



Northrop Grumman's B-21 Raider Powers Unmatched Long-Range Strike Capability

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Aerial refueling in test unlocks additional speed, flexibility in future operations

FALLS CHURCH, Va., April 14, 2026 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- Northrop Grumman is accelerating American airpower with the B-21 Raider aircraft, advancing rapidly through its flight test campaign to deliver exceptional warfighting capability. With demonstrated aerial refueling, the B-21 proves it can go anywhere in the world and hold any target at risk to deter and defeat threats.

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Northrop Grumman's B-21 Raider continues to demonstrate outstanding performance as the program moves into more advanced phases flight test, including aerial refueling. (Photo Credit: U.S. Air Force)

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The B-21 Raider conducts aerial refueling with a KC-135 Stratotanker, which is a key part to the Raider's role in projecting power globally. (Photo Credit: Northrop Grumman)



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"Our teams are moving the B-21 Raider through testing at an unprecedented pace, continually proving its outstanding performance – including aerial refueling," said Tom Jones, corporate vice president and president, Northrop Grumman Aeronautics Systems. "We've designed and built a reliable, adaptable aircraft that is vital to our warfighters' missions, while operating with a sense of wartime urgency to accelerate production and deliver this capability."

The B-21 Raider test campaign now includes aerial refueling, extending the stealth bomber's global reach and enabling longer, more efficient test sorties as critical weapons and mission systems evaluations continue.



The B-21 Raider conducts aerial refueling with a KC-135 Stratotanker, which is a key part to the Raider's role in projecting power globally. (Photo

Credit: Northrop Grumman)

As the most fuel-efficient bomber ever built, the B-21 consumes a fraction of the fuel used by fourth- and fifth-generation aircraft. This reduces demand for theatre tanker logistics and provides operational commanders with greater flexibility in force packaging.

With more than \$5 billion invested in digital technologies and manufacturing infrastructure for the B-21 program, Northrop Grumman is [accelerating its production](#), with the first aircraft planned to arrive at Ellsworth Air Force Base in 2027.

Expanded production capacity provides additional flexibility to increase the Raider fleet size aligned with future operational requirements. Northrop Grumman is positioned to deliver this capability at speed and scale, ensuring the U.S. Air Force maintains long-term global strike superiority.

10 Facts About Northrop Grumman's B-21 Raider:

Benefitting from more than three decades of strike and stealth technology innovation, the B-21 is the next evolution of the Air Force strategic bomber fleet and the world's first sixth-generation aircraft to reach the skies.

When it comes to delivering America's resolve, the Raider will provide the Air Force with long range, high survivability and mission payload flexibility. The B-21 will penetrate the toughest defenses for precision strikes anywhere in the world. Here are 10 key facts about Northrop Grumman's B-21 Raider as production accelerates.

1. Sixth-Generation Stealth

The B-21 Raider leverages decades of innovation to deliver superior stealth with extended range. Its advanced, fuel-efficient engines integrated into a sleeker airframe reduce tanker support reliance more than any previous bomber, enhancing agility and persistence across missions.

The B-21 has demonstrated outstanding stealth performance in testing, showcasing the effectiveness of its advanced low-observable design that will allow it to penetrate the most sophisticated air defenses undetected.

Modernized, low-observable processes will also make the B-21 easier and less costly to maintain than prior systems, ensuring the fleet's operational readiness for our nation's most critical missions.

2. Built to Deliver Strategic Deterrence

The B-21 Raider is designed to hold any target at risk, anywhere in the world. With the ability to deliver both conventional and nuclear payloads, it provides decision-makers with flexible, survivable response options across the full spectrum of conflict. The B-21's open architecture will deliver seamless upgrades, enabling the Raider fleet to evolve its mission and weapons capabilities to outpace any threat.

3. Mission-Driven Partnership

The development of the B-21 Raider is a testament to the results-focused collaboration between Northrop Grumman and the Air Force. Northrop Grumman's partnership is built on transparency and a commitment to shared success, exemplified by an industry-first agreement that provides access to valuable data, including the B-21 digital twin, enhancing affordability and agility in upgrades.

As a proven partner, Northrop Grumman delivers effective, data-driven solutions that meet the demands of critical missions. Together, the company and the Air Force are demonstrating the B-21's capabilities against adversaries.

4. Strategically Investing

Committed to leading the way, Northrop Grumman consistently invests in the technologies and tools that empower the best fighting force in the world. To date, the company has invested more than \$5 billion in the B-21 program's digital and manufacturing infrastructure. Our investments in manufacturing capacity are accelerating production, providing flexibility to support future fleet growth and ensuring long-term U.S. Air Force strike dominance.

These investments power our digital ecosystem, equipping the B-21 Raider with highly advanced software, manufacturing and engineering tools. As a result, software certification time has already been reduced by 50%, ensuring the B-21 stays at the speed of relevance for future technology insertion. The ecosystem also enables real-time validation of aircraft performance during tests.

5. Delivering Results that Ensure America Wins

Northrop Grumman's expertise in advanced aircraft systems is driving flight test results that showcase speed, efficiency and exceptional performance.

Multiple B-21 Raider aircraft are currently in flight test, consistently exceeding expectations. Most sorties achieve "code one" status, indicating the aircraft returned from its flight without maintenance issues and is ready to go fly again. This reaffirms the quality of the design and build, and signals strong future operational performance.

Simultaneously, Northrop Grumman engineers are conducting ground tests to ensure the B-21 can operate in the most extreme mission conditions. These test results consistently surpass digital modeling predictions, further validating the aircraft's design and capabilities.

6. Accelerating Advanced Manufacturing

Northrop Grumman's advanced manufacturing processes, including digital and augmented reality tools, enable technicians to visualize tasks and solve problems before ever touching the plane. This approach connects technicians to design engineers as never before, improving efficiency and cultivating expertise throughout the manufacturing workforce.

Northrop Grumman has invested in manufacturing technology and capacity at our facilities across the U.S. to accelerate and scale production of the B-21 Raider. We are increasing production rates on capability that will project American power anywhere in the world.

7. More than a Bomber

As the world's most advanced aircraft to take the skies, the B-21 Raider combines unmatched range, access and payload in a single system designed to perform specialized missions no other aircraft can accomplish.

Instrumental in maintaining U.S. and allied security amid a complex global landscape, the B-21 is a key part of a powerful family of systems. It delivers a new era of capability and flexibility by seamlessly integrating data, sensors and weapons – enabling precision strikes and comprehensive situational

awareness.

8. Ready on Day One

Northrop Grumman is developing comprehensive training, sustainment and fleet management tools for the Air Force as they prepare to operate and maintain the B-21 Raider. Leveraging extensive flight test data and decades of sustainment experience across a variety of systems, these tools ensure the B-21 enters service ready, affordable and sustainable at scale.

Test pilots report exceptional handling during aerial refueling, noting a high degree of stability and control. These qualities reduce training requirements and enable faster refueling, increasing operational tempo and agility – further proving that the B-21 will deliver unmatched performance for U.S. Air Force operators.

9. American Made Deterrence

An all-American team of more than 8,000 industry and Air Force personnel are designing, building, testing and delivering on the promise of B-21. The team consists of more than 400 suppliers across 40 states. This is a nationwide effort to provide deterrence capability that strengthens and defends our nation.

10. Bold, Innovative, Courageous

The B-21 Raider is named in honor of the Doolittle Raid of World War II when 80 airmen, led by Lt. Col. James “Jimmy” Doolittle, and 16 B-25 Mitchell medium bombers set off on a mission that changed the course of World War II. The raid was a catalyst for a multitude of future progress in U.S. air superiority and serves as the inspiration behind the Raider name and the pioneering, innovative spirit instilled across the workforce bringing the B-21 to life.

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Photos accompanying this announcement are available at

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