

Australia–Israel Be'er Sheva Dialogue

Proceedings and Outcomes

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Melbourne, Australia







Introduction

In Australia, there's a tendency to see Israel purely through the lens of the Palestinian issue and the peace process. But there's really no country in the Middle East whose interests are more closely aligned with Australia's than Israel.

That's why four years ago ASPI, with the generous support of the Pratt Foundation, established an annual strategic dialogue with Israel, teaming with the Begin–Sadat Center for Strategic Studies (BESA). The aim was to examine areas of defence and security cooperation in which our interests are aligned, like counterterrorism and cybersecurity.

The fourth annual Be'er Sheva Dialogue was held in Melbourne on 1 November 2018. It once again brought together defence officials, senior parliamentarians and analysts from ASPI and BESA and elsewhere to discuss areas of strategic common interest and potential collaboration.

The dialogue is named in honour of the historic Anzac Light Horse victory at the Battle of Beersheba during World War I and alternates its location between Australia and Israel each year. Australian parliamentary participants were well represented this year and included Assistant Defence Minister David Fawcett, Assistant Home Affairs Minister Linda Reynolds, Shadow Assistant Cyber Security and Defence Minister Gai Brodtmann, Shadow Attorney-General and Shadow National Security Minister Mark Dreyfus, and Shadow Assistant Defence Industry Minister Mike Kelly. Defence Minister Christopher Pyne addressed the dialogue in a dinner keynote speech hosted at [Raheen](#). The Australian side was led by the head of ASPI's defence and strategy program, Michael Shoebridge, and the Israeli side was led by BESA's director, Efraim Karsh.

The sessions included an overview of regional perspectives, a review of geopolitics in the Middle East and Asia, counterterrorism, Australia–Israel defence cooperation and cybersecurity. Boaz Ganor, founder and executive director of the [International Institute for Counter-Terrorism](#) at the Interdisciplinary Center in Israel, spoke on the growing threat from lone-wolf terrorists. The session proved to be especially timely and prescient given the Islamist terror attack in Melbourne eight days later.

A number of recommendations from previous dialogues and from ASPI's [The wattle and the olive](#) report have now been taken up by the Australian government.

These include Prime Minister Scott Morrison's recent [decision](#) to post an Australian defence attaché to Israel, and the establishment of a two-star dialogue between the Australian and Israeli defence forces, the first of which was held earlier this year. Other measures include the signing of a memorandum of understanding on defence industry cooperation and the convening of a joint track 1.5 cyber dialogue in Australia.

There was a recognition at this year's dialogue that the two sides need to talk more about China and its investments in critical infrastructure. For example, Israeli security analysts have expressed some concerns about China's increasing presence in the Mediterranean region as part of President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative and about China's growing role in Israel's maritime domain.

The Shanghai International Port Group is expected to take over the running of a new private port at Haifa in 2021. The former chief of US naval operations, Admiral Gary Roughead, [stated](#) in September this year that he believed that a Chinese-run port in Haifa would mean that US Navy ships couldn't regularly call there. That was because of the likelihood that Chinese intelligence activity would present an enhanced risk to operational security.

Participants at this year's dialogue agreed that more work could be done on pursuing increased cooperation on defence industry and research and development, and even exploring the vision of joint capability development in some areas. One idea raised was to examine trilateral opportunities in defence industry cooperation for Israel, Australia and South Korea.

The dialogue considered the need for an exchange on the lessons that our military leaders are learning from their operational experience. It was suggested that benefits could also be gained by both sides looking at new energy sources for defence. It was proposed that a high-level officer be sent to study at the Israeli National Defence College and an Israeli officer be posted to the Australian Defence College.

Australia, it was also suggested, could learn more from Israel about the role of the healthcare sector in preparing for terrorism as well as social media open-source analysis in countering terrorism from lone actors. Australian delegates noted their appreciation of the willingness of Israeli intelligence to [share information](#) with our security agencies to foil an Islamic State plot to blow up an Etihad flight from Sydney last year.

One proposal was that Israel's and Australia's prime ministers and selected ministers hold a dialogue every few years, similar to the annual meeting between Israel and Germany.

It was suggested that there should be greater exchange agreements between the two countries for faculty and students in areas related to strategic studies and international relations. One participant suggested that each year a special issue of a suitable prestigious journal be devoted to Australia–Israel relations.

There was no shortage of ideas for future dialogue topics, including nuclear proliferation, US relations with Israel and Australia, public diplomacy, information warfare and the idea of China as a 'frenemy'. Both sides agreed that space policy was an area of growing interest in both countries (Australia recently [established a space agency](#)) and that space research could form the basis for future discussions.

A key finding from the four dialogues to date is that Australia and Israel can cooperate in strategic affairs to the benefit of both countries. Closer ties between Australia and Israel in recent years have only increased the importance of the Be'er Sheva Dialogue.



Concepts discussed at the fourth Be'er Sheva Dialogue divided in strategic, operational and tactical levels

Strategic

- Australia needs to develop the capability to manage risk as we cannot outsource risk to the US as we have done previously
- There is debate in Australia about the reason for participating in coalitions: is it the US alliance or recognition of international risks, or a combination of the two, and if the latter, what is the proper balance that serves Australia's interest?

Intelligence

- While Australia is part of "Five Eyes", we need to broaden our intelligence sharing and work more closely with the wider intelligence community. For example, Israel alerted our security services to a mass-casualty terrorism plot at Sydney Airport.
- There is a need to develop open-source intelligence capabilities to satisfy demand for real-time high-tech collection and analysis

Counterterrorism

- There is a need for a shift in focus from deradicalisation to preventing radicalisation as a more effective application of limited resources.
- Counterterrorism approaches need to be proactive (not reactive) and forward thinking
- Counterterrorism experts have a responsibility to help government strike the right balance between privacy and security, while government has the responsibility to deliver on implementation through timely legislation and departmental supervision.
- Israel is a good example of counterterrorism operational success but falters at preventing radicalisation. The countries can work together to improve their prevention capabilities while Australia can learn from Israel in regards to operational success.

China

- Australia and Israel need to develop a greater understanding of Chinese methodology

- Australia should partner with countries including Israel to provide sovereign alternatives to China's "cash flash"
- Australia needs to have strong declaratory policy regarding China and its actions
- Chinese investment in universities and national infrastructure in Israel and Australia is a double-edged sword. Countries can collaborate ways to balance security and economics

Technology

- There is a need to separate out the transactional side and strategic side of military cooperation at all three levels
- Capability assurance is an area where the two militaries can work together in an area that enhances the operational capability and sustainability of both defence forces
- Israel has an informal sovereignty, it buys what it can and produces what it can. Australia can learn from this model.
- By necessity, Israel has become a world-leader in producing low-cost consumable systems to complement top-shelf defence and battlefield systems which themselves cannot be replaced hastily or inexpensively. As Israel has shown, these complimentary systems can be innovated, produced and scaled rapidly into place. Australia can learn from this.

Cooperation

- There is good industry cooperation and sharing of knowledge, but tactical and operational level cooperation less so. Also need to improve research cooperation and have an MOU agreement on cooperation.
- Australia has strong presence in Asia and Israel should take advantage of this. There is an opportunity for greater collaboration between the two in specific areas in Asia both traditional (defence) and non-traditional security (i.e. natural disaster relief) cooperation
- There are similar situations facing Australia and Israel; both are living in a neighbourhood with a very strong neighbour wanting to change the order. While these strong neighbours may employ different methods, the goal is similar. Both

have spoken about the conflict between pragmatic Muslim countries and populations, and radicals.

- Both countries need to recognise the value of exchanging strategic assessments and concepts given different global and environmental perspectives
- Examination of trilateral opportunities for defence cooperation involving both Israel and Australia

Operational

- Previously the relationship between the two countries primarily focused on the strategic level. There needs to be more focus on tactical, person to person, unit to unit individual training and developing weapons systems

Military

- There is potential for modest Australia-Israel military personnel exchanges, modelled on the ADF's "Long Look" with the UK and/or current Israeli and US naval cadet exchanges. Send a high-level officer to study at the Israeli national defence college.
- There is potential for collaboration on the JSF. See the example of F-11 and Redflag, US platform combined with Israeli knowhow gave Australia an advantage that could not be matched by the US.
- The Israeli navy, which has now participated in RIMPAC, can work together with the Australian navy on scenario training for similar threats. There is also potential for submarine collaboration between the two countries.
- Explore alternate energy options for defence

Cyber

- Australia can learn from Israel in identifying cyber potential and developing it early by identifying high schoolers for training and incentivising applying those talents towards national service.
- Information warfare is another space with room for cooperation



Gai Brodtmann ✓

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Following



Blurry selfie @ASPI_ICPC @FergusHanson before our @ASPI_org Australia-Israel Beersheba Strategic Dialogue #cybersecurity panel discussion with Uzi Rabin and Yossi Kuperwasser. @MikeKellyofEM @markdreyfusQCMP



Dialogues and exchanges

- Once in a few years create a dialogue with PMs and selected ministers of the two sides like the one that exists between Israel and Germany
- Exchange information on how our military and senior leaders are learning and value of reflective exchange

Tactical

- Extend future Beersheba Dialogues beyond a day through relevant field trips
- Involve mid or early career servicemen from both countries in the Dialogue
- Create an adjunct cyber 1.5 dialogue

- Next dialogue to discuss hybrid terrorism which controls land and population and how this challenges human rights law, human shields and underground deterrence; discuss soft power diplomacy and cultural diplomacy; human rights and counterterrorism interaction; Nuclear Proliferation: North Korea, Iran; US Relations with Israel and Australia; Public Diplomacy and Information Warfare; China Frenemy
- Arrange writing of op-articles by two experts, one from each country, on issues of mutual interest.
- New techniques for the dialogue - Ask each participant to send before the conference a short position paper (1500 words) and then ask each participant to revise the paper after the conference. Put the best papers into a booklet (Australia-Israel: Studies in National Security) or a special journal issue
- Organize exchange of interns ASPI-BESA, 6 months.
- Check Australia –Israel government exchange agreements for faculty and students and if they apply to strategic studies-international relations. If so organize exchanges between ASPI-BESA for 2 to 6 months. If doesn't apply, add to existing or new agreements.



Traditional and non-traditional areas of security to consider

Traditional

- Need to develop open-source intelligence capabilities to satisfy demand for real-time high-tech collection and analysis
- Cooperation in military technology such as submarines and joint strike fighters

Non-traditional

- Metals of strategic importance; diversify Australia's supply chain to prevent dependence on China and prevent China from continuing to stockpile strategically important materials
- Development cooperation in the Pacific. Israel has experience in agriculture and renewable energy, water management etc. and Australia has the necessary relationships
- Working with media instead of treating them as adversaries - Israel has experience in this that Australia can learn from
- Water security
- Agricultural terrorism
- Health oriented responses to terrorism, rescue and recovery
- Ensure oil energy security whilst also working to reduce dependence on oil
- Alternate energy sources

Long-term and short-term goals for the Dialogue

Long term

- Create an adjunct 1.5 track Cyber dialogue
- Create a solid relationship to ensure the involvement of mid or early career servicemen from both countries and particularly their continuing involvement

Short term

- New topics to discuss next dialogue: hybrid terrorism which controls land and population and how this challenges human rights law, human shields and

underground deterrence; discuss soft power diplomacy and cultural diplomacy;
human rights and counterterrorism interaction; Nuclear Proliferation: North Korea,
Iran; US Relations with Israel and Australia; Public Diplomacy and Information
Warfare; China Frenemy

- Extend beyond a day