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This one Toyota pickup truck is at the top of the shopping list for the Free Syrian Army — and the Taliban

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Rebels operating under the Free Syrian Army sit in a Hilux pickup truck on one of the battlefronts in Jobar, Damascus, August 2013

Credit: REUTERS/ Mohamed Abdullah

The Hilux, a pickup truck Toyota has built since the late 1960s, isn't available in the US, but it's popular around the globe, including with insurgent groups such as the

Taliban, al-Qaeda and Boko Haram.



Recently, when the US State Department resumed sending non-lethal aid to Syrian rebels, the delivery list included 43 Toyota trucks.

Hiluxes were on the Free Syrian Army's wish list. Oubai Shahbander, a Washington-based advisor to the Syrian National Coalition, is a fan of the truck.

"Specific equipment like the Toyota Hiluxes are what we refer to as force enablers for the moderate opposition forces on the ground," he adds. Shahbander says the US-supplied pickups will be delivering troops and supplies into battle. Some of the fleet will even become battlefield weapons.

"You can absolutely expect for many of those trucks to be mounted with crew-served machine guns or other type of equipment, military equipment, that the opposition forces have access to. I mean, that's one of the reasons why the Toyota Hilux is such an important force multiplier, because it could be used both for humanitarian purposes and for operational purposes as well."

Syria is only the latest war zone where the Hilux has been a vehicle of choice. The BBC's Kabul correspondent, David Loyn, saw the Hilux put through its paces by the Taliban in the 1990s, and credits the truck with having given Taliban forces a battlefield edge.

"They perfected very fast-moving maneuver warfare, and they did it with Hilux trucks," he says. "The Jane's Defense Weekly analysis of the seizure of Kabul in 1996 was that it was a textbook operation, from three sides, a coordinated piece of warfare using these Hilux trucks as very fast-moving troop-moving vehicles."

Loyn ranks the Hilux among the great game-changers of modern warfare. "You have seen in many wars in the past, a sort of symbolic weapon: the longbow at Agincourt, the Huey helicopter in Vietnam and, I think, the Hilux truck in Afghanistan in the hands of the Taliban was [as] significant and iconic a weapon as those."

Check out how the crew of BBC television's Top Gear sinks a Hilux pickup truck in a river, smashes it with a wrecking ball, then sets it on fire. And fails to kill it. No wonder fighters are attracted to the Hilux.

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