The stage is set for the emergence of a “new American way of war,” in which U.S. forces are able to bring military power to bear against an enemy state quickly, comprehensively, decisively, and with minimal risk of heavy casualties. Arguably, such a transformation in U.S. military capabilities and strategy has been conceivable since the emergence of aircraft with large payloads around the time of World War II. But it has taken the emergence of new technologies and the development of new concepts for all-weather day/night surveillance and engagement, battle management, precision attack, low-observables, and other capabilities to make this new approach to warfare a reality.

Or a near reality. Today, the primary obstacles to realizing this revolution seem more budgetary and political than technical or operational. Some programs key to making this new approach a reality are being abandoned or delayed because of the press of limited resources and competing demands. In this environment, it is critical that the Air Force more clearly define the potential contributions of airpower to joint operations and the role of airpower in this emerging strategy—the “new American way of war.”

The purpose of this report is to recommend a new approach to defining basic doctrine for airpower—an approach that responds to this new strategy. The approach offered here begins with a consideration of the basic characteristics of air forces and space forces, then identifies the operational capabilities of these forces, and finally lists the missions and operational objectives to which these forces can contribute. By insisting that these missions and objectives be defined from the perspective of joint operations, this approach to
Defining the Role of Airpower in Joint Missions

doctrine positions the Air Force favorably to advance the role of its forces in the competition for roles within missions that is envisaged in Title 10 of the U.S. Code.

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PROJECT AIR FORCE

Project AIR FORCE, a division of RAND, is the Air Force’s federally funded research and development center (FFRDC) for studies and analyses. It provides the Air Force with independent analyses of policy alternatives affecting the development, employment, combat readiness, and support of current and future aerospace forces. Research is performed in three programs: Strategy and Doctrine, Force Modernization and Employment, and Resource Management and System Acquisition.