

# Bahrain, Nato keen on global peace

## 'Nato is a political organisation where Iceland, which has no army, can veto US'

By Habib Toumi

BAHRAIN'S favourable response to the Nato initiative to promote closer cooperation with countries in the Broader Middle East denotes its high-level commitment to international peace, stability and security, the Deputy Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato), Alessandro Minuto Rizzo, has said.

"I am encouraged by the results of my visit. We had very important talks with Bahrain's leadership and we are optimistic about achieving results that would reinforce peace and stability," Rizzo told the *Tribune* during his one-day visit to the Kingdom, heading a Nato team. "We are looking at reaching bilateral accords with the six states of the Gulf Cooperation Council, very much in line with the relations we have with the Mediterranean Dialogue countries, such as Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia," he said.

"There are many things that we can agree upon, such as expertise in defence, operations, fight against terrorism. It all depends on what the Gulf countries want," said Rizzo. The Nato team had visited three countries in the Gulf. They will visit the other three after Ramadhan.

Nato has recently engaged in a drive for closer relations with the region. In June, it launched the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative to "further contribute to long-term global and regional security and stability while complementing other international efforts."

On September 22, it agreed to help in the nation-building process in Iraq by creating a military training academy in

ence in the country. The decision was reached after two years of feuding over the US-led war and after overcoming concerns raised by France and others that a larger presence would be tantamount to putting the alliance into the Iraqi battlefield through the back door.

Rizzo stressed Nato would be in Iraq for training and that it would have no direct combat role. "Nato support to Iraqi security institutions will help build its capability to address the security needs of its people. Nato's effort will focus on training, assisting with equipment and technical assistance," he said.

A training, education and doctrine excellence centre will be established to focus on leadership training for Iraqi Security Forces, and help to build nationwide multiethnic security institutions.

Rizzo stressed that the Nato effort would be independent from other forces in Iraq and that the mission would report to Nato. "The aims of this mission are training and technical assistance, not combat. Of course, robust force protection is of the utmost importance. The multinational force (MNF) should provide a secure environment for the protection of Nato forces in Iraq."

The accord is expected to raise the Nato presence to around 300 people from just 40 now. "I really do not know the exact figure yet, but it will be in the hundreds," Rizzo said. On Thursday, Nato's top commander in Europe, General James Jones, said that up to 3,000 troops could be deployed to train Iraqi security forces. The figure would include the military trainers as well as security personnel.



**Ambassador Rizzo talks to Bahrain Tribune Deputy Editor Habib Toumi about Nato initiative to promote closer cooperation with countries in the Broader Middle East.**

itary organisation. It is also political one, where all 26 members have equal votes and veto powers. All decisions have to be unanimous, so even Iceland, which has no army, can veto a suggestion by the USA, for example," Rizzo said.

Nato was established on April 4, 1949, by representatives from 12 nations (Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States). The other members are Bulgaria (2004), Czech Republic (1999), Estonia (2004), Germany (1955), Greece (1952), Lithuania (2004), Hungary (1999), Latvia (2004), Poland (1999), Romania

(2004), Spain (1982) and Turkey (1952).

Nato at first had no military structure. The Korean War, however, which began in June 1950, was first perceived by the West as part of a worldwide Communist offensive, which prompted them to establish a Nato military force.

Nato which started as a defensive international institution changed its original intention and purpose.

The institution, today made up of 26 countries, currently concentrates on promoting political, social, and economic ties among its members and other countries as well.

Rizzo attributed the refocussing of the Nato goals to the latest political and eco-

identified by the end of the cold war. "We started off as an organisation that is based in Europe and working on protecting Europe. Today, Nato is 7,000 kms from its headquarters in Afghanistan where it is helping to rebuild the country. It is so far away from home," said Rizzo who was Italy's representative to the Committee for Policy and Security of the European Union and to the Western European Union before becoming Nato's Deputy Secretary General in 2001.

The Deputy Secretary General said that global interest was the main drive of the organisation. "We have a Muslim member (Turkey), and the only war we ever fought helped protect Muslims in Bosnia; we believe in working together towards common goals that serve mankind," he said. These goals include non-military options, and Nato attaches great importance to the values like the rule of law, democracy, freedom of the media.

Nato has a stabilisation force mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (SFOR), made up of 28 nations. Last July, it said that it was not going to turn its back on the country in December, the timeframe to conclude the SFOR operations. Nato Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer pledged that Nato would retain a military presence in Bosnia to assist authorities with defence reform and to carry on certain operational supporting tasks.

Commenting on a possible role in the Middle East, Rizzo said that Nato would help in conflicts if the states involved requested its presence and all the Nato members agreed.

He expressed hope that the organisa-

ties with a wide spectrum of countries. "We started the Mediterranean Dialogue countries in a modest way. We keep adding new things and now it has improved," he said, adding that he hoped similar formulas would work with other countries.

Rizzo said that with all kinds of developments, countries had to change their strategies, make their forces more mobile, more effective in the field, and better capable. "Not only new state members have to go for defence reforms, but also the older members who needed the new vision. There is a new way of looking at things and we have witnessed enormous changes. Nato has undergone a tremendous transformation. We had to make several changes to adapt to the new mentality, ways of operating. All members had to upgrade their armies, make them easier and faster to deploy. The military had to be reduced. It is not a matter of how large the army is or big the tanks are, but rather a matter of capabilities and of being sustainable," he said.

Rizzo said that at the globalisation age, Nato was working with other countries and organisations to help secure a safer and more stable world.

"We are working together to confront challenges. It is not easy to work alone. The challenges are numerous and there is a crucial need for diplomacy, civil society, finances among other things. For this, countries need to work together. Nato also needs to work with others," he said.

He stressed that the threat of terrorism was serious and called for coordination in diplomacy, law enforcement and inter-

# Istanbul Cooperation Initiative: Reinforcing world stability

NATO leaders have launched the *Istanbul Cooperation Initiative*, an offer to engage in practical security cooperation activities with states throughout the *Broader Middle East*. This new initiative stands alongside NATO's long-standing *Partnership for Peace* program and *Mediterranean Dialogue*. These security cooperation partnerships are part of the way NATO is responding to the new challenges of the 21st century:

- With a transformed Alliance determined to respond to new challenges, NATO is ready to undertake a new initiative in the broader Middle East region to further contribute to long-term global and regional security and stability while complementing other international efforts.

- In this context, progress towards a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should remain a priority for the countries of the region and the international community as a whole, and for the success of the security and stability objectives of this initiative. Full and speedy implementation of the Quartet road map is a key element in international efforts to promote a two-state solution to the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict in which Israel and Palestine live side by side in peace and security. The road map is a vital element of international efforts to promote a comprehensive peace on all tracks, including the Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-Israeli tracks.

- NATO's initiative, based on a series of mutually beneficial bilateral relationships aimed at fostering security and regional stability should take into account the following principles:

- the importance of taking into account ideas and proposals originating from the countries of the region or regional organisations.

- the need to stress that the NATO initiative is a cooperative initiative, based on joint ownership and the mutual interests of NATO and the countries of the region, taking into account their diversity and specific needs.

- the need to recognise that this process is distinct yet takes into account and complements other initiatives including by the G-8 and international organisations such as the EU and the OSCE as appropriate. The NATO initiative should also be complementary to the Alliance's *Mediterranean Dialogue* and could use instruments devel-



Nato headquarters in Brussels.

oped in this framework, while respecting its specificity. Furthermore, the new initiative could apply lessons learned and as appropriate mechanisms and tools derived from other NATO initiatives such as the *Partnership for Peace* (PfP).

- the need to focus on practical cooperation in areas where NATO can add value, particularly in the security field. Participation of coun-

tries in the region in the initiative as well as the pace and extent of their cooperation with NATO will depend in large measure on their individual response and level of interest.

- the need to avoid misunderstanding about the scope of the initiative which is not meant to either lead to NATO/EAPC/PfP membership, provide security guarantees or be used to create a

political debate over issues more appropriately handled in other fora.

- Taking into account other international efforts for reforms in the democracy and civil society fields in the countries of the region, NATO's offer to those countries of dialogue and cooperation will contribute to those efforts where it can have an added value: in particular, NATO could make a notable contribution in the security field as a result of its particular strengths and the experience gained with the PfP and the *Mediterranean Dialogue*.

## Aim of the initiative

- The aim of the initiative would be to enhance security and regional stability through a new transatlantic engagement with the region. This could be achieved by actively promoting NATO's cooperation with interested countries in the field of security, particularly through practical activities where NATO can add value to develop the ability of countries' forces to operate with those of the Alliance including by contributing to NATO-led operations, fight against terrorism, stem the flow of WMD materials and illegal trafficking in arms,

and improve countries' capabilities to address common challenges and threats with NATO.

- Countries of the region might see benefit in cooperation with the Alliance through practical support against terrorist threats, access to training, defence reform expertise and opportunities for military cooperation, as well as through political dialogue on issues of common concern.

## Content of the initiative

- The initiative's aim would be essentially achieved through practical cooperation and assistance in the following priority areas, and illustrative menu of specific activities:

- providing tailored advice on defence reform, defence budgeting, defence planning and civil-military relations.

- promoting military-to-military cooperation to contribute to interoperability (the requirements constitute firm prerequisites for contributing nations such as the need to communicate with each other, to operate together, to support each other and to train together) through participation in selected military exercises and related educa-

tion and training activities that could improve the ability of participating countries' forces to operate with those of the Alliance in contributing to NATO-led operations consistent with the UN Charter.

- invite interested countries to observe and/or participate in selected NATO/PfP exercise activities as appropriate and provided that the necessary arrangements are in place;

- encourage additional participation by interested countries in NATO-led peace-support operations on a case-by-case basis;

- fighting against terrorism including through information sharing and maritime cooperation.

- invite interested countries in accordance with the procedures set out by the Council for contributory support from non-NATO nations, to join *Operation Active Endeavour* (OAE) in order to enhance the ability to help deter, defend, disrupt and protect against terrorism through maritime operations in the OAE Area of Operations;

- explore other forms of cooperation against terrorism including through intelligence exchange and assessments as appropriate.

- contributing to the work of

the Alliance on threats posed by weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their means of delivery:

- promoting cooperation as appropriate and where NATO can add value in the field of border security, particularly in connection with terrorism, small arms and light weapons and the fight against illegal trafficking;

- offer NATO-sponsored border security expertise and facilitate follow-up training in this respect;

- access to appropriate PfP programmes and training centres.

- promoting cooperation in the areas of civil emergency planning;

- offer NATO training courses on civil emergency planning, civil-military coordination, and crisis response to maritime, aviation and surface threats;

- invitations to join to observe relevant NATO/PfP exercise as appropriate and provision of information on possible disaster assistance.

## Geographical scope of the initiative

- Based on the principle of inclusiveness, the initiative could be opened to all interested countries in the region.