



# Guardians of the Ukraine: The Ukrainian Air Force Since 1992

*Babak Taghvae*

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Ukraine inherited a large portion of the former Soviet Air Force's equipment and infrastructures after its independence. 944 military aircraft including 137 heavy strategic bombers were quickly inducted into service with the Air Force on 17 March 1992, when it was officially established. This huge amount of military equipment made it the second most powerful air power in Europe. With a large variety of exotic combat aircraft types, including the last operational Yak-28s and Su-15s in the world, and with four fighter/ground attack/bomber divisions and seven fighter/ground-attack/ electronic countermeasures/ reconnaissance regiments, the Ukrainian Air Force has become an attraction to aircraft lovers as well as air defense analysts.

The financial problems and new defensive doctrine of the country were two principal factors for the decline in combat strength and expenditures of its Air Force during the past 23 years. However the downsized and weakened Air Force wasn't the shadow of former Soviet airpower, but since the mid-2000s the country's aircraft repair plants inaugurated numerous upgrade projects for the enhancement of the combat readiness of the aircraft and helicopters of the force.

In 2014, when the territorial disputes on the Crimea peninsula started before morphing into to a full-scale war with pro-Russian separatists, the Ukrainian Air Force had a fleet of 66 operational-ready fighter planes in service across seven Tactical Aviation Brigades, by means of which a series of interdiction and close air support missions were conducted. However during the war approximately 14 fighter/bombers of the air force have been lost, although its outbreak provided motivation for its commanders to start rebuilding its combat strength.

This book provides a detailed look on the organization and combat strength of the air force, and its aircraft and helicopters. Drawing on a wide range of previously unseen photographs supplemented by specially commissioned color artwork, Guardians of the Ukraine presents all types of combat, transport and training aircraft, as well as helicopters previously or currently operated by the Ukrainian Air Force, many of which are supported by captions detailing individual aircraft histories.

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