



THE FUTURE FIGHT
MISSISSIPPI'S DEFENSE ECONOMY
STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-2026





Airmen from the 321st Contingency Response Wing from Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J., try to attach a sling load to a Mississippi Army National Guard medical evacuation UH-60 Black Hawk.



For generations, Mississippi has supported missions vital to America’s security and defense. The state’s commitment is evidenced by its multiple military installations and training areas, a population that is willing to serve, communities willing to support and a legacy of excellence. We have helped expand the defense industry with thousands of high-wage, high-skill jobs, research and development facilities and high-tech manufacturing capabilities that can compete successfully with some of the world’s most innovative leaders.

Mississippi’s defense economy is not just critical to supporting our national security. Mississippi is ranked 5th among all states in defense GDP and 21st in defense contract spending. These statistics demonstrate the strength of our military installations and our defense industry, as well as the fact that several thousand Mississippi families depend on jobs in this important

sector. Add to this the downstream benefits experienced by military communities that support activities on and around our military installations, and it becomes evident how vital the defense industry is to all Mississippians.

Over the last decade, we have witnessed a dramatic shift in the nature of national defense and homeland security, as demand has grown for unmanned, cyber and space-based assets to counter existing and future threats. With this evolution comes tremendous opportunity, and we are not simply waiting for this opportunity to come to us. We have a plan.

Through partners such as the Governor’s Office of Military Affairs, the Mississippi Defense Initiative, the Mississippi National Guard, Accelerate Mississippi, and the Mississippi Development Authority, we are realigning our core strategies, resources and workforce to ensure Mississippi is well positioned to capitalize on trends in our national defense and security efforts.

We also are working closely with our military communities to foster even more cooperation in our military towns, cities and counties. These efforts benefit the service members who wear our nation’s uniform, those whose jobs and businesses help support the missions of our bases and families seeking the best quality of life for their loved ones.

This plan, which has been developed with input from military personnel, commercial defense industry members, academic experts and leaders from communities across our state, belongs to all Mississippians and those stationed here while they serve. It will position Mississippi at the forefront of the defense industry while benefiting all Mississippians and ensuring continued freedom for the country we love.

Defense. Security. Prosperity. Mississippi is ready to do our part.

Sincerely,

Tate Reeves

Governor



TABLE OF CONTENTS

FORWARD.....5

INTRODUCTION.....6

AREA 1 – Military Installations and Supporting Communities 12

AREA 2 – Defense Industry..... 16

AREA 3 – Veteran Employment, Collaboration, and Growth Opportunities.....20

CONCLUSION 24

Wyoming Air National Guard airmen participate in Southern Strike at the Gulfport Combat Readiness Training Center. Southern Strike is a large-scale, multi-branch exercise hosted by the Mississippi National Guard. Photo by Tech. Sgt. Jon Alderman.

FORWARD

The creation of a strategic pathway to develop and support Mississippi’s defense industry economy began in earnest with the publication of the Mississippi Defense Initiative Strategic Plan in 2019. One of the major goals stated in the plan was: “Mississippi will formalize its commitment by establishing a coordinating body to guide, market, disseminate information, and facilitate policy recommendations for Mississippi’s defense economy.”

This goal was achieved in June 2021 with the formation of the Governor’s Office of Military Affairs (GOMA), housed within the Mississippi Development Authority (MDA).

The process has continued into the present with the publication of this strategic plan for the years 2022 to 2026. The primary authors of this strategic plan are GOMA and the Mississippi Defense Initiative (MDI). This plan was developed with input from various economic development organizations, Mississippi’s research universities, Mississippi’s defense industrial base sector, business and government leaders, and active and retired military personnel.

Governor’s Office of Military Affairs

Governor Tate Reeves created GOMA in the summer of 2021. It is housed within MDA. GOMA’s charge is to develop the landscape that attracts space and defense business and to ensure U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) and national security investments.

Mississippi Defense Initiative

MDI, a program located at the University of Southern Mississippi (USM), is derived from the DoD Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation’s (OLDCC) Industry Resilience (IR) grant. MDI works to make Mississippi’s defense sector more resilient, competitive, and diversified by improving job opportunities, the local tax base, wealth creation, and quality of life (QoL). MDI’s mission is to strengthen Mississippi’s defense and national security assets as an economic driver.

INTRODUCTION

MS Army National Guard Soldiers with the 2nd Battalion, 20th Special Forces Group (Airborne) conduct fast rope insertion training. Photo by Staff Sgt. Shane Hamann.

Mississippi has a history of supporting America's defense and security efforts. Installations in our state train and equip warfighters, maintain mission-critical machinery and equipment, and develop platforms and technologies that ensure the United States remains dominant on the battlefield.

National defense and security, however, are ever-evolving, and our state must respond accordingly. Maintaining technological superiority is critical as our nation responds to new and emerging threats. In addition to fighting enemies on land, sea, and air, our military leaders have declared that the fight now extends to the cyber and space domains. Cyberspace, artificial intelligence, data science, robotics, unmanned systems, space-based systems, and countless other technologies are major priorities.

While Mississippi's defense industries, research universities, and federal defense assets are already involved in these sectors, we must continue to anticipate and adapt to existing and emerging defense needs that address the changing character of modern warfare.

Mississippi is well-positioned to play a leading role in the modern defense economy. We recognize the technological needs of our fighters, the spaces in which they train, the tours of duty on which they proudly serve, and the sacrifices they make to ensure we all remain strong, safe, and free.



A WC-130J Super Hercules aircraft from the 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron (Hurricane Hunters) taxis at Keesler Air Force Base after completing its mission.

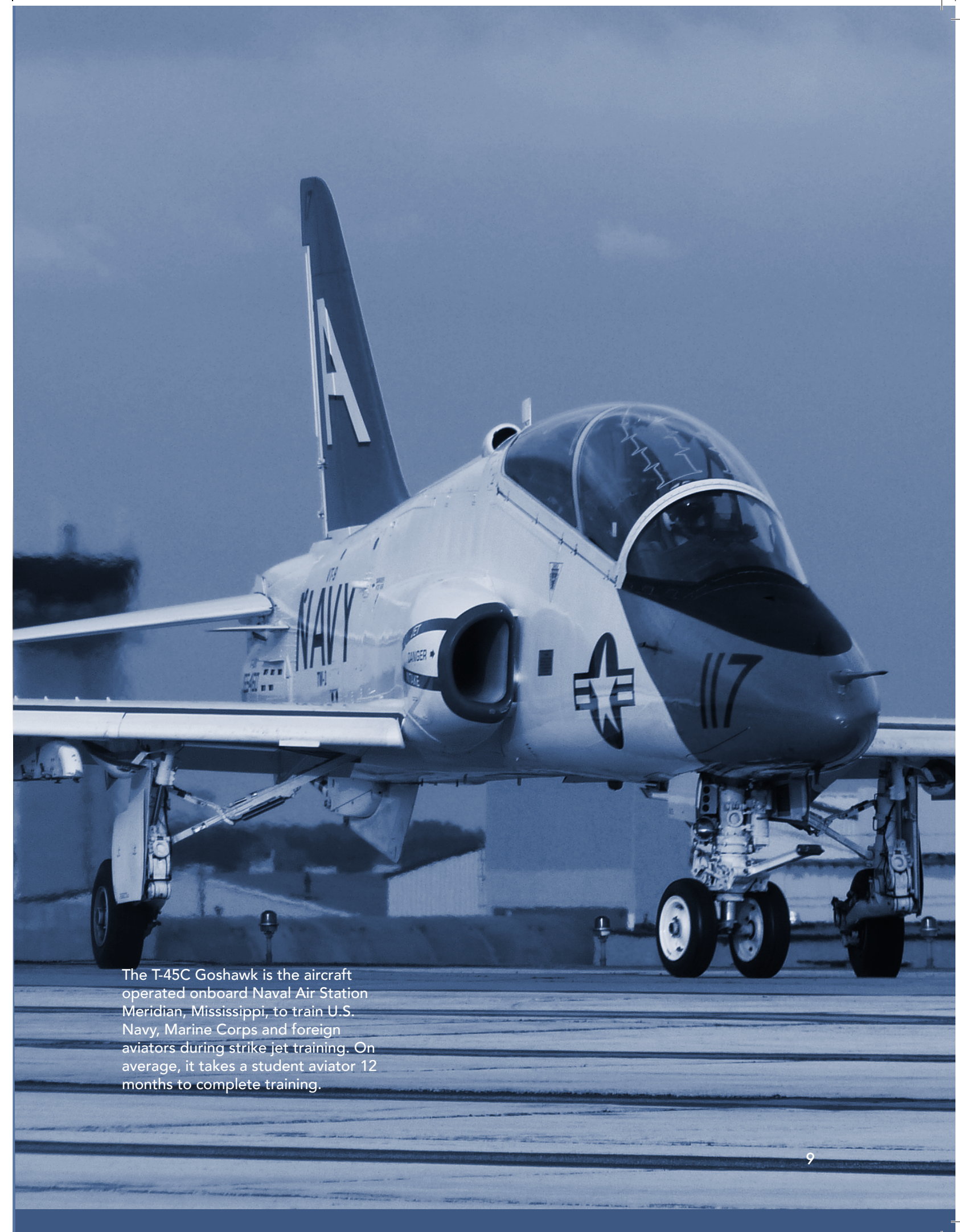
Ingalls Shipbuilding Company was founded in 1938 and is today the largest producer of ships for the U.S. Navy. Ingalls continues to bring economic growth to Mississippi by remaining the largest manufacturing employer in the state. Source: History of Defense In MS, MSDefense.net



At the time of the Pearl Harbor attack on Dec. 7, 1941, more than 40,000 soldiers were in training at Camp Shelby. From 1956 to 1965, the base was established as the main training camp for the 31st "Dixie" Division. During the height of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, 250,000 service members trained at Camp Shelby.



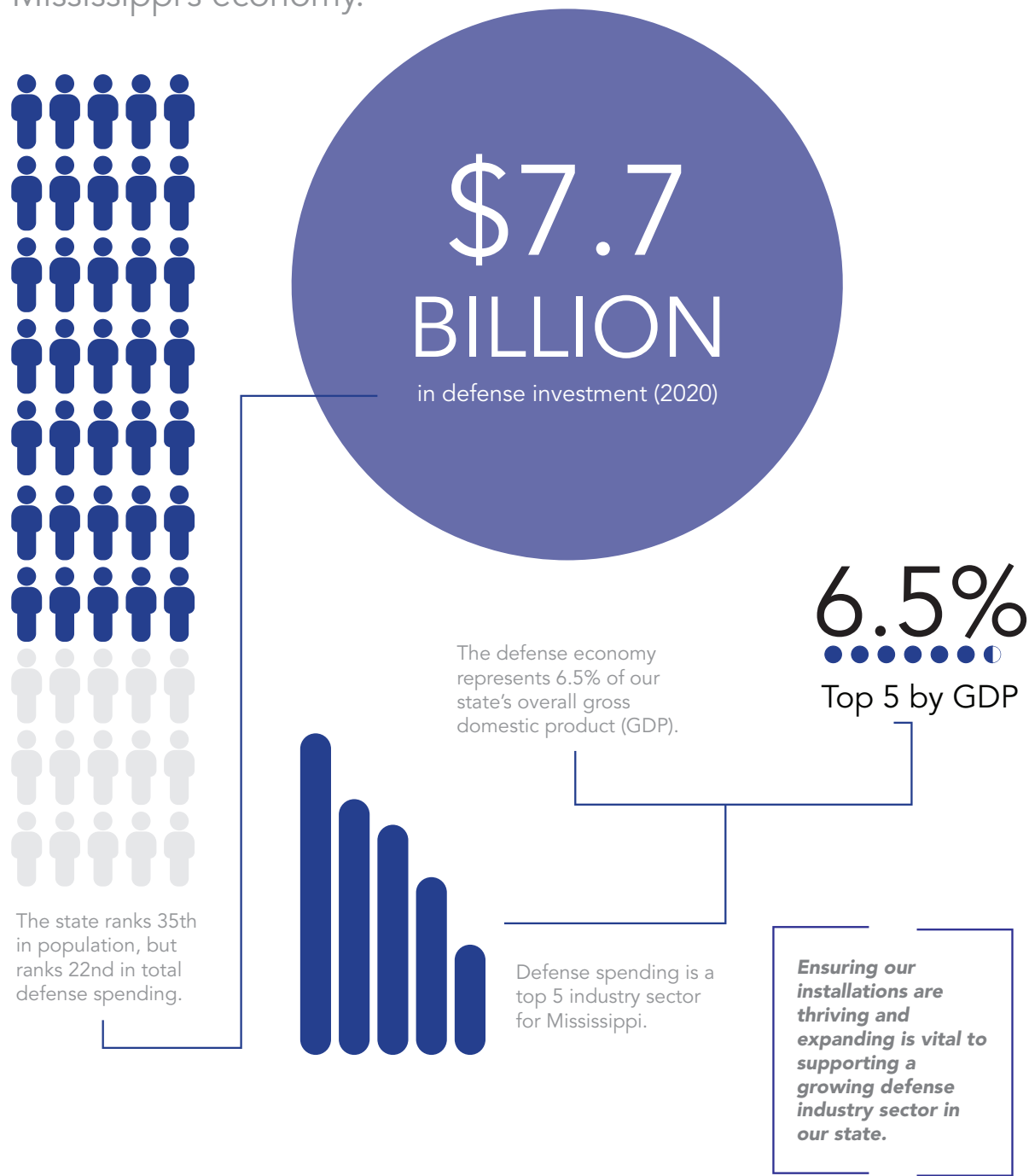
The Naval Technical Training Center at Naval Air Station Meridian is the Navy's primary training facility for enlisted administrative and supply class "A" schools.



The T-45C Goshawk is the aircraft operated onboard Naval Air Station Meridian, Mississippi, to train U.S. Navy, Marine Corps and foreign aviators during strike jet training. On average, it takes a student aviator 12 months to complete training.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Military spending has an outsized impact on Mississippi's economy.



This plan reflects a strategic approach to growing Mississippi's defense and security economy by establishing goals and tactical actions within each of these key areas.

- Area 1: Military installations and their supporting communities
- Area 2: Defense industry
- Area 3: Veteran employment and collaboration

It should be noted that while these have been split into three different goals, they are all interrelated and have a significant amount of overlap.



The 248th Air Traffic Control Squadron operates out of Key Field, in Meridian. The 248th provides service to all aircraft, including commercial airline, civilian general aviation, and military aircraft.

AREA 1

MILITARY INSTALLATIONS AND SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES

STAKEHOLDERS:

Installation Leaders
Community Leaders
Local Economic Development Organizations
Local Chambers of Commerce
Mississippi Defense Communities Development Council
Mississippi Development Authority

AREA OBJECTIVE:

Ensure Mississippi's military installations are thriving
by supporting military communities.



U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Marc Alfonso Ganir, 154th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron aerospace propulsion craftsman, inspects a C-17 Globemaster III engine during the Southern Strike exercise at the Gulfport Combat Readiness Training Center.

This area’s focus is the relationship between the community and the installation, which will increase in importance with the likelihood of installation missions evolving or changing in the future.

Goals for Area 1

Goal 1 – Re-create the Mississippi Military Communities Council (MMCC) as a new entity, shifting emphasis away from a Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) focus*. The new MMCC will work to improve quality of life for military families and support military installations and missions.

- 1. Advise on investments for installations, communities, and mission support.
- 2. Improve the quality of life for military families.
- 3. Protect and grow military installations via relationship development and pooling information resources.

Goal 2 – Foster awareness, strategic communications, and continuous improvement between installations and communities that support them.

- 1. Study best practices and concepts.
- 2. Develop a best practices manual.
- 3. Disseminate best practices.
- 4. Refine the process.

Goal 3 – Work with installation leadership and communities to develop an installation-specific strategic plan.

- 1. Advocate for enhancements and other mission support when appropriate.
- 2. Identify opportunities for Mississippi businesses to provide solutions.

*The Governor’s Office of Military Affairs accomplished this goal prior to the publication of this document.

The Pentagon has made it a priority to address QoL. The DoD has made it clear that QoL aspects can and likely will affect basing decisions. For this reason, QoL at our installation communities must be a priority.

Mississippi can invigorate its relationship with the military by reforming the MMCC as the Mississippi Defense Communities Development Council (MSDCDC). This was addressed by Governor Reeves in February of 2022 when he signed Executive Order 1562, which instituted MSDCDC. In his remarks Governor Reeves stated, “The council will continue to lead a community-based effort to strengthen the state’s military installations and advise state and federal lawmakers on opportunities for new missions and new facilities.”



The Security Department at Naval Air Station Meridian is tasked with providing professional law enforcement and physical security service for the installation by protecting life and property and providing a safe environment. The department’s Military Working Dog Program operates with three expertly trained dogs and their handlers.

AREA 2

DEFENSE INDUSTRY

STAKEHOLDERS:

Local Economic Development Organizations
Communities
Industry Organizations
Mississippi Development Authority

AREA OBJECTIVE:

Strengthen and grow Mississippi's defense industry.



An air traffic controller with the 248th Air Traffic Control Squadron (ATCS) observes inbound aircraft at Key Field Air National Guard Base. Key Field is the busiest airport in the state of Mississippi for military and commercial air traffic.

This area focuses on supporting and augmenting state, local, and federal efforts to attract defense installations and defense-related industrial development via dedicated economic development strategies.

Goals for Area 2

Goal 1 – Conduct Defense and Industry Assessment

- 1. Utilize MDI resources to facilitate research and reporting for needs as identified.
- 2. Conduct Defense Survey Initiative (pilot project).
- 3. Utilize information gained from defense industry survey to provide solutions.

Goal 2 – Create market resources

- 1. Develop messaging strategy for increasing DoD interest and engagement.
- 2. Produce marketing materials for target industry sectors and military missions.

Defense spending in Mississippi can be broken into two major categories: defense personnel and contract spending. Those two categories represent annual spending of around \$1.7B and \$6B respectively. Growing defense spending benefits our economy, but our military personnel also benefit from a strengthened defense ecosystem in the state.

This area is focused on assessing growth opportunities across our ecosystem. In Goal 1, we recognize the need to gather and apply data. MDI is already positioned to research critical metrics and analyze growth opportunities. In Goal 2, GOMA and MDI will partner with industry, military, and academia to showcase the landscape of opportunities for the defense industry, DoD, and national security agencies to utilize state assets leading to new and expanded investment.



For six decades, NASA's Stennis Space Center, located on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, has played a pivotal role in our nation's aerospace and defense industry. With its state-of-the-art rocket and jet engine testing facilities and research institutions, Stennis maintains one of the greatest concentrations of aerospace and defense personnel in the country. Mississippi offers a robust portfolio of resources and advantages, such as the Aerospace Initiative Incentives Program and our proximity to major military installations, to help industry leaders in this vital sector soar above – and beyond – the competition.

Four key tactics will be the focus for GOMA and MDI for the life of this strategic plan. The tactics will lead to growth in military spending and defense industry investment:

- 1. Leverage our strengths in defense research, unmanned systems, high-performance computing, testing and evaluation, logistics, training, and maintenance as a catalyst for industry expansion and growth.
- 2. Support efforts to attract assets to the state that are complementary to current and evolving military missions.
- 3. Work with MDA and local Economic Development Organizations (EDOs) to provide research, expertise, and connectivity for industry attraction projects.
- 4. Develop a mechanism to foster partnerships among applicable businesses, particularly underutilized and potential in-state suppliers.



The 186th Air Refueling Wing provides rapid global mobility and agile combat support to our state and nation. The 186th is a unit of the Mississippi Air National Guard stationed at Meridian Regional Airport.

AREA 3

VETERAN EMPLOYMENT, COLLABORATION, AND FOCUS ON THE FUTURE FIGHT

STAKEHOLDERS:

Installations
Civilian Workforce
Local Economic Development Organizations
Community Elected Officials
Mississippi Veterans Workforce Council
Mississippi Enterprise for Technology
Mississippi Research Consortium
Accelerate Mississippi

AREA OBJECTIVE:

Grow the defense industry from within the state by focusing on veteran employment in current and emerging verticals and utilizing DoD approved collaborations and public-private partnerships.



Naval Air Station Meridian is home to Marine Aviation Training Support Squadron One, which provides “A” military occupational specialties following Marine Corps Recruit Training and Marine Combat Training. On average, 800 enlisted Marines graduate from the program each year.

This area focuses on crucial elements for expanding our defense workforce and creating additional opportunities for existing entities within the state while also envisioning the future of defense.

Goals for Area 3

Goal 1 - Build on previous successes and develop a data-centric platform that connects veterans and military-trained personnel with defined workforce needs in the state.

- 1. Build on the success of the Mississippi Veterans Workforce Council (MS-VWC).
- 2. Incorporate efforts of workforce development organizations.
- 3. Create a platform connecting military personnel with private sector opportunities.
- 4. Once established, focus on employment in current and emerging defense verticals.

Goal 2 - Facilitate the creation of ecosystems, partnerships, and consortia that will lead to future growth.

- 1. Utilize all available partnership tools such as Enhanced Use Lease agreements to create private-sector growth alongside public-sector locations.
- 2. Leverage interconnected networks of physical infrastructure and defense assets.
- 3. Envision future fight needs and developing recommendations to move Mississippi’s defense and security industry in applicable alignment.

MS-VWC operates as an innovative state interagency body committed to sharing best practices and leveraging resources with participating agencies across the state to address the needs of veterans, Active Duty (including National Guard and Reserve), and their families regarding employment and employment-related challenges. The Coalition was formed to mitigate employment challenges concerning the COVID-19 global pandemic by triaging the readiness of agencies with a veteran client base. Five agencies initially organized MS-VWC, including Mississippi Veterans Affairs Department, MDI, Mississippi Army National Guard, Work for Warriors Mississippi Program, Mississippi Department of Employment Security, and MDA. Accelerate MS joined the council in 2022.

Recruiting, developing, and retaining a high-quality military and civilian workforce is essential for warfighting success. Cultivating a lethal, agile force requires more than just new technologies and posture changes; it depends on the ability of our warfighters and the military workforce to integrate new capabilities, adapt warfighting approaches, and change business practices to achieve mission success. The creativity and talent of the American warfighter is our greatest enduring strength and one we do not take for granted.

For this reason, the plan reflects a high priority on attracting and training a qualified workforce, identifying and supporting applicable resources and training programs, upskilling active duty and recently discharged military personnel, and connecting the defense industry with workforce entities.

The authors will also seek partners to focus on other industry needs, including the facilitation of beneficial partnerships with Mississippi’s research universities and community college training programs, education regarding available and potential incentive packages/programs, coordinating opportunities for in-state supplier partnerships, and helping to establish a communications conduit between communities.

In 2020, the State Legislature vested Accelerate MS with the authority to be the state’s workforce agency. Solving workforce challenges is crucial to defense sector growth. The authors of this strategic plan recognize both the needs and challenges and will ensure their efforts are complementary to our state’s efforts and focuses.



Seabees at the Naval Construction Battalion Center Gulfport participate in the homeport training project.

CONCLUSION

A CH-53E Super Stallion helicopter assigned to Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 366 is staged on the flight line during Exercise Raven 20-1 at Gulfport.

Our approach to strengthening and growing our defense economy comes partly from the 2018 National Defense Strategy (summary). A section of that document states:

The security environment is also affected by rapid technological advancements and the changing character of war. The drive to develop new technologies is relentless, expanding to more actors with lower barriers of entry, and moving at accelerating speed. New technologies include advanced computing, “big data” analytics, artificial intelligence, autonomy, robotics, directed energy, hypersonics, and biotechnology—the very technologies that ensure we will be able to fight and win the wars of the future. New commercial technology will change society and, ultimately, the character of war.

The fact that many technological developments will come from the commercial sector means that state competitors and non-state actors will also have access to them, a fact that risks eroding the conventional overmatch to which our Nation has grown accustomed. Maintaining the Department’s technological advantage will require changes to industry culture, investment sources, and protection across the National Security Innovation Base.

In other words, national defense is highly dependent on the defense industrial base to provide solutions. Mississippi will continue to contribute to our common national defense by both training the warfighter and equipping the warfighter. Development and growth begins with recognizing what our military looks like today in terms of personnel, the wars they are fighting, and the theaters in which they are waged.

The state of Mississippi’s efforts are aligned with those of our warfighters. Our communities are oriented to support our warfighters and local military leaders, enhancing the installations they serve.

We are leading the way.



102nd Rescue Squadron loadmasters watch as a UH-60 Pave Hawk refuels during an air refueling training scenario over the Gulf Coast of Mississippi during the Southern Strike exercise.

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