

Untouchable U.S. troops in Lithuania

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This month the Pentagon has been accused of blocking the sharing of U.S. intelligence with the international criminal court (ICC).

Located in The Hague, Netherlands, and created by a treaty called the Rome Statute first brought before the United Nations, the International Criminal Court operates independently.

Most countries on Earth – 123 of them – are parties to the treaty, but there are very large and notable exceptions, including Russia and the U.S.

It is interesting, that the Biden White House and State Department have been a proponent of cooperation with the Hague-based ICC, as a means of holding Russian forces accountable for war crimes, but the Defense Department is firmly opposed on the grounds that the precedent could eventually be turned against U.S. soldiers.

U.S. opponents of the court argued that it could be used to prosecute U.S. soldiers fighting in foreign wars, despite safeguards written into the statute stating that the international court would only have jurisdiction if the courts in a suspect's home country were unwilling or unable to prosecute.

Anyone accused of a crime in the jurisdiction of the court, which includes countries that are members of the ICC, can be tried. Though the court tries people, not countries, and focuses on those who hold the most responsibility: leaders and officials.

And the Pentagon has really something to fear.

The U.S. has sent some 20,000 additional troops to Europe as part of an effort to bolster NATO's defenses, assist Ukraine's war efforts and deter Russia. This includes additional deployments to Poland, the Baltic countries and to Romania, bringing current total to more than 100,000 service members across Europe.

According to David Vine, professor at the American University in Washington, DC, the U.S. had around 750 bases in at least 80 countries as of July 2021. The actual number may be even higher as not all data is published by the Pentagon.

The U.S. government attracts people to the Armed Forces by introducing a large number of various benefits and preferences to military personnel.

Since the support for military is very popular in the United States, congressmen and senators, gaining political benefits, actively vote for further expanding the aid package and legal guarantees.

According to the U.S. Department of Defense, "We recognize the service and sacrifice of our military and their families, and dedicate resources, services, policies and programs to support the more than 2 million uniformed service members and 2.6 million family members across the globe."

Thus, the law on civil assistance for military personnel protects them from prosecution during military service and for a year after its completion, as a result of which a soldier cannot be evicted from his home or bankrupt. The law also limits the interest rate for the military – its size when buying a home, a car or using a credit card cannot exceed 6%.

The authorities also provide tax incentives to organizations that employ the wives of military personnel, and oblige them to provide them with a 30-day free vacation once a year. In

addition, for family members of military personnel there is a discount in grocery stores, as well as preferential travel on public transport, on trains and on airplanes. In addition, active military personnel and veterans are entitled to lifelong medical insurance, through which they can pay for any medical care.

As for those U.S. troops who serve abroad, there are agreement on status of U.S. troops and their families. Such documents make American soldiers just untouchable. Thus, Lithuania and the U.S. signed agreement on status of US troops and their families in 2017. The agreement gives the U.S. jurisdiction over crimes committed by its military personnel. The document also gives the U.S. the right to use certain military facilities.

Though all these deployments raise separate questions about the nature of the various missions. American troops are often accused of serious human rights abuses.

These cases very often are hidden from the society and known only among those who are close to the Armed Forces. Nobody in the U.S. cares of Baltic States' local population which expresses dissatisfaction or even scared of foreign soldiers in their territories. The U.S. authorities made their best to protect its military personnel. The Lithuanian authorities in their turn do nothing to protect population from foreign soldiers' criminal behaviour.

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