

2 NATO Jets Crash in Military Exercise

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VILNIUS, Lithuania — Two military jets collided above Lithuania during a NATO exercise Tuesday, but one managed to land and the other crashed in an unpopulated area after its two pilots ejected. No serious injuries were reported.

The collision of the Lithuanian and French aircraft occurred near the Zokniai air base in northern Lithuania, home to NATO jets patrolling the skies over the Baltic countries.

The French Mirage fighter was only "lightly damaged" and landed safely at the air base, NATO said.

The Lithuanian pilots successfully ejected from their L-39 Albatros jet after the collision at 10:30 a.m. local time, according to NATO.

"The two Lithuanian pilots walked away from the crash without serious injury and are currently under medical supervision," the military alliance said in a statement.

The pilots catapulted themselves out of the L-39 combat training aircraft after aiming it toward an unpopulated area to avoid casualties on the ground, Lithuanian defense chief

Arvydas Pocius told reporters in the capital, Vilnius. They returned to service after medical checks, he said.

The plane crashed in a forested swampland near Lake Rekyva, which is about five kilometers from the air base, Defense Minister Rasa Juknevičienė told the Baltic News Service. There were no reports of injuries on the ground.

Aerial photographs of the crash site released by Lithuania's Defense Ministry showed what appeared to be parts of the wreckage scattered around a crater surrounded by trees.

A panel was set up to investigate the cause of the collision, which occurred during a routine training flight, Pocius said. "All questions will be answered after we recover the crashed plane's black box," he added.

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