



Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments

## STUDIES

# Air Power Metamorphosis: Rethinking Air Force Combat Force Modernization

March 10, 2023 | **Christopher J. Bowie**

Resources: Future Warfare & Concepts

For the past three decades, Chinese leadership has closely studied the United States' power projection capabilities and concept of operations. Consequently, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has tailored its anti-access/area denial approach and air defenses to prevent the United States from leveraging its current strengths. A short- or medium-range concept of air power is unlikely to be successful for power projection or deterrence in the Western Pacific, and a change in direction for the U.S. Air Force is likely necessary.

In *Air Power Metamorphosis: Rethinking Air Force Combat Force Modernization*, Dr. Christopher Bowie proposes a series of shifts to adapt to the changing geostrategic environment. He outlines how to reshape the Air Force over the next 15 years to increase its long-range power projection, even in a scenario where funding levels remain flat. Bowie suggests using the Air Force's newest aircraft, the B-21 stealth bomber, as the focus of power projection, explaining how the B-21 can fulfill a wide variety of missions and offering tradeoffs to increase B-21 production rates. He demonstrates that the plan carries risks, but historically, the Air Force has been able to mitigate those risks and make the most of its platforms. Bowie concludes with a potential path forward and what force structure attributes the Air Force would have in 15 years if it chooses this course of action.