



By: TA | AP Brief

US military aircraft hit in Iran war are first shot down by enemy fire in over 20 years



Iran **shooting down** two American military aircraft marks an exceedingly rare assault for the U.S. that has not happened in more than 20 years and shows the Islamic Republic's continued ability to hit back despite President Donald Trump asserting it has been "completely decimated."

The attacks came five weeks after U.S. and Israeli strikes first pounded Iran, with **Trump saying** earlier this week that Tehran's "ability to launch missiles and drones is dramatically curtailed."

Iran shot down a U.S. F15-E Strike Eagle fighter jet Friday, with one service member getting rescued and the search still underway for a second, U.S. officials say.

Iranian state media also said a U.S. A-10 attack aircraft crashed after being hit by Iranian defense forces.

The last time a U.S. fighter jet was shot down in combat was an A-10 Thunderbolt II during the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, said retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Houston Cantwell, a former F-16 fighter pilot.

But, he said, that's because the U.S. had largely been fighting insurgents who didn't have the same **anti-aircraft capabilities**.

The fact that there have not been more fighter jets lost in Iran, Cantwell said, is a testament to the capabilities of U.S. forces.

"The fact that this hasn't happened until now is an absolute miracle," said Cantwell, who served four combat tours and is now a senior resident fellow at the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies. "We're flying combat missions here, they are being shot at every day."

Shoulder-fired missile likely used

U.S. Central Command said in a statement Wednesday that American forces have flown

more than 13,000 missions in the Iran war while striking more than 12,300 targets.

After more than a month of punishing U.S.-Israeli airstrikes, a degraded Iranian military nonetheless remains a stubborn foe.

Its steady stream of strikes against Israel and Gulf **Arab neighbors** have been causing regional upheaval and global **economic shock**.

When it comes to American dominance over Iran's airspace, there's still a distinction between air superiority and air supremacy, said Behnam Ben Taleblu, Iran program senior director at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a hawkish Washington think tank.

"A disabled air defense system is not a destroyed air defense system," he said. "We shouldn't be shocked that they're still fighting."

American planes have been flying missions at lower altitudes, which makes them more vulnerable to Iran's missiles, Taleblu said.

It's possible that Iran fired at the F-15 with a surface-to-air missile, but it's more likely that a portable, shoulder-fired missile was used, he said.

Those are much harder to detect and reflect how Iran is "weak but still lethal."

"This is a regime that is fighting for its life," he said.