

War in Ukraine

France open to sending fighter jets to Ukraine

President Emmanuel Macron says 'nothing is excluded' after US rules out supplying F-16s



A Mirage 2000 fighter jet flying over Paris. France had 106 such jets in service at the start of 2022, all of which will be replaced by fifth-generation Rafale jets by 2030 © Christophe Simon/AFP/Getty Images

Leila Abboud in Paris, **Henry Foy** in Brussels and **Ben Hall** in London 4 HOURS AGO

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France has signalled openness to sending fighter jets to Ukraine as western countries weigh the next steps in military assistance to help Kyiv resist Russian attacks.

“By definition, nothing is excluded,” President Emmanuel Macron said at a press conference in The Hague on Monday, adding that he had not received a request for jets from Ukraine.

Since the US and Germany announced last week their decision to send [main battle tanks](#) to Kyiv — something France has not yet done — Ukraine’s backers have turned their attention to the possibility of supplying US-made F-16 or other western fighter jets. Ukrainian officials have said more advanced aircraft would help bolster air defences, repel Russian attacks and help prepare for a renewed offensive in the spring.

US president Joe Biden on Monday night [ruled out](#) sending F-16s to Ukraine, which appeared to dent Kyiv’s hopes that its biggest backer would lead the movement on the jets. Germany has [taken a similar stance](#), but some more hawkish European countries such as Poland are in favour of sending combat aircraft under certain conditions

SUCH AS F-16S ARE IN FAVOUR OF SENDING COMBAT AIRCRAFT UNDER CERTAIN CONDITIONS.

Paris has informed other European capitals that the possibility of sending additional weapons systems, including jets, is on the table, according to two officials briefed on the discussions, but a decision is unlikely to be made in the immediate future.



French president Emmanuel Macron: 'We make ... decisions based on the requests Ukraine makes, not the rumours going around' © Valeria Mongelli/Bloomberg

The priority remains to provide air and missile defence systems, they said, and the new push to provide tanks and train Ukrainian crews to use them.

Ukraine's defence minister Oleksiy Reznikov will be in Paris on Tuesday for meetings with his French counterpart and Macron, and the issue of military assistance will be discussed.

On Monday night, Macron once again laid out the criteria France uses when considering requests for military gear from [Ukraine](#): will it be useful and practical for the Ukrainian army to use? Does it pose the risk of escalation? Will supplying the military hardware weaken French military capabilities?

"We make these decisions based on the requests Ukraine makes, not the rumours going around ... every time we get a request we consider it," he added at the press conference, following a meeting with Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte.

Based on such criteria, France has so far decided not to send its Leclerc main battle tanks to Kyiv, although Macron has not ruled it out and has agreed to send lighter

armoured personnel carriers known as the [AMX-10](#). Ukraine was keener to acquire German-built Leopard 2 tanks.

Kyiv is also in negotiations with the French and Italian governments to obtain a SAMP/T advanced medium-range air defence system, similar to the US Patriot battery, which can shoot down ballistic missiles.

Defence analysts expect that France would send an older model of its Mirage jets to Ukraine if Macron opted to supply combat aircraft. Manufactured by Dassault Aviation, France had 106 Mirage 2000s in service at the beginning of last year, all of which will be replaced by fifth-generation Rafale jets by 2030.

France retired 14 Mirage 2000-C jets in June, so giving them to Ukraine would not degrade French military capabilities, and it will phase out a further 26 Mirage 2000-5 interceptors over the next few years.

Given that France makes its own jets, there would be no need for third-party approval to export them. Several European armed forces operate F-16s but would require US authorisation to send them to Ukraine. That made French jets a more obvious candidate, one of the European officials said.