Australia–Israel Be'er Sheva Dialogue

Proceedings and Outcomes

31 October–1 November 2016

Sydney, Australia

SUMMARY

The Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) in cooperation with the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies (BESA) held the second Be'er Sheva Dialogue in Sydney, Australian on 31 October–1 November 2016. Following on from the inaugural Be'er Sheva Dialogue held in Israel in November 2015, the aim of the dialogue was to bring together experienced delegates from Australia and Israel to exchange ideas and perspectives on enhancing the relationship between the two states with a focus on defence and security issues.

It is the only bilateral dialogue that brings together members of the media, independent analysts, government, military and the private sector of each country. The naming of the Be'er Sheva Dialogue acknowledges the Charge of the Australian 4th Light Horse Brigade at Beersheba on 31 October 1917.

The welcome reception was held on 31 October—marking the 99th anniversary of the battle of Be'er Sheva—and provided the opportunity to launch the ASPI–BESA report by ASPI's Anthony Bergin and BESA's Professor Efraim Inbar, *The wattle and the olive: A new chapter in Australia and Israel working together* (the Joint Report). Major General (ret'd) Jim Molan provided opening remarks before launching the Joint Report which outlines common strategic interests to drive forward cooperation on security and other issues to the benefit of both countries. The report was favourably received by delegates from both sides. *The Australian*, Australia's leading national newspaper, covered the fundamental principles of the Joint Report that support a sustained exchange between the two countries.

The Dialogue was held under Chatham House rules, allowing delegates to engage in frank discussion about the future of Australia–Israel relations in the context of the future global strategic environment. Cooperation on cybersecurity, innovation and defence relations were emphasised as optimal platforms to take the relationship forward. Other topics included mutual security concerns such as 'asymmetric warfare', new challenges posed by non-state actors and 'hybrid' threats, and meeting future capability requirements.

The Australian delegation was led by Mr Peter Jennings, ASPI's Executive Director, and included political representatives from both major parties, the Australian Ambassador to Israel, senior Army officers both retired and serving and members of ASPI and the Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council. The Israeli delegation was led by Professor Efraim Inbar, Director of BESA and co-author of the ASPI–BESA report, and included Israel's Ambassador to Australia and other representatives of the Israeli Embassy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and defence industry, and members of BESA and Bar-Illan University.

KEY OUTCOMES

Launch of the ASPI–BESA Report 'The wattle and the olive: A new chapter in Australia and Israel working together'

The Joint Report was launched by General Jim Molan to an audience of senior defence and business leaders, parliamentarians, media, academia and independent analysts. He commended the report's authors–ASPI's Dr Anthony Bergin and BESA's Professor Efraim Inbar. He remarked on the significance of the story of the battle of Be'er Sheva, and the historical themes that underscore the title of the report——remarking that these images should focus the minds of Israelis and Australians on the existing links between the two nations, and the opportunities to the development of new ones. General Molan's personal observation of the two societies was that our cultures are quite similar. But the report would not fulfil its objective of advancing the Australia–Israel relationship without identifying some tangible areas of common interest.

The report delivers on this remarkably well; it is informative and easy to follow, but most importantly, there's a willingness to question the status quo which fosters the kind of innovation that is essential in these early stages of relationship building. In concluding his comments, General Molan set the context for the second Be'er Sheva dialogue by highlighting the opportunities that lie in the security dimension of the relationship. By working together, the two countries can better understand the global strategic environment, and the new security threats that it presents. This is particularly important for Australia that has to fight most of its wars abroad in a coalition context. Recognition of the strategic environment means welcoming the rise of China but from a position of strength, as Israel does. Israel's clout has earned it the status of regional super power and Australia may need to become one. This is a ripe context to nurture a strong strategic relationship.

The global strategic environment

We are living in an era of uncertainty. Both states are affected by uncertainties about the US role in the world, the rise of China, the spread of radical Islam, and the threat of nuclear proliferation. The sureties of the Cold War have paled as the global system tries to adapt to the challenge of a new multi-polar age marked by the decline of Pax Americana (and with it the domination of the liberal Western institutions of peace and security) and the rise of China within a rapidly developing Asia and re-emergence of Russia. The trajectory of the US and China are the key variables going forward. Will the US retreat to isolationism? Can the rules-based order endure resistance from the East, driven by China and to a lesser extent Russia and the Philippines?

Beyond geopolitics, the dark side of globalisation—increased inequality, democratisation of information, decentralisation and the rising power of corporations— engenders new challenges including mass migration, terrorism and a rising nationalist sentiment.

This strategic uncertainty is counterbalanced to an extent by increasing economic interdependence, though it remains to be seen whether any future US administration will dismantle or champion economic cooperation.

Middle East security in 2030

The Middle East security picture could look very different in 2030, though the trends driving that change are already visible. The Iran deal is due to expire in 2030. If it survives the Trump Administration, there's really no telling how it will affect the Iranian regime. Cracks are appearing in the ruling regimes in Egypt, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, and Algeria may also be included on that list. Countries afflicted by protracted conflicts—Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen—may never recover full statehood. Given these fissures, it is possible we will see a complete collapse of the Arab State System. Some delegates raised the potential for nuclear proliferation in the region.

Other trends are more certain, terrorism will persist, and the threat will be heightened with the proliferation of chemical and other weapons of mass destruction. ISIS itself will be largely defeated, but the ideology of militant Wahhabism will endure. On current trajectories, it's difficult to envision the resolution of the Palestinian question.

The speakers were divided over the significance of outside influence. One delegate stated that it was critical that the US play a key role, with increasing Russia and Chinese interests, while another delegate saw limits on the influence outsiders like Russia and US can wield. Another delegate sat somewhere in the middle, positing that Russia would monopolise on a US retreat to enhance its foothold in the region through the Syrian regime and Iran. The prospect of an energy efficient US could have significant ramifications for the region, although delegates agreed that the marginalisation of the Middle East was not in the US interest. For Israel, containing Iran was a priority. It was suggested that Egypt, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia are unlikely to stand idly by as Iran, their regional competitor, makes nuclear progress.

Other concerns for regional security include the destabilising effects of increased refugee flows, desertification and water scarcity.

The future of the Australia–Israel relationship

Whilst goodwill and shared values are a crucial foundation to a bilateral relationship, a sustained partnership requires investment in mutual interests. In the past there's been insufficient dialogue between government ministers; opportunities for strategic cooperation on converging interests have been overlooked.

It was suggested that it is unlikely that an enhanced relationship with Israel would damage Australia's standing in the Arab or Muslim world. Israel has peace treaties with Egypt, the most important Arab state, and with Jordan. Other Arab countries are quietly getting closer to Israel because of the rise of Iran in the region and the shared fear of radical Islam.

Foreshadowing the afternoon's discussion topics, delegates identified cybersecurity and defence as mutually-shared strategic interests. Great potential for engagement lies in the innovation sector, which was a key recommendation of the joint report. Israel is a leading innovation hub and Australia is keen to follow suit. Australia has a lot to learn from Israel's innovation ecosystem; the establishment of the innovation Landing Pad in Tel Aviv is a welcome measure in that regard. Australia, it was pointed out, has a flourishing tech scene with commercial opportunities for Israel.

There's scope for the two countries to work together to foster stability in their respective regions. Australia has a stake in conflict management in the Middle East, while Israel stands to benefit from increased development cooperation with Indo-Pacific nations like India, China and Japan. Israel's efforts to engage neighbouring Muslim nations have been constructive. Both countries have an interest in improving outcomes in countering violent extremism, both domestically and regionally.

In the past, a lack of understanding and failure to recognise converging interests have prevented the two countries from maximising opportunities for collaboration; more frequent dialogue between government ministries would foster a productive strategic relationship. It was noted that Israel's prime minister has announced plans to visit Australia in 2017.

Rounding out the discussion on Australia–Israel engagement, guest speaker Ido Spitzer of Rafael Advanced Defense Systems gave a presentation on cooperation around defence industry and research. Mr Spitzer emphasised the need to develop solutions rather than just building capabilities, and advocated including capability providers in a techno-operational dialogue to bring weapons users, developers and formal entities together to devise means to plug capability gaps.

Cybersecurity and 'asymmetric' threats

Australia and Israel are in a similar position on cybersecurity: while both governments recognise the significance of the cyber threat, there's a lot of work to be done on the

application of cyber capability. Two disturbing trends are emerging: the active targeting of critical national infrastructure and the use of data as a weapon.

The low barrier to entry for criminals and asymmetric disadvantage for those responding makes cyber a unique complex threat.

Israel has a thriving cybersecurity industry, with 300 start-ups in Israel focused on cybersecurity. This puts Israel in good stead to bolster cyber capability, but it has a way to go developing a comprehensive cyber policy. Australia could do more to engage industry to advance its cyber strategy, but has made positive investment in frontline staff to develop national cyber resilience as well as offensive capability.

Whilst both countries will need to forge an indigenous approach to cybersecurity, there's scope for cooperation on cyber diplomacy and the development of international cyber norms and law to prohibit cybercrime.

New challenges in warfare: Strategies for the IDF and ADF

Both countries face regional security challenges. A snapshot of the Indo-Pacific illustrates the volatility of Australia's neighbourhood. The region boasts 8 out of the world's 10 most populous nations, 7 of the 10 largest militaries and 6 of 9 nuclear weapons state.

Australia's strategic outlook is influenced primarily by externally-driven and regionally based challenges; the relative predominance of China and the US in the Asia–Pacific, the straining rules-based global order, the enduring threat of terrorism and fragile neighbouring states menaced by climate change and rising inequality and organised crime.

The security environment is rapidly evolving. In capability terms, Australia needs to keep a pace with modern militarisation including digitisation, direct energy weapons, hypersonics, autonomy and autonomisation. The ADF has a lot of experience fighting in coalitions, but must develop its capability to operate without allied assistance.

Manoeuvrability across multiple domains will be crucial; access to Israeli innovation and technology will enable this.

Israel's geographic vulnerability is self-evident. The IDF has a greater internal focus. Israel is a pioneer of unmanned aerial systems, although adversaries have learnt to hedge against this aerial superiority. Land forces are vulnerable to tunnel attack and guerrilla warfare, and improved underground systems have diminished the advantage of manoeuvrability. As Hamas and Hezbollah expand their unmanned aerial capabilities, it will be incumbent on Israel to retain its upper hand.

Cyber and space domains are part of the global commons. Terrorism is a phenomenon that will not go away, but intelligence-sharing makes states more resilient to the terror threat. There is also a spectrum of threat. Nowadays, irregular non-state activity is the most likely threat. Adversaries in urban warfare have the ability to quickly transition to guerrilla tactics, thereby changing the character of conflict. But the prospect of state-on-state conflict is re-emerging (particularly in non-conventional domains like cyber) and carries devastating potential. The key take-away is that learning and adaptation is crucial. As one Australian delegate noted, 'if you benchmark against the Taliban, you're at risk of losing the next war'.

Closing remarks

Despite the geographical separation of Australia and Israel, there's significant convergence of interests and a strong foundation for strategic and defence cooperation between the two countries. There's a lot to gain from nurturing the bilateral relationship through an exchange of technology, research, policy and strategic planning across the traditional and non-traditional security sectors. There's also great potential to work together to foster diplomatic and economic opportunities in the respective regions. As one Israeli delegate put it: 'Good guys should stick together'.

In closing, the following remarks were made about taking the relationship forward:

- Cyber, innovation in defence industry, academic exchanges and countering violent extremism (CVE) are key areas to develop.
- Both countries have a privileged role in the US alliance; it's vital to keep the US engaged in our respective regions.
- Frank strategic conversation between Israel and Australia is constructive and there should more frequent dialogue between the respective government national security ministries.
- We have a shared interest in talking about China's long-term strategic objectives.
- We can cooperate to promote a positive role for both countries in our respective regions.
- There's opportunity for joint development projects in Indonesia, particularly on water management and irrigation.

Next step

Both sides agreed to meet in Israel next year for the third Be'er Sheva Dialogue, which will coincide with the centenary of the Charge of the Australian Light Horse Brigade at Be'er Sheva. Both countries noted the need to plan the third Dialogue around the commemoration activities of the Israeli and Australian governments and the Pratt Foundation.

Be'er Sheva Dialogue Delegates

Australian Delegation

Dr. Anthony Bergin

Senior Analyst, Australian Strategic Policy Institute

Ms. Gai Brodtmann MP

Shadow Assistant Minister for Cyber Security and Defence Personnel, Parliament of Australia

Ms. Elisabeth Buchan

Research Intern, Australian Strategic Policy Institute

LTCOL. Ashley Collingburn

Visiting Fellow, Counter-Terrorism Policy Centre, Australian Strategic Policy Institute

The Hon Michael Danby MP

Member for Melbourne Ports, Parliament of Australia

Dr. Tobias Feakin

Head of International Cyber Policy Centre and Director National Security Program, Australian Strategic Policy Institute

Ms. Fiona Geminder

Visy Corporate

Mr. David Irvine AO

Former Director-General of Security ASIO, former Director-General ASIS

Mr. Peter Jennings PSM

Executive Director, Australian Strategic Policy Institute

Mr. Stephen Loosley AM

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Mr. Alastair MacGibbon

Special Adviser to the Prime Minister on Cyber Security, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet

MAJGEN. Fergus (Gus) McLachlan AM

Head of Modernisation and Strategic Planning – Army

MAJGEN (Ret'd) Jim Molan AO DSC

Former senior officer in the Australian Army

Mr. Stephen Moore

Assistant Secretary Global Interests, International Policy Division, Department of Defence

Senator. Linda Reynolds CSC

Senator for Western Australia

Dr. Colin Rubenstein AM

Executive Director, Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council

Ambassador Dave Sharma

Australian Ambassador to Israel

Mr. Ahron Shapiro

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Maj. Gen. (res.) Yaakov Amidror

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H.E. Shmuel Ben-Shmuel, Ambassador

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Ms. Dorit Herscovich

Spokesperson & Director of Cultural Affairs, Embassy of Israel in Canberra, Australia

Prof. Efraim Inbar

Director of the The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies

Dr. Alon Levkowitz

The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies

Ms. Vera Muravitz

Executive Director of UK and Australasia, Bar-Illan University

Dr. Eitan Shamir

Former head of the National Security Doctrine Department in the Israel Ministry for Strategic Affairs. The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies

Dr. Max Singer

Co-founder of the Washington-based Hudson Institute. The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies

Mr. Mark Sofer

Deputy Director-General, Head of the Division for Asia and the Pacific of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ms. Anat Sultan-Dadon

Minister – Counselor, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of Israel in Canberra, Australia

Mr. Ehud Yaari

Journalist, Israel's Channel 2 news, The Jerusalem Report and the Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Guest Speaker
Mr. Ido Spitzer