drones, resulting in heavy losses. And this is far [from](#) the only case. The Russian military has even started using [scooters](#) for transportation on the front line.

Other videos depict Russian troops attempting attacks on motorcycles, which also result in significant casualties.

According to the OSINT project Oryx, Russia has [lost](#) over 15,000 pieces of military hardware since launching its full-scale invasion in February 2022, including more than 3,700 tanks and roughly 8,000 armored vehicles. The number of destroyed civilian vehicles is even higher.

Military analyst Yan Matveev [noted](#) that combat vehicles primarily serve as troop transporters. Infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs) and armored personnel carriers (APCs) are designed to move soldiers across "no man's land" to enemy positions or evacuate them, providing some level of protection.

However, Russia's IFVs have [proven](#) inadequate in Ukraine and the country [lacks](#) mine-resistant ambush-protected (MRAP) vehicles, which the U.S. [supplies](#) to Ukraine.

The increasing dominance of drones on the battlefield has made attacks even more perilous. Recently, Ukrainian forces [decimated](#) an armored column from Russia's elite 155th brigade as it attempted to advance across open terrain in the Kursk region.

Analysts say that repeated costly assaults have severely depleted Russia's vehicle reserves.

"The critical shortage of transportation in the Russian army has completely deprived it of the ability to conduct strategic offensive operations," Matveev [said](#).

Even local battlefield breakthroughs have become difficult to exploit, he said, as Russian forces struggle to transfer reinforcements or resupply advancing troops. This has resulted in a

slow, grinding style of warfare.

Despite setbacks, Ukrainian forces have managed to hold defensive lines, largely because Russia's logistical network is stretched thin, Matveev said.

Due to equipment shortages, Russian units have [begun](#) using civilian vehicles, including cars and minibuses, to transport personnel and supplies. Both Russian and Ukrainian forces employ such vehicles, but they lack the necessary armor, making them highly vulnerable to drone attacks as both sides actively target each other's logistics.

Videos filmed by Russian soldiers [show](#) frontline roads [littered](#) with burned-out civilian and military vehicles. As a result, the Russian army has occasionally resorted to using pack animals for transporting ammunition and other supplies.

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Military expert Pavel Luzin noted that other countries' militaries use pack animals in difficult terrain like deserts or mountains.

"In the steppes of Ukraine, where there is an extensive road network, the use of animals is purely due to a lack of transportation," he told The Moscow Times.

In some places, the situation is even more dire.

On the battlefield near Pokrovsk, a key Donetsk region stronghold for Kyiv, Russian troops must march 18 kilometers (11 miles) on foot due to vehicle losses, Russian military blogger Svyatoslav Golikov [reported](#). Supplies, reinforcements and ammunition deliveries have slowed dramatically.

The loss of armored vehicles and worsening logistics have already affected the pace of Russian advances. Data from the Ukrainian OSINT project Deep State shows that in early February, the Russian army captured the smallest amount of Ukrainian territory since June 2024, [according](#) to an analysis by the outlet Agentsvo.

Since the start of the war, Russia has been able to make up for its heavy vehicle losses by pulling old Soviet-era vehicles from storage and restoring them — but these reserves are now depleted. Satellite imagery of Russian military storage bases indicates that stocks of armored vehicles have declined by nearly 32% since 2021, according to OSINT analysts [cited](#) by Newsweek.

The number of MT-LB armored personnel carriers has fallen from 2,527 before the war to just 922 in May 2024. Meanwhile, Soviet-era BTR-60, BTR-70 and BTR-80 armored personnel carriers have been completely removed from storage.

More than 40% of old Soviet tanks and armored personnel carriers were pulled from storage at the Vagzhanovo military equipment base in the republic of Buryatia, The Moscow Times' Russian service [reported](#) in 2023, citing an analysis of satellite images.

Military experts have also [noted](#) that the newest Russian T-90M tanks have been delivered to

the front without crucial components, likely due to sanctions that have cut Russia off from key technologies.

According to satellite imagery, Soviet-era military equipment in storage bases may only last until the end of 2025, Russian military expert Yury Fedorov [told](#) Novaya Gazeta Europe. He said that equipment stockpiles are nearly depleted, though it is impossible to determine exactly how much weaponry remains in storage. Experts also note that not all equipment in storage can be restored to working condition.

Military expert Richard Vereker has [observed](#) a sharp decline in Russian tank and APC losses, which he attributes to the dwindling number of these vehicles in the field.

However, he [notes](#) an increase in losses of newer models such as the BTR-82, suggesting that Russia's defense industry is struggling to restore older Soviet vehicles while ramping up production of more modern alternatives.

Ukrainian military expert Alexander Kovalenko said even these newer models share the same fundamental weakness as their Soviet predecessors: poor armor protection.

Expert Luzin said that factories can't keep up with demand: "Factory capacities are limited and losses are too high."

According to Forbes, Russia [produces](#) approximately 200 new BMP-3 IFVs and 90 new T-90M tanks per year, along with several hundred other armored vehicles, including BTR-82 APCs. However, this is far from enough to replace vehicles destroyed on the battlefield.

Pavel Aksyonov, a military analyst for the BBC's Russian service, linked Russia's inability to replace its losses to the fact that it had not prepared for a prolonged war when it invaded Ukraine in early 2022.

"For a short military campaign, a country doesn't need a stable production line of equipment and weapons — it just needs a stockpile sufficient for its objectives," Aksyonov said. "Russia's economy was not ready for a war of attrition, and it had to be restructured."

While Russia may not be able to rebuild its military fully for years, that does not mean it will abandon its long-term ambitions.

"Russia has not abandoned its goals — to destroy Ukraine, undermine NATO and challenge U.S. leadership. This is an ideological motivation that does not have to take material factors into account," Luzin said.

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