

Escalation and Militarization, US-NATO Deployments: Third U.S. Naval Group Arrives in Mideast, Countries Prep to Evacuate Thousands

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2,000 U.S. Marines are deployed on board a flotilla near Egypt, aircraft carrier USS Eisenhower is already west of Crete, fighters and refueling aircraft have been stationed in the Gulf, and dozens of planes and special forces are deployed in Cyprus in case of a flare-up between Israel, Hezbollah and Iran

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Three weeks after the Hamas attack that prompted the current war in Gaza, the United States, Britain and other Western countries have amassed offensive, defensive and logistical forces in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The breadth of deployment attests to multiple considered scenarios, including a multidirectional missile attack on Israel; a second, northern front between Israel and Hezbollah; escalation into a regional war; and, finally, consideration of the need to evacuate thousands of Western citizens.

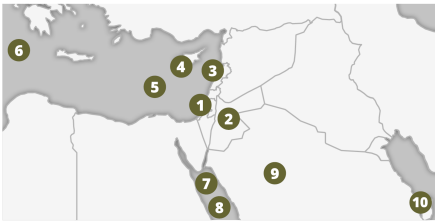
The speed with which these forces have been deployed attests to the lessons the Biden administration learned from the unexpected fall of the Afghan government in the summer of 2021 and the ensuing panicked retreat from Kabul.

Based on open source data, **20 U.S. heavy transport aircraft and about 50 leased civilian transport aircraft - Israeli as well as foreign** - have been transporting equipment and armaments from bases in the United States and Europe, and from other



logistical centers, since the airlift to Israel started following the October 7 terror attack on southern Israel.

U.S. military reported that the planes carried artillery shells and interceptors for air defense systems to Israel. Additional publications by the Israeli Defense Ministry revealed other military equipment arrived at Ben-Gurion Airport, Ramon Airport (near Eilat) and the Nevatim air force base in southern Israel.






International forces deployment in the Mideast



1 Israel

-  20 USAF heavylifters
-  50 civilian cargo planes






2 Jordan

-  25 USAF heavylifters
-  F-15E squadron deployed from U.K.
-  Special forces
-  9 German transport planes
-  German Eurofighter squadron



3 Lebanon

Evacuation preparation flights



4 Cyprus

-  40 USAF heavylifters
-  20 RAF heavylifters + 2 intel planes
-  7 heavy-lift helicopters
-  4 Dutch transport planes: Marines, rapid support and consular staff
-  4 German transport planes, special forces

5 USS Ford CSG

-  Aircraft carrier
-  2 guided-missile ships




6 USS Eisenhower CSG

-  Aircraft carrier
-  3 guided-missile ships



7 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit

-  Bataan ARG (3 ships)
-  2,500 Marines

8 Red Sea




-  2 destroyers from Ford CSG
-  Aerial defense for Israel
-  Tomahawk cruise missiles

9 Aerial defense

-  THAAD
-  Patriot missiles

* Exact deployment location unknown

10 Persian Gulf

-  2 F-16 squadrons
-  A-10 squadron
-  20 aerial-refueling tankers

*Locations not exact, map updated as of 31 Oct

In addition to the increased U.S. supplies to the Israel Defense Forces, the Americans may be increasing inventory in their own emergency warehouses in both Israel and the region.

Alongside the armament transports to Israel, **over 25 U.S. heavy transport planes landed as of Tuesday morning at the Muwaffaq Salti Jordanian Air Force base east of Amman**, where many U.S. forces are stationed. A USAF F-15E squadron that is normally based in the United Kingdom was deployed to the Jordanian base, as well as special forces from Florida's Eglin base. Nine German transport aircrafts have also landed on the base in the past two weeks - in part due to a German Eurofighter aircraft deployment drill planned before the war's outbreak.

The most significant international deployment of forces and equipment remains in Cyprus. More than 40 U.S. transport aircrafts, 20 British transport aircrafts and seven heavy transport helicopters arrived at the British Akrotiri base on the island. They carried equipment, arms and forces. **Four Dutch transport planes also arrived on the island, along with about 200 Marines, rapid reaction forces and consular staff, to facilitate emergency evacuation of Dutch citizens from the region in case of a widespread war with Hezbollah.**

Germany also sent four transport aircraft with special forces for rapid reaction, while the **Canadian Air Force sent several transport aircraft in preparation for any possible rescue**. Planes and forces from other countries have also trickled into the small island.

Lebanon has also seen the arrival of special flights from U.S., British, Canadian, German, Spanish, Dutch and Italian air forces. Some of these landed at a Lebanese army special forces base near Tripoli, in an apparent attempt to prepare a forward operating base in case a mass rescue of their citizens from Lebanon is required due to a full-blown war between Israel and Hezbollah. The choice of location also indicates an assessment that in such a war, Beirut's international airport will not be used.

In the past two weeks, **the United States has also deployed many forces near Iran**. Two F-16 and A-10 squadrons were deployed in the Persian Gulf, and in the last few days about 20 more refueling aircraft arrived from the United States. The deployment of refuelers is intended to endow U.S. forces and their allies with operational flexibility, as air refueling allows for longer sorties. Dozens of U.S. transport planes also landed in Iraq, Qatar and Bahrain.

The New Jersey Air National Guard's 119th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron arrived within U.S. Central Command's area of responsibility, bolstering U.S. posture to defend U.S. forces and deter further aggression in the region. [@usairforce](#) [@CENTCOM](#) [@DeptofDefense](#) pic.twitter.com/5FomjiS0rq

— US AFCENT (@USAFCENT) [October 24, 2023](#)

The U.S. Department of Defense has announced an emergency deployment of the ballistic missile-intercepting THAAD battery and other Patriot missile batteries, whose locations have not yet been revealed. Over the past two weeks, U.S. forces stationed in Iraq and eastern Syria have suffered numerous missile and drone attacks from Iranian-backed militias.

The ground interception batteries are augmenting the U.S. Navy's defense systems, which had already intercepted Iranian missiles and drones launched by the Houthi militia in Yemen toward Israel two weeks ago. These moves are a de-facto realization of the vision for a [regional missile defense system](#) that was presented 18 months ago by then-Defense Minister Benny Gantz.

The airborne forces deployed in the area are joined by a huge naval armada. Two weeks ago, aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford and its strike group arrived in the eastern Mediterranean, west of Cyprus, along with about 80 fighter jets, electronic warfare and intelligence aircraft, and five guided-missile destroyers and cruisers.

Two of these - the USS Carney and USS Thomas Hudner - have already left the group and headed south to the Red Sea, where they are stationed in part to provide Israel with an additional layer of air defense. The former [intercepted the Houthi missiles and drones](#) headed for Israel earlier this month. A third destroyer, USS Roosevelt, is now back in Spain.



Harrier Jets, attack and transport helicopters and V-22 Ospreys aboard USS Bataan, currently deployed to the Red SeaCredit: U.S. Navy photo

The USS Dwight D. Eisenhower's carrier strike force, with three accompanying guided-missile destroyers and cruiser, entered the Mediterranean on Saturday and sailed east to the region. As of Tuesday, it is located west of Crete. It is still unclear whether the strike group will stay there or head south to the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf region.

The Bataan Amphibious Ready Group, carrying the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit, has also arrived in the region. The USS Bataan is a small aircraft carrier belonging to the United States Marine Corps. Images released by United States Central Command (CENTCOM) indicate that it carries a number of Harrier fighter aircraft with vertical takeoff and landing capabilities. However, most of its aerial wing is probably made up of assault and transport

helicopters and V-22 aircraft, which would serve as a rapid intervention force.

Two other ships in the group, the USS Carter Hall and USS Mesa Verde, are floating ports for the Marines and will serve as a naval operation base for forces in the area (Carter Hall and Bataan are currently in the Red Sea, just south of the Sinai Peninsula; Mesa Verde is in the eastern Mediterranean). The group comprises about 2,000 Marines, who should provide the United States with rapid intervention capabilities – including for civilian rescue and ground attack in the event of a widespread flare-up in the region.

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Featured image: USS Dwight D. Eisenhower and strike group transit the Strait of Gibraltar into the Mediterranean Sea, 28 October, 2023 Credit: U.S. Navy

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