

UNITED STATES SENDS AIR DEFENSE TO GUAM: FORT BLISS THAAD UNIT MAY BE PART OF RESPONSE TO NORTH KOREA

(El Paso Times/ 4 April 2013)

Article by David Burge, El Paso Times, with contributions from the Washington Post



In this file photo (left) Chief Warrant Officer Three (CW3) Jonathan Lee, the 11th Air Defense Artillery (ADA) Brigade Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) action officer stands in front of the THAAD launchers in the brigade's motor pool. (Photo by Mark Lambie/El Paso Times)

FORT BLISS, TEXAS – In response to ongoing security threats from North Korea, the United States is deploying to Guam an anti-missile defense system that could be from Fort Bliss, the Department of Defense announced Wednesday.

The Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system is stationed at Fort Bliss but officials would not say if the unit being deployed will be from here.

THAAD, a relatively new missile-defense system, will be sent to Guam in the next few weeks as a "precautionary move to strengthen our regional defense posture against the North Korean regional ballistic missile threat," according to the release.

The Army has three THAAD batteries and all are located at Fort Bliss, officials said.

A spokesman for Fort Bliss' 32nd Army Air and Missile Defense Command (AAMDC), which includes the THAAD, declined to comment, pending further direction from the Department of the Army.

It's unclear exactly where the THAAD equipment that is headed to Guam will be from.

The Pentagon agreed in late 2011 to sell two THAAD batteries to the United Arab Emirates to help shore up that country's and Qatar's defenses against possible threats from Iran, the Washington Post reported.

It's uncertain whether the THAAD going to Guam would be from Fort Bliss or from a delay in the transfer to the United Arab Emirates, the Post reported.

Guam, located in the West Pacific, is a territory of the United States and the defensive weapon system is being sent there to "strengthen defense capabilities" for U.S. citizens and service members stationed there, according to the Department of the Defense.

Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel called North Korea a "real and clear danger and threat" to U.S. allies South Korea and Japan.

"They have nuclear capacity now," Hagel said. "They have missile delivery capacity now."

He specifically said that the North Koreans have threatened "our base in Guam, threatened Hawaii, threatened the West Coast of the United States."

"We have to take those threats seriously," Hagel said.

A THAAD is a land-based missile defense system that includes a truck-mounted launcher, interceptor missiles, tracking radar and an integrated firing control system, according to the Pentagon release.

Last October, Fort Bliss Soldiers from Alpha Battery, 4th Air Defense Artillery (ADA) Regiment (A-4 THAAD), 11th Air Defense Artillery Brigade participated in a joint exercise in the Marshall Islands and used the system to successfully shoot down a medium-range ballistic missile.

The test was called historic and prompted Brig. Gen. James Dickinson, commander of the 32nd AAMDC, to hand out 14 medals to Soldiers who performed particularly well in the test.

"We're the only country that is capable of shooting down a missile with a missile (from that range)," Dickinson said during the award ceremony in January. "It's like a needle hitting a needle."

The THAAD is designed to eliminate missile threats traveling inside and outside of the atmosphere. A THAAD battery may have about 100 soldiers who operate and support it.

It is also designed to cover a wider area than the Patriot system and provide greater flexibility.

During the most recent Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process, Fort Bliss was transformed from an installation with a long air defense history to being the new home of the 1st Armored Division.

But Fort Bliss still has a significant air defense presence.

The 32nd AAMDC is headquartered at Fort Bliss and oversees 10,000 soldiers at six installations across the United States and deployed in six countries.

One of those units is the 11th ADA Brigade, which is also stationed at Fort Bliss and is considered the largest air defense brigade in the Army with about 3,000 soldiers.

Original article and source location: http://www.elpasotimes.com/ci_22939069/washington-post-u-s-deploy-anti-missile-system