



Written by [Dennis Behrendt](#) on September 20, 2023

F-35 Found; Was It Hacked?

In an unusual situation, on Sunday the U.S. Marine Corps lost one of its \$135 million F-35B Lightning II stealth fighters. The mysterious loss occurred when the pilot ejected from the plane under circumstances that remain unclear.

The wreckage of the plane has since been found, according to an official statement from the Marine Corps, in an area “two hours northeast of Joint Base Charleston.”

The loss of the F-35 was met with derision in some quarters when authorities asked for help from the public in locating the missing aircraft.



F-35 Lightning II

“How ... do you lose an F-35?” asked Representative Nancy Mace (R-S.C.) in an obviously sarcastic tone in a post on X, the site formerly known as Twitter.

The answer to that seemingly reasonable question seems to be that the plane was on autopilot when the pilot exited the craft. But, this fact only contributes to a larger mystery: What caused the pilot to abandon a plane that may have still been able to fly?

One troubling possibility could be that the plane’s software was hacked. Speculation to that effect also appeared in posts on X.

Independent journalist Ian Miles Cheong alleged in a post on the Elon Musk-owned platform that the operating system of the F-35 was “quite possibly leaked.” That operating system, Cheong stated, “powers that f-35, F-22, F-16, and B-2.”

Bryan Larkin, a U.S. Defense Department contractor and founder of the Obsidian Intelligence Group — which describes itself as “a strategic partner of the United States Government” supporting intelligence communities and national security — replied to Cheong’s post affirming that possibility.

“I just wanna state for the record I have been warning the U.S. Govt about a potential leak” of the F-35’s operating system “for literally over a year and half now,” Larkin commented.

Whether the aircraft in question was hacked remains speculative at this time. But, what we know for sure is that the F-35 — as with other modern weapon systems — is highly computerized. And computerized systems anywhere can be vulnerable.

The question of F-35 cyber security was raised by Kris Osborn of Warrior Maven and the Center for Military Modernization. In a report on Air Force cyber resilience efforts in 2021, Osborn [observed](#) that F-35s have “complex computer systems ... that need careful monitoring to fend off enemies on many fronts.”



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In response to the incident, the Marine Corps ordered a two-day aviation stand down and the service has begun an investigation. But multiple Marine aviation incidents in recent weeks raise significant concerns. According to [Joseph Trevithick at The War Zone](#), the loss of the F-35 “over the weekend is ... the third major Marine aircraft accident to occur in the past six weeks.



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