



# RHUMB LINES

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## SSBNs – The Cornerstone of Strategic Deterrence

*"I think the fact that they really can't be found ensures, just as it did during the Cold War, that anyone that wishes us ill has to know that these submarines are out there and can always protect our country."*

– **Honorable Robert Gates, Secretary of Defense**

The 1000<sup>th</sup> Trident patrol ceremony on Feb. 19 in Kings Bay, Ga., marks the milestone of the ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) conducting 1,000 successful patrol periods since the first patrol of the USS Ohio (SSBN 726) in 1982. This milestone highlights the importance of strategic deterrence in today's world and the Navy's 14 Ohio-class SSBNs that support this crucial tenant of the Maritime Strategy.

### Strategic deterrence in the current environment

- As long as other nations who do not share the ideals of freedom and democracy possess nuclear weapons, the U.S. Navy will maintain the ability to respond to nuclear aggression or threats with highly reliable, credible and survivable nuclear forces.
- While history has demonstrated how difficult it is to predict the future, it has also shown that there will always be nations that, given the opportunity, will threaten the sovereignty of other peaceful nations through the threat of force.

### Ballistic missile submarines as the backbone of strategic deterrence

- The stealth of our submarines is the result of the combined efforts of experienced designers, skilled shipbuilders, dedicated maintainers and expert operators.
- Our ballistic missile submarines remain ready and vigilant, in a secure and survivable posture, able to rapidly respond to national tasking.
- Undetected SSBNs provide the most survivable leg of the United States' strategic deterrence arsenal.

### Commitment to the strategic deterrence mission

- The Navy's strategic deterrence mission area has been consolidated within two functional elements: the operational nuclear deterrent forces that are concentrated in the SSBN force and the acquisition/lifecycle support organization supported by the Navy's Strategic Systems Programs.
- Secretary of Defense Task Force on DoD Nuclear Weapons Management found the Navy has maintained its commitment to the nuclear mission. The Task Force concluded that the SSBN Sailor is deeply committed to the strategic deterrence mission and remains highly motivated to perform it well every day.
- The report is available at <http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/PhaseIIReportFinal.pdf>

### Key Messages

- The ballistic missile submarine provides the U.S. a strategic advantage over current and future potential adversaries.
- As long as other countries possess nuclear weapons, there will be a need for an SSBN force to protect the United States.
- The true strength of the ballistic missile submarine lies in the extremely talented and motivated Sailors who have voluntarily chosen to serve in the submarine community.

### Facts & Figures

- Each SSBN has two crews, Blue and Gold, which alternate manning the submarines while on patrol. This maximizes the SSBN's strategic availability while maintaining the crew's training readiness and morale at high levels.
- The first four Ohio-class submarines were converted to guided-missile submarines after the 1994 Nuclear Posture Review determined that the United States needed only 14 of its 18 SSBNs to meet the nation's strategic force.