



Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments

STUDIES

Five Priorities for the Air Force's Future Combat Air Force

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Resources: Strategy & Policy

The 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) calls for increasing the capacity, lethality, and survivability of the joint force in future contested threat environments. CSBA's report recommends five priorities for the USAF's combat air force (CAF) that support these objectives. In addition to growing the size of the CAF to support future combatant commander requirements, the report recommends the Air Force accelerate its acquisition of stealth F-35As, procure a larger overall inventory of next-generation B-21 bombers, and field unmanned aircraft and weapons that would increase the CAF's survivability and ability to operate over long ranges. The report also recommends the Air Force maintain its ability to generate combat sorties from increasingly resilient basing postures in the Indo-Pacific and Europe. Doing so will require the Air Force to rapidly disperse its forward combat air forces, counter missile attacks on its theater operating locations, and reduce its reliance on vulnerable theater runways and base infrastructure. The report concludes additional resources, including a significant increase in acquisition funding over the next decade, is needed to address the growing gap between the Air Force's combat capabilities and requirements of the 2018 NDS.