



# Maluhia 2023: Promoting a Collaborative Policy Environment

April 25-27, 2023

## PARTICIPANT NOTES

*Unofficial – For participant use only*

Both new and more traditional challenges to global order have emerged in recent years, posing risks to peace, stability, and development in the Indo-Pacific and elsewhere. These challenges require increased collaboration. To that end the outcomes of “Maluhia 2023: Promoting a Collaborative Policy Environment” were to:

- Share perspectives on prioritization of regional issues, challenges, and trends as reflected in the current Indo-Pacific strategies of allies and partners in the region and beyond;
- Prioritize areas for expanded integration and collaboration; and,
- Identify policy requirements for expanding collaborative efforts.

The event included 38 participants from the Indo-Pacific region, Europe, and North America, comprised of senior-level defense, foreign affairs, and national security officials.

Participant-focused discussion and breakout groups explored the enablers and inhibitors to collaboration based on the priorities identified in various Indo-Pacific strategies, white papers, and action plans. The workshop also featured insights by the U.S. and other officials on their current strategies and plans.

These notes are provided to the workshop participants for their use only. They are not for publication or general distribution. When combined with the other materials provided before, during and after the workshop, they cover the key themes and discussion points. All materials are accessible at <https://dkiapcss.edu/maluhia23>

**Pre-workshop Survey.** A survey was sent to participants to identify policy inhibitors in the areas of security cooperation, malign influence, and other topics of concern raised by the respondents. Common policy inhibitors included a lack of agreements and frameworks to address issues as well as difficulties scoping requirements and dialogue. Workshop slides in the link above contain more information.

**Polling.** Participants used anonymous, electronic polling to share opinions about the state of the region.

- Over half of participants felt that the Indo-Pacific security environment was getting worse.
- Over half of participants felt that the most influential country was the one that had the most friends and allies, followed by largest economy. There was discussion on whether the responses may have been different if it was “most powerful” country. Smaller size countries noted the necessary importance of relationships.

- Most participants responded that domestic politics affected the ability of their governments to fulfil its vision of the Indo-Pacific. There was a discussion on domestic impact at the formulation vs. the implementing stage and weighing economic vs. strategic costs of actions.
- Most participants assessed that U.S. strategy was somewhat or mostly aligned with their government's views. Gaps that were highlighted included trade, economics, climate, and presence.
- In order, the top challenges identified in the region over the next five years were climate change and natural disasters, traditional military conflict, maritime disorder and encounters at sea, economic crisis and technology-based crisis, and political crisis/weak governance/state fragility.
- Over half of participants identified interagency issues as the primary inhibitor to collaboration. Though not a polling option, the practices of regional organizations were also highlighted as a source of inhibitors.
- Most participants felt that their security policies were largely or somewhat constrained by their economic interests. Participants discussed how views may have changed after Russia's invasion of Ukraine and how PRC economic retaliation has not been effective in changing policies in some areas.
- Most participants viewed the impact of U.S. security engagement in the region was very or somewhat positive. Discussion included examples of positive engagement while emphasizing that there is still more to do.
- Participants viewed the impact of PRC security engagement in the region as neutral, somewhat negative, or very negative. Discussion included specific examples of negative actions, the challenges of voicing private vs. public concerns, and areas outside of the Indo-Pacific where China's role is not as negative.
- A plurality of participants generally neither agreed nor disagreed that their country is doing everything it can to disincentivize China from using coercion against Taiwan; however, there was discussion as to how the responses may have looked if the neutral option was removed from the polling choices.
- Over half of participants responded that their government definitely or probably should do more to counter North Korea's illicit funding of its weapons of mass destruction program, though a third of participants were not sure.

**Enablers Working Group Backbriefs and Discussion.** Participants broke out into four sectoral working groups along defense, foreign affairs/other agencies lines to identify policies and practices that enable regional coordination effectively. Common enablers across the working groups included strong relationships through both formal mechanisms and informal ties, finding areas of commonality, and using broad definitions of security. Participants highlighted that a common understanding of "free and open" is important, and that leaders play a critical role in pushing through barriers to cooperation. Participants also discussed leveraging existing frameworks such as ASEAN or fora such as Shangri La Dialogue to bring partners together. The role of mini-laterals was also highlighted as important to fill specific gaps, but that transparency on these groupings is paramount to reassure partners across the region. See workshop slides in the link above for more information.

**Inhibitors Working Group Backbriefs and Discussion.** In sectoral and sub-regional working groups, participants identified inhibitors to expanded collaboration to “develop, combine, and coordinate our strengths to maximum effect.” During discussion common themes emerged from the groups. As a final exercise, participants were asked to apply the identified inhibitors to a scenario of their own formulation to test how these inhibitors would impact a potential coordinated response.

Policy inhibitors identified included: differences in strategic priorities; constraints due to strategic competition; disconnects between leadership commitment and execution by bureaucracies; mini-laterals and emerging dialogues potentially duplicating efforts, excluding smaller countries, and weakening existing vital multilateral structures and legal frameworks; duplication in donor activity due to lack of coordination; differences in access to information, technology, and capabilities to support interoperability; poor interagency coordination to leverage all elements of national power; economic interdependence; and, inadequate and unequal ability to counter misinformation/disinformation.

During the scenario discussion, inhibitors shared by multiple groups included: competing national priorities; lack of existing architectures for inter- and extra-regional coordination during crisis; lack of information sharing bodies and agreements; lack or inefficiency of existing legal and multilateral frameworks; differences in interpretation of international law.

**Inhibitors to Collaboration – U.S. Perspectives.** A panel of the U.S. Government participants reflected on the inhibitors identified by the participants and discussed how their offices are aligning policies, investments, and activities to build capability and strengthen deterrence through collaboration. Discussions covered the need for a whole-of-society approach to Indo-Pacific strategy; the importance of countering disinformation; the need to expand diplomatic presence in the region; the disconnect between leader commitment and the bureaucratic challenges of implementation; the evolution and implementation of US-China strategy; the enduring bipartisan political support for Indo-Pacific strategy; the need for private sector engagement. Workshop participants also highlighted the need to better explain U.S. strategy and terms to countries in the region; diversify options for countries in the region so that they are not forced to choose between the U.S. and China; improve coordination between U.S. government agencies and allies in the region; address economic issues, such as tariff alignment and outbound investments; understand the risks posed by China's strategy to coerce Taiwan; and to work with ASEAN on issues such as the South China Sea.

The workshop also included Indo-Pacific perspectives from Canada, Japan, Korea, Australia, and the UK.

**Closing Thoughts.** Final take-aways included the increasing importance of transparency and clarity in terms of U.S. messaging to the region, especially in terms of avoiding miscalculation with China over cross-strait relations; the need to ensure that U.S. presence and interest in the region is focused on the long-term, and not just the acute security situation; regional partner concern over emerging mini-laterals; partner access to technology, information, and capabilities

to support interoperability as an inhibitor to cooperation and the need for higher resource nations to ensure that other regional partners are not left behind; the negative implications of China framing the region in terms of a false narrative of competition or choice between two powers; traditional approaches to security architecture and historical grievances in the region as an inhibitor to collective action. Final comments highlighted there is no better time than now to address these challenges, due to the increased level of trust and familiarity among partners. Participants should take agency to address the inhibitors identified during the workshop once they return home. DKI APCSS looks forward to hosting Maluhia 2024 based on regional priorities and participant feedback.