

'Nato key to stability, security in Gulf'

BY AJU JACOB

THE role of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in addressing security and other related issues in the Gulf region was explored during discussions at a daylong conference in Dubai on Monday.

The conference touched on various issues involved in promoting co-operation and fostering relations between Nato (an alliance of 26 countries from North America and Europe) and the Gulf countries in the framework of the 2004 Istanbul Co-operation Initiative (ICI) which offered states in the Middle East an opportunity to cooperate with Nato on security issues.

Addressing the conference organised by the Gulf Research Centre (GRC) and Nato Division of Public Diplomacy, Abdulaziz Sager, the chairman of GRC said an expanded Nato role in the Gulf was likely to contribute to greater security and stability in the region.

He said in view of the volatile security situation in the Gulf, Nato could play a role in assisting the region develop more comprehensive and lasting structures against dangers that it might be confronted with.

Sager said since announcing the ICI and its willingness to co-operate

with the Middle East region, Nato had proceeded at a rapid rate in concluding agreements with four of the six GCC states including Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE.

"Discussions are on with Oman and Saudi Arabia and are likely to be brought to a positive conclusion shortly."

Dr Abdullah Baabood from Cambridge University said cooperation of Gulf countries with Nato in security-related matters could reduce the over emphasis on the US as the sole guarantor of security in the region.

"The transatlantic link of Nato will bring several nations into the picture and

the Gulf countries can benefit considerably from the co-operation."

No pre-conditions

He observed that issues like ensuring stability in Iraq, resolution of the Palestine issue and so on should not be put forward as pre-conditions to co-operation with Nato as these issues could be taken up within the framework of the alliance.

Dr Mustafa Alani, programme director of security and terrorism at GRC, said the co-operation between Nato and the GCC should be explored in terms of what could be done to allay secu-

rity concerns associated with the instability in Iraq and nuclear ambitions of Iran.

Earlier in the keynote address, Nato assistant secretary general for public diplomacy Jean Fournet said the organisation was in the throes of a transformation to realign itself with the new realities of a post cold war world.

He said the organisation which had even transformed its way of thinking was now addressing issues like terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, illegal trafficking in arms and so on.

"It is important to co-ordinate efforts with nations

and institutions to deal with global threats. Addressing common challenges together and developing a sense of partnership are absolutely essential," he opined.

Fournet pointed out that most of the current challenges confronting the nations were of a global nature and dealing with such challenges called for global responses.

"In the present world no single institution can deal with various forms of interventions required to deal with challenges. The complex world of today demands complex solutions," he added.

Thanos Dokos, from the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy, said the Gulf region was important to Nato and Europe.

"There are various schools of thought that point out oil, proliferation of weapons, terrorism and so on as reasons for Nato's interest in the Gulf region," Dokos said.

The security situation in the region continues to be in a flux and there is a prospect for a multilateral security regime in the region, he said.

According to Dokos, countries of the region should work towards developing a new security solution to counter threats and deal with issues.



Participants during one of the sessions of the daylong conference on NATO-Gulf co-operation organised by the Dubai-based Gulf Research Centre on Monday.