



STRATEGIC DETERRENCE UNABATED

DEFENDING THE NATION DURING A PANDEMIC

By U.S. Strategic Command

While much of the world scaled back or shut down due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the United States Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM), with headquarters at Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska, continued business as usual in maintaining the nation's deterrence posture. The command continued to fulfill its 24/7 real-world, global responsibilities, including strategic deterrence, nuclear operations, joint electromagnetic spectrum operations, global strike, missile defense, and analysis and targeting.

At the outset of the pandemic, new protective measures were implemented at headquarters and at units in the field to ensure the safety of assigned personnel while maintaining mission readiness. To inhibit spreading the virus, many personnel changed to teleworking from their residences and only the most critical personnel, including those required for the Global Operations Center, continued to work in the headquarters building. New procedures there ranged from temperature checks and contact management to emphasizing individual hygiene and contact tracing when someone tested positive for the virus. As virus-related procedures matured, most teleworkers phased back into daily work at the headquarters building.

During the pandemic, the 16-year Continuous Bomber Presence mission of long-range bombers at Anderson Air Force Base, Guam, made a previously planned transition to the more agile and less operationally predictable Bomber Task Force model under the Pentagon's Dynamic Force Employment concept. Since standing up the

A Minuteman III test launch at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California.

SENIOR AIRMAN CLAYTON WEAR/U.S. AIR FORCE

Bomber Task Force concept, there have been 12 forward deployments and 24 missions starting and ending in the U.S., using B-1 Lancer, B-2 Spirit and B-52 Stratofortress long-range bombers. These missions demonstrated the U.S.'s ability to project power anywhere in the world on short notice and provided training opportunities for U.S., allied and partner-nation forces. Operating from U.S. and forward-deployed bases, B-1, B-2 and B-52 bombers flew long distances to conduct integrated training missions with allies and partners in Australia, Canada, France, Greece, Japan, Morocco, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine and the United Kingdom. "Long-range bomber training missions strengthen our steadfast partnerships with allies across both Europe and Africa and showcase our ability to respond globally from anywhere," said Gen. Jeff Harrigan, commander of U.S. Air Forces in Europe and Air Forces Africa.

The successful pivot from Continuous Bomber Presence to Bomber Task Force generated envy from Russia and China. Russian defense officials claimed to set "a world record for [the] longest non-stop flight" with a pair of Tu-160 Blackjack long-range bombers launching from and returning to Engels Air Base in western Russia on a 25-hour

flight September 18-19, 2020, primarily over the Russian landmass. While that was a long flight for the Tu-160 Blackjack, it falls well short of a 30-hour mission flown by the U.S. Air Force's B-1 Lancer — that the Tu-160's design was copied from — and is a mere shadow of the 45-hour round-the-world flights by the B-52 Stratofortress.

On September 19, China's People's Liberation Army Air Forces posted a video titled *The God of War H-6K Goes on the Attack!* on the Chinese website Weibo. This video showed what appeared to be computer generated imagery of two H-6K bombers, with J-11 fighter escort, launching an attack on what was described as a U.S. air base on Guam. The sequences were clearly from Hollywood movies, including *The Hurt Locker*, *The Rock* and *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*. While it is true that posting video of training exercises is common practice for many nations, it is not accepted practice to use intellectual property (such as movie clips) without permission or payment. It is also unprofessional to imply that such footage represents a nation's actual military capabilities. The U.S. and our allies choose to publish actual footage of our responsible and relevant training exercises.

Over the past several months, USSTRATCOM held several small, in-house exercises. While limited in scale, they were deep in innovation and successfully tested and validated current and new operational concepts. One concept demonstrated is the ability to resupply submarines at sea. Nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines can cruise the seas for years before requiring refueling. But the crews need to refuel more frequently, requiring the submarines to return to port or rendezvous with a replenishment ship at sea. A third resupply option was successfully tested off the coast of Hawaii using remotely controlled drones and manned rotary-wing and fixed-wing aircraft to air drop resupply packages on or very near a submarine running on the surface. During the pandemic, such resupply methods have the added benefit of reducing human-to-human contact between members of an isolated submarine crew and the crews of replenishment ships or port supply personnel.

At the end of October 2020, the command conducted one of its two annual capstone exercises, Global Thunder 21, involving thousands of personnel across the globe and allied partners. From the depths of the oceans to the canopy of space, strategic systems, personnel, processes and communications were tested against both a notional adversary and the COVID-19 virus, and USSTRATCOM was victorious. Throughout the exercise, USSTRATCOM continued to fulfill its 24/7 real-world, global responsibilities, including strategic deterrence, nuclear operations, joint electromagnetic spectrum operations, global strike, missile defense, and analysis and targeting ... business as usual continued. As the exercise concluded, Adm. Charles "Chas" Richard, USSTRATCOM commander, commented: "Bravo Zulu [nautical expression for 'well done'] to all those who were involved in development and execution of this year's exercise. I have complete confidence, now more than ever, in the men and women standing watch around

the globe 24 hours a day, seven days a week who provide the credible deterrent which underpins all other joint force operations." The command's annual checkup is complete, with a clean bill of health to deter or respond to any threat against the U.S. and its allied and partner nations. USSTRATCOM's never-ending vigilance continues.



A drone leaves a ballistic missile submarine after delivering a replenishment package. U.S. NAVY

One of many important activities is testing the readiness, reliability and lethality of the intercontinental ballistic missile force with test launches from Vandenberg Air Force Base, California. Since the COVID-19 outbreak, these "Glory Trips" — intercontinental ballistic missile test launches without a nuclear warhead attached — have continued, with three test launches of Minuteman III missiles since March 2020. Once launched, the missiles travel 4,200 miles (almost 6,700 kilometers) in about 30 minutes to strike simulated targets in the ocean near the Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands in the South Pacific Ocean. These test launches are conducted by crews deployed to California from active combat squadrons to test their preparedness and provide live training. Regarding the purpose of the October 29, 2020, test, Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr., chief of staff of the U.S. Air Force, said: "Like previous test launches, this event demonstrated the Air Force's commitment to the nation's nuclear enterprise while ensuring the United States' nuclear deterrent is safe, secure and effective to deter our adversaries while reassuring our allies and partners."

Operationally the pace of the command's critical, must-be-right-every-time, worldwide mission continues and has even improved during the COVID-19 pandemic. "Throughout the challenge presented by COVID-19, U.S. Strategic Command continues to be fully mission capable. We're ready," Adm. Richard confirmed. USSTRATCOM remains poised and ready to fulfill its global missions. □

The mission of U.S. Strategic Command is to deter strategic attack and employ forces, as directed, to guarantee the security of our nation and our allies. The command's vision is to deliver a dominant strategic force and innovative team to maintain our nation's enduring strength, prevent and prevail in great power conflict, and grow the intellectual capital to forge 21st century strategic deterrence.