

Air Force Sends B-52 Bombers to Diego Garcia Amid Middle East Buildup: Report



A U.S. Air Force B-52H Stratofortress bomber takes off from Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, for a routine training mission in the vicinity of the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, on Sept. 23, 2018. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Christopher Quail)

The U.S. Air Force is sending six B-52 Stratofortress bombers to Diego Garcia, a military hub that acts as a strategic location for operations in both the Middle East and the Pacific.

Citing a U.S. official, CNN on Monday reported that the Cold War-era bomber will be “available for operations against Iran if ordered.”

However, the latest “deployment does not signal that operations have been ordered,” CNN reported.

“For operational security, we are not discussing forces flowing into or out of the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility at this time,” Pentagon spokeswoman Cmdr. Rebecca Rebarich told Military.com in response to a request for comment.

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Diego Garcia — like Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, and Al Udeid Air Force Base, Qatar — has the ability to house B-52s with flight lines and airfields that can accommodate the aircraft’s size.

B-52s frequently deploy to those bases for continuous bomber presence missions, or to act as a reassuring overwatch and sit alert in case of conflict. B-52s also routinely launched from Diego Garcia to conduct missions in Afghanistan following 9/11.

But following President Donald Trump’s order for an airstrike that killed Quds Force Maj. Gen. Qasem Soleimani last week, Iran has threatened to retaliate by striking U.S. forces in the Middle East.

Rocket attacks on Saturday hit Baghdad’s “Green Zone,” which houses the U.S. Embassy; another rocket attack hit Balad Air Base where U.S. troops are stationed, according to Iraq’s military and state media. No U.S. injuries were reported.

Soleimani was killed at Baghdad’s International Airport last week in what U.S. officials called a “decisive defensive action” to protect American personnel and diplomats in the Middle East. He has been charged by the U.S. as the mastermind behind attacks that killed hundreds of U.S. troops since the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

While the latest deployment may act as extra support, it’s not the first time the Defense Department has sent a B-52 bomber task force to the region in recent months as a response to Iran.

Four long-range, heavy bombers from the 20th Bomb Squadron, out of Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana, arrived at Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar, on May 8, 2019.

The bombers conducted patrols over the Persian Gulf alongside F-15

Eagles and F-35A Joint Strike Fighters for weeks before more firepower was added to the region in subsequent months.

Once the amphibious assault ship Bataan, which is moving toward the Middle East, arrives, the U.S. will have added roughly 10,000 personnel to the area within the last week, according to The Wall Street Journal.

— *Richard Sisk contributed to this report.*

— *Oriana Pawlyk can be reached at oriana.pawlyk@military.com. Follow her on Twitter at @Oriana0214.*

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