



War in the Ukrainian Skies: Air Shield with Korkut Anti-Aircraft Guns and F-16 Fighters

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As the conflict continues and Ukraine's skies remain under waves of air attacks, **the issue of defending against low-cost drones has become an absolute priority** and one of Kyiv's most complex economic challenges. To counter this threat, Ukraine is combining several technological solutions, from foreign-made automated air-defense systems to the use of F-16 fighters.

The cost dilemma: multimillion-dollar missiles versus cheap drones

Russia's extensive use of "kamikaze" drones (modeled on Iranian Shahed systems) and jet-powered aircraft has severely strained traditional defenses. **Producing a Shahed drone costs only a few tens of thousands of dollars** (approximately **\$70,000**), but employing advanced interceptors such as **Patriot PAC-3** or **IRIS-T** missiles entails costs ranging from **hundreds of**

thousands to millions of dollars per launch. Consequently, the exclusive use of missiles is **economically unsustainable** over the long term.

The Turkish technology contribution: the Korkut system

This scenario has led to the deployment of new solutions aimed at reducing defense costs. Aselsan CEO Ahmet Akyol confirmed to the *Financial Times* that **the automated Korkut air defense system is operational in Ukraine** — as well as in nine other countries — and has enabled the destruction of hundreds of drones.

- **Cost efficiency:** The Korkut system uses 35 mm programmable airburst rounds (estimated at around **\$1,000 each**).
- **Cost savings:** It can shoot down a kamikaze drone at a **total cost of less than \$10,000**, making it a far more efficient response than traditional missiles.
- **Theoretical capabilities:** Although there are no public records of a Korkut being used against faster jet-powered drones, analysts note that the system is designed to **counter fast, low-altitude targets**, such as cruise missiles and subsonic aircraft (700-900 km/h).

Frontline use of F-16 fighters: successes and operational limits

On the other hand, Ukraine has integrated **U.S.-made F-16 fighters** into its defense line, described by President Volodymyr Zelensky as **one of the most effective tools** for intercepting drones threatening its cities.

- **Operational successes:** Ukrainian pilots have achieved important results; in a single month, the fighters intercepted a significant share of the jet-powered drones launched by Russia, and **one pilot shot down 10 drones during a single flight**.
- **Fleet wear:** Kyiv's small fleet of F-16s (**about 50 aircraft in total**) is constantly flying, with roughly half the aircraft temporarily grounded for maintenance in Europe, increasing the **risk of failures and wear**.
- **Strategic cost:** Military experts, such as retired General David A. Deptula notes that **every F-16 mission used to pursue a drone is one less resource** available for air counterattacks or the strategic offensive.

- **Logistical and training shortfalls:** Operating them requires significant time, complex training programs (such as the one underway at Fetesti Air Base in Romania), and a steady supply of munitions and spare parts.

Toward a layered defense

To reduce pressure on its F-16 fleet and optimize financial resources, Ukraine is seeking to develop and integrate additional interceptors and **layered air defense systems**. Kyiv's objective remains to strike a **sustainable balance** between the immediate protection of urban centers and preserving its long-term military capabilities.