

AL SAARA AL AWJAT

## **NATO: Re-birth**

**Brussels: Mina El-Oraibi – 7<sup>th</sup> October 2005**

After the end of the cold war in the last decade of the last century, questions emerged about the reasons for the continuing existence of NATO, which was established in 1949 to confront the Soviet Union. But the visit by the NATO Council delegation, lead by NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, to Afghanistan this week shows how far NATO is from its original main objective, that is to protect the USA and western Europe (as well as Canada that is usually forgotten) from a military confrontation with Russia. But without realising it, NATO realised that it had no role to play in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. After this confrontation ended, NATO officials sought new and serious goals. Hence today we find NATO launching initiatives that consolidate NATO's political and diplomatic weight in the international arena. Also, security challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century made co-operation between NATO member states and other countries worldwide crucial for both parties. After the launch of the "Istanbul Co-Operation Initiative" last year, there has been increased political and security co-operation between NATO and the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries. Also NATO's participation in the training of Iraqi officers means that NATO's forces have reached their furthest point from the Atlantic since it was established.

The alliance between the USA, its neighbour Canada and their European allies went through a series of changes over the past 56 years. The first phase was the most significant, as NATO was established to confront Communist Russia and its allies in the "Warsaw Pact". The second phase, after the cold war, witnessed the Balkan wars. NATO responsibilities moved from confronting Russia to bringing stability to South-East Europe because of fears that the problems in the region would spread to Western Europe.

52 years after its formation, the allies found they needed the NATO beyond expectation when the principal member received the biggest blow in its modern history: 11 September attacks. NATO's main and permanent goal is "maintaining the freedom and security of all its members through political and military means". Article 5 of Washington Treaty to form NATO is the most prominent as it confirms that an attack against one of the allies shall be considered an attack against NATO as a whole. This article, which was designed to confront Communism, was used to fight the international terrorist threat. NATO forces went to Afghanistan following the US invasion there. NATO is now involved in various operations around the world. The largest of these operations is in Afghanistan, where 16,000 NATO

soldiers are deployed, with a rotating leadership every six months. "Active Endeavour" in the Mediterranean is one of the most important NATO operations, and countries from outside the NATO are involved in it at various levels. The operation was launched on 28 October 2001, immediately after the 11 September attacks. NATO intervened in the Balkans three times in the last decade of last century: the first was in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1995, in Macedonia in 2001 and currently it leads peace-keeping operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. NATO members have also supported relief operations in Darfur and helped deliver relief aid to it. It did not deploy troops there, but it co-operates with the African Union through a team of 11 NATO staff in the region. Unlike the harmony amongst all 26 NATO members in support of the USA in Afghanistan, NATO was greatly divided during the preparation for war against Iraq. Some NATO members, mainly France and Germany, refused participating with the forces in the invasion of Iraq.

In a statement to Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, a senior NATO official said NATO's approval to train officers in the Iraqi Army and Police was "a compromise" for NATO's contribution in Iraq avoiding the participation of forces from opposing countries in military operations there. Around 200 specialist NATO officers are training 1000 Iraqi officers in Iraq and 500 abroad. NATO intends to provide training for 500 Iraqi officers in Iraq every year to rehabilitate its security forces.

The USA is working with Europe to overcome the divisions between them following the war in Iraq, not only within NATO, but also in the international political arena, including the UN. NATO became the focus for bringing together both parties and restoring US-European relations to previous levels. This made NATO's officials seek to present NATO to the world as a political as well as a military organisation. A senior NATO diplomat said that "NATO is the only place where the USA meets with Europe. The Americans feel relaxed here, and they feel that they really belong in NATO". The USA is the strongest NATO member. It has the biggest military force as well as the largest defence budget. This leads to the mistaken belief that NATO is US-led. The senior official said that each NATO member has one vote, and all decisions are by consensus. Therefore any one of the 26 NATO members can stop a decision being made, even if it were supported by the remaining members. NATO participates with Arab countries in confronting international threats that threaten their joint security. A senior NATO official told Al-Sharq Al-Awsat that terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction threaten Arab countries, as well as NATO members. Thus NATO launched the "Istanbul Co-operation Initiative" in June last year to offer the GCC the opportunity of bilateral security co-operation. Following a visit to NATO in Brussels, Kuwait, Bahrain, UAE and Qatar approved this initiative which offers the

forces in each country the opportunity to train with NATO forces, as well as exchange security intelligence. NATO is involved in discussions with Saudi Arabia and Oman in an attempt to conclude similar agreements with them.

NATO members define terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and instability in failed states as the main threats they face. But threats from other countries will not disappear for good. Despite the decline of the Russian threat, military co-operation between China and Russia is flourishing and attracting the attention of NATO strategic planners. It was announced that two Russian military ships would patrol with NATO patrol boats in the Mediterranean next January. This is historic co-operation following decades of political confrontation between the two sides. However, interests might not always be mutual, which makes NATO officials anxious that their forces are prepared to fight any time they are called upon. NATO endeavours to turn into a diplomatic organisation that manoeuvres to protect its members. But this policy often relies on the possibility of using great military force if necessary.



AL SAUD ALAWD

## **A Saudi Delegation discusses the “Istanbul Initiative” with the NATO Leadership in Brussels**

**NATO Secretary General: 3 factors threaten world peace, including terrorism**

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NATO Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, confirmed that “Islam does not threaten world peace, but that those who hijack planes and innocent people should be stopped from hijacking Islam”. Addressing Arab journalists at NATO Headquarters in Brussels yesterday, he added that terrorism threatens world peace, so does the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the threat from “failing states or states that might fail”.

The press conference coincided with a two-day visit to NATO Headquarters by a senior Saudi delegation lead by Prince Turki Bin Mohammad Al Saoud the Great, Asst. Foreign Under-Secretary for Political Affairs. In a series of meetings with Arab journalists, senior NATO leaders stressed the importance of co-operation between NATO member states and the Arab World, as well as confronting terrorism. Scheffer said “terrorism is everywhere”, thus NATO does whatever is necessary to protect the peoples of member states against terrorism.

Scheffer, who has just returned from a visit to Iraq to inaugurate an academy for training Iraqi Army Officers, admitted that Iraq suffered from terrorism, and added, “the random killing that Iraq witnesses now is pure terrorism”. He added that “there is no substitute for the political process which should continue”. He pointed out that “the failure of the political process in Iraq threatens not only Iraq, but also the whole region”, and went on to say that it was not possible to send NATO Forces to Iraq, as NATO is training Iraqi Forces and providing them with military equipment.

NATO’s invitation to a number of Arab journalists is amongst NATO’s attempts to “improve its image” amongst people in the region, said a NATO senior official. NATO seeks to intensify its activities to promote its work in order to encourage co-operation with Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) Countries as part of the “Istanbul Co-operation Initiative” launched last year. Following the approval of Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE, NATO is working towards establishing areas of co-operation with Saudi Arabia and Oman. The NATO senior official, who preferred to remain anonymous, described that the visit by Prince Turki Bin Mohammad Al Saoud took place “in a positive atmosphere”. He added that the delegation would inform the Saudi leadership of the talks with the NATO Secretary General and

some of its members, hoping that official co-operation between NATO and Saudi Arabia would be the outcome of the visit. Scheffer announced that his forthcoming visit to Egypt would be on 12 October. He said, "Egypt is an important country in the region, I will meet the Egyptian Foreign Minister, and hope that I will also meet President Mubarak."

A NATO senior official said that Egypt's participation, in addition to six other countries, in the "Mediterranean Dialogue" since 1994 is not "a back door to join the NATO". He added that this group, as with the "Istanbul Initiative" that focuses on GCC countries, is a way of co-operating to counter the three threats of terrorism, weapons of mass destruction and failing states. It is not a means of joining NATO".

On Afghanistan, the official confirmed that NATO was getting ready to take over peace-keeping responsibilities from international forces there. He added that the US Army would continue its operations after NATO takes over peace-keeping operations before the end of 2006.