

# Nato looks beyond Atlantic, seeks Middle East partners

DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL RULES OUT INTERVENTION IN ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

DUBAI — Nato is expanding its reach in an effort to promote security cooperation, particularly in the Middle East. Nato's engagement in the region unfolds under the slogan to help in promoting security, stability and peace by providing training and expertise in fighting terrorism and preventing the proliferation of WMDs.

Nato Deputy Secretary-General Alessandro Minuto Rizzo with a delegation toured the Gulf region with the aim of discussing the "Istanbul Cooperative Initiative" (ICI) floated by the Atlantic organisation at its 2004 June summit.

The Gulf Research Center met Rizzo during his visit to its Dubai office, during which the Nato official spoke on the organisation's role and ambitions in the region.

**Q: What are the key premises and major objectives of the ICI?**

**A:** Today's Nato is very

different from the Nato of the past. In order to deal with new challenges, the alliance, at the Istanbul Summit last June, decided to launch the ICI to reach out to countries in the broader Middle East region. Nato intends to build a bilateral relationship with interested countries of the region with the common objective of fostering security and stability in the region.

**Q: Do you intend to discuss this initiative with the governments of the AGCC countries?**

**A:** Yes, after individual consultation meetings I had in Brussels last May with the authorities of six Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (AGCC) countries on a mandate from Nato's highest political body, the North Atlantic Council, I am now visiting the countries here in the region to discuss the way ahead in the implementation of the ICI.



ALESSANDRO RIZZO

**Q: What countries does the initiative cover?**

**A:** The ICI is open to all the interested countries in the region who subscribe to the aim and content of the initiative, based on the principle of inclusiveness,

particularly fighting terrorism and addressing the challenges posed by WMDs.

**Q: Are we going to see a greater involvement of Nato in Iraq?**

**A:** Nato is in Iraq at the request of the Iraqi authorities to help and assist the Iraqi government develop the capacity to provide security for its people. Nato countries decided, upon Iraqi's request, to focus on training and assisting with equipping and providing technical assistance to the security forces. The Nato mission will, therefore, not be engaged in combat.

**Q: What about the disagreements among Nato members about the US influence?**

**A:** It is wrong to equate Nato with the US or vice-versa. The US is an important member. Political disagreements emerge from time to time among the members. In the past, Nato's mission was

limited to winning the war against the Soviet Union. Today, however, the mission is much larger, particularly when it comes to building partnerships, as Nato is extending across the entire globe — in the Gulf region, Afghanistan, the Mediterranean basin etc.

**Q: During the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was stated that one of the goals of intervention of the alliance was to protect the Muslims from the genocide. Is there any plan for an alliance to protect the Palestinians from the Israeli aggression?**

**A:** Nato did not intervene in the conflict in Bosnia but was called by the international community to implement the Dayton agreements. It did so under a UN mandate. Nato is not involved in the Middle East peace process but believes that progress towards a just, lasting, and comprehensive settlement of the

Israeli-Palestinian conflict should remain a priority.

**Q: Do you believe that it is necessary for Nato to survive as an organisation even after the collapse of the former Soviet Union and the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact?**

**A:** In the past, Nato's primary mission was to protect its member countries. With the end of the Cold War, Nato has moved from confrontation to cooperation in the security field. It has launched a new cooperative approach to security based upon partnerships. Today, we have specific partnership relations with Russia, once the enemy of Nato, Central and Eastern European countries and countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus. In practice, Nato has transformed in such a way that it has become more of a political alliance with political goals. — Gulf Research Center