

AUSTRALIA, ISRAEL AND PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Address by Senator Evans at dinner hosted by Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, Jerusalem, 10 July 1995.

There is, and always will be, a special bond between Australia and Israel. In spite of geography, and the demands placed upon our two countries by their respective regions, Australians have been and remain deeply committed to Israel, and deeply interested in the relationship between you and your neighbours, not the least because of our prominent Jewish community back in Australia, whose contribution to Australia's economic and cultural advancement has been invaluable.

Australia, therefore, is very much aware of what Israel means to all Jewish people all over the world. We have shared the agony of so many of you whose families suffered unspeakable cruelties at the hands of European oppressors. We admire the commitment you have demonstrated to building your state, and the sacrifices you have made in maintaining and defending its security.

My last visit to the region in May 1992. Three years on, one cannot help but notice how much things have changed for the better. In three short years, considerable headway has been made on all tracks of the peace process. That this process has gone ahead, despite its uncertainties, despite fears and doubts on all sides about its ultimate outcomes, and despite the ugly violence perpetrated by those who would destroy the process, is eloquent testimony to the courage of those leaders who embarked upon it. Australia applauds their fortitude and their vision.

As Amos Oz said recently, "there is, of course, a long way to go yet, a way full of fury and disappointments, but one can see at last the first hesitant lights of hope". The challenges that lie ahead are no less daunting than the tasks which confronted those who launched this process.

I want to say something tonight not about the immediate nuts and bolts issues facing the negotiators in the run up to 25 July and beyond - except to express the fervent hope that sufficient common ground can be found to keep the process moving forward - but about the overall regional outlook as we in Australia see it, and to outline where I see Australia playing its part in the peace-building process.

While the prospects for achieving a basis for sustainable military peace for the region have never been better, the challenges that lie ahead

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are real and urgent, and of different sorts. A long lasting peace for the region will only be achieved if a very widely focused approach to security is adopted. In my book *Co-operating for Peace* which I launched at the UN General Assembly in 1993 to try and help define a peace and security agenda for the post Cold War world - with a particular emphasis on the role of the UN - I developed the concept of "co-operative security". This is meant to embrace three other security concepts that have been around for some time: 'collective security' (the notion of member states agreeing to renounce the use of force among themselves and collectively coming to the aid of any member attacked by an outside state or renegade member); common security (the notion of states finding security by working with others rather than against them); and comprehensive security (the notion that security is multi-dimensional, covering political, economic, social and other non-military issues as well as military capabilities).

Without going into detail about what all this means in terms of particular structures and processes and strategies, I simply want to suggest that this general approach has applicability not only on a global scale, but also at a regional level, and particularly for this region where military, economic, resources and cultural problems are interlocked and co-operation in one domain is probably beyond reach without a certain amount of cooperation in others.

Foreign Minister Peres and our colleague Crown Prince Hassan bin Talal in Jordan, have in fact been most articulate proponents of the view that there has to be in this region a concerted effort to move beyond power politics towards cooperative problem solving, which entails, in the security field, finding security with others rather than against them.

We recognise the yearning of Israelis for normal relations with their neighbours, on the basis of their acceptance as a distinctive society which has much to offer to the collective good of the region. We have shared that experience, to a degree, in our part of the world. But we have learnt that if cooperative security approaches are to develop, any gains that superior regional power alone might bring in terms

of national security are likely to prove illusory in the longer term. There is a case - which we rarely acknowledge in our own region as elsewhere - for keeping a close eye on power balance considerations: thus our own continuing enthusiasm for keeping the United States engaged, in defence terms in East Asia (an enthusiasm shared by just about every other country in the region, whether publicly acknowledged or not). But we seek to run a parallel path as well of dialogue, transparency, trust and confidence building, weapons non-proliferation and arms reduction - and that is coming together through our newly established regional security dialogue forum, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) loosely modeled on the OSCE.

We would therefore encourage Israel to take risks of its own. We would suggest that even if Israeli approaches to security may continue to take deterrence as their starting point, those approaches should not be allowed to end there.

Israel and Australia have had an ongoing dialogue on commitments to full adherence to global arms control regimes, particularly the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Australia believes the establishment of effective long-term arms control regimes remains an imperative for security in the Middle East. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the extension of missile technologies, and the stockpiling of disturbing volumes of conventional weaponry, all provide grounds for serious concern at the global level. Australia, as part of that wider global community, has a clear interest in enhancing support in the Middle East for global arms control regimes. It is our firmly held view that all countries of the region should be members of, and abide fully by, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. We also urge all countries of the region that have yet to do so to join the Chemical Weapons Convention, and to ratify it. We enjoin all regional countries to become original signatories of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. It is our firm view that each one of these regimes is deserving of support and adherence in its own right - that nothing is to be gained, and much is to be lost, by each being made conditional on the other, or on some other circumstance.

We note that Israel has identified the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) Working Group, developed from the Madrid Conference, as the appropriate forum for negotiating regional arms control measures. That particular Working Group has already produced significant gains for Israel in terms of opening up important channels of dialogue with your neighbours, especially in the military field, on subjects previously undiscussable. One can never underestimate the importance of building these linkages, even if the process of implementation is tortuously slow

and frustrating.

Australia has been an active participant in the ACRS process, and is a keen supporter of all its objectives, including the initiation and development of what could be termed an arms control culture through gradual development of arms control expertise. Achieving sustainable security in the region will to a large degree depend on building these skills. Doing so opens up opportunities to examine security in new ways. It also allows the careful development of confidence and security building measures that should form the foundation building blocks for greater levels of dialogue and institution building. It establishes trust and confidence between regional parties.

A specific contribution of Australia to the ACRS has been to facilitate and encourage the development of regional security centres which we hope will be operational by the end of this year. We will be contributing seed funding to the development of these centres, which are intended to operate as venues for dialogue, education, training, and policy development, and may eventually come to play a role in more hands-on preventive diplomacy.

Australia is neither a party to the Arab-Israel conflict nor likely ever to be able to play a major diplomatic role in mediation or the like. But we are prepared to play a role commensurate to our resources to facilitate as best we can the process of historic reconciliation between Israel and its Arab neighbours.

So Australia is presently providing personnel, for example, to both the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO), and the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO). The MFO in particular - which is presently being commanded by an Australian, and which I had the pleasure of visiting on the ground in the Sinai yesterday - has been a low cost success story, enhancing communication between Egypt and Israel and providing an important underpinning to peace between both countries. It has now been agreed that the period of service of the Australian headquarters contingent with the MFO will be extended to January 1998. This will bring the duration of the present commitment to five years. Our long-standing commitment of Australian military personnel to the UN Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO) has also displayed Australia's credentials as a good international citizen.

The cooperative security approach we believe in also entails looking at those many non-defence issues which are crucial to the region's stability in the future. Of

these, the issue of water security is the one in which Australia has taken most interest, both because of its intrinsic importance - any lasting regional settlement will have to accommodate the issue of water rights between the parties - but because of our expertise, living as we do on the most arid continent in the world. Australia has, accordingly, been an active contributor to the Water Resources Working Group of the peace process. We hosted, for example, in April a successful workshop on rainfall enhancement, involving delegations from Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Morocco, Oman, and Palestinians.

Australia's material support for the peace process is expressed not only through active participation in the multilateral working groups I've mentioned, but through our aid program to Palestinians, involving a blend of UNRWA and NGO projects.

We announced at the Middle East donors' conference in 1993 that we would provide \$A15 million in grant aid over three years in support of the broad objectives of the Israel-PLO Declaration of Principles. I don't pretend that amount is other than modest, given the scale of the need, but I am pleased to say that Australia has delivered a significantly greater proportion of its pledged support than many other major donors. The activities which we have supported to date have been notable for their immediate impact. By the end of this year all that pledge will have been spent or committed to specific projects.

The enhancement of regional security in the Middle East will depend to a very large extent on the development of improved communication between and within those societies. People who can't, won't, or don't know how to talk to each other are always going to find it difficult to live together. We think that there is scope for outsiders to play some small role in this respect, and that within the framework of Australia's overall objectives in the Middle East, there may be a place for us in encouraging and supporting interaction in some areas between Israelis and those Arabs whose governments are committed to supporting the peace process. As one small way of giving practical expression to that idea, the Australian government is lending its support to the facilitation of exchanges of Australian, Israeli and Arab women artists through a program to be conducted by the School of Art of the Australian National University.

You know that there are a number of issues which will continue to arise during the peace process in which we will continue to press arguments and perspectives with which Israel may disagree, eg the question of the settlements, the balance to be struck between security and human rights in Israel's presence in the Occupied

Territories, and above all Jerusalem, I do not intend to rehearse the detail of those differences here when our separate views are already so much a matter of public record. We understand completely the depth of emotion which a subject like Jerusalem presents to all sides - but we are troubled by the persistence of extremely inflexible views, eg the opinion survey I saw recently which suggests that only 14 per cent of Israelis were willing for the question of Jerusalem to be even discussed with the Palestinians. Our concern is to work quietly and constructively with Israel to strengthen an already warm relationship, and one in which your concerns and ours are fully understood. Our ability to address frankly issues of human rights and regional arms control, to cite just two examples, demonstrates the strength and maturity of our relations.

There is a great deal of reason for satisfaction when one examines the state of bilateral relations between our two countries. We have worked together, with considerable success, over the past three years in addressing a range of issues which concerned us both. UNGA Resolution 379 has been rescinded. The Arab boycott has been more or less dismantled in its secondary and tertiary applications. We have made regular representations and enquiries on the release of Israelis missing in Lebanon, including Ron Arad whose family I met earlier today. We have tried to be helpful in regard to the situation of Syrian Jews. And we are gratified that Israel, for its part, has been generous in its support for Australia in such areas as international candidacies - we hope that that will continue with our bid for the UN Security Council next year.

In the short to medium term, there would seem to be potential to expand the volume of bilateral trade, which now hovers between A\$250-300 million per annum. In 1994, the trade deficit was A\$155 million in Israel's favour. To meet that challenge, Australians need to get across the message to Israelis of what Australia has to offer. The Australia-Israel Chamber of Commerce has appointed a full-time representative in Israel, which should assist both sides to realise the full potential for trade between us. Greater political will is also required to establish a better framework for trade and investment. A double taxation agreement has, for example, been under discussion for several years between Jerusalem and Canberra, and it's about time it came to fruition.

Strategic investment represents an important area of commercial opportunity. Our proximity to and knowledge of East Asian markets makes Australia an attractive springboard to many countries in the Asia-Pacific, and we have been seeing scores of multilateral companies over the last five years or so choosing not just to operate

out of Australia, but to use us as a regional headquarters. Some Israeli companies have already seen the potential for operating from Australia. Teledata Communications, a leading Israeli telecommunications company, has developed a successful manufacturing facility in Brisbane. As well as supplying the Australian domestic market, Teledata Australia now exports to Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Indonesia. NETAFIM Ltd, the leading Israeli drip irrigation company, recently decided to establish a plant near Melbourne, to improve its sales within Australia, and to win exports to regional markets.

On the other side of the ledger, Israel is for Australia a potential source of capital funding, foreign investment and technological innovation. There is also potential for Australian firms to benefit from Israeli access arrangements and market connections to both the United States and the EU. I would like to see a more concerted effort on the part of Israeli firms to bring such opportunities to the attention of their Australian business counterparts.

As I come to the end of what has been a welcome return to a country which means so much to many Australians, I feel reassured that the idealism which gave rise to the birth of Israel has not diminished among this country's present leaders. The present Israeli government has demonstrated a strong commitment in principle to the peace process, and I hope that commitment can be sustained in practice through all the trials that lie ahead. Israel has a very strong interest in responding of the needs of the more pragmatic leaders in the region, and in sharing the political and economic burden which a cooperative approach to security entails. Peace-building here means developing a sense of mutuality and respect between Israelis and Palestinians. Achieving durable security is not only a matter of understanding the interests and interaction of states. It also requires mutual understanding of the ways in which leaderships and their audiences see the world, themselves and each other. As the American writer David Shipler once observed,

"Whatever happens in war or diplomacy, whatever territory is won or lost, whatever accommodations or compromises are finally made, the future guarantees that Arabs and Jews will remain close neighbours in this weary land, entangled in each other's fears. They will not escape from one another. They will not find peace in treaties or in victories. They will find it, if they find it at all, by looking into each other's eyes".

We in Australia know that our host tonight, Shimon Peres, has done as much as

any human could to look into the eyes of his neighbours. We applaud what you have achieved so far, encourage you to take every possible step to keep the momentum going, and pledge ourselves to play whatever part we usefully can to bring about a lasting peace in this region that touches our hearts so much.

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