The B-2 stealth bomber made its first overseas deployment 20 years ago — here's why it's still one of the most feared aircraft in the sky

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B-2 Spirits deployed from Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri, await clearance to taxi onto the flightline after conducting local training at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, January 16, 2017.
US Air Force

This week marks the 20th anniversary of the deployment to Guam of one of America's most important and expensive weapon systems — the B-2 Spirit.

The B-2 was originally intended to carry nuclear bombs deep into Soviet territory if the Cold War had ever turned hot. Its shape — paired

with the plane's stealth systems — would enable it to be undetected by Soviet radars. The B-2's long range meant it could fly deep into enemy territory and return home.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the B-2 has been used as a conventional bomber. It made its combat debut during the Kosovo War in 1999, and has since flown sorties in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya.

More recently, the B-2 has been placed in bases in the Pacific as part of a strategy to deal with potential threats from North Korea.

Here's why it's one of the most feared aircraft in the world: