

U.S. unveils next-generation B-21 nuclear bomber costing \$700 million each

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Washington, December 4 (RHC)-- The United States has unveiled its latest high-tech strategic bomber – the B-21 Raider – which is capable of carrying a nuclear payload and can be flown without a crew on

board. The next-generation stealth bomber was rolled out at arm's manufacturer Northrop Grumman's facility in California during a flashy ceremony attended by top US officials on Friday.

The U.S. Air Force plans to buy at least 100 of the B-21 aircraft, which comes with a \$700m price tag per plane, a Northrop Grumman spokesperson said. The unveiling of the new bombers comes at a time of heightened geopolitical tensions between the US, Russia and China amid the war in Ukraine and the territorial integrity of Taiwan.

Russian and Chinese strategic bombers flew a joint eight-hour patrol over the western Pacific on Wednesday in a display of ongoing military cooperation between the two nations. China's Defence Ministry called the mission a "routine" effort in bolstering defence ties with Russia.

Moscow and Beijing are also currently developing strategic stealth bombers – China's Xian H-20 and Russia's nuclear-capable Tupolev PAK DA – which are expected to compete with the B-21. While the B-21 is capable of taking to the air without a pilot, the US Air Force said the aircraft is "provisioned for the possibility, but there has been no decision to fly without a crew".

"The B-21 Raider is the first strategic bomber in more than three decades," U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in a prepared statement at Friday's event. Austin touted the aircraft's range and superior design. "Fifty years of advances in low-observable technology have gone into this aircraft," he said. "Even the most sophisticated air defence systems will struggle to detect the B-21 in the sky."

The B-21, which carries a similar "flying wing" shape to its predecessor, will be capable of carrying conventional and nuclear weapons around the world using long-range and midair refuelling capabilities. Northrop Grumman has hailed the new planes as "the backbone of our future bomber force."

The aerospace and design company said the long-range bomber's first flight is expected to take place in 2023. Six of the long-range bombers are in various stages of assembly and testing at its facility in California.

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