

Kuban Security: *The Story of Russia's privately owned Air Force*
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You have all seen the ads. Fly a MiG in Moscow. It is nothing new and since the fall of the Soviet Union, flying a MiG 25 or MiG 29 is not a new thing. In fact, it is one of the more profitable ventures of the Russian Federation that helped in particular its Air Force with both flying time and bringing some hard earned cash into the Russian economy that was undergoing the controversial shock therapy treatment.

What is less known that inspired by similar western organisations, a wealthy individual started up Kuban Security 1999 with just a few aging MiG 23s in a sleepy airport near the Black Sea. His intention officially was to sell Aggressor Squadron services to the former Soviet Republics with the blessing of the Russian Federation leadership. The intention was that a privately owned aggressor company - similar to companies in the US - would be cheaper to operate and be able to test the Air Force pilots by using inventive tactics and Dissimilar Air Combat Training.

The Air Force was expanded in 2003 with fourteen ex-Swedish Air Force AJS 37 Viggens who was sold under an era of "Strategic Blackout" alongside a large supply of weapon pods and spare parts. Kuban Security even got permission to purchase a small number of RB 04E Missiles for "evaluation as target drones" before the Swedish Government stopped sale for all weapons for the airplanes. By that point it was too late with Kuban Security having tasked a national arms manufacturer to produce rockets and bombs for the airplanes while adapting the Viggens to carry Russian Air Force weapons such as the K-13 and KH-29 missiles.

The reason for these adaptations was the market for Private Military Companies to provide different services abroad. The Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq saw demand for private solutions to military problems soar and not just in the Middle East. Asia, Africa and even South America saw business opportunities for companies that had military hardware suitable for difficult operations. It is unclear exactly how many countries called upon Kuban Security for clandestine operations against a wide array of targets but it is known they took part in the Georgian War of 2008.

In early 2009, the company got an unofficial warning from the Russian Federation Ministry of Defence; unless they could provide potent aggressor training for Russian Forces, the lucrative contracts would be left to expire. With few manufacturers willing to sell capable combat jets to a private company, Kuban Security turned to Chengdu Aircraft Industry Group. While hesitant, the Chinese Government approved the sale of twelve JF-17 Thunder of the Block I variant to Kuban Security to be delivered in installments of four. The sale also involved a number of simulated and real export-grade weapons systems compatible with the JF-17 Thunder.

As the writing of this article, Kuban Security have equipped one flight with the JF 17 Thunder (Block I) and retains one flight of AJS 37 Viggens; kept flying by cannibalising the other eight for spare parts....