

BLISS THAAD CREW HEADING TO GUAM FOR MISSILE DEFENSE

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Article by Armando Cordoba, (Guam) Pacific Daily News

HAGATNA, Guam — Almost 100 U.S. Army personnel will deploy to this Pacific island territory in coming weeks as the Pentagon moves one of its missile defense systems designed to knock down hostile targets in the upper atmosphere.

The move comes as North Korea in the past several weeks has threatened to fire nuclear missiles at the United States and claimed it had scrapped the 1953 armistice that ended fighting in the Korean War. But the Army won't divulge exactly when the ground-based Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system and its 95-person crew based at Fort Bliss, Texas, will arrive here because of security reasons, said Lt. Col. Margaret Kageleiry, an Army public information officer.

"We don't know the duration of the deployment, but what we do know is that they are ready," Army Maj. Gen. Dana J.H. Pittard, commander at Fort Bliss, said during a Texas press conference. "They are trained, they are ready, and they will do the mission."

What Guam will get is a truck-mounted launcher, interceptor missiles, tracking radar and a fire-control system. Fort Bliss is home to all three THAAD missile batteries.

As the Army readies for possible conflict with North Korea, the archbishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Agaña, Anthony Apuron, told the island's faithful Sunday to practice mercy and pray for world peace.

"Like the bishop says, pray those guys won't do something and everybody will live in harmony," said Francis Mendiola, 56, of Barrigada, Guam, who attended the Mass of Peace.

Yet as they pray, the people of Guam should remain vigilant because of the threat of attack, Apuron said.

South Korean President Park Geun-hye's national security director said Sunday that North Korea may be planning a missile launch or another provocation around Wednesday, according to presidential spokeswoman Kim Haing.

After the Air Force flew B-52 bombers over South Korea in late March as part of war games between the United States and South Korea, North Korea has threatened the U.S. and its territories, specifically naming Andersen Air Force Base in Yigo, Guam, where the B-52s originated; and U.S. bases on Okinawa, Japan. Guam, which has been a U.S. territory since 1898, is about 2,100 miles southeast of North Korea's capital, Pyongyang, and 5,800 miles southwest of San Francisco.

Officials in Pyongyang say they are developing nuclear missiles and long-range weapons to keep the U.S. and South Korea from attacking it first. The U.S. has about 28,000 troops in South Korea, 50,000 in Japan and 10,000 in Guam.

The THAAD system being deployed to Guam will work in tandem with other missile defense-systems in the region, Pittard said.

The Aegis ballistic missile defense system enables ships to intercept missiles after launching. The Phased-Array Tracking Intercept of Target system, known as a Patriot missile, provides defense at a higher altitude. The THAAD system shoots down ballistic missiles as they are aiming at their target.

In a 2012 report, the National Research Council of the National Academies said a THAAD system would be the one best suited to protect military bases on Guam and in Japan from a North Korean attack.

Last week South Korean officials said North Korea moved a missile with considerable range to its east coast, which Voice of America said likely is a Musudan rocket capable of carrying a 1.2 ton bomb.

The Musudan's range is a little less than 2,000 miles but potentially could be as much as 2,500 miles, according to the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation in Washington. That's enough firepower to

reach Japan and also could make a target of Guam, a 209-square-mile island with about the same area as Huntsville, Ala., Guam, along with the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands about 120 miles to the northwest, is the farthest west of the U.S. territories although, other Pacific countries such as Japan and South Korea have U.S. military bases.

North Korea also has medium-range Rodong missiles with an outer limit of a little less than 1,900 miles, the arms control center said.

In light of the tensions in the Korean peninsula, Guam officials are urging U.S. leaders to move forward with the island's military buildup and a permanent missile defense system.

The Defense Department had planned to develop a \$242 million Army Ballistic Missile Defense Task Force on Guam but mothballed it in 2010 because of spending concerns from some lawmakers, including Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz.

In March, Madeleine Z. Bordallo, the territory's Democratic delegate in the U.S. House, urged the Pentagon to revise plans to build a missile defense facility here. Previous plans would have brought 24 truck-mounted missile interceptors to the island.

The main component of the buildup, initially planned to move about 9,000 Marines from Okinawa to Guam, has been downsized and continues to face questions from some senators, including McCain.

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