

Preserving the American Edge: Revitalizing the Defense Industrial Base

Description

Episode 147 of the *Irregular Warfare Podcast* examines the past, present, and future of America's defense industrial base and why its strength may determine the outcome of the next era of great power competition.

Drawing on historical experience and contemporary reforms, the episode argues that American military advantage has long depended on close collaboration between government and industry. From Roosevelt's wartime mobilization to Cold War breakthroughs in stealth and reconnaissance, U.S. success has repeatedly flowed from its ability to harness commercial innovation and industrial scale. Today, however, that ecosystem faces mounting strain as China expands its manufacturing capacity and defense production at unprecedented speed.

The conversation highlights a central tension: while the United States retains unmatched technological depth—especially in commercial sectors such as artificial intelligence and advanced computing—much of that innovation remains only partially integrated into defense. Regulatory barriers, acquisition culture, and post-Cold War consolidation have narrowed the defense industrial base, limiting the military's ability to tap the full breadth of American industry. In response, the U.S. Army is experimenting with faster acquisition cycles, commercial partnerships, and modular, software-driven designs that shorten timelines from concept to fielding while preserving the ability to scale production in a crisis.

Finally, the discussion addresses the policy implications of rebuilding industrial strength. Sustained investment, clearer demand signals to industry, and greater flexibility in budgeting and contracting are essential to restoring surge capacity and critical stockpiles. The guests emphasize that the costs of preparation are far lower than the costs of deterrence failure. For practitioners and policymakers alike, the episode highlights a simple but urgent message: preserving America's military edge requires aligning industrial policy, acquisition reform, and technological innovation with the realities of renewed great power competition.

[Dr. Alexander Miller](#) is the Chief Technology Officer and Senior Advisor for Science and Technology to the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army. He holds a Master's degree in Systems Engineering from Johns Hopkins University and a Doctorate of Technology from Purdue University's Polytechnic Institute.

[Dr. Seth G. Jones](#) is President of the Defense and Security Department and Harold Brown Chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). His work focuses on defense strategy, the defense industrial base, and irregular warfare. His book *The American Edge: The Military Tech Nexus and the Sources of Great Power Dominance* anchors this episode's discussion.

[Ben Jebb](#) and [Kyle Atwell](#) host this episode. Please reach out to the Irregular Warfare Podcast team with any questions about the episode or the broader mission of the show.

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Outro music: [â??Launchâ??](#) by Ketsa

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