

Viewpoint: Mass.-Israel relationship is strong in cybersecurity, but competition is growing

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When it comes to cybersecurity, buzz around the world — especially here in Massachusetts — is unmistakable. Last month hundreds of industry professionals from Greater Boston and beyond gathered for two days of intensive discussion intended to bolster Massachusetts’ already formidable cybersecurity footprint. At the center of these inaugural events was a leading partner of the commonwealth’s, a tiny state in the Middle East: Israel.

At the state’s first-ever Cybersecurity Forum, hosted by the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, Gov. [Charlie Baker](#) noted that the reason he took his first international economic development mission to Jerusalem last December was because when it comes to cybersecurity, “Israel is at least 20 years ahead of the rest of the world.”

The MassTech event was followed by the commonwealth’s first CEO Cybersecurity Forum launched by Gov. Baker, the Dean of Harvard Business School Nitin Nohria and Tel Aviv University’s Professor [Isaac Ben Israel](#) (often referred to as the “father” of Israel’s cybersecurity ecosystem). Here, industry leaders gathered to explore the landscape of cybersecurity entrepreneurship, the real-world implications of security breaches, and ways in which Massachusetts can strengthen its leadership position.

Massachusetts has a proven track record when it comes to reaping the benefits of a robust business relationship with Israel. A 2016 study commissioned by the New England-Israel Business Council revealed that Israeli-founded companies operating in Massachusetts generated over \$18 billion in revenue and contributed to nearly 4 percent of the state’s GDP for 2015. No less important, Israeli-founded companies supported over 27,000 jobs for residents of the commonwealth.

Since 1992, Massachusetts CEOs have traveled to Israel to experience our comprehensive, multi-faceted innovative ecosystem firsthand. There they’ve been met by young entrepreneurs eager to share their ideas and

technologies with the rest of the world. It's a perfect fit, as a similar ecosystem exists here in Boston — one where the entrepreneurial spirit is strong and young talent is eager to grow Massachusetts' innovative economy.

In fact, at a recent discussion hosted by the Boston College Chief Executives Club, founder and executive chairman of the World Economic Forum Klaus Schwab praised Israel's cybersecurity ecosystem and our proficiency in creating "cooperation between business and governments to create more robust, more resilient systems." He recalled consulting with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to scale this model on a global level.

Across the United States, Israeli firms are creating new opportunities for people of all skill sets and walks of life to participate in one of the world's fastest-growing industries. With the expansion of global business cooperation, including with Israel, a number of states have chosen to adopt legislation that prohibits contracting with companies that discriminate against a particular individual.

Such legislation already exists in 22 states across the U.S., among them are the country's top 10 states with the largest economic footprint as measured by GDP. In New England, Rhode Island has passed such legislation. Massachusetts has not yet.

Israel is known to be an international pioneer of cybersecurity. For a country of just under 9 million citizens, Israel accounts for 20 percent of global private cybersecurity investment and 10 percent of the global market share. It therefore should come as no surprise that information technology is now the chief component of the Massachusetts-Israel business partnership.

While the Massachusetts' relationship with Israel is as robust as it has ever been, it of course faces competition. Examples include the University of California system signed a memorandum of understanding with Israel's National Technological Innovation Authority; Texas A&M and the University of Haifa established a joint venture to build an oceanographic observatory in the eastern Mediterranean Sea; and [Cornell University's](#) recently opened [Cornell Tech](#), a \$2 billion project situated on Roosevelt Island in partnership with Israel's Technion Institute of Technology.

For states like Massachusetts, cybersecurity innovation offers tremendous potential for R&D collaboration, increased revenue, and job creation. Israeli companies may start off small, but they certainly grow fast. Among

others, Tufin Ltd. was one of the first cybersecurity companies to open in Boston following Gov. Baker's trade mission. The office opened with about 20 employees but hopes to employ 300 people worldwide by the end of 2017.

Other, more established, Israeli-founded cybersecurity firms based in Greater Boston, like CyberArk and [Cybereason](#), are proof of just how bright the future of business with Israel can look with hard work and the proper infrastructure. We're optimistic, as we continue to advance our partnerships across government, business and academic sectors towards achieving this goal.