

U.S. Fighter Jet Crashes Off Kurils

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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A U.S. F-16 fighter during training exercises over Canada.

A U.S. F-16 fighter jet has crashed in waters near islands claimed by both Russia and Japan, and the pilot was safely rescued.

The plane went down near the islands — called the Kurils by Russia and the Northern Territories by Japan — after experiencing difficulties shortly after 8:30 p.m. local time on Sunday.

Before hitting the water the pilot managed to eject and was rescued by a patrol boat with Japan's fishing and forestry department, RIA-Novosti reported, citing the Border Guard Service.

The jet was headed to Alaska from a U.S. airbase in Japan, Interfax reported. It fell near the island of Matua, in the central section of the 56-island archipelago.

A Foreign Ministry spokesman said a Russian An-72 jet and a patrol boat were sent to inspect

the area around the crash and said the sunken aircraft posed no environmental threat, according to Interfax.

The islands and the waters surrounding them have long been a bone of contention between Russia and Japan and have prevented the two sides from signing a peace treaty ending World War II. The Soviet Union seized the far eastern islands in the waning days of World War II, and Moscow has refused to return them ever since, declaring them an essential part of its territory.

The islands are located in rich fishing waters and are believed to have offshore hydrocarbon reserves, as well as gold and silver deposits.

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