

National Security Leaders Underscore Urgency in Complex Threat Landscape



Release from SENEDIA

Led by SASC Chair, SECNAV, and Navy VCNO, Conference Speakers Call for Innovation and Collaboration to Maintain American Competitiveness

NEWPORT, R.I. – SENEDIA, the alliance for defense tech, talent, and innovation, yesterday concluded Defense Innovation Days, an important national defense convening that featured three days of policy discussion, industry networking, and planning for the future in an increasingly-complex national security landscape.

Senator Jack Reed, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, participated in multiple sessions, providing critical insight and underscoring the urgency of the moment.

“Our defense industry leaders understand the urgency and enormity of the challenges we face today in a constantly changing national security landscape,” said Reed. “Our adversaries have found ways to exploit this environment, and in order to keep pace, we need to transform the Department of Defense to innovate at the speed of progress. Innovation must be nourished and maintained. We must work smarter and harder to regain ground lost.”

Urgency, innovation, and collaboration emerged as key themes at this year’s 9th annual event, with speakers warning of the potential consequences if investments stall in research and

development, workforce training, or military deterrence.

“Defense Innovation Days brings together the most influential voices in national security, paired with the most innovative leaders of the defense industry, and this year’s event illustrated the power of that partnership,” said Molly Donohue Magee, Executive Director of SENEDIA. “When we collaborate in service of our nation—guided by a desire to support our men and women in uniform—we can maintain and advance our strength at home and abroad.”

Among the key takeaways are:

- China and climate change are among the greatest threats and sources of instability facing our national security landscape.
- We are in a “decade of maximum danger,” which calls for a “decisive decade” of investment, training, and strategic planning in return.
- By working with and learning from private industry, as well as investing in its own internal capacity, DoD is rapidly scaling up the development and deployment of innovative and emerging technologies. Innovation must concurrently include the ability to scale to meet the demand.
- Collaboration is essential to accelerate progress, including connecting supply chain companies to DoD contracts, investing in workforce development, and enacting meaningful public policy like AUKUS.

Distinguished speakers at this sold-out event with more than 400 registrants included the Honorable Carlos Del Toro, Secretary of the Navy; Adm. Lisa Franchetti, Vice Chief of Naval Operations; Dr. William LaPlante, the Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment; and Rear Adm. John

Mauger, Commander of the U.S. Coast Guard First District.

Urgency: Navigating a Complex Threat Environment

America faces a range of threats at home and abroad, including the short- and long-term impacts of climate instability. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse ticked off a list of threats to the military created or worsened by the changing climate, such as sea level rise threatening coastal Naval bases.

“Climate is also a huge catalyst of conflict. A lot of that will have to do with migration and a lot of that will have to do with the battle over resources,” said Whitehouse. “It gets real in a hurry.”

Multiple speakers referenced DoD efforts to reduce climate emissions, including Rear Admiral John Mauger, Commander of the First Coast Guard District. The Coast Guard and their counterparts across branches have increasingly had to navigate severe storms, fires, floods, and other weather-related challenges.

“Reflecting on all of this, I can’t help but feel that this level of complexity is our new normal. As complex as these situations are, I understand that command, control, multi-domain warfighting is even more complex,” he said.

China was the other major threat highlighted extensively throughout the convening. Dr. Andrew Erickson, a Professor of Strategy at the Naval War College and Research Director of its China Maritime Studies Institute, offered a sobering conclusion, calling this the “decade of maximum danger,” as China maximizes its capabilities and investment.

Innovation: Transforming Government and Industry, Together

With the challenges clearly laid out, [Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro emphasized that, across the board, innovation is a key solution](#), particularly in the undersea environment.

“Our nation expects us to be ready with the necessary capabilities and capacity to prevail now and in the future. We cannot do that without a tremendous and continuous push to innovate,” he said. “Our competitors have invested huge amounts of money into building up their capabilities and we must maintain the pace.”

Innovation is happening as the Navy modernizes its fleet, with 86 ships under contract and 54 in construction, reducing maintenance delays in the process. Dr. William LaPlante, the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment, likewise pointed to billions of dollars in investments to industrial base activities and the supply chain and called on the audience to find additional ways to work together to drive progress.

“We cannot be complacent in the undersea domain,” he said, [pointing to the New England Submarine Shipbuilding Partnership—an initiative powered by SENEDIA](#) that has supported the training of more than 3,400 defense professionals since 2020—as an example of ensuring that the armed services have the talent and technology they need to be effective. “It has been a poster child of how we can work together.”

Task Force 59, charged with rapidly integrating unmanned systems and artificial intelligence into maritime operations, is a hotbed for technology being tested, developed, and deployed. “We’re learning a lot. We’re failing fast. We’re iterating and we’re getting better,” said Captain Colin Corridan, Commodore of Task Force 59.

Nickolas Guertin, Director of Department of Defense Operational Test and Evaluation, noted that some of the innovation needed is not just in the technologies and systems used, but in the processes behind them and the organizational culture that inspires people to think outside the box.

“We need to better understand what it takes to move people in a different direction,” he said. “We need to embrace what we don’t know.”

Collaboration: Making Connections to Accelerate Progress

Complex challenges demand multi-pronged solutions. Most of all, said Vice Chief of Naval Operations Lisa Franchetti, they require collaboration. She said we are in the midst of a “decisive decade,” and compared the heightened need for defense investments today to the pre-war readiness efforts of the 1930s.

“A decisive decade requires a decisive Naval force,” she said. “Only a concerted effort across the executive branch, Congress, Navy, and industry can provide and maintain the fleet America needs to deter, fight, and win wars at sea. The stakes are too high, and the time is too short, to act otherwise.”

AUKUS was cited as a strong example of the power of collaboration. Lisa Radocha, Executive Director of the Program Executive Office Attack Submarines, and Vice Admiral William Houston, Commander, Naval Submarine Forces, served on a panel about the trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Radocha called it a “monumental opportunity” and a “generational endeavor,” stressing that undersea warfare is one of the most important missions in the DoD.

Defense Innovation Days is one of the mechanisms SENEDIA uses to increase collaboration between industry and DoD. On the exhibitor floor, best-in-class technology, products, and programs were on display [as 30 sponsors connected with one another](#). During open questions across the three days, companies learned more about how to do business with and compete for contracts with the Department of Defense.

Other speakers featured at Defense Innovation Days include

Congressman Seth Magaziner; Dr. Brett Seidle, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development, Test, and Engineering; Marie Bussiere, acting Technical Director for the Naval Undersea Warfare Center Division Newport and DASN RDT&E Digital Transformation Executive for the Naval Undersea Warfare Center; and Brigadier General David Trybula, Deputy Commanding General, Combat Capabilities Development Command and Senior Commander of Natick Soldier Systems Center.

The 10th annual Defense Innovation Days will take place 26-28 August 2024 in Newport, RI. Registration will open in January.