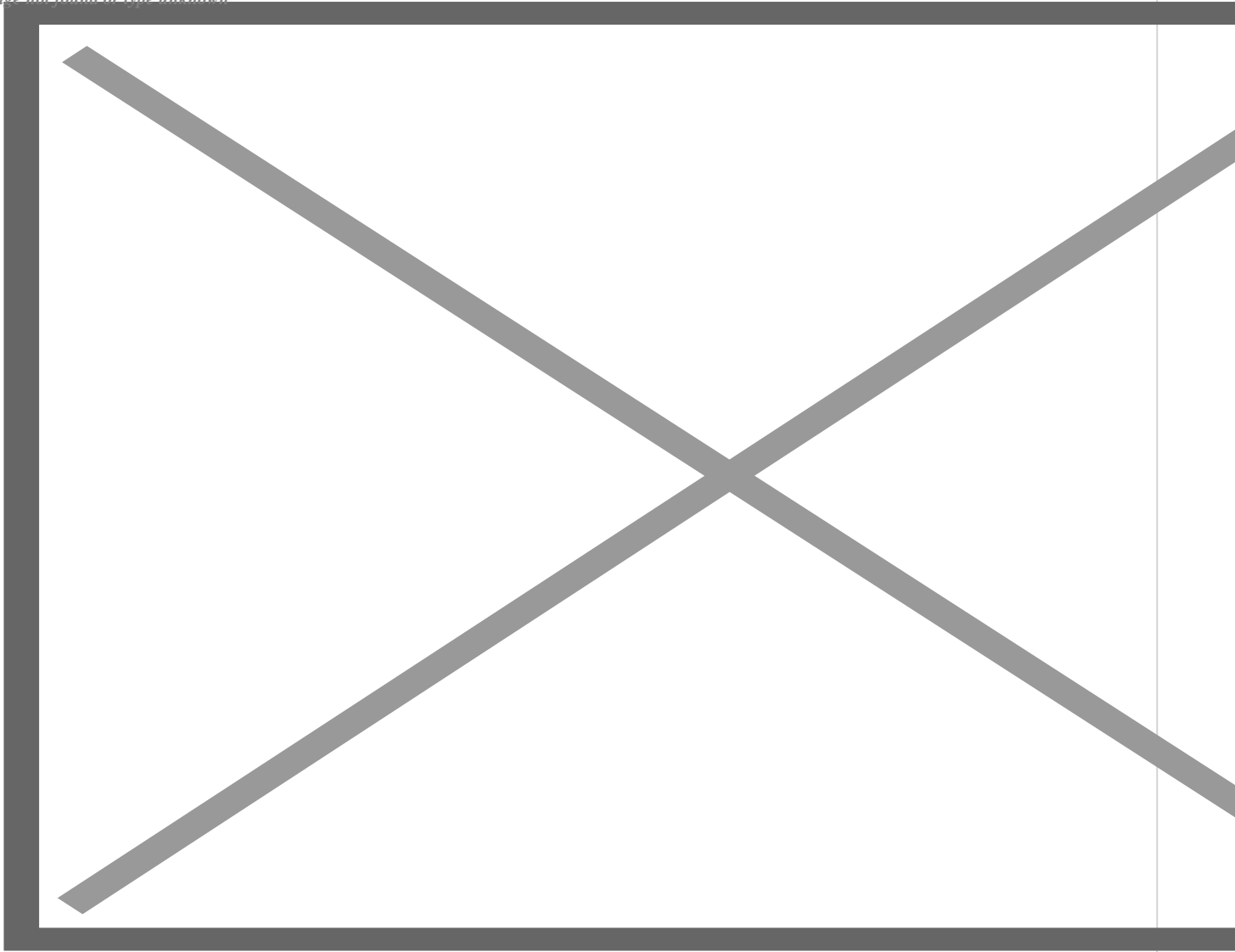


U.S. withdraws 120 military personnel from Israel

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U.S. withdraws 120 military personnel from Israel, issues travel advisory

Washington, May 14 (RHC)-- The Pentagon says it has pulled 120 U.S. military and civilian personnel from Israel amid rising tensions in the occupied territories of Palestine. The group, who were there to plan military exercises, had left on a C-17 military aircraft to return to a base in Germany, the Pentagon

confirmed Thursday.

According to Defense Department press secretary John Kirby, the U.S. Central Command and US European Command staffers arrived in Ramstein Air Base in Germany earlier on Thursday. "We made this decision to remove these individuals in coordination with our Israeli counterparts," Kirby told reporters at the Pentagon.

"These people from throughout the department were in Israel for a routine planning event" dealing with an upcoming military drill, he added. The planning conference, which is a routine practice to work through the details of any major military exercise, was already slated to wrap up by the end of the week, but the Pentagon sped up the staff's departure by a few days.

"Out of an abundance of caution and good prudence ... we ended that planning conference a little early and got them safely to Germany," he said. Meanwhile, the U.S. State Department on Thursday urged citizens to "reconsider travel to Israel" because of the escalating situation.

The travel advisory level, which had been lowered in recent weeks due to improvement in Israel's Covid-19 situation, was raised to Level 3, out of a maximum of four. This comes as Israel's military has reportedly launched more than 1,000 rockets and carried out more than 350 air raids on the Gaza Strip since Monday.

Resistance groups have launched more than 1,800 rockets from the crowded coastal enclave in the worst escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in years.

The escalation began after Gazans rose up in protest against Israel's serious violations in the nearby Tel Aviv-occupied territory of the West Bank, especially the holy city of al-Quds.

The violations have seen the Israeli forces and illegal settlers attacking Palestinian worshipers throughout al-Quds, including on the al-Aqsa Mosque Compound -- Islam's third-holiest site -- that is located in al-Quds' Old City. The forces have also been trying to forcibly remove Palestinian residents from their homes in the city's Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood.

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