

The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI)



The 21st century's new and more complex threats require wide international cooperation and collective effort. That is why NATO has developed, and continues to develop, a wide network of partnerships with non-NATO countries in the security field. Against this background lies the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) which is part of this network.

The ICI was launched at the Summit meeting of NATO Heads of State and Government held on 28 June 2004 in Istanbul, Turkey. Four countries have since joined the initiative: Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

The ICI is based on the premise that the security and stability of the Gulf region is of strategic interest to Alliance - just as the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic area matters to the Gulf Region. The ICI partnership also aims at enhancing security and regional stability through a new cooperative engagement with the countries in the security field. It addresses common security challenges, in a way that responds to the specific needs of the countries involved. The Initiative is open to all countries in the region which subscribe to its aims, particularly the fight against terrorism and countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, starting with but not only limited to the individual members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

During the last 10 years of their partnership with the Alliance, the ICI countries have become efficient security providers and contributed to international efforts in projecting stability and security. Today, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates contribute militarily to the NATO ISAF operation in Afghanistan, and Qatar and Kuwait have contributed in one way or the other to NATO's efforts in Afghanistan. Following the launch of Operation Unified Protector (OUP) in Libya in 2011, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates promptly provided air assets to the operation and were recognized as contributing nations, playing a key role in the success of the operation.

10 years after the inaugural NATO Istanbul Summit, the first meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers with their ICI counterparts is scheduled to take place in Brussels on 2 April 2014.

Key developments of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative

The new NATO Strategic Concept, adopted at the NATO Lisbon Summit in November 2010, identifies cooperative security as one of three core tasks for the Alliance. It refers specifically to the ICI, and states:

“We attach great importance to peace and stability in the Gulf region, and we intend to strengthen our cooperation in the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. We will aim to develop a deeper security partnership with our Gulf partners and remain ready to welcome new partners in the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative

In 2012, at NATO's Summit in Chicago, NATO's Heads of State and Government reaffirmed their commitment to strengthen political dialogue and practical cooperation in the ICI and their openness to receiving new members in the ICI, including Saudi Arabia and Oman. They also warmly welcome the generous offer by the State of Kuwait to host an ICI Regional Centre, which will help us to better understand common security challenges, and discuss how to address them together.

Practical Cooperation

The ICI initiative offers - since 2011 in the Partnership Cooperation Menu - proposed activities from which ICI countries can choose, comprising a range of cooperation areas. These include, amongst others, the following:

- Tailored advice on defence transformation, defence budgeting, defence planning and civil-military relations;
- Military-to-military cooperation to contribute to interoperability through participation in selected military exercises and related education and training activities that could improve the ability of participating countries' forces to operate with those of the Alliance;
- Cooperation in the fight against terrorism, including intelligence-sharing measures;
- Cooperation in the Alliance's work on the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery.
- Cooperation regarding border security in connection with terrorism, small arms and light weapons and the fight against illegal trafficking;
- Civil emergency planning, including participating in training courses and exercises on disaster assistance.
- Joint public diplomacy activities to update governments' and opinion formers' understanding of NATO and the evolution of the ICI.



Also in the area of education and training, NATO-ICI relations have advanced considerably. At the NATO Summit in Riga in 2007, the NATO Training Cooperation Initiative (NTCI) was launched. The NTCI aims at complementing existing cooperation activities developed in the ICI framework through: a) the establishment of a dedicated Middle East Faculty at the NATO Defence College (NDC) based in Rome. This Faculty now teaches the “NATO Regional Cooperation Course (NRCC)”, and a shorter, one week long Senior Executive Regional Course (SERC). Course members and lecturers from all ICI countries and from Oman and Saudi Arabia have participated in these courses at the NATO Defence College. And b) the opportunity for ICI countries to offer national Training and Education Centres affiliated to NATO and aimed at initiating synergies among them and other partnerships.

Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programmes (IPCP) allow interested ICI countries to frame their practical cooperation in a more forward-looking and focused way, enabling interested countries to outline the main short and long-term objectives of their cooperation with the Alliance.

Political Dialogue

Since 2004 significant progress has been made in the political dialogue with ICI countries. Visits and official bilateral meetings are taking place on a regular basis to exchange views on issues of common concern and interest.

The multilateral dimension of the ICI partnership has also developed. The first NAC+4 meeting was held in November 2008; it was followed by other such meetings in 2009, 2010 and 2012. In 2012 alone, the Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Prime Minister of Qatar, and the Minister of State of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia visited NATO headquarters to hold consultations. Also additional high-level political consultations took place in the framework of the ICI, through the North Atlantic Council seminar held on 14 February 2012 in order to discuss ways to deepen the ICI partnership ahead of the NATO Chicago Summit. At the Chicago Summit held in May 2012, three Gulf foreign ministers (from Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE) represented their government in different meetings at the NATO Summit. ICI countries attend regular ISAF ministerial meetings. And ministerial meetings were held during Operation Unified Protector in 2011. All in all, the political dialogue between NATO and the Gulf states is closer and more regular than it has ever been. Furthermore, issue specific meetings - such as on anti-piracy, military cooperation or education – have been taken place with the participation by Saudi Arabia and Oman.

Public Diplomacy

Public Diplomacy represents an important element of the ICI. This has been regularly underlined by ICI nations. High visibility events gave way to informal discussions on security related issues of common interest. The ICI Ambassadorial Conferences in Kuwait (2006), Bahrain (2008), the United Arab Emirates (2009) and Qatar (2011) - which were attended by the Secretary General, the Deputy Secretary General and all NATO Permanent Representatives, as well as by high-ranking officials, policy makers and opinion leaders from ICI countries - focused on discussing and addressing the perception of NATO in the Gulf, as well as ways to develop the NATO-ICI partnership in its two dimensions.

The year 2014 offers enormous potential to continue this public diplomacy outreach and to highlight the benefit of NATO-Gulf cooperation to a wider public.

The NATO-ICI Foreign Ministerial meeting on 2 April will be an excellent opportunity to celebrate the 10th anniversary. In addition to this, a series of visits to NATO HQ of opinion formers, academics, media and government representatives from all ICI partner countries will be organized in the framework of the celebrations of the 10th anniversary of the ICI.

Several recent public diplomacy activities were already conducted and included a visit by an inter-ministerial delegation from Qatar on 21 March 2013, an inter-ministerial delegation from Kuwait in September 2013 and in February 2014, a visit by a group of Qatari diplomats to NATO HQ in January 2014, a visit by diplomats from Bahrain in May 2013, a visit by Opinion Makers and Officials from Saudi Arabia in May 2013, and a visit of Professors and Students from the Sultan Qaboos University in Oman on 18-19 March 2014.



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