KC-135 US Air Force crashes in Iraq: rescue operations ongoing, at least five people on board

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A **KC-135 Stratotanker** tanker aircraft of the **US Air Force** went down on Thursday in **western Iraq** during US military operations against Iran. This was confirmed by the **U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM)**, which specified that the incident occurred in **friendly airspace** and **was not caused by hostile or friendly fire**.

According to the military statement, **two aircraft** were involved in the episode: **one was lost in western Iraq**, while **the second landed safely**. Subsequently, a US official told **CNN** that the second aircraft was also a **KC-135**.

CENTCOM also announced that, at the time of the release, **rescue operations were still ongoing**. The statement did not specify whether there were any **injuries or casualties** among the American military personnel involved.

According to a US official speaking to CNN, **at least five crew members were on board the crashed aircraft**. Under normal conditions, a **KC-135** crew consists of **three or four military personnel**: **pilot, co-pilot, and boom operator**, who is responsible for the in-flight refueling boom. On some missions, **navigators** may also be present, depending on the operational profile.

The Air Force has not clarified what the **specific mission** of the two tankers was at the time of the incident. However, **KC-135s** are regularly used for **in-flight refueling**, a central function in long-range air operations, and can also be configured for **cargo transport** or **medical patient transport**.

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The incident occurred during the so-called **Operation Epic Fury**, the name the Pentagon uses for the ongoing US military campaign against Iran. Numerous KC-135s are currently deployed in the CENTCOM area of responsibility, used to support the sorties of other aircraft.

The **KC-135 Stratotanker** is one of the oldest platforms still in service in the US Air Force inventory. The last unit was delivered in **1965**. Derived from the civilian jet **Boeing 707**, the four-engine aircraft has received significant upgrades over time, including engine replacements. According to a US Congressional report, **376 units** were in active service last year.

The loss of the tanker represents the **fourth known incident of a US crewed aircraft loss** since the beginning of the war with Iran. Last week, **three F-15E Strike Eagle fighters** were shot down over **Kuwait** in a friendly fire error; on that occasion, all six crew members managed

to eject and save themselves.

CENTCOM explained that further details will be released “**as the situation evolves**” and asked for patience to gather additional information, so as to “**provide clarity to the families of the involved military personnel**.”

News link: https://www.armytimes.com/flashpoints/2026/03/12/us-air-force-kc-135-goes-down-in-iraq-centcom-says/