

# US special forces launch rescue operation inside Iran after downing of US fighter jet

Andre Damon  
3 April 2026

Iranian air defenses shot down an F-15E Strike Eagle jet over western Iran Friday, the first US aircraft shot down by Iranian fire since the war began. Following the downing, US special forces launched a rescue operation inside Iran to recover the pilot. *Axios* reported that “US special forces located one of the crew members and rescued him, alive, on Iranian territory.” The other crew member remains missing inside Iran.

The rescue operation came as roughly 7,500 Marines from three Marine Expeditionary Units and a combat brigade from the 82nd Airborne Division’s Immediate Response Force arrived or were en route to the Persian Gulf, joining more than 50,000 US service members already in the region. The buildup points toward a ground invasion.

Following the downing of the aircraft, President Donald Trump wrote on Truth Social: “With a little more time, we can easily OPEN THE HORMUZ STRAIT, TAKE THE OIL, & MAKE A FORTUNE.” Seizing Iran’s oil would require a ground invasion and occupation.

A second aircraft, an A-10 Thunderbolt, was shot down in a separate incident the same day. The pilot ejected over Kuwaiti airspace and was rescued. Two HH-60G rescue helicopters sent to recover the F-15E’s crew were also hit by Iranian fire, injuring US personnel aboard before returning to base. In all, four American aircraft were struck in a single day—the worst losses of the five-week war.

The shoot-downs came two days after Trump addressed the nation in a prime time speech in which he threatened to destroy Iranian society. “We are going to hit them extremely hard over the next two to three weeks,” Trump said Wednesday. “We are going to bring them back to the stone ages, where they belong.” He threatened to hit “each and every one of their electric generating plants,” and said he had not yet struck Iran’s oil only because doing so “would not give them even a small chance of

survival or rebuilding.”

“We are on track to complete all of America’s military objectives shortly, very shortly,” Trump said in the same speech. “They have no anti-aircraft equipment. Their radar is 100 percent annihilated. We are unstoppable as a military force.” Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth declared on March 31: “Iran knows that, and there’s almost nothing they can militarily do about it.” Forty-eight hours later, Iran shot an American fighter jet out of the sky.

As the *Intercept* noted, “Neither the White House nor the Pentagon responded to requests for comment on how Iran could down an advanced US aircraft when the country supposedly no longer possesses anti-aircraft weaponry.” The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) claimed responsibility for the shoot-down.

The *Washington Post* verified footage of US refueling and rescue aircraft operating roughly 90 miles inside Iranian territory. Mark Cancian, a senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), said the low-altitude flights indicated “willingness to take a lot of risk.”

Meanwhile, *Politico* reported Friday that US officials were warning that the military was running out of targets to strike. Roughly half of Iran’s ballistic missile launchers remain intact despite more than 12,000 US and Israeli strikes since February 28. The *New York Times* reported that Iranian operatives have been digging out underground bunkers struck by American and Israeli bombs and returning them to operation within hours. Iran is deploying decoys, making it difficult for US intelligence to assess how many launchers have actually been destroyed.

The destruction continues to widen. On Thursday, Trump posted footage of US strikes hitting the newly constructed B1 bridge between Tehran and Karaj, which was due to open this year. Trump wrote: “Bridges next, then Electric Power Plants!”

On Friday, a drone struck a Red Crescent relief warehouse in Iran's southern Bushehr province. Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran, one of the country's most prominent institutions, was hit during strikes on the capital. Iran has struck back at Gulf energy infrastructure—hitting a power and water desalination plant in Kuwait and a Kuwait Petroleum refinery, underscoring the vulnerability of Gulf states that depend on desalination for drinking water.

Five weeks of bombing have killed more than 5,000 people, the vast majority of them Iranian civilians. More than 85,000 civilian structures have been damaged, including 64,000 homes and 600 schools. Between 3 and 4 million Iranians have been internally displaced. Iran's 90 million people have been cut off from the outside world by a near-total internet blackout since February 28.

Thirteen American service members have been killed and nearly 370 wounded. Brent crude has surged more than 60 percent and gasoline has passed \$4 a gallon. The war has cost at least \$25 billion—and the administration is asking for more.

On Friday, Trump released the largest defense budget in American history: a \$1.5 trillion Pentagon request for fiscal year 2027, a 44 percent increase. The budget cuts the Environmental Protection Agency by 52 percent, and NASA by 23 percent. It cuts \$73 billion from environmental, health and education research to pay for warships, missiles and a “Golden Dome” missile defense system. Jessica Riedl, a budget analyst at the Brookings Institution, said the purpose of the budget is “to push Congress to approve the largest defense spending increase since the Korean War.”

The war is expanding. Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz announced that the Israel Defense Forces will demolish all homes in Lebanese border villages “like in Rafah and Beit Hanoun.” More than 600,000 Lebanese have fled their homes. Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich has called for making the Litani River Israel's new northern border.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**