

Austin Orders Additional Naval Assets to Middle East Amid Rising Tensions



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Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III has ordered additional naval assets to the Middle East to reinforce the United States' commitment to Israel's defense amid escalating regional tensions, Pentagon Press Secretary Air Force Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder told the media during a briefing today.

Austin dispatched the USS Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Group – which is equipped with stealth F-35C Lightning II combat jets – as well as the ballistic missile submarine USS Georgia to the Central Command region, Ryder said.

The order came following a phone call Sunday between Austin and Israeli Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant.

"reiterated the United States' commitment to taking every possible step to defend Israel and noted the strengthening of U.S. military force posture and capabilities throughout the Middle East in light of hostile regional tensions," Ryder said.

Ryder added that the additional naval assets will add to the capabilities being provided by the USS Theodore Roosevelt Carrier Strike Group, which has already been operating in the region.

"These U.S. military posture adjustments are designed to improve U.S. force protection, to increase support for the defense of Israel and to ensure the United States is prepared to respond to various contingencies," Ryder said.

When asked if the Defense Department had any specific information regarding an imminent attack in the region, Ryder said he wouldn't speculate on such a topic.

"I think the point here," Ryder responded, "is that we recognize the tensions in the region. We're doing everything we can to deter aggression, deter conflict prevent this from becoming a wider war – while at the same time ensuring that we have the capabilities in the region to be able to protect our own forces also defend Israel, should it be attacked."

During the Sunday phone call, Austin and Gallant also discussed Israel's operations in Gaza, including the importance of mitigating harm to civilians, progressing toward a ceasefire, securing the release of hostages, and deterring aggression by other countries throughout the region, Ryder said.

Ryder also addressed an attack on U.S. and coalition service members by an uncrewed aerial system in Syria this past Friday.

"Military officials are still assessing the damage, though they credited swift and effective preemptive measures in limiting the drones," Ryder said, adding that although nobody was seriously hurt in the attack, several U.S. and coalition personnel were treated for minor injuries, including smoke inhalation.