

The Trump administration (Administration) recently released “America’s Maritime Action Plan” (MAP), which is the next step towards achieving the policy goals stated in the Administration’s April 9, 2025 Executive Order 14269 entitled “Restoring American Maritime Dominance.”

The MAP focuses on rebuilding the US domestic shipbuilding capacity, modernizing maritime regulations, increasing the size of the US merchant fleet and increasing support for maritime workforce education and training.

The MAP reinforces the Administration’s focus on America’s maritime sector. Similar to the US Trade Representative’s (USTR) Section 301 investigation into Chinese shipbuilding and maritime practices, the MAP is premised on the notion that commercial shipbuilding and a vibrant merchant marine are directly tied to, and indeed essential to national and economic security. The MAP is yet another example of the continued intersection between economic, trade and national security concerns that is central to President Donald Trump’s “America First” agenda. MAP is premised on the following precepts:

- Commercial shipbuilding is integral to national and economic security
- US-built and US-flagged vessels are viewed as strategic priorities
- Multi-year procurement and financing reforms aim to stabilize industrial demand
- Autonomous maritime systems are integrated into long-term industrial planning
- Arctic access and maritime infrastructure are treated as economic and security assets
- Workforce, trade, tax and regulatory reforms are used to lock in long-term maritime industrial capacity

## The Pillars of the MAP

The MAP is an overarching master plan that cuts across multiple areas of the maritime sector.

To increase the size of the US flagged merchant fleet and grow domestic shipbuilding capabilities and enhance national maritime security, the MAP is broken into the following “Pillars:”

### Pillar I – Rebuilding US Shipping

- Increasing domestic shipbuilding capacity
- Incentivizing investment in US shipyards
- Establishing maritime prosperity zones to incentivize and align new domestic and allied investment in US maritime industries and waterfront communities
- Addressing supply and demand issues
- Reducing dependence on unreliable suppliers through heightened cooperation with allies and partners

### Pillar II: Marine Workforce Education/Training

- Expanding mariner training and education to address workforce challenges in the maritime sector through maritime educational institutions and workforce transitions
- Providing financial and regulatory incentives for the training of shipbuilders and US credentialed mariners
- Modernizing the US Merchant Marine Academy
- Enhancing maritime training capabilities to meet industry needs

### Pillar III: Growing the Marine Industrial Base (MIB)

- Strengthening requirements for shipping government-impelled and commercial cargoes on US-flagged vessels
- Imposing a land port maintenance tax to balance payments from importations across land ports versus maritime ports
- Streamlining and improving acquisition processes for US government vessels, while reducing change orders
- Considering actions, as appropriate, based on the USTR’s investigation of China’s targeting of the maritime, logistics and shipbuilding sectors for dominance

### Pillar IV: National and Economic Security

The goals that are part of Pillar IV are designed to strengthen the resilience of the maritime industry as follows:

- Strengthening the resilience of the MIB through improved component supply chains
- Increasing the fleet of commercial vessels trading internationally under the US flag
- Establishing a Maritime Security Trust Fund (MSTF)
- Fostering the development of the autonomous maritime technology industry
- Developing a strategy to secure Arctic waterways and enable American prosperity in the face of evolving Arctic security challenges and associated risks
- Prioritizing the recapitalization of government owned sealift vessels

## Significant MAP Recommendations

Among the recommendations set forth in the MAP are:

### Overhauling Ship Financing

- Investors, the finance industry and other shipping industry professionals should take note that the MAP calls for the long-term funding and the modernization of the federal ship financing program (Title XI), as well as the US Maritime Administration (MARAD) Capital Construction Fund.

### Establishing Maritime Security Trust Fund (MSTF)

- The MSTF would provide funding for long-term investment in America’s shipbuilding capacity, fleet expansion and maritime workforce

## Vessel and Land Entry Fees

- A universal fee on foreign built vessels from any nation entering US ports would be imposed. Revenue collected from the universal vessel entry fee would be paid to fund either infrastructure improvements, or the MSTF. The fee would be assessed on the weight of the imported tonnage arriving on the vessel.
  - It is not clear whether proposed fees would be in addition, or in lieu of the fees proposed by the USTR's Section 301 China maritime investigation.
- To prevent the circumvention of the vessel entry fees, a land port maintenance tax is proposed based on 0.125 percent of the value of the merchandise that enters the US.

## International Bridge Agreements

- Reaching agreements with allied shipyard to build vessels in their home yards, while having foreign shipbuilders invest in US shipyards.

## What's Next

### Potential Congressional and Agency Action

The MAP is a blueprint for the government, shipbuilders and the maritime industry to meet the goals articulated in [Executive Order](#) 14269 – “Restoring American Maritime Dominance,” and highlights a pressing need to invest in the maritime sector. The MAP sets out to expand domestic shipbuilding from less than 1% of global commercial ship construction to a level that can support both military logistics and international trade. The US currently operates only eight active shipyards capable of building vessels greater than 400 feet in length. The repair base includes 22 shipyards with drydocking capability, and 25 additional shipyards with topside repair capability.

As the MAP proposes hundreds of billions of dollars in new investments to achieve its goals, an important question is how success will be measured. Given the breadth and cost of the MAP, its credibility and political viability during the time required for its completion will depend in part on whether the government sets clear priorities and concrete benchmarks for progress, so that resources are tied to measurable gains in, for example, shipyard capacity, fleet growth, workforce development and maritime readiness.

To implement the MAP, government-wide action across several agencies and future legislation will be required. A key related question is whether the government can coordinate the MAP's many legislative, regulatory, financing and trade-related pieces in a clear and effective way. Without that coordination, even sound ideas may create delay and confusion rather than the sustained maritime growth the MAP is intended to promote.

The anticipated legislative initiatives should be viewed as complementing the pending Shipbuilding and Harbor Infrastructure for Prosperity and Security Act of 2025 (SHIPS Act) and the Building Ships in America Act of 2025. Federal agencies will have to engage in rulemaking to either revise existing regulation or implement new rules to give effect to MAPS objectives. From a public policy perspective, however, workable implementing rules alone will not be enough to ensure that the MAP is seen as a practical industrial strategy rather than merely a statement of aspirational policy goals.

That will depend in significant part on whether Congress supports the effort through stable appropriations and financing tools that create clear, reliable incentives sufficient to give private and allied investors the confidence to commit long-term capital.

## Increased Opportunities in the Maritime Sector

There are several areas and issues that have been discussed over the last year, but remain largely undefined, for example:

- The Administration is relying on billions in foreign investment, primarily from Japanese and Korean shipbuilders, to jumpstart a US shipbuilding renaissance, but little new investment has materialized
- The Administration was counting on universal fees on foreign built vessels entering US ports, or at least very high fees on Chinese-built and-owned vessels pursuant to the section 301 investigation, but that initiative was put on hold
- There was talk of expanded cargo preferences for US flag vessels (which may be foreign-built) and port-of-entry fees imposed on foreign merchandise delivered by land as tools to reshape American fleet composition and investment incentives
- Expanded workforce training, credentialing reform and investment in maritime education were framed as essential to sustaining increased shipbuilding output, but little is materializing at this time.

While the surge of federal interest is intended to increase commercial activity in the maritime industry, creating opportunities in the US and abroad, a key question is whether the measures described above will expand US maritime capacity, or simply increase costs across the supply chain. If they are not designed and implemented carefully, vessel fees, cargo preferences and similar measures may impose new burdens without generating the shipyard investment and fleet growth the MAP is intended to promote. Because the MAP will require sustained legislative and administrative action, maritime stakeholders will, however, have a meaningful opportunity to engage with lawmakers and regulators to help ensure that practical commercial concerns are addressed as implementation moves forward.

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