

Gulf-NATO to review terror clamp

Gulf Daily News (Bahrain), Sept. 25

Gulf and NATO experts were due to hold a conference tomorrow to find ways to boost co-operation between the two parties which have been collaborating in the fight against terrorism.

The one-day conference "will make it possible to provide an in-depth look at the issue of a possible NATO role in Gulf security matters," said Gulf Research Center, a Dubai-based think-tank, which is organising the talks.

GRC-NATO seminar in Dubai

The Gulf Today (UAE), Sept. 25

A DUBAI-BASED research centre has joined hands with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) to organise a one-day joint conference in Dubai.

Gulf Research Centre (GRC) and NATO's Division of Public Diplomacy will organise the conference to be held at Jumeirah Beach Hotel on Monday from 9am to 6pm.

Titled "Promoting Co-operation and Fostering Relations: Nato-Gulf Relations in the Framework of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative," the discussion will focus on NATO's decision to adopt the Istanbul Co-operation Initiative in June 2004, which underscores its intention to work with interested countries in the Middle East, starting with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, an official release from.

"These discussions will serve as a backdrop to foster a mutually beneficial bilateral relationship and enhance security and stability. It will also explore the possibility of NATO's role in Gulf security matters," GRC Chairman Abdulaziz Sager said in an official statement issued on Saturday.

Apart from experts from NATO and the GCC countries, the event will be attended by a number of high-level diplomats from both sides.

NATO Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy Jean Fournet will give the keynote address.

GRC-NATO conference focuses on bridging perception gap

Gulf in the Media, Sept. 27

Without undermining the importance of strategic ties with NATO, delegates from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries sought clarification about the real intent and mechanism of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) during a conference in Dubai on Monday.

Jointly organized by the Gulf Research Center (GRC) and NATO's Division of Public Diplomacy, the conference – NATO-GCC relations in the framework of the ICI – brought to the fore the misconceptions about NATO's role in the region and an assurance that it will be continuously involved in “fighting the perception battle.”

During his keynote address, NATO's Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy Jean Fournet said that the ICI was a step in the “transformation” and “reinventing” process of the organisation in its effort to provide a transatlantic link.

Announced in June 2004, the ICI is modeled on the Mediterranean Dialogue, which started in 1994. It calls for NATO's cooperation with the GCC countries in 12 areas, including counterterrorism, border security, disaster preparedness, civil emergency planning, training and education.

“NATO's open-door military-political alliance is now reaching out to civil society issues, with consensus and complementarity of interests being the cornerstones,” said Fournet, whose team is organising various forums to allay the fears of the people in the region.

Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE have signed the ICI accord. Saudi Arabia and Oman are expected to follow suit.

Underlining the importance of NATO's role in the region, GRC Chairman Abdulaziz Sager said that an expanded role in the Gulf could contribute to greater security and stability in the region. “NATO's knowledge and practice in constructing a multilateral alliance network, burden sharing, as well as promoting individual country specialization, ultimately leading to a more effective coalition, is unprecedented and of direct utility for the GCC countries.”

According to the think tank's chairman, the conference was meant to help clear the air regarding NATO's objectives and interests, as well as a lack of understanding about the ICI among the general public.

While several delegates sought to know more about the differences between the ICI and the US-promoted Greater Middle East Initiative, they agreed that military cooperation with NATO could reduce the overemphasis on the US as the sole guarantor of security in the region. More importantly, it was impressed upon the NATO team that restoring order in Iraq was crucial to the region's stability. Dealing with Iran, which is currently not on NATO's agenda, was equally important to make the engagement meaningful, they said.

The need to involve the masses, and not just governments, was a common call during the deliberations. Delegates also emphasized that the GCC countries would judge NATO's security credibility from its role in resolving the conflicts in Bosnia and the Balkans, as well as Afghanistan, where the US withdrawal will put NATO at the forefront of security matters.

Expanded NATO role 'will boost security'

Khaleej Times (UAE), Sept. 27

An expanded NATO role in the Gulf is likely to contribute to greater security and stability in the region, Abdulaziz Sager, Chairman of Gulf Research Centre (GRC), said yesterday.

He made the statement during his address at a conference organised jointly by the GRC and NATO's Division of Public Diplomacy in Dubai yesterday.

"Since first announcing its Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) and stating its willingness to broaden its outreach to the Middle East region and specifically the Gulf, NATO has proceeded at a relatively rapid rate and has been able to conclude agreements with four of the six AGCC states — Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE under the ICI umbrella," he said adding that discussions are underway with Oman and Saudi Arabia and are likely to be brought to a positive conclusion shortly.

Highlighting the significance of NATO's role in the region, Sager said, "Given the volatile security situation that currently exists in the Gulf, NATO can play a role in assisting the region to develop more comprehensive and lasting

structures that can deal with the dangers with which the region might be confronted.”

He added that NATO’s “knowledge and practice in constructing a multilateral alliance network, in burden-sharing as well as in promoting individual country specialization ultimately leading to a more effective coalition, is unprecedented and of direct utility for the AGCC states.”

Sager pointed out that over the past year, there have been a number of initiatives by GRC to build upon its relationship with NATO. He noted that a year ago, the GRC hosted Alessandro Minuto Rizzo, Deputy Secretary General Ambassador, for a roundtable discussion that coincided with the visiting dignitary's initial talks with regional governments about the ICI and NATO’s offer of a broadened relationship.

The one-day conference, Sager noted, was organised considering the confusion and uncertainty about NATO's objectives and interests in general, and lack of understanding among the general public about the ICI in particular.

“We agreed to hold this joint conference so that people in the Gulf region will become more aware about this important initiative and so that NATO itself can enlighten us all about its intended and envisioned role in the near future,” he said adding that the existing perceptions have to be overcome if NATO is to succeed in making the initiative an important component of a more inclusive regional security dialogue.

In that context, it is important that one begins to better understand the composition of NATO as an organisation, to comprehend the relationship between NATO and the US as well as the rest of the member states and to get a better sense of the different components that make up the ICI.

In his keynote address Jean Fournet, Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy (NATO), said that with transformation as the key concept for its evolving process, and while keeping co-operation as its founding stone, NATO is re-inventing itself. He noted that since “the challenges we are facing now are global in nature, we need to try and bring about global solutions through a global alliance”.

NATO-Gulf ties debated

Khaleej Times, Sept. 28

The International Studies Department at the American University of Sharjah (AUS) hosted a lecture titled 'NATO-Gulf Relations in the Framework of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative,' delivered by Jean Fournet, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy, at the campus yesterday.

In his lecture, Ambassador Fournet focused on the different responses of the security communities during the Cold War, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and post September 11, 2001. He highlighted the important role played by NATO; and how it is constantly adjusting to the evolution of the world and reinventing itself to address new threats and challenges.

"In a complex world, we need to provide sophisticated answers based on cooperation, partnership and dialogue," he said.

He also said that with transformation as the key concept for its evolving process, and while keeping co-operation as its founding stone, NATO is re-inventing itself. He noted that since "the challenges we are facing now are global in nature, we need to try and bring about global solutions through a global alliance."

The lecture was attended by Dr Winfred Thompson, American University of Sharjah Chancellor, Dr John Mosbo, Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Dr Nada Mourtadah-Sabbah, Chairperson of the International Studies Department, and senior American University of Sharjah officials, faculty members and more than 85 International Studies students.

Following the lecture, the Ambassador answered a number of questions raised by students pertaining to the security in general and the role of NATO, as well as to the possible evolution of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative.

GRC-NATO conference focuses on bridging perception gap

The Peninsula, Sept. 29

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