

Will US-NATO Soon Pilot Ukrainian F-16s Out of Moldova for Sorties Against Russia?

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This scenario carries with it very serious potential consequences.

The [report](#) late last month that Ukraine finally received some of its [long-awaited F-16s](#), at least one of which was then [spotted](#) flying over Odessa, was followed earlier this week by two related developments. Senator Lindsey Graham [revealed](#) during a press conference in Kiev that Zelensky wants to hire retired Western pilots to fly the F-16s until his country trains enough of its own, shortly after which Russia [summoned](#) the Moldovan charge d'affaires amidst reports that they'll be based in his country.

If this comes to pass, then Westerners will soon pilot Ukrainian F-16s out of Moldova for sorties against Russia, including nearby Crimea but also possibly parts of its pre-2014 territory like [Kursk Region](#). This scenario carries with it very serious potential consequences. For starters, while those mercenary pilots wouldn't officially represent their countries, their participation in the conflict would almost certainly be seen by Russia as further proof of the West escalating everything in the direction of direct involvement.

Flying out of Moldova would be less provocative than flying out of NATO countries like Poland or Romania, though that could still possibly happen if some of Ukraine's F-16s [are stored there](#). Nevertheless, it's still not without any risks either since Russia could retaliate against Moldova if any planes from there carry out strikes against its territory, including former Ukrainian lands. That might in turn lead to Moldova [invading its breakaway region](#) of Transnistria where Russia troops are still based.

A rekindling of that frozen conflict could involve Ukraine and/or neighboring Romania between whom Moldova is sandwiched. Kiev is looking for another quick morale boost while Bucharest could see an opportunity to [forcibly reincorporate its historic region](#) that only became an independent state by chance due to the USSR's dissolution. Russia's [estimated 1,100 troops](#) there could easily be outmatched if that happens, but the legacy of its modern-day Thermopylae might be long-lasting.

It's difficult to imagine Russia declining to declare war against Moldova in that scenario since public pressure might become impossible to withstand, in which case Moldova could be destroyed in revenge if Russia finally stops fighting with [one hand tied behind its back for political reasons](#) like it presently is. Regardless of whatever happens to all or part of Ukraine in that scenario, there'd still be the risk of a hot war breaking out with NATO [if any of its forces](#) inside of Moldova are killed during Russia's retaliation.

Considering the enormity of what's at stake, which could include forcible reincorporation

into Romania despite the majority of society's wishes [per a reliable poll](#) from August 2023 as well as the risk of World War III being sparked by miscalculation as explained, Moldovans might protest against hosting the F-16s. "[Putin Implied The Possibility Of Forthcoming Anti-Elite Protests In Moldova](#)" last fall so his forecast might soon come to pass if it's confirmed that Moldova will indeed serve as an anti-Russian airbase.

At the same time, there's always the possibility that Russia restrains itself for the "greater good" like it's thus far done in spite of so many other perceived red lines having already been crossed. The rationale might be that it's not worth turning Transnistria into a modern-day Thermopylae, let alone risking a hot war with NATO, especially if Russia is able to defend itself from this new threat. While some might breathe a sigh of relief, others will worry that this could embolden the West to cross even more red lines.

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