

Pentagon Accelerates Carrier Group Deployment To Persian Gulf

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U.S. Navy will deploy the aircraft carrier USS John C. Stennis and its strike group four months earlier than previously scheduled and shift its destination to the Gulf region, maintaining two carrier strike groups in that area, Pentagon Press Secretary George Little said Monday.

The deployment will take place late this summer in response to the Central Command's requirement for an extended carrier presence, Little said. The Central Command oversees the Gulf region.

The move affects 5,500 sailors aboard the Stennis and the Aegis cruiser USS Mobile Bay. The deployment was requested by Central Command commander James Mattis, and was approved last week by Defense Secretary Leon Panetta.

"The decision will help support existing naval force requirements in the Middle East and reduce the gap caused by the upcoming departure of the USS Enterprise Strike Group," Little said. "It is in keeping with our long-standing commitments to the region."

The Stennis strike group was due to deploy at the end of the year to U.S. Pacific Command. The group returned from duty in the Middle East in March. Currently, the USS Enterprise and USS Abraham Lincoln carrier strike groups are deployed to U.S. Central Command. The USS Eisenhower Carrier Strike Group is due to relieve the Lincoln group shortly. The Stennis group will relieve Enterprise.

Little said the accelerated deployment to the Central Command area of responsibility is not aimed at any specific threat, nor is it a direct response to tensions with Iran.

The U.S. military is "always mindful of the challenges posed by Iran, but ...this is not a decision based solely on the challenges posed by Iran," Little said.

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