

# Technical (vehicle)

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Improvised fighting vehicle



A technical armed with the [DShK](#) belonging to the [Ansar Dine](#) jihadist group in [Timbuktu](#) in 2012



Non-standard Tactical Vehicles (NSTVs) used by the [United States Armed Forces](#) in [Syria](#) in 2019

A **technical**, in professional military parlance often called a **non-standard tactical vehicle (NSTV)**, is a light [improvised fighting vehicle](#), typically an open-backed civilian [pickup truck](#) or [four-wheel drive](#) vehicle,

mounting a [machine gun](#), [anti-aircraft gun](#), [rotary cannon](#), [anti-tank weapon](#), [anti-tank gun](#), [ATGM](#), [mortar](#), [multiple rocket launcher](#), [recoilless rifle](#) or other support weapon (somewhat like a light military [gun truck](#) or potentially even a [self-propelled gun](#)).

The [neologism](#) *technical* describing such a vehicle is believed to have originated in [Somalia](#) during the [Somali Civil War](#) in the early 1990s.<sup>[1][2]</sup> Barred from bringing in [private security](#), [non-governmental organizations](#) hired local gunmen to protect their personnel, using money defined as "technical assistance grants". Eventually the term broadened to include any vehicle carrying armed men.<sup>[3]</sup> However, an alternative account is given by [Michael Maren](#), who says the term was first used in Somalia in the 1980s, after engineers from Russian arms manufacturer *Tekniko* mounted weapons on vehicles for the [Somali National Movement](#).<sup>[1]</sup> Technicals have also been referred to as *battlewagons*, *gunwagons*,<sup>[4]</sup> or *gunships*.  
<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

Among [irregular armies](#), often centered on the perceived strength and charisma of [warlords](#), the prestige of technicals is strong. According to one article, "The Technical is the most significant symbol of power in southern [Somalia](#). It is a small truck with large tripod machine guns mounted on the back. A warlord's power is measured by how many of these vehicles he has."<sup>[5]</sup> Technicals are not commonly used by well-funded armies that are able to procure purpose-built combat vehicles, because the soft-skinned civilian vehicles that technicals are based on do not offer much protection to crew and passengers.

Technicals fill the niche of traditional [light cavalry](#). Their major asset is speed and mobility, as well as their ability to strike from unexpected directions with automatic fire and light troop deployment. Further, the reliability of vehicles such as the [Toyota Hilux](#) is useful for forces that lack the repair-related infrastructure of a conventional army. However, in direct engagements they are no match for heavier vehicles, such as [tanks](#) or other [armored fighting vehicles](#).

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## History[[edit](#)]

### Prototypes and early usage[[edit](#)]



"L" Detachment [SAS](#) in armed jeeps, during the [North African campaign](#) of World War Two

Light improvised fighting vehicles date back to the first use of [automobiles](#), and to the horse-drawn [tachankas](#) mounting [machine guns](#) in eastern Europe and Russia. At the [Bombardment of Papeete](#) during World War I, the French armed several Ford trucks with 37 mm guns to bolster their defense of the city.<sup>[6]</sup> During the Spanish Civil War, field guns were fixed to lorries to act as improvised self-propelled guns, while improvised armoured cars were constructed by attaching steel plates to trucks.<sup>[7]</sup> During [World War II](#), various British and Commonwealth units, including the [Long Range Desert Group](#) (LRDG), the No. 1 Demolition Squadron or 'PPA' ([Popski's Private Army](#)), and the [Special Air Service](#) (SAS) were noted for their exploits in the deserts of Egypt, Libya and Chad using unarmored motor vehicles, often fitted with machine guns. Examples of LRDG vehicles include the Chevrolet WB 30 cwt Patrol Truck<sup>[8]</sup> and the [Willys MB](#) Jeep.<sup>[9]</sup>



[USMC](#) launching a [TOW missile](#) during a 1980s training exercise at the [Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center](#)

The SAS' use of heavily armed Land Rovers continued post war with their use of Series 1 Land Rovers and later Series 11A 1968 Land Rovers in the [Dhofar Rebellion](#). The SAS painted their Land Rovers pink as it was found to provide excellent camouflage in the desert and they were nicknamed 'Pink Panthers' or Pinkies. The SAS also used a more modern Land Rover Desert Patrol Vehicle (DPV) during [Gulf War 1](#).<sup>[10]</sup>

### Western Sahara[[edit](#)]

Tactics for employing technicals were pioneered by the Sahrawi People's Liberation Army, the armed wing of the [Polisario Front](#), fighting for independence against [Mauritania](#) (1975–79) and [Morocco](#) (1975–present) from headquarters in [Tindouf, Algeria](#). Algeria provided arms and [Land Rovers](#) to [Sahrawi guerrillas](#), who

successfully used them in long-range desert raids against the less agile conventional armies of their opponents, recalling [Sahrawi](#) tribal raids ([ghazis](#)) of the pre-colonial period. Polisario later gained access to heavier equipment, but four-wheel drive vehicles remain a staple of their arsenal.<sup>[*citation needed*]</sup>

The Moroccan army quickly changed their strategy and created mounted units using technicals<sup>[11]</sup> to challenge Polisario speed and hit and run strategies in the large desert, where the Moroccan units proved their efficiency.

## **Chadian–Libyan conflict**<sup>[[edit](#)]</sup>

In 1987, [Chadian](#) troops equipped with technicals drove the heavily mechanized [Libyan](#) army from the [Aozou Strip](#). The vehicles were instrumental in the victory at the [Battle of Fada](#), and were driven over 150 km (93 mi) into Libya to [raid military bases](#). It was discovered that these light vehicles could ride through anti-tank minefields without detonating the mines when driven at speeds over 100 km/h. The vehicles had become so famous that, in 1984, *Time* dubbed early stages of the conflict the "[Great Toyota War](#)".<sup>[12]</sup>

The Toyota War was unusual in that the force equipped with improvised vehicles prevailed over the force equipped with purpose-built fighting vehicles. [MILAN anti-tank guided missiles](#) provided by [France](#) were key to the Chadian success, while the Libyan forces were poorly deployed and organized.

## **The Troubles in Northern Ireland**<sup>[[edit](#)]</sup>

Main article: [Improvised tactical vehicles of the Provisional IRA](#)

Throughout the [conflict in Northern Ireland \(1960s-1998\)](#), the [Provisional IRA](#) fitted vehicles, specially vans and trucks, with automatic weapons, heavy machine guns and improvised mortars. They also employed tractors and trailers to transport and fire improvised mortars.

## **Somali Civil War**<sup>[[edit](#)]</sup>

Technicals played an important role in the 1990s [Somali Civil War](#) and the [War in Somalia \(2006–2009\)](#). Even prior to the collapse of the SDR government, camouflaged Toyota pickup trucks with mounted M2 Browning machine guns appeared in Somali military parades during the 1980s. After the fall of the [Siad Barre](#) regime and the collapse of the [Somali National Army \(SNA\)](#), it was rare for any Somali force to field [armored fighting vehicles](#). However, technicals were very common.

Somali faction leader [Mohamed Farrah Aidid](#) used 30 technicals along with a force of 600 militia to capture [Baidoa](#) in September 1995.<sup>[13]</sup> It was reported that after his death in 1996, his body was carried to his funeral on a [Toyota](#) pickup.<sup>[14]</sup>

Proving their susceptibility to heavy weapons and their value as a military prize, the [Islamic Courts Union](#) (ICU) was able to capture 30 "battlewagons" during the defeat of warlord [Abdi Qeybdiid](#)'s militia at the [Second Battle of Mogadishu](#) in 2006.<sup>[15]</sup> That September, an impressive array of 130 technicals was used to take [Kismayo](#) from the forces of the [Juba Valley Alliance](#).<sup>[16]</sup>

On November 13, 2006, then President of [Puntland](#), General [Adde Musa](#), personally led fifty technicals to [Galkacyo](#) to confront the Islamists. They were used a month later against the army of the Islamic Courts Union at the [Battle of Bandiradley](#) alongside [Abdi Qeybdiid](#)'s reconstituted militia.<sup>[17]</sup>

However, forced into conventional battles in the [War in Somalia \(2006–2009\)](#) the unarmored technicals of the ICU proved no match for the [T-55](#) tanks, [Mil Mi-24](#) helicopter gunships and fighter-bombers employed

by [Ethiopia](#).<sup>[*citation needed*]</sup>

## War in Afghanistan<sup>[[edit](#)]</sup>

In the [War in Afghanistan](#), [U.S. special forces](#) were known to use technicals for patrol both because of the rugged terrain and the nature of their [clandestine operations](#).<sup>[18]<sup>[*citation needed*]</sup></sup> The [Taliban](#) also used technicals while they were in power.<sup>[19][20]</sup>

## Iraq War<sup>[[edit](#)]</sup>



[Iraqi National Guard](#) troops with a [PK machine gun](#) mounted on a fourth generation [Ford Courier](#)

Technicals were used by [Iraqi military](#) forces in the [2003 invasion of Iraq](#).<sup>[21]</sup> The [Iraqi Republican Guard](#) and [Fedayeen](#) emulated tactics of the [Somali National Alliance](#) with limited success,<sup>[22][23]</sup> but were outmatched by [Coalition](#) armor and aviation.<sup>[24][25]</sup> In the aftermath of the invasion technicals saw use by [Iraqi insurgents](#) for transporting personnel and quick raids against the [Iraqi police forces](#). The insurgent use of technicals increased after the [Iraq Spring Fighting of 2004](#).<sup>[*citation needed*]</sup>

Many military utility vehicles have been modified to serve as [gun trucks](#) to protect [Coalition](#) convoys. The [Humvee](#) allows for weapon mounts by design, so it is not considered a technical.

The Coalition also supplied technicals to the [Iraqi police](#).<sup>[26]</sup> [Private military contractors](#) also use technicals and the [United States military](#) used modified [Toyota Hiluxes](#), [Land Cruisers](#), and other trucks as well.<sup>[27]</sup>

## Darfur conflict<sup>[[edit](#)]</sup>

[Janjaweed](#) militias use technicals on their [raids against civilian villages](#) in [Darfur](#), [Sudan](#),<sup>[28]</sup> as do the [Sudan Liberation Army](#) (SLA) and [Justice and Equality Movement](#) (JEM) rebel troops in defense of their areas of operations.<sup>[29]</sup> Light vehicles such as technicals are often thought to be more mobile than armored vehicles, but on one occasion an African peace-keeper driving a [Grizzly AVGP](#) whose guns had jammed, succeeded in catching up with, ramming and rolling over a fleeing Sudanese technical.<sup>[30]</sup>

## Lebanon<sup>[[edit](#)]</sup>

Introduced by the [Palestine Liberation Organization](#) (PLO) guerrilla groups, technicals were extensively employed by all factions involved in the [Lebanese Civil War](#) between 1975 and 1990, including the Christian [Lebanese Front](#) and Muslim [Lebanese National Movement](#) (LNM) irregular militias, the [Lebanese Army](#) and the [Internal Security Forces](#) (ISF). Opposition forces have reportedly used technicals in the fighting for the [Chouf District](#) during the [May 2008 clashes in Lebanon](#).<sup>[31]</sup>

## Libyan civil war[[edit](#)]



A [ZU-23-2](#) technical used by the forces of the [National Transitional Council](#) during the Libyan civil war, in October 2011

During the [Libyan Civil War](#), both regime loyalist forces as well as the [anti-Gaddafi forces](#) used technicals extensively. The type of warfare that had been carried out in the conflict—wherein highly mobile groups of soldiers and rebels continued to move to and from on the desert terrain, retreating at a time and then suddenly attacking to regain control of small towns and villages in the Eastern rebel held parts of Libya—had led to the technical becoming a vehicle of choice for both sides.

Technicals had also been widely used by the rebels whilst setting up checkpoints. It also formed a vast percentage of the rebel inventory which was limited to light weapons, light body armor and very few tanks. Some medium [flatbed trucks](#) carried the Soviet-made [ZPU](#) and [ZU-23-2](#) towed anti-aircraft twin or quad barreled guns, as well as [recoilless rifles](#) and [S-5 rocket](#) helicopter rocket launcher pods.<sup>[32]</sup> Some rebels have improvised with captured heavy weaponry, like [BMP-1](#) turrets<sup>[33]</sup> and helicopter rocket pods, as well as lower-tech methods such as using doorbells to ignite rocket-launched ammunition.<sup>[34]</sup> Rebel technicals have also frequently employed [BM-21 Grad](#) rockets. Rocket tubes were salvaged from damaged regime [Ural-375D](#) trucks and mounted on the backs of pickups, with the technicals able to fire anywhere from one to six rockets.<sup>[35][36][37]</sup>

## Syrian Civil War[[edit](#)]

This article needs to be **updated**. Please help update this article to reflect recent events or newly available information. *(October 2015)*



[Kurdish militia](#) technical during the Syrian civil war

In the ongoing [Syrian Civil War](#), technicals are extensively used as improvised fighting vehicles, especially by [opposition forces](#) and the [Al-Nusra Front](#), who largely lack conventional fighting vehicles. [Syrian government forces](#) also use technicals, but on a smaller scale. The kind of weapons mounted on technicals varies widely, including [machine guns](#), [recoilless rifles](#), [anti-aircraft guns](#) (commonly [ZPU](#) and [ZU-23-2](#)) and even [BMP-1](#) turrets. The [Military of ISIL](#) extensively used technicals in Iraq and Syria.



An [SDF](#) technical in a village captured from [ISIS](#) near [Raqqa](#)

[Peshmerga](#) forces have used technicals to surround and attack [ISIS](#) targets.[\[38\]](#)

## War in Donbas[\[edit\]](#)

According to [Gazeta.ru](#), during the 2014 [war in Donbas](#) both sides were using home-made military vehicles. [\[39\]](#) OSCE monitors recorded 15 Russian armoured utility vehicles ([UAZ-23632-148 Esaul](#)) in a training area near non-government-controlled Oleksandrivska in April 2021.[\[40\]](#)[\[41\]](#)

## Yemeni Civil War[\[edit\]](#)

In the ongoing [Yemeni Civil War \(2015-present\)](#) [Houthis](#) and Hadi-aligned militias use technicals.

## Composition[\[edit\]](#)

Technicals consist of weapons mounted on a [four-wheel drive pickup truck](#). Many pickups have been used as technicals including [Ford Ranger](#) and [Mitsubishi Triton](#), but the most favoured are the [Toyota Hilux](#) and [Toyota Land Cruiser](#). They are typically fitted with [heavy machine guns](#) (especially the [DShK](#) and [M2 Browning](#)), anti-aircraft artillery (usually the [ZPU](#) or [ZU-23-2](#)), [recoilless rifles](#) (usually the [SPG-9](#) or [M40 recoilless rifle](#)), and [multiple rocket launchers](#) such as the [Type 63](#) or the [M-63 Plamen](#).

Optional add-ons include [improvised vehicle armour](#) such as welded steel plates, as defense against small arms fire.

## See also[\[edit\]](#)

- [Armadillo armoured fighting vehicle](#)
- [Boghammar](#)
- [Chariot](#) - ancient equivalent
- [Hit-and-run tactics](#)
- [Narco tank](#)
- [Portee](#)
- [Zamburak](#) - Late medieval equivalent

## References[\[edit\]](#)

- ↑  Jump up to: <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> Neville, L.; Dennis, P. (2018). *Technicals: Non-Standard Tactical Vehicles from the Great Toyota War to modern Special Forces*. New Vanguard. Bloomsbury Publishing. pp. 4, 21. ISBN 978-1-4728-2252-9. Retrieved January 23, 2019.
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- [A World of Dust](#)
- [Road Warrior](#) Journeyman Pictures, 1 September 1995; 50 minute documentary regarding technicals of Mogadishu

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