

Air Force Pilot Involved in Su-27 Crash in Ukraine, Fate Unknown



A Su-27 Flanker takes off from Starokostiantyniv Air Base, Ukraine, Oct. 10 during the afternoon launch as part of Clear Sky 2018. The exercise is the first large-scale, air-centric, multinational regional security exercise that United States Air Forces in Europe - Air Forces Africa has sponsored in eastern Europe since 2014.

(Charles Vaughn/Air National Guard)

16 Oct 2018

Military.com | By Oriana Pawlyk

The status of a U.S. Air Force pilot who was aboard a Ukrainian Su-27UB fighter that crashed in that country's Khmelnytskyi region during Exercise Clear Sky still remains unclear hours after the disaster.

The crash occurred at approximately 5 p.m. local time, officials with U.S. Air Forces Europe-Africa said in a statement.

"We understand there was an American in the backseat of the aircraft," the statement said, adding that the Air Force is investigating the incident.

The Ukrainian General Staff had issued an earlier online statement indicating that both a Ukrainian pilot and an American pilot were on board and killed in the crash. The statement has since been taken down.

The accident follows an emergency landing by an Air Force F-15 Eagle that occurred Friday.

An F-15D participating in the exercise "had a minor mechanical issue in flight on Friday that caused the sortie to be cut short," Air Force Maj. Tristan Hinderliter told Military.com in an email. "The aircraft landed without incident back at Starokostiantyiv Air Base and is expected to resume participating in the exercise this week."

Hundreds of U.S. and Ukrainian airmen are conducting flight operations at Starokostiantyiv between Lviv and Kiev in Ukraine's western region in the two-week exercise, a first of its kind.

U.S. assets participating include six F-15C Eagles from the 144th Fighter Wing, based at Fresno Air National Guard Base, Calif.; an F-15D from the 48th Fighter Wing, at RAF Lakenheath, England; and C-130Js from the Guard's 146th Airlift Wing, operating out of Vinnytsia Air Base.

Pararescue airmen from California's 129th Rescue Wing are also in Vinnytsia for combat search-and-rescue training with their Ukrainian counterparts. Other airmen and aircraft, such as an MQ-9 Reaper drone, are operating out of Poland for the missions.

Officials told Military.com last week that Clear Sky is the first time F-15s from the California Air National Guard have touched down in Ukraine, and the first time the aircraft has been in Ukraine overall since 1998.

The exercise is meant to enhance regional security, offering training with the Ukrainians to increase interoperability with NATO allies and other partners in the region, officials have said.