



Dr. Mara E. Karlin

Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities



Dr. Mara E. Karlin is the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities. She is responsible for advising the Secretary of Defense and other senior defense leaders on national security and defense strategy; the forces, contingency plans, and associated posture necessary to implement the defense strategy; emerging capabilities; and security cooperation plans and policies, to include strategy and policy for the Defense Security Cooperation Agency. Dr. Karlin ensures that the Department of Defense (DoD)'s program and budget decisions support and advance senior DoD leaders' strategic direction, especially as articulated in defense planning guidance.

Prior to assuming her current role, Dr. Mara Karlin was Performing the Duties of Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy from August 2021 to February 2022. Dr. Karlin was sworn in as the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategies, Plans, and Capabilities on August 17, 2021.

Preceding this role, Dr. Karlin served as the Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, where she led the Department's relations with Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Russia, Eurasia, and the Western Hemisphere. She served on the policy team for the Biden-Harris Transition, was Director of Strategic Studies and an Associate Professor at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), and a Nonresident Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution. Previously, she served in national security roles for five U.S. secretaries of defense, advising on policies spanning strategic planning, defense policy and budgeting, future conflicts, and regional security affairs.

Dr. Karlin started her government career as a civil servant in the Office of the Secretary of Defense and has received the Secretary of Defense Meritorious Civilian Service Award. She is the author of two books on defense policy and military history.