# Prioritising Cyber Between Strategic Partners – The U.S.-Australia Cyber Dialogue

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World leaders now discuss cybersecurity as a priority issue with their counterparts in many guises, be it the seemingly endless revelations of state led cyber espionage, state sponsored information leaks, or cyber criminals enjoying an extended reach from distant safe havens. Increasingly digitally-dependent economies and digitised infrastructure are vulnerable to these threats, however they also offer opportunities for governments and the private sector. These systems require resilient cybersecurity if they are to realise their potential and not be manipulated and disrupted.

The issue is a frequent point of contention amongst leaders of the major powers. President Obama regularly exchanges strong views with his Chinese counterpart President Xi over state-led economic espionage and with President Putin in regards to Russia's apparent mission to reshape the use of cyberspace as a tool for strategic information operations.

The cyber discussion is equally important amongst allies in shoring up economic and national security wellbeing. The partnership between Australia and the US is longstanding and deeply embedded in our national consciousness, but what is often overlooked is the ability of the relationship to evolve to suit the changing international environment. It is this reflexive ability to adapt to new forms of exchange and business that has enabled it to endure.

Cognisant of this and the growing importance of cybersecurity discussions, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull travelled to Washington DC for bilateral meetings with President Obama in January this year, ready to talk cyber security on multiple fronts. Yet he and the team were said to be impressed by how central it was in all of their meetings from President to Secretary: they all wanted to address aspects of cyber security with a tech savvy alliance partner's PM.

During that trip the PM announced a new US-Australia Cyber Security Dialogue to be convened by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute and the Center for Strategic and International Studies. The idea is a simple one: that whilst the two countries are strong alliance partners who have excellent government relationships, there was more that could be done. Bringing together the public and private sector with leading academic thinkers was the clear next step in growing the depth, complexity and strength of the bilateral relationship.

Competition in cyberspace is taking place in the Asia-Pacific at a rate commensurate with the growth of the region's importance to global business and security. Despite the region's economic growth easing it's still expected that during 2016 the regional economy will grow by 6.7%, accounting for

one-third of total global growth. This is appealing to
businesses and investors for legitimate reasons, but also for criminals wanting their share of the
economic prize.  Criminals in the region take advantage of a permissive legislative environment, and
growing connection speeds to boost their operations here. Combine this with the already increasingly
tense geo-strategic circumstances, which are often replicated online, and cyberspace is one of the key
emerging domains for competition in the twenty first century.

One of the practical responses to this regional dilemma is collaborative cyber capacity-building
projects involving US and Australian governments, but perhaps more importantly, collaborating with
the private sector entities who are keen to have a fair opportunity to build their digital businesses in
the Asia-Pacific. Bringing the private sector in at the design phase of projects is vital for building
effective capacity building around the region. There is a pressing need to expand our cooperation into
supporting regional countries to engage cyberspace more securely so they can protect their strategic
and economic interests. The growth of stable, trusted digital markets in the region will also assist
Australian and American businesses to engage the region digitally with the confidence that they will
not fall victim to cyber criminals, or regulations that impede their ability to compete. Capacity
building in the region supports security and economic growth, and a combined approach to
enhancing the capability of the region to protect itself from cyber threats would be beneficial to
governments, business and society.

The multi-faceted nature of the threat posed by cyberspace requires a multi-faceted response. Unlike
other traditional security issues, cyber security cannot remain purely the purview of states. To keep
up with the threats posed by other, resources must be pooled and expertise and information shared. In
the online world, Australia faces a strategic picture filled with foes constantly rewriting the rule book
as to what can be achieved though disruption and disinformation online. But governments are not the
exclusive targets. States looking to gain a competitive economic advantage are targeting the private
sectors of other nations in pursuit of the nugget of information or intellectual property that will
guarantee a domestic payday. Working together to practice combined and cooperative responses to
cyber threats that affect public and private entities will be key to managing the risk of cyber threats to
both sectors.

The Australia-US cyber security dialogue recently held in Washington DC examined all these issues
and how best to manage them in a cooperative manner. The robust bilateral and cross-sectoral
discussions identified a work plan that ASPI and CSIS will progress over the coming 12 months.
Three focus areas were highlighted: programs to coordinate capacity-building efforts, undertaking a
joint US-Australia industry-led cyber exercise, and conducting research on how to overcome bilateral
and regional barriers to digital trade.

Bilateral cooperation between longstanding partners to address these issues will advance our interests
in cybersecurity in the region and further afield, providing better security outcomes for Australia, the
US and the region. The inaugural Australia-US Cyber Security Dialogue laid important ground work
towards this effort, but continued dedication to this important issue is vital in order to progress our
respective interests in cyberspace. In this vein ASPI and CSIS will work together to ensure that the
2017 Dialogue builds on this success when it is held in Australia.