

Nato hopes to build Gulf ties

By GEOFFREY BEW

NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) plans to dramatically increase its co-operation with the Gulf countries, one of its officials said yesterday.

Head of the Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Co-operation Initiative countries section Nicola de Santis said the Belgium-based organisation hopes to reproduce the peace and stability that it has helped create in Europe since its foundation in 1949.

Mr De Santis said there seemed to be an outdated image of Nato and its objectives in the Middle East, but insisted the organisation was not controlled by America and was only interested in creating a secure environment.

He made the comments during the first event Nato has held in Bahrain.

"We are here to offer the hand of friendship to the countries of the region, based on the approach we adopted in Europe after the Cold War," he said.

"This is a new Nato which is trying to stress that in today's fast changing world we need each other.

"No one nation can deal with the complex security challenges alone.

"We are ready if countries want to engage with us.

"Our policy is non-discrimination and our offer is the same to all the countries."

He made the comments during the opening ceremony of a two-day conference discussing media issues concerning security challenges in the Gulf.

Ambassadors, academics, civil society organisations, security officials and journalists from across the region attended the event at the Ritz-Carlton Bahrain Hotel and Spa.

Media in a Changing World: Perspectives from GCC and Nato has been jointly organised by the Information Ministry and Nato division of Public Diplomacy.

Mr De Santis was speaking during a discussion about Nato and Gulf security in the new strategic environment.

He said areas of future co-operation between Nato and the GCC could be



Officials, dignitaries and guests at the event

War of ideas 'new threat to peace'

A WAR of ideas is intensifying the global security threat, Information Minister Dr Mohammed Abdul Ghaffar said yesterday.

He said the media in the Gulf has the power and influence to prevent a region-wide war outbreak, but only if sensationalism is avoided.

"It has become clear that one of the first challenges which our societies and states are facing is such a war - the war of ideas which intensify the dangers and the effects of the other challenges that include security, development, modernisation and reform and the challenges resulting from the effects of globalisation," he said.

Dr Abdul Ghaffar was speaking at the opening ceremony of a two-day conference discussing media issues concerning security challenges in the Gulf.

He also met Nato assistant secretary-general Jean Fournet, Mr De Santis and head of regional affairs and Mediterranean dialogue sec-

tion, political affairs and security policy division Dr Alberto Bin.

Media in a Changing World: Perspectives from GCC and Nato has been jointly organised by the Information Ministry and Nato division of Public Diplomacy.

It is taking place at the Ritz-Carlton, Bahrain Hotel and Spa.

Dr Abdul Ghaffar said regional and international changes have produced unprecedented threats to security, including the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, organised crime, drugs and money laundering.

He says a pressing need has arisen for the media to correct misconceptions and distorted stereotypes, as well as explain complex security issues to help the public understand them.

Dr Abdul Ghaffar said this could help increase peace and stability, which would

also have a positive impact on sustainable development, provided the media remained fair and objective.

"Conflict in the 21st Century is no longer only a conflict of weapons and advanced technology - it is also a conflict of ideas," said Dr Abdul Ghaffar.

"In a changing world, media push ideas and their influence forcefully to the forefront, including such ideas that advocate peace and justice, and those that advocate violence, hatred, extremism and arbitrary measures against the rights of others.

"From such a premise the media draws its strength in evolving public opinion and in demonstrating the extent of its influence over foreign policies."

Dr Abdul Ghaffar says the power and influence of the media in the Gulf cannot be doubted and believes they

have the capability to prevent the outbreak of war, if sensationalism is avoided.

"We fully realise that today's disagreements are tomorrow's disputes and tomorrow's disputes could turn into wars and conflicts," he said.

"They can contribute positively to avert armed conflicts.

"They can bring about peace in societies threatened with collapse, civil wars, divisions, and splits in their national entity.

"They can promote accord among their populations."

The minister said it was also important for the Gulf and Arab media to shed light on human rights violations such as those committed in Iraq or the Palestinian territories.

He warned the role could put the lives of journalists at risk, but said it was vital to uncover the truth.

"It is a pressing responsibility of the Arab and Gulf media to move from a media of reaction to a media of prevention," he said.



Dr Abdul Ghaffar delivers his speech

intelligence sharing and border security.

He pointed to the success of the Mediterranean Dialogue, launched in 1994 to contribute to regional security and stability and achieve mutual understanding, whose members include Jordan, Egypt, Israel, Algeria,

Morocco, Tunisia and Mauritania.

Nato is an alliance of 26 countries from North America and Europe committed to fulfilling the goals of the North Atlantic Treaty, which was signed on April 4 1949.

It brings together the armies of various countries, including the UK and the US, and was formed after the end of the Second World War.

The stated aim of Nato is to prevent conflict between member countries and work for world peace.

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Layoffs must only be the last resort

Early retirement is just another word for redundancy, when it is used by a company to cut its staffing levels.

The hard fact of life is that when a company is making a loss, it has to find ways to get back into profit and managements often start by looking at staffing levels.

It has become common practice to sweeten the pill with talk of natural wastage and voluntary early retirement, but the inescapable reality is that jobs will go.

This is not just an issue for those currently in those jobs, since the opportunity for others to fill those places in the years to come, will also be lost.

Back in my days in the UK, unions would often stand their ground in a bid to resist job cuts,

whether in the form of forced redundancy, early retirement or natural wastage - in other words not replacing people who leave.

Sometimes, they would strike, plunging the company concerned even further into trouble and often resulting in the loss of even more jobs.

What a strong trade union should do is use its muscle to ensure that management has exhausted all other possibilities, before it resorts to the relatively easy route of shedding workers.

Unions should have either within their membership, or in their employ, people who are able to look at how a company is being run and how it is performing, to identify areas of waste or inefficiency, which may be put right.

They should also have people able to read the company books - and the muscle to demand to see those books before allowing the management to start swinging the jobs axe.

Management must be allowed to manage, but inefficient management should be challenged and should not be allowed to make others pay with their livelihoods for its corruption or incompetence.

I remember talking to a union leader many years ago who argued, rightly, that neither an employer nor an employee has the right to needlessly throw away a job, that they must safeguard it for the generations to come.

That is true, but in a world of evolving technology and global competition, we must accept change and, at times, the loss of certain jobs.

But managements must be made first to look seriously at all the other options, before they sentence someone to unemployment, however golden the handshake.

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DRIVER HELD FOR STEALING SPONSOR'S CAR AND CASH

By SARA SAMI

AN Indian driver is being held in custody for stealing a car and BD3,000 given to him by his sponsor to buy pre-paid cards to be sold at profit.

"The defendant, who works as a driver for the Bahraini woman, was given the cash

and told to buy the prepaid cards so that she could sell them and make a profit," a Public Prosecution spokesman said yesterday.

"The defendant agreed to

help the sponsor with her plan, but ended up taking the cash, the sponsor's car and fleeing."

The incident was reported to police, who found the man several days later driving under the influence of alcohol

in the stolen car.

He was jailed for two months for drunk driving by the traffic public prosecution.

After serving his term, his case was transferred to the Public Prosecution where he was interrogated.

The man confessed to stealing the money and the car.

He claimed that he spent the money to pay off debts and on alcohol.

He is being held in custody for a week until his case goes to court.