

Will Biden Send US Airpower for Ukraine Offensive?

Description

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If Ukrainian collapse is imminent, Biden doesn't need NATO for a decision to use 'volunteers' in rebadged planes



A Ukrainian boneyard is filled with broken-down leftover Soviet aircraft. Still usable planes in the Ukrainian air force are not a great deal better. Will Biden send rebadged planes with 'volunteer' pilots? Photo: English Russia

As a practical matter, any modern military offensive launched without air cover is a suicide mission.

Ukraine no longer has much of an air force, even with the addition of perhaps a dozen or so old MIG-29s acquired from NATO countries. Some of those are not flyable and others are being disassembled and used for parts.

Ukraine's operational fighter aircraft have to fly against more advanced Russian fighters including the formidable Su-35, and survive in combat against mobile Russian air defenses.

Whatever Ukraine has, its air force cannot be expected to last more than a few days in a major combat, if that.

And yet, Ukraine is planning a new offensive. It is possible that US President Joe Biden is planning to provide air support to the Ukrainian army or at least has winked in the direction of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Biden already has said he won't let Ukraine fall. But, even within the administration, some are questioning the wisdom of supporting a major offensive, citing fears that the Ukrainians don't have the troops or the tactics to succeed.

This raises the question of whether Ukraine's military leaders are going ahead knowing full well they are sending their land forces into a meat grinder, or whether they have been given assurances that the US will neutralize Russia's air force and air defenses. Is there a possibility that Zelensky has been offered American planes and pilots with rebadged F-16s?

There is nothing new in the idea of "volunteer" air operators. Remember the Flying Tigers of World War II or Russian pilots in Chinese uniforms flying rebadged MIGs in the Korean war, or Russian pilots pretending to be Egyptian flyboys in the Egypt-Israel War of Attrition (1967-1970).

How well American aircraft would perform against layered Russian air defenses is not certain, but if the Russians are only half-successful, the US could lose many planes and pilots. Worse still, the Russians may attack American bases outside of Ukraine, including in Poland and Romania, vastly escalating the war in response to American escalation.

The strategy and tactics of the Ukrainian Army are clearly dictated at times by politics. Military leaders have made it known that they were told by Zelensky to stay in Bakhmut and other urban hot spots, resulting in huge casualties.

Attempts to relieve Bakhmut by sending in more troops and by a counteroffensive that Tass reports has been "thwarted," have only helped a little because, with muddy secondary roads and fields and heavy rain, the relief operations have been limited to light equipment.

In the last few weeks, President Zelensky appears to have somewhat moderated his posture, telling his army it only needs to hold out there until mid-May when the anticipated offensive in the south will begin. But then, Zelensky made another U-turn and said there will be no surrender in Bakhmut.

Bakhmut does not have much to do with a planned Ukrainian offensive that will move tens of thousands of troops against Russian positions further south. So, it seems Zelensky's order to hang in there makes no sense. If Bakhmut is a lost cause, it would make sense for the Ukrainian army to pull out.

Ukrainian Brigadier General Sergey Melnik told Spain's El Pais that Ukraine has already lost most of its professional soldiers and that Ukraine "will need 'four to six times' as many troops as Moscow has fielded in its ongoing military campaign" if it is to break through the defenses built by the Russian forces in their current positions.

For its planned offensive, Ukraine is said to have assembled a force of 60,000 (if they operate fully staffed) consisting of 12 brigades, nine of which have some Western equipment including tanks, armored personnel carriers and infantry fighting vehicles, and artillery and rocket launchers.

Such a large force, even if it is broken into separate pincer-style operations, is going to be easily discoverable. Russia has drones and satellites, as well as ground observers. It has use of east-to-west road structures to move its equipment and men. Russia also is superior in artillery and rocket launchers.

As yet, Ukraine has done little in the way of offensive strikes. Instead, it has been fighting defensive battles in urban towns, cities and villages, digging in its forces in a manner reminiscent of the trench warfare of World War I.

Even in this conservative type of operation, Ukraine has heavy and increasing casualties. While it is nearly impossible to get reliable numbers, the leaked Pentagon/CIA documents estimate that Ukraine is losing seven soldiers to every Russian.

Put these same forces on the offensive, and the casualties are likely to soar, perhaps ten to one or even 20 to one. Ukraine cannot sustain losses on this scale. There are already units refusing to fight and the Russians say Ukrainian troops are walking across lines and surrendering rather than continue to be exposed to the Russian "meat grinder."

Take Russian comments as you will, but it is ironic that Western media, which had been emphasizing horrific Russian losses, seem to have turned to heavy Ukrainian casualties.

If Biden sees an imminent Ukrainian collapse, the possibility of American intervention cannot be ruled out. He does not need NATO for a decision to use "volunteers," but if he does so, there is plenty of reason to think NATO will collapse anyway – not because NATO is attacked but because NATO was deceived.

Dragging Europe into a big war is something even the dumbest European leaders worry about, and they should. NATO has been skirting disaster for some time now, provoking the Russians beyond reason.

Why NATO is so keen on this course is hard to fathom: Probably it is intense pressure from the United States. Germans know just how reckless the Biden administration can be as they watch the bubbles rising to the surface in the Baltic Sea.

Does the Biden administration really want to take this immense risk? Does Zelensky, who could find a Russian response in a nuclear attack on Kiev, think this will assure his future?