

Mara Karlin, PhD is a senior executive and national security leader with two decades of experience shaping geopolitics at the highest levels of the U.S. government. She is a professor of practice at Johns Hopkins University-School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. She served in national security roles for six U.S. secretaries of defense, advising on strategic planning, risk management, defense budgeting, the future of conflict, and regional affairs. She was confirmed by the U.S. Senate and served as Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities, leading the development and implementation of the 2022 National Defense Strategy, the Nuclear Posture Review, and Missile Defense Review—the first time all major strategies were conducted simultaneously. In that role, she advised the secretary of defense on forces, plans, posture, emerging capabilities policy, and security cooperation, including a historic modernization of U.S. force posture, security cooperation reform, and the development of numerous national and defense strategic guidance documents. Previously, she led the Department of Defense's relations with nearly 150 countries, and spent years focused specifically on U.S. policy toward the Middle East, Europe, and Asia. She has negotiated with dozens of countries around the world, including brokering the very first deal in which a foreign country invested in the U.S. defense industrial base. In addition to working across three administrations, she has been Director of Strategic Studies at SAIS and an associate professor at SAIS, was on the 2018 National Defense Strategy Commission staff, and a member of the Congressionally appointed Syria Study Group. She was a professor on Semester at Sea in Spring 2017 and Spring 2024.

Karlin published two acclaimed books on military history and defense policy: *Building Militaries in Fragile States* and *The Inheritance: America's Military After Two Decades of War*. She received the Secretary of Defense Distinguished Public Service Medal, the highest civilian award presented by the secretary of defense.

She holds an undergraduate degree in Political Science summa cum laude from Newcomb College, Tulane University; a master's degree in Strategic Studies, Middle East Studies, and International Economics with distinction from SAIS; and a PhD in Strategic Studies from SAIS.