

DOD Official: Defense Industrial Strategy Already Making Headway in Maritime Space

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In January, the DOD released for the first time a National Defense Industrial Strategy, which, among other things, spells out how the department plans to strengthen the U.S. defense industrial base. Already, priorities outlined in that plan are having a positive impact on the nation's maritime space, the assistant secretary of defense for industrial base policy said.



The DOD's NDIS is driven by four priorities, including building resilient supply chains, investing in workforce readiness, leveraging flexible acquisition strategies and enabling economic deterrence.

On Wednesday, Laura Taylor-Kale discussed DOD efforts so far on three of those priorities during the 2024 Sea-Air-Space maritime exposition outside Washington.

"Resilient supply chains seek to invest in and strengthen supply chains in order to be able to securely produce the products and services and technologies that we need now and in the future," Taylor-Kale said.

Her office, she said, manages the Defense Production Act along with industrial base analysis and sustainment programs.

"These programs make targeted investments in the industrial base and in critical areas in the supply chain," she said. That includes, for instance, solid rocket motors and chemicals and critical materials needed for weapons systems.

"Through these programs, last year, we invested more than a billion dollars in critical minerals and materials, castings and forgings and microelectronics supply chains," she said.

The recently signed and passed fiscal year 2024 defense appropriations and the FY2025 presidential budget request, Taylor-Kale said, billions of dollars for supply chain investments includes munitions, maritime strike capabilities, shipyard and submarine industrial base improvements and workforce development initiatives.

Spotlight: FY 25 Defense Budget

"Another way to help build industrial base resilience is to engage with our allies and partners, especially our close ones, to expand global defense production and increase supply chain resilience," she said.

The department is doing that now, she said, citing the AUKUS trilateral security partnership among the U.S., U.K. and Australia as an example. The AUKUS partnership, agreed to in 2021, is aimed at fostering technology exchanges among the three nations and also at helping to build Australia's nuclear-powered submarine force.

Spotlight: AUKUS

"We've worked with Congress to make it easier for our defense industrial base to work closely and collaboratively with industry in Australia and the United Kingdom," she said.

Australia is now working to manufacture munitions for the guided multiple launch rocket system, also called GMLRS, she said. And outside AUKUS, the DOD's relationships with partners and allies are yielding other positive outcomes as well.

"Norway is expanding its capacity to produce 155 mm artillery rounds," she said. "And Germany's Rheinmetall is working to build a munitions factory in the Ukraine just to name a few examples."

In the Indo-Pacific, Taylor-Kale pointed to recently announced agreements in place with India and Japan to coproduce and acquire advanced capabilities to strengthen deterrence across the Indo-Pacific and said there are efforts underway to implement major defense initiatives with South Korea and the Philippines as well.

Spotlight: Focus on Indo-Pacific

As part of an effort to invest in workforce readiness, Taylor-Kale pointed to a program run out of her office, the Metallurgical Engineering Trades Apprenticeship & Learning, or METAL program, which advances efforts to get more young people involved in casting and forging — a critical skill needed to support maritime defense.

"There is a global challenge for skilled workforce," she said. "I hear this all the time, not just from American industry and our colleagues here, but also from international industry as well as our international partners. Younger generations generally show less interest in pursuing manufacturing careers or lack the science, technology, engineering and math skills needed for industrial work."

Casting and forging, Taylor-Kale said, plays an important role in the maritime environment, including construction of offshore platforms, ship hulls, propellers and rudders.

"Through national workforce initiatives like the [METAL] program ... the DOD is introducing younger generations to careers in casting and forging, something that I actually think is really cool and fascinating that we're doing it and we're oftentimes using advanced technologies to help spur interest in these areas," she said.

 *Spotlight: Science & Tech*

Supporting economic deterrence, Taylor-Kale pointed out that Congress has named Australia and the U.K. as domestic sources eligible for the Defense Production Act.

"Companies in those countries, as well as in Canada, can apply for [Defense Production Act] grants," she said. "And ... our newly stood-up Defense Industrial Base Consortium ... also accepts proposals from international partners, from the U.K., Canada and Australia."

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