

Nato's role in Mideast New era for armed forces: chief comes under scrutiny

By Sarmad Qazi

THE Nato's claim as a political organisation was questioned by a regional strategic expert at a session on the entity's role in Middle East yesterday.

"As if the failed Middle Eastern policies of the US, UN and other such powers were not enough, we now have Nato acting as an organisation that encourages political and diplomatic dialogues as well," said chairman of Gulf Research Center, Dubai, Abdulaziz bin Saker.

"They (Nato) were in Riyadh last year, 'encouraging' the kingdom to sign up to the offer of joining the Istanbul Co-operation Initiative (ICI) as well, but still waiting for a response. I find the whole idea of a military coalition undergoing a transformation and coming out as a political organisation, a little ironic," said Saker.

He was part of a panel discussion on a session entitled 'Nato's transformation and its role in the Middle East through the ICI'.

The head of Mediterranean



From left: de Santis, Alzamat and Saker

Dialogue and ICI Countries section, Nicola de Santis, and Prof Khalid Hammed Aba Alzamat of Qatar University also participated in the session.

The seminar was organised by the Center for Strategic Studies, Qatari Armed Forces and Nato's Public Diplomacy Division.

In his speech, Prof Alzamat also warned Nato of "facing negative repercussions from the people of the region, if it is to act biased."

"The Middle East is engulfed in non-stop conflicts and disputes, as it is, and any political or diplomatic role that Nato wishes to play, has to be cau-

tioned and well-balanced," said Alzamat, who is from the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at the university.

"We do not want a policeman replacing another in the region," he added.

"If Nato is a political organisation as they have been suggesting, then why is it that they keep failing to play their role in issues pertaining to Muslims' sentiments, such as media desecration of Prophets," he asked.

The educationist also suggested that Nato should not act alone and 'support' the UN, while transparency and constant review of roles were also emphasised.

In his speech, de Santis admitted that "in this part of the world Nato is seen as an organ-

isation with military character," but he emphasised that "it has helped keep peace for long periods of time through political consultation."

"It is clearly stated in the first treaty of Nato, signed in 1949, that all disputes will be settled with negotiations," he pointed out, while adding that Nato can be called the 'only political-military (pol-mil) organisation of its kind in the world.'

"The ICI is a purely bilateral exercise. We are not forcing any one to join. The initiative's principals are based on no discrimination, non-imposing and self-differential," he said.

"It is simply a pursuit of peace and co-operation that we are trying," he added.

Staff Reporter

THE Qatari Armed Forces (QAF) has entered a new era by joining Unifil, the UN-backed peacekeeping force in Lebanon, while it has also taken part in relief operations in the disaster-struck areas in Iraq, Pakistan and Indonesia, the QAF chief of staff, HE Maj Gen Hamad bin Ali al-Attiyah, said yesterday.

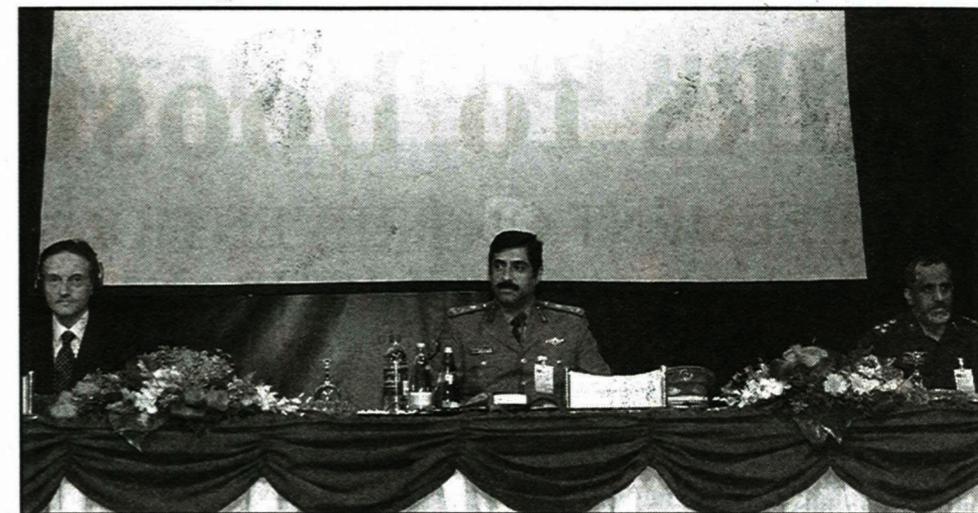
"Lately we have been playing a dual role of guarding the borders in addition to supporting the civilian authorities and those in need of help. We have also made attempts to expand our relations with other international strategic forums such as Nato," he said.

HE Maj Gen al-Attiyah was addressing the opening session of seminar 'The role of Nato in peace & stability in the Middle East,' organised by Center for Strategic Studies, QAF and Nato's public diplomacy division.

It was attended by a large number of military and security officials, diplomats and visiting guests. The deputy secretary general of Nato, Claudio Bisogniero, was the keynote speaker.

The head of Center for Strategic Studies, Brig (Air) Abdulaziz Abdulla al-Mahmoud, was also present at the opening session.

Highlighting the strategic location of Qatar and the other GCC countries, Maj Gen al-Attiyah pointed out that "many



Al-Attiyah flanked by Bisogniero (left) and al-Mahmoud

countries' interests lie in the region and is thus essential to maintain the security and stability in the area."

"Our country has taken a number of steps to ensure the continuity of peace, by establishing new institutions that are capable of fighting terrorism and dealing with crisis management. Another major highlight was Qatar joining the Istanbul Co-operation Initiative (ICI) after it was offered to us," he said.

The ICI was the result of a summit in Istanbul in 2004, which offers states throughout the Middle East to engage in practical security co-operation activities. Of all the GCC countries Saudi Arabia and Oman

have yet to decide to join the grouping.

The ICI was agreed upon in addition to Nato's existing Mediterranean Dialogue, which was established in 1994 as a vehicle for promoting co-operation with states in the Mediterranean and North Africa.

Talking about the evolution of the 26-member military forum, Bisogniero explained that "Nato continues to find itself engaged in a complex environment, with terrorism, transnational crimes, religious extremism and spread of weapons of mass destruction, and so the moral obligation to 'serve' continues as well."

Next year Nato, widely iden-

tified as a counter-bloc to Soviet-era Warsaw Pact, will celebrate its 60th anniversary.

"With the changed situations, Nato has constantly shown adaptability and is now involved in initiating political dialogue as well as effective diplomacy," said Bisogniero.

According to him, Qatar was the first among the GCC states to respond to the ICI and even appointed a liaison. A Nato team visited Doha, two weeks ago to assess the country's crisis management and peace support operations as well.

"Together we can train and educate, while Nato can also acquire more local experience. Only together, we can foster hope for the future," he added.

Nepali engineers hold seminar

NEPAL Ambassador to Qatar Suryanath Mishra has appealed to the engineering professionals from his country to upgrade their skills to meet with challenges of the time.

Mishra was addressing a seminar hosted by the Nepal Engineers Association (Qatar chapter) recently. The envoy expressed happiness at the growing numbers of Nepali professionals in Qatar.

About 50 engineers attended the seminar.

Association office-bearers, including Narayan Prasad Chaudhary, Ganesh Paudel, Sitaram Chaudhary and Dilip Shrestha, presented papers.

The Qatar chapter is the third of its kind of Nepali engineers in the world after those in Japan and Thailand, said an offi-



Suryanath Mishra (middle) and Prasad Chaudhary

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