



Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments

## BRIEFS

# **The Unmanned Combat Air System Carrier Demonstration Program: A New Dawn For Naval Aviation?**

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Resources: Forces & Capabilities

Aircraft carriers are one of America's key power-projection systems. To ensure their continued operational effectiveness and survivability in the future security environment, they need to be equipped with new air platforms with greater range (independent reach), greater persistence (ability to loiter over the target area), and improved stealth (ability to survive in contested airspace).

In brief, this study finds:

- An important way to achieve these goals is to develop and field a low observable and air-refuelable carrier-capable unmanned combat air system (UCAS).
- The key first step toward achieving this transformational capability is the Navy's new Unmanned Combat Air System Carrier Demonstration (UCAS-D) program and its associated technology maturation efforts to ensure these new aircraft can be safely operated as part of integrated carrier air operations.
- Congress and the Office of the Secretary of Defense should consider funding an expanded UCAS-D and technology program to improve the chances that a safe, reliable, and effective carrier-capable UCAS can be introduced into fleet service by the end of the next decade.