

# [***Poland Made A Better Russian-Style Tank And Gave It To Ukraine***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:67JK-KDJ1-DXVP-5007-00000-00&context=1516831)

Forbes.com

February 14, 2023 Tuesday

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**Length:** 707 words

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**Highlight:** Poland s first post-Soviet tank was the PT-91 Twardy. A faster, better-protected version of the Russian T-72M1 that, most critically, also boasts a new fire-control system with high-end optics.

**Body**

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Polish PT-91s during a 2017 exercise.

U.S. Army photo

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The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 left the Polish army s tank corps in a precarious position. Poland s tankers long had ridden in Soviet tanks. A Polish firm, Bumar-Labedy, even produced a licensed copy of the T-72, then the main Soviet tank type.

But Soviet or Russian support was about to end. Poland was moving toward the West and soon would join NATO. Anticipating the schism, the Polish army and its supporting industries devised a plan. The goal of that billion-dollar, 14-year effort: to make Poland an independent tank power.

Poland s first post-Soviet tank was the PT-91 Twardy. A faster, better-protected version of the Russian T-72M1 that, most critically, also boasts a new fire-control system with high-end optics.

Twenty-seven years after the PT-91 entered service with the Polish army, the tank went to war for the first time ...**against the Russians**. In the summer of 2022, just a few months after Russia widened its war on Ukraine, Warsaw began transferring to Kyiv many of the roughly 230 Twardys in the Polish arsenal.

The PT-91s Poland has been donating to Ukraine represent just a small part of Warsaw s wide-ranging military support for Kyiv. Poland has gifted to Ukraine, or**pledged** to gift,no fewer than 330 tanks. Old T-72M1s. PT-91s. Even a small number of German-designed Leopard 2s.

The latest pledge came on Monday. Polish prime minister Mateusz Morawiecki confirmed Ukraine has received around 250 T-72-style tanks, apparently including PT-91s. And Warsaw would send an additional 60 modernized T-72s and PT-91s in the near future, Morawieckisaid.

That Poland has been willing to give away a third of its tanksit can launch local productionof new American M-1s and South Korean K-2s speaks to Poland s determination to help Ukraine defeat Russia.

That many of those ex-Polish tanks are some of the better tanks Ukraine has gotten from its allies speaks to the Polish army and industry s success in freeing themselves from their former dependency on the Soviet Union.

To produce a PT-91, Bumar-Labedy starts with a 45-ton T-72M1 a downgraded export variant of the 1983-vintage, Soviet T-72A and replaces the engine, transmission, fire-controls,opticsand autoloader and adds bricks of Polish-made Erawa reactive armor.

The result is a tank that still looks a lot like a T-72. Same silhouette. Same 125-millimeter 2A46 main gun. Same three-person crew. But it s got an 850-horsepower diesel engine in place of the old, 780-horsepower model making it several miles per hour faster. The neatly-fitted reactive armor offers better protection against high-explosive rounds.

The new fire-controls are the PT-91 s most important feature, however. The stabilizer on the T-72M1 is crude and requires frequent recalibration, limiting the tank s accuracy while firing on the move. The Twardy adds new, more robust, two-axis stabilization.

A T-72M1 has a TPD-K1 day sight and a TPN-1-49-23 infrared night sight. The sights are mediocre even by 1980s standards.

The night sight in particular is problematic, as it s an**active** infrared sight. That is to say, it requires the crew to illuminate a target with an infrared spotlight. On a modern battlefield, a spotlight is worse than useless. It betrays the T-72 s position.

A trained gunner peering through a TPD-K1 day sight might be able to identify a target 3,000 yards away. At night, peering through a spotlight-aided TPN-1-49-23, he s blind past 800 yards or so.

The basic PT-91 upgrade adds a new SKO-1M Drawa-1T fire-control system that replaces the active infrared sight with a passive model no spotlight necessary and roughly doubles the identification range. The later PT-91M and PT-91MA1 have an even**better** Savan fire-control system.

All things being equal, the Ukrainian army clearly would prefer big consignments of the latest Western-designed tanks.Challenger 2s.Leopard 2s. M-1s. But the ***politics*** around Western tanks are fraught. By contrast, getting Polish PT-91s potentially lots of them has been pretty easy for Ukraine.

So while the Ukrainians wait for Challenger 2s, Leopard 2s and M-1s, they re riding into battle in Soviet-style tanks. The PT-91s might be the best of them.

**Load-Date:** February 15, 2023

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