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U.S. sends message to Russia, moves aircraft carrier to Mediterranean

By Tamer El-Ghobashy

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F/A-18 fighter jet takes off at the USS Harry S. Truman aircraft carrier in the eastern Mediterranean Sea on Monday.

This 20-story-tall aircraft carrier with a crew of 5,000 made an unplanned diversion from the Gulf to the eastern Mediterranean last week — a quick pivot intended to send a clear message to Russia.

The massive ship serves as a launching point for a near-constant barrage of airstrikes on Islamic State targets in Iraq and Syria. Since November, it has accounted for a little more than half of the total sorties flown over those two countries by the U.S. military.

Rear Adm. Bret Batchelder, the highest-ranking officer on the carrier, told visiting reporters this week that moving the “capital ship” of the U.S. Navy from the Gulf through the Suez Canal is a flexing of muscle meant to reassure North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies of the American commitment to maintaining the balance of naval power in the Mediterranean.

It is a demonstration of capability. That’s for sure,” he said. “There are undoubtedly folks who are watching that and this is just a graphic representation of what we’re capable of.”

A military official in Washington said the Truman’s shift was a signal to Moscow and a demonstration of the Navy’s operational flexibility and reach.

Pentagon officials believe the high-tech railgun could pave the way for military advantage defending assets on sea and on land. Photo: U.S. Department of Defense

The official and Adm. Batchelder said the ship’s position in the Mediterranean could make it a vital asset if the U.S. and its allies were to begin operations against Islamic State in Libya. The U.S. is contemplating operations in the oil-rich North African country.