



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

F-16s change the Ukrainian front before landing



The F-16 fighter jet might become the first weapon to change the course of war drastically even before it appears on the battlefield.

Even if no F-16 appeared as part of the Ukrainian Air Force, which has until recently been almost impossible, it has already played an important role in favour of the Ukrainian defence against Russian aggression.

When it appears on the Ukrainian front, because now it is no longer a question of "if", F-16 non-combat capability will be equal to its combat capability, which has been emphasised in detail for months.

Since US President Joe Biden gave the green light for the delivery of fighter jets to Ukraine at the recent G7 summit in Hiroshima, its arrival on the "Eastern Front" is a matter of logistics and time, not politics.

Moscow's reaction to Biden's decision has been good confirmation of this as a significant shift in the Ukrainian crisis. The vocabulary was as threatening as before (regarding the membership of Sweden and Finland in NATO, for example), but at the same time, Moscow exhibited nervousness and even panic.

"We see that Western countries are still adhering to the escalation scenario. It involves colossal risks for themselves", said Deputy Head of Russian Diplomacy Alexander Grushko.

Not a game changer, but...

The combat capabilities of the US F-16 and the advantages and disadvantages of its use in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict have been established in detail.

Numerous expert comments emphasised that sending this aircraft to Ukraine could not be a "game changer" in itself. But some former and even active fighter jet pilots are convinced of this.

However, the rumour surrounding sending one of the most reliable and widely used fighter jets to Ukraine has been circulating for long enough to put a lot of pressure on Russia, and indirectly on the success of its war campaign.

The Ukrainian leadership has been asking its Western partners for this type of aircraft for a long time, as the help it would bring will perhaps represent a decisive advantage on the front.

President Zelensky did not demand more modern, efficient, and expensive aircraft, knowing this might be even less achievable. Considering F-16s are numerous in partner countries, and thus supplies would not be threatened by deliveries to Ukraine, they were adamant about the F-16s.

The legendary fighter has been in production since the mid-70s. More than 4,500 jets were produced, half of which are still in use today in as many as 25 countries.

This gives Ukraine and its partners scope to decide more easily on deliveries without worrying about stocks, just like recent deliveries of modern Western tanks.

Panic that will last

Ukraine receiving American fighter jets has been raising the optimism of Ukrainians for months. Their defence will receive a sudden, significant, and perhaps even decisive boost from their Western partners.

On the other side of the front line, the possibility of F16s appearing in the sky creates uneasiness, even fear, because the plans for the conquest of Ukraine most certainly did not include that possibility.

As if facing a nightmare they wanted to avoid, the Russians simply refuse to believe that a technologically and strategically new generation of weapons will soon be used against them, for which they will have no response.

"There is no infrastructure for the use of F-16s in Ukraine, and the required number of pilots and maintenance personnel is not there either", said Anatoly Antonov, the Russian ambassador to Washington, as if to comfort his own public.

Such nervousness, and perhaps even panic, will continue for months, given the undivided opinions that Ukrainian military pilots need time for full training on American fighter jets.

Faced with the very public hint of launching a Ukrainian counter-offensive, which is causing anxiety among front-line troops, the least the Russian military needs is the countdown to the arrival of the F-16s.

Deterring some future aggression

An even longer-term, but also psychological, problem of Russia and the arrival of the F-16s in Ukraine relates to its strategic and political decisions regarding the further conduct of the war, in particular how the war could end.

Delivery of F-16s to Ukraine is not a short-term loan to be returned when peace comes.

American fighter jets will be delivered to Ukraine and stay there. With fighter jets, the whole system of logistics, maintenance, weapons, and adaptation with other parts of the defence system is coming to Ukraine.

This means that Russia can forget its expectations that after achieving some kind of peace, it could always reactivate military actions against Kyiv, keeping Ukraine under constant tensions and occupied territories under its paw.

By announcing the introduction of the F16s into its defence ranks, Ukraine is already forcing Russia to change its current attack tactics, which are mainly based on missile and artillery strikes.

With the F16 factor, they will be less focused on offensive operations and more on plans to protect their missile and artillery systems from attack, which is already reducing Russia's offensive potential.

Belgorod part of the F16 supply operation?

The delivery of the F16s will keep Russia in constant fear of offensive actions on its territory, no matter how persuasive the West's warnings to Ukraine are that modern fighter jets are not to be used for that purpose.

The recent attack on the Russian border town Belgorod and the confusion over the identity of the attacking units only fuelled Russian fears that Ukraine would not shy away from offensive moves inside Russian territory.

After the Belgorod episode, it's hard to suppress the paranoia of what might happen when they get their hands on a weapon like

the F-16.

Regardless of when Ukraine receive American fighter jets and how long it will take to train pilots and technicians to operate and maintain these jets, the effect of this operation is already quite convincing.

The adoption of Western military technology also means the accelerated adaptation of Ukraine to Western military standards in wartime conditions, and its adoption, which will remain there permanently.

For Moscow, this should be a clear sign that its original war aims of taking over Ukraine and making it an integral part have been irretrievably abandoned.

Western support regarding the F-16 deliveries is also a huge moral boost for the Ukrainian defence, because it receives strong proof that its partners have its back.

"Even more important than all these military reasons, it gives Ukraine hope and a belief that we have their back; they deserve more than half a chance in their titanic struggle. We have seen what they can do with a few cheap drones; now imagine what they can do with modern Western jets", said Greg Bagwell, a retired Air Marshal, and former UK Air Commander.