

US Military Presence in South East Asia and North Pacific

Thursday 10 August 2017, by [GRIERSON Jamie](#), [HOLMES Oliver](#) (Date first published: 10 August 2017).

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What is the US military's presence near North Korea?

The US has nearly 40,000 personnel in Japan and 35,000 in South Korea, and uses Guam as a 'permanent aircraft carrier'.

The US military has a huge footprint across south-east Asia and the Pacific, particularly in Japan and South Korea. With North Korea threatening a missile strike on the US territory of Guam, here is an overview of US forces in the region.

Japan

There are more US military personnel serving in Japan than in any other country. According to Department of Defense data, 39,345 troops are stationed across 112 bases, a hangover from the second world war when American forces occupied Japan.

In April the US Air Force lined up dozens of helicopters, tactical fighter jets and surveillance planes on the runway at Kadena airbase in Japan as a show of force aimed at North Korea. On Tuesday, Japan conducted joint air drills with two US B-1B Lancers - capable of carrying nuclear bombs - near the Korean peninsula.

US troops in Japan are mostly based on the subtropical island of Okinawa, roughly 400 miles (640km) south of the rest of Japan.

The Seventh Fleet

Headquartered in Japan, the Seventh Fleet is the largest of the US navy's deployed sea forces, with roughly 50-70 ships and submarines, 140 aircraft and approximately 20,000 sailors across the Indian Ocean and the Pacific.

The USS Ronald Reagan, a nuclear-powered aircraft supercarrier, is permanently deployed at Yokosuka, Japan, as the fleet's flagship carrier.

The fleet also includes up to 14 destroyers and cruisers at any given time, some armed with ballistic missile interceptors, long-range Tomahawk land attack missiles and anti-aircraft missiles. Up to 12 nuclear-powered submarines are also available.

South Korea

After Germany, with 34,805 troops, South Korea is the third largest host of US military forces, with 23,468 people on duty at 83 sites. More than 300 tanks, including the powerful M1 Abrams, and armoured vehicles are stationed there.

Set up as a bulwark against North Korea in 1957 after a three-year war, the United States Force Korea (USFK) says its mission is to “deter aggression and, if necessary, defend the Republic of Korea”. In April the US installed a Terminal High-Altitude Area Defence system, or Thaad, in the country with the purpose of using interceptor missiles to destroy incoming missiles in mid-flight.

Guam

All eyes are on Guam, a US territory in the western Pacific Ocean run by an elected governor. The 210 sq mile (544 sq km) island, which had an estimated population of around 162,000 in 2015, is about 2,100 miles from Pyongyang. There are 3,831 military personnel on Guam, and much of the land is controlled by the armed forces, including the Anderson air force base, which hosts B52 bombers and fighter jets. The island is reportedly referred to by US commanders as a “permanent aircraft carrier”.

Thailand, the Philippines and Singapore

The US maintains a smaller presence across south-east Asian states, including in five bases across the Philippines where US troops have been allowed to station themselves. The US navy also plans to operate four warships out of Singapore by next year. Thailand has allowed US military aircraft to use its runways.

Hawaii

There are nearly 40,000 military personnel in Hawaii, the closest US state to the Korean peninsula. It is the headquarters for the United States Pacific Command, which covers about half the earth’s surface, including the entire Asia Pacific region. Its mandate includes roughly 375,000 US military and civilian personnel, 200 ships and more than 1,000 aircraft.

Oliver Holmes

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<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/aug/09/what-is-the-us-militarys-presence-in-south-east-asia>

Where is Guam and why is North Korea threatening it?

The remote island with limited self-government is at centre of war of the words between Washington and Pyongyang.

Guam, a 210 sq mile (544 sq km) sovereign US territory in the western Pacific Ocean, is used by the US as a strategic military base. Almost a third of its land is controlled by the US military and about

6,000 American troops are based there.

Its location, within range of North Korean medium- and long-range missiles, and military significance to the US make it a logical target for Pyongyang.

As recently as Monday, two US air force B-1B bombers flew from Guam to join their counterparts from South Korea and Japan for a mission over the Korean peninsula, about 2,100 miles away, in which the air forces practised various manoeuvres [1].

Last month, in another show of force, the US twice flew a pair of supersonic bombers that took off from Guam over the Korean peninsula after two North Korean tests of intercontinental ballistic missiles.

[Map not reproduced here]

The island is incredibly remote: the nearest significant population is in the Federated States of Micronesia, about 570 miles away. Beyond that, Papua New Guinea is 1,400 miles away, the Philippines are 1,600 miles from its shores and Japan 1,623 miles.

Approximately 40% of Guam's population, estimated in 2015 to be around 162,000, is made up of the indigenous Chamorro people, while another 25% are Filipino.

Though there has been some resistance and displeasure from the people of Guam over the US military's presence, it is also essential to the island's economy, second only to tourism.

According to the island's official tourism website, it is a destination like no other, with "star-sand beaches, crystal clear blue skies and world-famous sunsets".

Guam was claimed by Spain in 1565 and became a US territory in 1898 during the Spanish-American War.

Japan seized it for about two and a half years during the second world war. In 1950, an act of Congress made it an unincorporated organised territory of the United States.

It has limited self-government, with a popularly elected governor, small legislature, and non-voting delegate in the US House of Representatives. Residents do not pay US income taxes or vote in the general election for US president but its natives are US citizens by birth.

The US keeps a naval base and coastguard station in the south, and an air force base in the north, which was used during the Vietnam war.

Protecting the island is the US Army's Terminal High-Altitude Area Defence, or Thaad, which is used to shoot down ballistic missiles.

Guam's capital city is Hagåtña and its largest city is Dededo. Its chief languages are English and Chamorro. There have been various popular movements pushing for greater self-government or even US statehood, most notably a significant but failed effort in the 1980s to make it a commonwealth on par with Puerto Rico.

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Footnotes

[1] <http://www.pacaf.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/1272434/south-dakota-airmen-arrive-ready-to-fight-tonight-from-guam/>