



A U.S. soldier prepares to deliver air bundles containing care packages, Christmas stockings and mail to Soldiers stationed at a remote base in eastern Afghanistan, Dec. 24. The Soldier is assigned to the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan. (U.S. Army photo by Capt. Thomas Cieslak)

# U.S. Service Members Deployed Overseas, Keeping Citizens Safe during Holidays

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WASHINGTON — For many American service members, the holidays are just another work day.

**I**n a news conference last week, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey reminded Americans that their military is deployed worldwide, performing missions that keep their fellow citizens safe.

In his last news conference of 2013, Dempsey pointed out that, in addition to service members in combat zones, about 250,000 men and women in uniform are deployed overseas during this holiday period.

“I wish their families a peaceful and calm and happy holiday season, as their loved ones are forward-deployed

all over the world, doing what the nation asks them to do,” Dempsey said.

And where are they based this holiday season?

There are roughly 39,500 U.S. service members in Afghanistan, down from 66,000 at the beginning of 2013. The mission in Afghanistan has changed this past year, with Afghan security forces taking the lead throughout the country. American, NATO and partner forces are training and mentoring Afghan units. They are also providing logistics and air support, maintenance and intelligence assets. This does not mean the job is safe. The International Security Assistance Force announced a service member in Regional Command-East was killed over the weekend.

In South Sudan, 45 Americans are deployed to provide security for the embassy in the capital city of Juba.

There are about 28,000 American service members in South Korea standing watch on the demilitarized zone — often called the last Cold War frontier. Another 39,000 Americans are based in Japan, providing security for that critical ally.

There are roughly 43,000 Americans in Germany, 11,000 in Great Britain, 11,000 in Italy and 1,000 in Belgium. The number of American service members in Europe has dropped significantly from the mid-1980s, when 350,000 U.S. troops were based in West Germany alone.

Thousands of sailors and Marines are afloat this holiday season, patrolling the sea lanes to ensure they are open and safe. They represent the U.S. commitment to global security.

In Africa, about 2,500 Americans are based in Djibouti, while others are performing training missions in other nations of the world's second largest continent.

In the U.S. Southern Command area of operations, about 5,500 U.S. service members are working with allies and partners throughout Central and South America.

But it is not just those service members deployed overseas who work on the holiday. Thousands of airmen will man the consoles in the missile fields of the American West. Others will watch the skies for threats, while still others will be ready to respond to these threats.

Thousands of service members will care for brothers and sisters who are wounded or sick this holiday season. Others will provide services for the families of those deployed.

And wherever there are military personnel, there are DOD civilians and civilian contractors working right alongside them. Thousands of civilians will spend their holidays manning their duty stations to provide needed support for America's best. ■



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