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Mr. NICOLA de SANTIS Lectures on "Cooperation Between ICI Countries & NATO"



In a lecture at the Information Affairs Office of H.H. Sheikh Sultan Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. NICOLA de SANTIS, Head of the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative Countries (ICI) Section, NATO Public Diplomacy Division, said that Nato's relationship with countries in the region has already a more than decennial tradition through the Mediterranean Dialogue.

He pointed out that in order to enhance Mediterranean Dialogue and to reach out to countries in the broader Middle East region, in December 2003 NATO nations decided to consult, before the June 2004 Istanbul Summit, our Mediterranean partners and interested countries in the broader region.

Taking into account the views of the consulted countries, NATO has launched at its Istanbul Summit a more ambitious and expanded framework for the Mediterranean Dialogue and NATO's outreach with, and cooperation to, interested countries in the broader Middle East region, through the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, starting with individual members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, he said.

He indicated that the NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue was launched in December 1994, reaching out to non-NATO nations in the Mediterranean, willing and able to contribute to security and stability in the region. The overall aim of the Dialogue was and still remains today: to contribute to regional security and stability; achieve better mutual understanding between NATO and its Mediterranean Partners; dispel misperceptions about the Alliance among participating countries; and promote good and friendly relations across the region, he explained.

Mr. de SANTIS said that NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue was since its inception characterized by a phased approach, with the number of participating countries growing from the five initial members to include other countries, which has allowed the content of the Dialogue to evolve throughout the years.

He said that Since 1997, measures for practical cooperation between NATO and Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) countries are laid down in an annual Work Program, which aims at building mutual confidence through active cooperation in security-related areas. This Work Program, he said, comprises a wide range of activities including public diplomacy; civil emergency planning; science and the environment; crisis management; defense policy and strategy; small arms and light weapons; global humanitarian mine action; initiatives on WMD proliferation; and a sound program of military cooperation.

While the practical cooperative dimension is primarily bilateral (NATO+1, or 26+1 as it is termed, as well), the MD also allows for multilateral political consultations (NATO+7, or 26+7) and bilateral political consultations (NATO+1, or 26+1), at Ambassadorial level under the Chairmanship of the NATO Secretary General, or at working level under the Chairmanship of a representative of NATO's International Staff.

At their June 2004 Istanbul Summit, NATO leaders offered to elevate the Mediterranean Dialogue to a genuine partnership with the following objectives: enhancing the existing political dialogue; achieving interoperability; developing defense reform; contributing to the fight against terrorism, he said.

He pointed out that these objectives can be achieved through enhanced cooperation in a number of practical priority areas listed in the policy document “A More Ambitious and Expanded Framework for the Mediterranean Dialogue”, released by NATO at the Istanbul Summit.

The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) aims at enhancing security and regional stability through a new transatlantic engagement in the broader Middle East region, by promoting practical cooperation with interested countries, in areas where NATO can represent an added value, he explained.

He said, that based upon the principal of inclusiveness, ICI is opened to all interested countries in the region who subscribe to the aim and content of this initiative, including the fight against terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

He mentioned that NATO has had talks for the moment with six individual members of the GCC: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, adding that four countries at present: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the United Emirates have joined ICI.

Concerning the role of NATO in solving the conflict in the Middle East, Mr. de SANTIS stated that the Alliance is not a party to this conflict, as there are many players in this conflict, and no one asked NATO to intervene, but he said that NATO does support the Quartet and the United Nation’s efforts in solving this issue.

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