

Additional US fighter planes sent to Gulf amid Iran tensions

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The Air Force arm of US Central Command on Friday said the F-22 Raptors arrived this week at al-Udeid air base to “defend American forces and interests”. (Yonhap via AP/File)

Washington: Nearly a dozen Air Force F-22 stealth fighters have deployed to the Persian Gulf state of Qatar, part of a force buildup requested by US Central Command in May in response to what it called heightened Iranian threats against American forces in the region.

The Air Force arm of US Central Command on Friday said the F-22 Raptors arrived this week at al-Udeid air base to “defend American forces and interests”. It posted to its website photos of several F-22s arriving there on Thursday and said this is the first time F-22s have deployed to al-Udeid, which is a hub for US air operations in the Middle East.

F-22s, which carry air-to-air missiles and can perform ground-attack missions as well, had previously deployed to al-Dhafra air base in the United Arab Emirates, where they were used last year in support of US and partner forces in Syria.

Four B-52 strategic bombers were deployed to al-Udeid days after a May 5 White House announcement that the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier strike group also was being rushed to the region in response to “troubling and escalatory indications and warnings” and as a “message to the Iranian regime that any attack on United States interests or on those of our allies will be met with unrelenting force”.

At the request of General Frank McKenzie, commander of Central Command, additional Patriot air-and-missile defense systems also were sent to the Gulf region in recent weeks. He also is receiving additional surveillance and intelligence-gathering aircraft to improve the military’s ability to monitor potential Iranian threats against shipping in the Gulf area.

- AP