

SECURITY

COOPERATION

with the Mediterranean
region and the broader
Middle East



A Jordanian Navy patrol boat passes ships from NATO's mine countermeasure force, during an exercise organised under the Mediterranean Dialogue in the Gulf of Aqaba in March 2005

NATO is developing closer security partnerships with countries in the Mediterranean region and the broader Middle East. This marks a shift in Alliance priorities towards greater involvement in these strategically important regions of the world, whose security and stability is closely linked to Euro-Atlantic security. The current drive towards increasing dialogue and cooperation with countries in these regions builds on two key decisions taken at NATO's summit meeting in Istanbul in June 2004.

Allied leaders decided – ten years after the launch of NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue – to invite countries participating in the Dialogue to establish a more ambitious and expanded partnership. The Dialogue fosters links with seven countries stretching from western North Africa around the southern Mediterranean rim to the Middle East: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia. Through political dialogue and practical cooperation, the Dialogue aims to contribute to regional security and stability, and to promote good and friendly relations across the region. It also aims to

achieve better mutual understanding between NATO and its Mediterranean partners and to dispel misperceptions about the Alliance.

In parallel, a new, distinct but complementary initiative was launched at the Istanbul Summit to reach out to interested countries in the broader Middle East region. The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative aims to enhance security and stability by fostering mutually beneficial bilateral relationships, particularly in the context of the fight against terrorism and countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The importance of fostering security in these regions

There are several reasons why it is important for NATO to promote dialogue and foster stability and security in North Africa and the broader Middle East. One key reason is that a number of today's security challenges – terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, failed states and transnational organised crime – are common to both NATO member states and to countries in these regions and, consequently, require common responses. Moreover, in addressing these challenges, NATO is becoming more engaged in areas beyond Europe including a security assistance operation in Afghanistan, a maritime counter-terrorist operation in the Mediterranean and a training mission in Iraq. It is important to discuss these developments with countries in the Mediterranean region and the broader Middle East.

The potential in these regions for instability due to many unresolved political, social and economic issues is also a concern. In the

Middle East, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains a major source of tension. Progress towards a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of this conflict should be a priority for the countries of the region and for the international community as a whole. While NATO as such is not involved in the Middle East peace process, the Allies support the objectives of the Road Map – an initiative outlining steps to be taken towards a permanent settlement of the conflict, which is sponsored by the two parties directly concerned and the Quartet of the European Union, Russia, the United Nations and the United States.

Energy security is another concern with as much as 65 per cent of Europe's oil and natural gas imports passing through the Mediterranean. A secure and stable environment in the Mediterranean region is important not only to Western importing nations but also to the region's energy producers and to the countries through which oil and gas transit.

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Building bridges

Building bridges with the Mediterranean region and the broader Middle East merits the same degree of NATO attention as overcoming the legacy of division between East and West in the 1990s. The challenges may be different but are just as complex as those the Alliance faced, when it sought to develop cooperative relationships with former adversaries in central and eastern Europe. As was the case then, a major effort is required to overcome prejudices, tackle misperceptions, and build trust and understanding.

Thanks in large part to the groundbreaking Partnership for Peace – a major programme of practical bilateral cooperation between NATO and individual Partner countries – NATO has transformed the adversarial relationships

that existed during the Cold War into active security partnerships with most central and eastern European countries. This remarkable transformation is a source of inspiration for what could be achieved, with careful nurture, by the Mediterranean Dialogue and, in time, the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative.

Successful implementation will require a better understanding in participating countries of what NATO is, what it does and why. Working together to address common security challenges and develop practical cooperation in other areas of common interest will help build trust and understanding. However, a significant and sustained effort will be required in the countries concerned to counter public misperceptions about NATO. There is a need to raise public awareness of the cooperation being developed with the Alliance and of the mutual benefits of the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative.

Milestones

- 1994** | Mediterranean Dialogue is launched
 - Egypt, Israel, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia join the Dialogue
- 1995** | Jordan joins the Dialogue
- 1997** | First Annual Work Programme is drawn up for the Dialogue
- 1999** | Steps are taken to strengthen the Dialogue at the Washington Summit
- 2000** | Algeria joins the Dialogue
- 2002** | The Dialogue's political and practical dimensions are increased at the Prague Summit
- 2004** | At the Istanbul Summit, Dialogue countries are invited to establish a more ambitious and expanded framework for the Dialogue to move it towards a genuine partnership
 - In parallel, the distinct but complementary Istanbul Cooperation Initiative is launched

The Mediterranean Dialogue

Since the launch of the Mediterranean Dialogue in 1994, it has been an integral part of the cooperative approach to security that the Alliance has pursued since the end of the Cold War. Over the years, the number of countries participating in the Mediterranean Dialogue has increased: Egypt, Israel, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia, which accepted the invitation to participate in the Dialogue in 1994, were joined by Jordan in 1995 and Algeria in 2000. The Dialogue has also become more ambitious in scope.

Initially, NATO wanted to create a forum for confidence-building and transparency in which Allies could learn more about the security concerns of Dialogue countries as well as dispel misperceptions about NATO's aims and policies. Regular bilateral meetings were organised at working level and between the ambassadors of individual Dialogue countries with NATO's highest decision-making body, the North Atlantic Council, to discuss relevant security issues and the development of the Dialogue. Occasionally, multilateral meetings involving all seven Dialogue countries were also held.

Since then, political discussions have become more frequent and intense, and the Dialogue has been given more structure and opportunities for more concrete cooperation have gradually opened up. An Annual Work Programme, established in 1997, has steadily expanded to include an increasing number of elements and activities derived from the Partnership for Peace programme including military cooperation, civil emergency planning, scientific and environmental cooperation.



The first-ever ministerial meeting with Mediterranean Dialogue partners is held in Brussels, Belgium, on 8 December 2004

At the 1999 Washington Summit, steps were taken to strengthen cooperation, particularly in the military field. In the years that followed, the Alliance's focus on the Mediterranean Dialogue sharpened and political consultations with Dialogue countries, both individually and as a group, were strengthened.

This led to the adoption, at the Prague Summit in November 2002, of a package of measures to increase the political and practical dimensions of the Dialogue. These included more regular and effective consultations, more focused activities and a tailored approach to cooperation.

Building on these initiatives and after consultation with Dialogue countries, a decision was taken at the Istanbul Summit in June 2004 to establish a more ambitious and expanded cooperative framework. The aim is to elevate the Dialogue to a genuine partnership.

Guiding principles of the Mediterranean Dialogue

Joint ownership

The Dialogue is not about imposing ideas on other countries, but rather about taking into account the specific regional, cultural and political context of respective partners to build a cooperative relationship that is of mutual interest and relevance.

Non-discrimination and self-differentiation

All partners are offered the same basis for discussion and for joint activities, but the level of participation varies from country to country according to individual needs and interests.

Complementarity

The Dialogue complements other related but distinct international initiatives, such as those undertaken by the European Union, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the G-8. NATO brings added value through its experience of coordinating political and practical security cooperation among many member and partner countries.

Progressiveness

The Dialogue's progressive character allows its political and practical dimensions to be enhanced regularly, and the number of participating countries to grow.

The representatives of Turkey (left) and Israel greet each other at the first formal meeting of Chiefs of Defence or their representatives from NATO and Dialogue countries, at NATO Headquarters on 17 November 2004



Upgrading the Dialogue

Following the Istanbul decision, the overriding aims of the Mediterranean Dialogue remain the same but the future focus is on developing more practical cooperation. Specific objectives are to achieve interoperability (that is, improve the ability of the militaries of Dialogue countries to work with NATO forces); to contribute to the fight against terrorism; and to cooperate in the area of defence reform.

Political dialogue is also being enhanced by organising *ad hoc* meetings at ministerial level, over and above ongoing consultations at working and ambassadorial levels. A first ministerial level meeting took place in December 2004, when Allied foreign ministers met counterparts from Dialogue countries over a working dinner in Brussels.

NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer (left) and Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika speak to the press, after a meeting in Algeria on 25 November 2004



On the military side, the first formal meeting between Allied Chiefs of Defence Staff and counterparts, or their representatives, from the seven Dialogue countries took place at NATO Headquarters in November 2004. Both these meetings reaffirmed the mutual desire to move from dialogue towards genuine partnership. Further reflecting the new dynamic in the Dialogue, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer met heads of state and government and key ministers in a series of landmark visits to Dialogue countries in late 2004 and early 2005.

As part of upgrading the Dialogue, participating countries will be able to benefit from a series of mechanisms originally developed within the framework of the Partnership for Peace.

Joint public diplomacy: raising awareness and promoting discussion

One of the priorities of the enhanced Mediterranean Dialogue is for NATO and Dialogue countries to put into action a joint public diplomacy effort to better explain NATO's transformation and cooperative efforts. To this end, the NATO Public Diplomacy Division has put together an Action Plan, aimed at providing opinion leaders and other important audiences with a better understanding of NATO's transformation, its policies and goals and, in particular, of the aim and content of the upgraded Dialogue, in light of the decisions taken at Istanbul. Such activities include international conferences and seminars, co-sponsored by NATO and non-governmental organisations or think-tanks; visits to NATO Headquarters; and the dissemination of information through articles in the press, publications, and NATO's website.

This includes the possibility of support through NATO Trust Funds, aimed, for example, at disposal of weapons stockpiles; the use of action plans for practical, issue-specific cooperation; and the development of individual cooperation programmes to allow for greater self-differentiation.

Focus on practical cooperation

Proposals were made at Istanbul to expand and strengthen practical cooperation in a number of priority areas.

- **Military-to-military cooperation:** With a view to improving the ability of Alliance and Dialogue countries' forces to operate together in future NATO-led operations, existing activities and tools under the Partnership for Peace may be used, and participation in selected military exercises and related education and training activities enhanced.

- **Combating terrorism and new security threats:** More effective intelligence-sharing will be promoted as well as participation in NATO's Operation Active Endeavour, the Alliance's maritime operation to detect, deter and disrupt terrorist activity in the Mediterranean. Preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery is another key priority.

- **Border security:** NATO can provide tailored advice in this field, particularly in connection with terrorism as well as tackling the spread of small arms and light weapons and illegal trafficking.

- **Civil emergency planning:** Cooperation in disaster-preparedness could be enhanced, in particular to improve the capacity to deal with the consequences of a terrorist attack. In the case of a disaster, Dialogue countries will also be given the possibility of requesting assistance through the NATO-based Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre.

- **Defence reform:** Priorities in this area include promoting democratic control of armed forces and facilitating transparency in national defence planning and budgeting.

The proposals to broaden and deepen cooperation build on activities developed under the Annual Work Programme, which has expanded over the years to include seminars, workshops

Peacekeeping and refugee relief in the Balkans

Several Mediterranean Dialogue countries have made significant contributions to the NATO-led peacekeeping operations in the Balkans, where the protection of Muslim minorities has been an important factor. Peacekeepers from Egypt, Jordan and Morocco have served in Bosnia and Herzegovina; Jordan and Morocco have also contributed to the force in Kosovo. The United Arab Emirates, which has been invited to participate in NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, also sent a large contingent to Kosovo. In response to requests from the countries neighbouring Kosovo for assistance to deal with the flood of refugees in 1998 and 1999,



Israel provided a fully staffed and equipped field hospital, and the United Arab Emirates helped repair Kukes airfield in north-eastern Albania.

and other practical cooperation in 21 areas. These include civil emergency planning, crisis management, defence policy and strategy, border security, arms control, small arms and light weapons, humanitarian mine action, defence reform and defence economics, science and environmental cooperation, and information activities. Consultations also take place on terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The military dimension of the Annual Work Programme covers invitations to Dialogue

countries to observe or participate in military exercises and to attend seminars and workshops organised by NATO's Strategic Commands as well as courses at the NATO School in Oberammergau, Germany, and the NATO Defense College in Rome, Italy. It also includes visits of NATO's Standing Naval Forces to ports in Dialogue countries, on-site training of trainers by mobile training teams, and visits by experts to assess the possibilities for further military cooperation.

Further information on the Mediterranean Dialogue: www.nato.int/med-dial/home.htm



Scientific and environmental cooperation

Since 1999, scientists from Mediterranean Dialogue countries have been able to collaborate with their peers in NATO member states through NATO's science programmes. Previously, for economic, cultural or political reasons, scientists from most Dialogue countries had had limited opportunities to meet and work with colleagues in NATO countries. Between 2000 and 2003, more than 800 scientists from Dialogue countries participated in NATO-sponsored collaborative activities.

The majority of collaborative activities funded concern physical sciences. Beyond that,

environmental security and the management of natural resources is an area of particular interest for scientists in the region. For example, several grants have been awarded for collaboration on issues related to water resources and desertification (see *photo above*), or to workshops looking at how to address emerging threats to energy production and distribution systems.

Supporting scientific research into ways of improving defence against terrorism is a new priority. This includes research into ways of better detecting, protecting against and destroying chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear agents; methods of detecting explosive devices; and measures to protect against eco-terrorism and computer terrorism.

Further information: www.nato.int/science/med-dial/index.htm

The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative

The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative aims to enhance security and stability by fostering mutually beneficial bilateral relationships with interested countries in the broader Middle East region. 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.

In the run up to the June 2004 Istanbul Summit, before a decision was taken to launch the Initiative, NATO's Deputy Secretary General, Ambassador Minuto Rizzo, visited the six countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – to conduct high-level exploratory consultations to gauge the level of interest in such an initiative. All countries visited expressed an interest.

NATO's Deputy Secretary General, Ambassador Minuto Rizzo (left), consults the King of Bahrain on proposals for cooperation



In the months immediately following the summit meeting, the way ahead was discussed during a second round of visits to Gulf countries. By mid 2005, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates had joined the Initiative and the Alliance hopes the other countries will also do so.

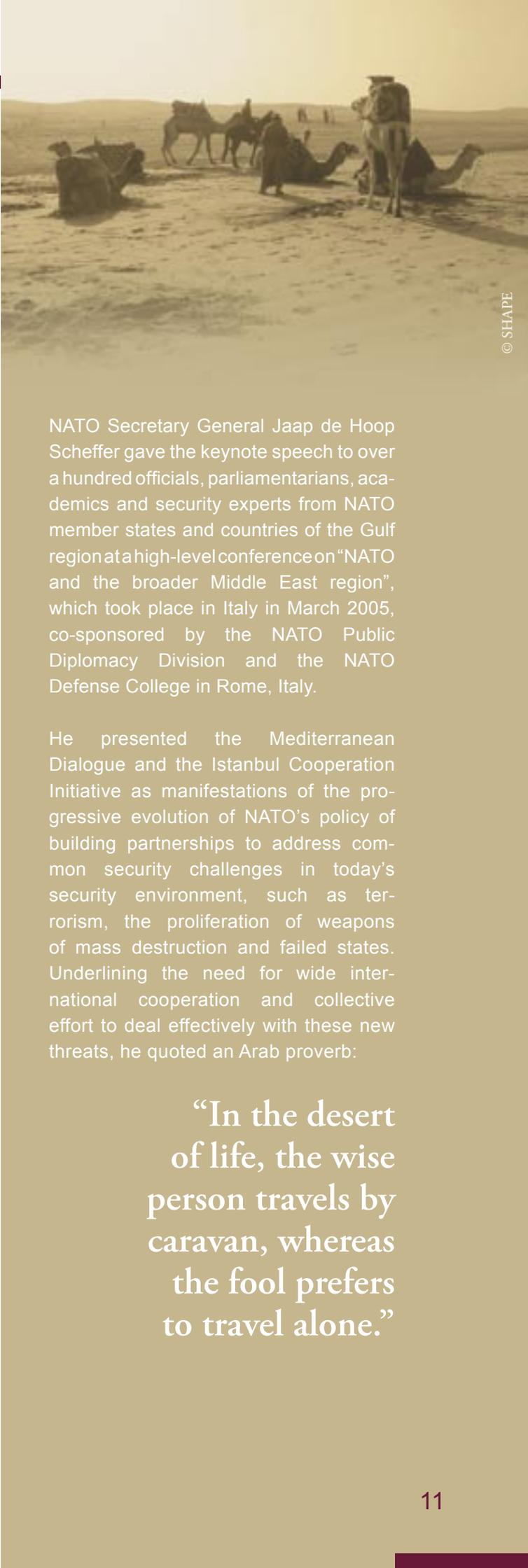
The Initiative proposes tailored advice in a number of specific areas where the Alliance has developed expertise and can add value. One key area is defence reform, defence budgeting, defence planning and civil-military relations. Another is military-to-military cooperation focused primarily on improving the ability of participating countries' forces to operate with those of the Alliance through participation in selected military exercises and related education and training activities. Important priorities for cooperation would be fighting terrorism, including through information-sharing and possibly maritime cooperation, and addressing threats posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery.

Other priorities for potential cooperation include advice in the field of border security and improving disaster-preparedness and disaster-response. Joint public diplomacy activities to update governments' and opinion formers' understanding of NATO and the Initiative will be essential.

NATO has developed a menu of practical activities in these priority areas which forms the basis of individual work plans to be jointly developed and implemented with interested countries. Practical implementation of the Initiative will draw on activities and mechanisms developed in the framework of the Partnership for Peace and will build on experience gained in the Mediterranean Dialogue.

The development of the Initiative is guided by the same principles that apply to the Dialogue (see box p. 6). In particular, it is clear that the success of the Initiative will depend on the development in the countries concerned of a sense of ownership for its objectives and activities. This calls for a process of regular consultation to ensure that the views of the participating countries are taken into account as the Initiative gradually develops and is implemented.

Further information on the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative: www.nato.int/issues/ici



NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer gave the keynote speech to over a hundred officials, parliamentarians, academics and security experts from NATO member states and countries of the Gulf region at a high-level conference on "NATO and the broader Middle East region", which took place in Italy in March 2005, co-sponsored by the NATO Public Diplomacy Division and the NATO Defense College in Rome, Italy.

He presented the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative as manifestations of the progressive evolution of NATO's policy of building partnerships to address common security challenges in today's security environment, such as terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and failed states. Underlining the need for wide international cooperation and collective effort to deal effectively with these new threats, he quoted an Arab proverb:

“In the desert of life, the wise person travels by caravan, whereas the fool prefers to travel alone.”



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