



Ukraine's air force is now allowing foreigners to sign up as pilots as it pushes for Western fighter jets

Description

- Ukraine's Air Force will now allow foreigners to serve as pilots, engineers, and specialists.
- Ukraine said that its air force has been inundated with offers from people willing to fight Russia.
- It said it has enough pilots for now but will need specialists if Western combat aircraft arrive.

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Ukraine's Air Force said it will now allow foreigners to serve as pilots and engineering specialists, with a spokesperson stressing the fact that Ukraine will likely need international recruits if and when it starts to receive Western combat aircraft.

Yurii Ihnat, a spokesperson for the commander of Ukraine's air force, said in a statement Thursday that foreign citizens will be able to join if they have suitable military training.

"If they have a military occupation such as a pilot or aviation engineer, then these people can legally become servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine," he said.

The spokesperson said that Ukraine is not currently lacking pilots because it is operating Soviet-era aviation equipment, but added that a need for specialists might increase if it receives the new combat aircraft it desires.

"If we have F-16 or other types of equipment, then maybe [foreigners] will appear," Ihnat said. "Because the experience of people who have long been working with this equipment will be needed even for briefings."

Ihnat said that the air force had been inundated with offers from people willing to help since Russia's

invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, with some of these volunteers being from other countries.

He noted that the Ukrainian army already has foreigners serving in certain military units, including an International Legion of foreign soldiers.

Ukraine has been pushing its allies to send it advanced military aircraft.

NATO members Poland and Slovakia have already begun sending Ukraine MiG-29 jets, which are Soviet-era designs, but Ukraine is seeking modern Western jets such as the US-made F-16s.

Despite bipartisan calls in the US for President Joe Biden's administration to send F-16s, Biden himself said on February 24 that Ukraine "doesn't need F-16s now."

Insider's Christopher Woody reported on March 22 that using F-16s has certain requirements which could prove challenging for Ukraine to meet. He also wrote that acquiring the jets, training the pilots and engineers to use and maintain them, and transferring them to Ukraine could take up to two years.

Serhii Holubtsov, chief of aviation of Ukraine's Air Force, however, told The Times of London that Ukrainian fighter pilots would be ready to fly F-16 jets after fewer than six months of training.

Retired Lt. Col. Dan "Two Dogs" Hampton, speaking to Voice of America, said it would be faster to send pilots who know how to fly F-16s than to send Ukrainians to a US training program — a more plausible option now that foreigners can serve.

Insider's Isobel van Hagen previously reported that Hampton, who is a decorated former US F-16 pilot, said he would volunteer himself to fly F-16s for Ukraine if the US eventually decides to send them.

"I'll even go myself. You can count on me," Hampton said, per Voice of America.

by Joshua Zitser

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Date Created

03/26/2023