

NATO SECRETARY GENERAL'S INTERVIEW TO JORDANIAN NEWSPAPER AL RAI

1- Can you tell us what is the aim of your visit to Jordan? What are the important issues will be discussed with His Majesty King ABDULLAH and the Jordanian Deputy Prime Minister ? Are you going to visit other countries in the region ?

I am very pleased to be in Jordan, following the invitations extended by the King to my predecessor. This is the first time a NATO Secretary General visits Jordan since the establishment in 1994 of the Mediterranean Dialogue. My visit is a recognition of the importance the Atlantic Alliance attaches to the strategic position of Jordan in the region and it is a clear demonstration of NATO's interest in developing a cooperative partnership with this country. The aim of my visit is to discuss the implementation of a more ambitious Mediterranean Dialogue, decided at the Alliance's Istanbul Summit last June. Before Jordan I visited Algeria and I intend to visit all the Mediterranean Dialogue countries this year, as part of the enhancement of the political dimension of our Dialogue.

2- Are you going to ask his Majesty to participate in some NATO missions in the BALKANS or in another place?

Jordan is already contributing a lot to international peace and stability, through the armed forces it has deployed on international peace support missions - including the NATO-led operations in Bosnia - and through other forms of assistance such as, more recently, the training of Iraqi security forces. Under the enhancement of the Mediterranean Dialogue we are offering our partner countries the possibility, if they so wish, to work together to promote military-to-military cooperation to be able to work more effectively together. This would be aimed at developing our joint ability to respond to international crisis in the future, to promote international security and peace. But I am not here to ask any specific participation of Jordan's armed forces to any particular operation today.

3- How do you see the Jordanian role in the Middle East?

Jordan has a key strategic position in the region to further the objectives of regional security, stability and peace, and that has been demonstrated in terms of the Middle East Peace Process. Another example of the crucial role of Jordan is offered by its contribution to the training of Iraqi security forces, enabling the Iraqis to provide for their own security.

4- In 1994 NATO established a Mediterranean Dialogue with some countries, they are now 7. Can you please explain what's the M.D and what are its aims?

The Mediterranean Dialogue was established by the Foreign Ministers of NATO at their meeting in December 1994. Five countries were initially invited to participate in the MD: Egypt, Israel, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia. Since its inception, NATO

nations agreed that the Mediterranean Dialogue would be progressive in terms of participation and substance. Such flexibility has allowed the number of Dialogue

partners to grow over time: Jordan joined in November 1995 and Algeria in March 2000. The Mediterranean Dialogue reflects the Alliance's view that security in Europe is closely linked to security and stability in the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean Dialogue aims to contribute to regional security and stability; achieve better mutual understanding between NATO and its Mediterranean Partners; dispel possible mutual misperceptions between the Alliance and participating countries; and promote good and friendly relations across the region. It also complements other international efforts towards the region such as the EU's Barcelona Process the OSCE Mediterranean Initiative, or the "Five plus Five" Initiative.

5- What forbids other countries to join the 7 countries in the M.D?

The Mediterranean Dialogue is opened to interested parties in the region willing and able to contribute to security and stability in the Mediterranean Region as a whole. Decisions on new membership will be taken by consensus in the North Atlantic Council, which is NATO's political decision making body, after considering each interested party on a case-by-case basis and on its own merit.

6- Will Iraq or the Palestinian Authority join, and also what about Syria?

There have not been discussions in the North Atlantic Council concerning the extension of invitations to new members. So I am not in a position to speculate on this subject. NATO's initiatives for the region are not intended to substitute for other ongoing efforts dealing with the Israel-Palestinian conflict. They should, instead, be seen as complementary to those efforts. At the Istanbul Summit NATO nations have clearly stated that the so-called "Road Map" is a vital element of international efforts to promote a comprehensive peace on all tracks, including the Syrian-Israeli and the Lebanese Israeli tracks.

7- Last December NATO celebrated the 10 years of M.D, what forms of cooperation are envisaged?

Jordan and NATO are already working together fruitfully. Since joining our Mediterranean Dialogue in November 1995, Jordan has played a very active role in the cooperation with the Alliance in many areas, particularly in the fields of border security, civil emergency planning, the fight against terrorism, as well as military-to-military cooperation. But also in other important areas, such as public diplomacy, air space management, science and the environment, small arms and light weapons, crisis management and military cooperation.

And last year, Alliance Heads of State and Government decided at their Istanbul Summit to further enhance the Dialogue and offered to transform it into a genuine partnership. The objectives of this partnership would be to enhance the ability of our armed forces to act together if needed, to develop defence reform, and to contribute more effectively to the fight against terrorism. The Alliance leaders indicated that these objectives could be achieved by enhancing both the political and practical dimensions of the Mediterranean Dialogue.

The enhancement of the MD's political dimension was showcased by the first ever meeting of NATO and MD countries' Ministers, took place on 8 December 2004 – and through high level visits to the region such as my visit today.

8- Many Arabic people are looking to NATO as the arm of the U.S.A, what's your opinion about that, and how can NATO convince them of the opposite?

The U.S. are certainly an important ally within NATO. At the same time, this organization, which works by consensus of all 26 members, is the expression of a EuroAtlantic commitment. This means the Alliance's transformation, partnerships and operational engagements reflect a strong consensus between North America and the Europeans.

I believe that a joint public diplomacy effort, to be conducted together by NATO and the Mediterranean Dialogue partners, is needed in order to provide the publics in the Mediterranean and in the broader Middle East with a better understanding of NATO's policies and goals.

9- The ICI was launched at the Istanbul Summit. What is it, and what's the difference with M.D?

The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) is a new initiative taken in parallel to the reinforcement of the Mediterranean Dialogue decided in Istanbul. Both initiatives focus on political dialogue and practical cooperation in the security field and complement each other. But they are distinct in the sense that the ICI tries to reach out to the countries of the broader Middle East. We had first contacts with the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council which all expressed a strong interest to cooperate with NATO.

10- Many people ask whether NATO will play a future role in the Middle East peace process.

NATO nations at the Istanbul Summit stated clearly that they attach the utmost importance to reaching a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They also stated that this should remain a priority for the countries of the region and the international community as a whole, and for the success of the security and stability objectives of the MD and ICI initiatives. Full and speedy implementation of the Quartet Road Map is a key element in international efforts to promote a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in which Israel and Palestine live side by side in peace and security. I would also like to say that while NATO is not involved in solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there are also two "Big ifs": If the two parties in conflict should come to an agreement and If they requested some sort of NATO involvement to help achieve the objectives of that agreement, then NATO would certainly discuss such a request.

11- How do you see the past year for NATO?

I believe 2004 has been a year full of achievements for NATO. We brought seven new democracies into the Alliance. We brought more security to Afghanistan and helped their democracy to grow. We successfully concluded the SFOR Operation in Bosnia-Herzegovina and helped to keep the peace in Kosovo. We defended against terrorism in the Mediterranean, through our naval Operation Active Endeavour. We began helping Iraq and the Iraqi people to train and equip their forces. And, last but not least, we began building stronger relations with countries to the south including in the Mediterranean region and the Gulf. So I think in all, in 2004, NATO did its job to help bring greater peace, greater security to the Euro-Atlantic community and beyond and I am confident we will even do more in 2005.

12- What do you want NATO to do in 2005 in AFGHANISTAN and in IRAQ? How do you think NATO will bring more security to Iraqi people? Do you think the world is more secure after Saddam Hussein?

I believe the world and Iraq are better off without Saddam Hussein in power—despite the terrible violence we are seeing every day on our television screens. Today, the Iraqi people have a great opportunity that they did not have when Saddam Hussein was in power: to build a free, democratic Iraq, based upon the strengthening of human rights and the rule of law. It will not be easy, it will require some time but it will in the end happen. And we cannot afford to let Iraq fail.

NATO is doing its part, together with international actors, to help Iraq find its feet. NATO is not involved in combat operations in Iraq. The Alliance was asked by the Iraqi Interim Government to provide help in crucial areas of training, equipping and other forms of technical assistance to empower their security institutions to reduce reliance on foreign forces. This is exactly what we are doing, under mandate from the UN.

As far as Afghanistan is concerned, the about 10.000 man strong NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is mandated by a series of UN Security Council Resolutions to assist the Afghan authorities build a new, safe, democratic and prospering country. ISAF supports the Afghan Transitional Authority in expanding its authority to the rest of the country, and in providing a safe and secure environment conducive to free and fair elections, the spread of the rule of law, and the reconstruction of the country. ISAF will provide support to the next parliamentary elections scheduled for this spring, including with existing and new Provincial Reconstruction Teams, as well as through the deployment of augmentation forces for the election period.

13- One final question, will NATO have in the future any missions to face the recent tsunami that hit Asian countries?

I do not have a crystal ball. What I can say is that NATO has certain capabilities and assets that might prove useful to the overall effort. We have been in touch with the UN, and they are aware of NATO's capabilities. If there is a real need, and NATO could provide some real added value to the relief effort, I am confident the Alliance would do what it can to help.