

Digital challenges and political resilience in the Indo-Pacific

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Australia-India-Japan Trilateral 2023

POLICY BRIEF

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This policy brief is the product of a the Griffith Asia Institute Australia-India-Japan Trilateral Dialogue held in Brisbane on 10 February 2023, supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan.

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States and societies across the Indo-Pacific face an evolving set of challenges arising from our reliance on digital systems to communicate, transfer payments, operate infrastructure, conduct elections, and maintain social stability. Some of those challenges are technical, concerning the robustness of the hardware and software we use, but some are also political, concerning the effects of misinformation or disinformation rapidly spreading through online social networks. All these challenges demand cooperation between governments and within states, as well as between governments, public institutions, businesses, the media, and civil society organisations, to ensure that the digital world remains rule governed and secure.

The Griffith Asia Institute recently hosted analysts from Australia, India, and Japan to discuss these challenges and identify potential responses that might be implemented by the Australian, Indian, and Japanese governments—and indeed others—individually and collaboratively, in unilateral and multilateral contexts.

The Trilateral conference explored:

- Persistent and emerging online threats to regional political resilience
- Best practice in responding to those threats in ways that uphold free and open societies and secure political institutions
- Areas where Japan, India, and Australia could work together to build the necessary capacity to manage these challenges

This policy paper summarises the findings of the conference, focusing on the participants' assessment of the digital challenges faced in the Indo-Pacific and their recommendations for action.



The Trilateral explored several ways to enhance regional cyber-security, acknowledging the scale and the dynamic nature of the challenges involved.

Recommendations:

Several wide-ranging recommendations were made:

1. Governments and public and private institutions should invest in ongoing cyber-security contingency planning across a range of scenarios and build the capabilities to manage potential threats. This includes enhancing the cyber literacy of boards and senior executives.
2. Australia, India, and Japan should ensure that their cyber-security foreign engagement programs are well-funded and well-designed, and that digital divides between the well-prepared and the more vulnerable states in the region do not persist.
3. Australia, India, and Japan should also use their ongoing dialogues on cyber issues to review their experiences in mitigating risk and managing threats, given clear divergences in approach between the three to dealing with cyber security incidents. Priority should be given to discussing best practice for engaging the business community and the wider public.
4. Australia, India, and Japan should review and, if necessary, upgrade their intelligence sharing agreements and protocols concerning cyber threats and lessons learned from earlier incidents.
5. The three countries should consider developing trilateral cyber security threat and best practice response indices, for distribution across the Indo-Pacific.
6. Australia, India, and Japan should also consider developing trilateral table-top exercises to model the management of critical threats.
7. Australia, India, and Japan should collaborate in setting out preferred standards for a range of existing and emerging technologies, including 5G internet protocols, and collectively advance these proposals in regional and global multilateral negotiations.
8. Australia, India, and Japan should review and, if necessary, invest in research collaborations in cyber-security and critical and emerging technologies between universities and research organisations in all three countries. The participants expressed the concern that there were too few collaborations and that funding was patchy and scarce, and that these factors were undermining the capacity of all three states to manage the challenge they face.

The Trilateral participants also discussed how best to counter disinformation, recognising that it can pose a significant threat to democratic processes and to social stability. They observed that Australia, India, and Japan have different approaches, reflecting the different scales and origins of disinformation circulating



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The Griffith Asia Institute would like to express its gratitude to the following participants in the 2023 Australia-India-Japan Trilateral.



Ms Baani Grewal
Australian Strategic Policy Institute
Canberra



Mr Daisuke Kawai
Japan Institute of International Affairs
Tokyo



Ms Kyoko Kuwahara
Japan Institute of International Affairs
Tokyo



Dr Teesta Prakash
Australian Strategic Policy Institute
Canberra



Dr Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan
Observer Research Foundation
New Delhi



Ms Trisha Ray
Observer Research Foundation
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Dr David Tuohy
Griffith University
Brisbane

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We do this by: i) delivering research excellence on the politics, security, trade and business, governance and economic development of the region; ii) partnering for policy and impact outcomes in the region; and iii) shaping the next generation of Asia-Pacific leaders through learning experiences.

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