

F-35 Pilot: NATO Could “Completely Destroy the Russian Forces”
Kyle Mizokami - Popular Mechanics



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A former F-35 test pilot weighed in on the fighter jet’s performance in the Ukraine conflict and how it represents a massive leap forward from Cold War-era aircraft.

Billie Flynn contends the F-35 is so different from Soviet Cold War fighters that pilots used to the latter would be unable to transition to the F-35.

Flynn also thinks the F-35 is the most survivable aircraft for the dangerous skies over [Ukraine](#).

One of the most noted authorities on the F-35 has some interesting things to say about the jet, including how it would fit in with European air forces, and how suitable the fighter is for the air war over Ukraine.

Billie Flynn, a former Lockheed Martin test pilot, also talked about how the jet represents a massive leap forward from older, [Soviet-designed fighter jets](#), noting that the pilots who train them would be unable to learn how to fly the F-35. Flynn also believes the F-35 is the only jet that can survive in the lethal air environment over Ukraine.

Billie Flynn is one of the most accomplished test pilots around. [Flynn](#) originally flew CF-18 Hornets for the Royal Canadian Air Force, and later flew as a test pilot for the Euro-fighter Typhoon.

He later went on to fly for Lockheed Martin for 17 years, from 2003 to 2020, in support of the [Joint Strike Fighter](#) program. Flynn is a big fan of the F-35, and if there’s anyone who knows the jet inside and out, it’s him.

In a wide-ranging interview with [The Aviationist](#), Flynn touched upon a number of points about the F-35. One of the most interesting is his assertion that pilots in Eastern European countries that still fly Soviet-era fighters are just going to be unable to fly a fifth-generation jet like the F-35.

Three NATO countries—Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Poland—still fly the Soviet MiG-29 fighter jet, classified by NATO in the 1980s as the “Fulcrum.” The MiG-29, designed in the late 1970s, is the equivalent of the American [F-16 Fighting Falcon](#).

The collapse of the Warsaw Pact in 1989 and the absorption of most countries into NATO means that some countries fly both MiG-29s and F-16s. And, as it continues to modernize, Poland will soon be in the unique position of flying [MiG-29s](#), F-16s, and F-35s. Does this mean a Polish pilot could fly all three?

Not so fast, says Flynn. He contends that pilots that have flown Soviet-era fighters for the bulk of their careers would simply be unable to effectively fly the F-35. The MiG-29 is a completely different [aircraft](#) built with different design philosophies in mind.

The MiG also lacks the technological sophistication of the F-35, from the stealthy design to the distributed aperture system that allows the pilot to “see” through the side of his aircraft.



Gallo Images - Getty Images A Polish Air Force F-16. Poland operates 36 F-16Cs with 32 F-35A Joint Strike Fighters on order.

A pilot unused to such advances, flying on muscle memory and learned instinct, might not properly take advantage of everything the F-35 has to offer. Flynn believes that Poland’s air force, which could soon fly all three jets, would likely push F-16 pilots into the F-35, leaving MiG pilots to close out their careers on the aging jets.



DIMITAR DILKOFF - Getty Images A Russian S-400 surface-to-air missile. The S-400 is widely considered one of the most effective air defense systems in the world, and the F-35 was built to operate within its range envelope.

Flynn also believes that the F-35 would dominate in the air war over Ukraine, because it is exactly the environment the jet was built to excel in. The war has already [claimed more than three dozen fighters and attack jets](#) from both sides.

Ukrainian Air Force jets, for example, not only have to deal with Su-30M Flanker and [Su-35 Flanker-E](#) twin engine, multi-role fighters, but S-400 long-range air defense systems and short-range battlefield air defense systems.

Russian fighters must contend with Ukrainian fighters, Ukraine's original air defense network, and now an increasing number of surface-to-air missile systems donated by NATO.

The F-35 is only the second fighter jet in history developed with stealth technology from the ground up, and specifically with the S-400 missile system in mind.

Furthermore, Flynn believes the jet's network of sensors, and ability to share data with other aircraft and ground assets, would make it an efficient air-defense killer, identifying S-400s and similar platforms and then killing them with ruthless efficiency.

Flynn asserts that while nobody wants NATO dragged into the war, if it was, it would "completely destroy the Russian forces."