



Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments

## STUDIES

# Towards a Tier One Royal Air Force

March 29, 2019 | **Mark Gunzinger, Jacob Cohn, Lukas Autenried, Ryan Boone**

Resources: Forces & Capabilities

Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a substantial disconnect between the United Kingdom's National Security Objectives and the resources provided to the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to achieve them.

In the early 1990s, cuts to the UK military budget and reductions in its force structure were rationalized by arguments that the world was a safer place in which most challenges to the nation's security interests could be addressed in a time and manner of its choosing by a smaller Joint Force. Yet, the assumed post-Cold War decrease in operational demand for military forces never materialized.

UK forces have been deployed to the Middle East, Afghanistan, and Eastern Europe for most of the last thirty years even as national defense spending decreased. This helped to create a decades-long mismatch between the missions the UK military has been required to support and the resources made available to it. Should the United Kingdom fail to align its resource priorities with its changing national security needs, this mismatch will grow even larger.

In this report, the authors offer a new force-planning construct that can guide the Royal Air Force's future plans and resource priorities as it prepares for both the most dangerous (NATO Article V) and most likely (continued counter-terror operations) challenges it may confront over the coming years. Moreover, the report recommends investments in new capabilities that would help transition the Royal Air Force to a future force of choice for suppressing anti-access/area denial threats to NATO operations.