

NATO In The Persian Gulf

From Third World War To the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative

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The NATO summit held in the Turkish city of Istanbul on June 28-29, 2004 was nothing less than epochal in terms of its geopolitical repercussions, where several historical thresholds were crossed and post-World War II international taboos violated.

Some of the decisions reached at the summit were commented upon in the world press at the time as the precedents they were, but the implementation of the same has in the interim come to be accepted as not only an accomplished fact but as within the natural and inevitable nature of things.

The multifaceted expansion plans formalized by NATO at the summit will be dealt with separately below and major emphasis will be directed to that least examined aspect, the eponymous Istanbul Cooperation Initiative.

On January 3 of this year Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Transformation Adm. Luciano Zappata was obliging enough to issue this statement:

“The vast dimension of the emerging area of responsibility and interest covers traditional NATO borders, but also ranges from the Strait of Bering to Norway and Estonia; from the Bosphorus-Dardanelles, the Gibraltar Strait and the Mediterranean Sea to the High North; and from the Suez Canal to the Red Sea, Horn of Africa, the Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf – and possibly beyond.” (NATO International, Allied Command Transformation, February 3, 2009)

The Persian Gulf and beyond will be the main focus of this article.

But to provide historical context, the last four NATO summits have been held in Eastern Europe: the Czech Republic in 2002, Turkey in 2004, Latvia in 2006 and Romania in 2008.

Three of the four host nations were formerly in Warsaw Pact territory and one, Latvia, was a former Soviet Republic. Latvia and Romania were only inducted into NATO in 2004, at the Istanbul summit, and were the sites of summits themselves only two and four years later, respectively.

A lot has happened since then US Secretary of State James Baker assured the Soviet Union's last president Mikhail Gorbachev in 1990 that “there would be no extension of NATO's jurisdiction for forces of NATO one inch to the east.”

What began to happen, four years later to be exact, was that NATO instituted two transitional mechanisms for integrating states traditionally ‘out of area’ (Alliance term) into

what were even at that time plans for a global military nexus.

The two programs were the so-called Partnership for Peace (PfP) and Mediterranean Dialogue partnerships, both of which were initiated in 1994.

The first, with Ireland didn't join until 1999, included every nation in non-post-Soviet continental Europe not already one of NATO sixteen members (here and henceforward by European nations are designated all but minor entities like Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco and the Vatican State) except for what remained of Yugoslavia and two former Yugoslav republics (Bosnia and Croatia, both still riven by post-conflict instability) and Cyprus, and all fifteen former Soviet republics.

In the first category were Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Ireland, Macedonia, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Sweden and Switzerland and in the second Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Russia would pull out of the PfP in 1999 in reaction to NATO's war against Yugoslavia, about which more later, and Ireland would join in the same year.

Malta, which was incorporated into the PfP in 1995 would withdraw the following year – the only nation ever to have pulled out of a NATO structure – but was dragged back in last year.

Also in 1994 NATO launched what it called the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD), a military and political partnership with seven nations on the southern flank of the Mediterranean Sea, on or near its eastern wing and all the way to Africa's Atlantic coast: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia.

With Bosnia (2006), Croatia (2000) and Montenegro (2006) being pulled into the PfP, 17 of 21 nations with coastlines on the Mediterranean are now full NATO members or members of the blocs partnerships.

Starting clockwise from the Strait of Gibraltar they are: Gibraltar/Great Britain (NATO), Spain (NATO), France (NATO), Italy (NATO), Malta (PfP), Slovenia (NATO), Croatia (PfP, soon to be a NATO member), Bosnia and Herzegovina (PfP), Montenegro (PfP), Albania (PfP, also soon to be inducted into NATO), Greece (NATO), Turkey (NATO), Israel (MD), Egypt (MD), Tunisia (MD), Algeria (MD) and Morocco (MD).

The only exceptions currently are Cyprus, Lebanon, Libya and Syria. (For the purposes of this study the Palestinian Gaza Strip will be considered separately.)

After Israel's war against Lebanon in the summer of 2006, German warships were deployed to the Eastern Mediterranean to lead a naval blockade of the nation, leading a leading Western press source to note, accurately enough but also blandly, that the German deployment represented "this country's first military engagement in the Middle East since World War II."

Berlin's cohorts in this ongoing blockade include Denmark, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands and Bulgaria. In other words, a NATO operation in all but name.

And one that is slated to be extended to the Mediterranean coast of Gaza.

It April of last year it was announced that “Libya has agreed to participate in its first NATO naval exercise” and “Libya will send naval vessels to NATO’s Phoenix Express-2008. ...” (World Tribune, April 4, 2008)

On January 28 of this year a Cypriot paper wrote that the opposition Democratic Rally (DISY) party had “re-introduced the issue of Cyprus joining the Partnership for Peace, a programme of practical military and security co-operation between NATO and individual countries,” and that “DISY is trying to forge alliances with other parties that support its entry.” (Cyprus Mail, January 28, 2009)

One has to assume that the above initiative was forged in Brussels and Washington and not Nicosia.

Should all the above efforts to pull hitherto unaffiliated nations into NATO’s military nexus succeed, that would leave only Syria unaligned in the entire Mediterranean.

The Mare Nostrum (Our Sea) of imperial Rome at its zenith never dreamed of such comprehensive control. Neither did the Berlin-Rome Axis of Hitler’s Germany and Mussolini’s Italy, even with the former’s Vichy France proxy’s control of what are now Algeria, Morocco, Lebanon and Syria.

At the 1999 50th anniversary summit in Washington, as the bloc was waging its first full-blown war – against Yugoslavia, which then didn’t even border a NATO state much less threaten one – the first post-Cold War NATO expansion was effected.

It was not only the single largest extension of memberships at any one time – three countries were brought into the fold – but all the new inductees were former Warsaw Pact members: The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, with one, Poland, bordering Russia (the Kaliningrad enclave).

Only three years later the Czech capital hosted the next NATO summit and two years after that the Alliance further demonstrated its new drive east by holding a summit in Istanbul, Turkey.

That summit make a complete mockery of James Baker’s earlier cited pledge and in a number of alarming ways.

First, NATO accepted seven new members, more than half the number of original NATO members at its founding summit in 1949.

Also, it brought into its phalanx six more nations once in the Warsaw Pact (Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), the first two new members on the Black Sea since Turkey joined in 1952 (Bulgaria, Romania), the first former Yugoslav republic (Slovenia) and, what was unimaginable a few years earlier, three former Soviet republics (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania).

The Istanbul summit also signaled an equally dangerous shift in another direction: The south.

The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) was created to elevate the Mediterranean Dialogue to full partnership status and to initiate a military arrangement with the six nations of the Gulf Cooperation Council – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab

Emirates – in the Persian Gulf.

On the opening day of the summit the NATO website published a description of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative which is at this link: <http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/2004/06-istanbul/docu-cooperation.htm>

It contains plans to promote “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 in contributing to NATO-led operations” and to “invite interested countries to observe and/or participate in selected NATO/PfP exercise activities” such as “to join Operation Active Endeavour (OAE)....”

Operation Active Endeavour is the all-encompassing naval surveillance and interdiction deployment that was started in October 4, 2001 under NATO’s Article 5 mutual defense clause and is slated to end...never.

Also, the ICI intends to not only upgrade Mediterranean Dialogue but eventually also Persian Gulf allies to the level of the Partnership for Peace apprenticeship and gateway to complete NATO integration; or, as the Alliance document states, to provide the thirteen new partners “access to appropriate PfP programmes and training centres.”

The last-named is already being implemented with the annual Cooperative Longbow / Cooperative Lancer multinational military exercises in the South Caucasus – last year in Armenia (which included Istanbul Cooperation Initiative forces), this year in Georgia.

Last year in the third South Caucasus nation, Azerbaijan, the annual NATO Week activities included the participation of “Representatives from about 100 member countries of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) and Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative” members. (AzerTag, May 27, 2008)

One astute Persian Gulf observer characterized the ICI in these terms:

“Nato, as a...tool in the hands of the US, became the final arbiter in world disputes and effectively sidelined the UN. It took on the mantle of the ‘world cop’...In 2004, after the US and the Group of Eight (G8) industrialised nations coined the new term ‘Broader Middle East and North Africa’, Nato launched the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI), an ambitious joint-venture endeavour with the GCC countries.”

And added that “A sensitive aspect of the ICI is the clause that it ‘should be complementary to the alliance’s Mediterranean Dialogue and would complement Nato’s specific relationship with the partner countries of the Mediterranean Dialogue’... .Oman is apprehensive the ICI stands the risk of being interpreted by Iran as an attempt to rope in Nato to intimidate it.” (Gulf News [United Arab Emirates], October 13, 2008)

In addition to the Alliance filling in another geopolitical gap in its expansion from its Euro-Atlantic metropolis southward and eastward toward what is a self-proclaimed global NATO, and as will be documented later the bloc’s plan to police world energy resources and their transit, the invitation to the six nations of the Gulf Cooperation Council to be integrated into the regional and worldwide ambitions of NATO was aimed squarely at Iran.

To both solidify and camouflage what has been, particularly since 1990, a permanent and ever-growing and deepening US military presence in the Gulf, already used to wage two wars against Iraq in 1991 and 2003, since 2004 NATO has been used to ensnare the Persian Gulf sheikdoms and monarchies into a military cordon sanitaire around and a string of basing and transit launching pads for potential attacks against Iran.

Regarding the already extant US buildup in the region, it's worth recalling that the US 5th Fleet is based in Gulf Cooperation Council/Istanbul Cooperation Initiative member state Bahrain. The 5th Fleet takes in the entire area of responsibility of the Pentagon's Central Command (CENTCOM) including 25 nations in and bordering the Persian Gulf, Red Sea, Arabian Sea and the coastline of East Africa south to Kenya.

The Fleet was decommissioned after World War II and only recommissioned in 1995, in between the two wars against Iraq.

The US Pentagon's Central Command headquarters was shifted to Qatar for the war on Iraq named Operation Iraqi Freedom in and after March of 2003.

100,000 US troops were amassed in Kuwait for the initial attack and the nation remains a key transit station for the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Slightly over a year ago the Congressional Research Service in the US reported that Washington had provided \$72 billion dollars worth of arms to the six Gulf Cooperation Council members from 1981 to 2006.

Regarding just US air forces in the region, there are "About 27,000 Air Force personnel are stationed in the Middle East region....They operate from a network of bases that stretch from the Persian Gulf to Central Asia. The Air Force has at least five air bases inside Iraq, one in Afghanistan, one in Kyrgyzstan, and several others in Qatar, Kuwait, and surrounding countries." (Boston Globe, December 23, 2008)

The Gulf is also an integral part of the US's plans for a global interceptor (Star Wars) missile system and has been for a while.

"The Bush administration announced plans on Wednesday to sell advanced anti-missile systems to the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait with a combined potential value of nearly \$10.4 billion. "The Pentagon told Congress the United Arab Emirates had asked about buying 288 Patriot Advanced Capability PAC-3 missiles and related gear worth up to \$9 billion." (Reuters, December 5, 2007)

"The UAE (United Arab Emirates) led the region in missile defense deals, receiving approval from the Pentagon to buy Patriot 3 launchers and systems. It also became the first country outside the US to receive approval to purchase the THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) designed to shoot down incoming missiles, in a deal valued at \$7b." (Jerusalem Post, October 16, 2008)

In December of 2007 Pentagon chief Robert Gates traveled to Bahrain to issue a call for an "air and missile defence umbrella" over the Gulf region to deter missile attacks by Iran." (Agence France-Presse, December 8, 2007)

The following month the US Defense Department "proposed sales of Patriot missile defence and early warning systems to the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait worth more than \$US10

billion.” (Khaleej Times [United Arab Emirates], January 27, 2008)

It's upon the above foundation that NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative is being constructed.

The following excerpts from a speech by NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer illumine another aspect of NATO plans in the Gulf:

“[NATO] can help to police the oceans....Just a few days ago NATO defence ministers decided to detach parts of a NATO Maritime Task Force to the Gulf of Aden....Just this week we are holding a major conference in Doha [Qatar] on energy security with our partners from the Middle East and the Mediterranean. Those partners include Qatar, which is the world's largest producer of liquified natural gas, but also major energy producers in Central Asia such as Kazakhstan or Turkmenistan, not to speak of important African producers such as Nigeria....Energy security is today very much on the agenda when we meet with these countries in our Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, our Mediterranean Dialogue or our Istanbul Cooperation Initiative.. ..” (Quoted in Lloyd's List [Britain], December 9, 2008)

Again NATO's plans regarding energy and military expansion are not only integrally, indeed inextricably, linked but are fully reciprocal. Allegedly providing for “energy security” and “protecting shipping lanes” are in fact just as much the public relations rationale for projecting military power into strategic areas as they are concerns and objectives in themselves.

A review of NATO's relations with the ICI since the 2004 summit will illustrate the bloc's major strategies in relation to the Persian Gulf, which include:

-Integrating the Gulf Cooperation Council states into NATO's global army. The progressively larger involvement of GCC military forces in exercises in the South Caucasus alongside those of the Mediterranean Dialogue and Partnership for Peace has been discussed earlier.

The United Arab Emirates has assigned troops to serve under NATO in Afghanistan alongside counterparts from the Partnership for Peace and so-called Contact Countries like Australia, New Zealand, South Korea and Singapore.

In increasingly frequent meetings of NATO Chiefs of Defence, the Alliance's highest military authority, the heads of defense and other representatives from ICI partners are in attendance.

-Employing GCC states to base troops, warplanes, cargo and surveillance for operations both in the area and throughout the so-called Broader Middle East.

-As mentioned above, incorporating the Gulf States into a global missile surveillance and missile shield program

-Bringing the GCC nations not only under the US's missile and nuclear umbrella, but effectively under NATO's Article 5 mutual defense provision, the latter entailing the possibility of claiming that one or more GCC members is threatened by a non-member (that is, Iran) and using that as a pretext for 'preemptive' attacks.

-Reprising NATO's Operation Active Endeavor in the Gulf by inaugurating a comprehensive naval interdiction – that is, blockade – in the Strait of Hormuz where an estimated 40-50% of world interstate oil transportation occurs.

The following chronology attests to how far these plans have advanced since 2004.

At a conference entitled International Conference of NATO and Gulf Countries: Facing Common Challenges Through ICI attended by NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer and delegates from all NATO and GCC states held in Kuwait City in December of 2006, the head of Kuwait's National Security Agency, Sheikh Ahmad Fahd al-Sabah, said:

“Kuwait and the rest of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states are looking forward to building strategic security cooperation with NATO’ and Scheffer said that cooperation between NATO and Gulf states had already increased in the fields of political contacts, intelligence sharing and military inter-operability. ” (Agence France-Presse, December 12, 2006)

The latter also revealed that NATO had submitted a list of demands to Kuwait, that was more elaborate than the list that was previously presented to GCC states, “regarding border security, counter-terrorism, crisis management, as well as military training and development. ” (Kuwait News Agency, December 12, 2006)

The conference was touted as gathering “together for the first time in the region the NATO secretary general and the North Atlantic Council – which includes top NATO officials, academics and government officials from all six Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) invited countries – to exchange views on the ICI and opportunities for cooperation available to the countries of the broader Middle East region.” (Kuwait News Agency, December 4, 2006)

The Alliance's motives were characterized as NATO seeking “to establish a political and security partnership with important international and regional blocs including the GCC due to the Gulf states' strategic location, natural resources and their investment and economic role internationally. ...” (Ibid)

During the meeting NATO signed a military intelligence agreement with Kuwait, the first such between the Alliance and a GCC member state.

Several months later NATO commenced negotiating a transit pact with Kuwait, described in the local press “the first of its kind in the Gulf region, and NATO is working to conclude a similar one with Qatar.” (Kuwait Times, September 9, 2007)

Representing NATO, its Deputy Secretary General Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo also announced that “the alliance was now developing a ‘training and education initiative’ including a new faculty for the Middle East at NATO Defense College in Rome.” (Ibid)

In the interim between the last two reports, “Experts from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization [arrived] in Kuwait...to assess the Gulf Arab nation's preparedness to deal with a nuclear emergency.” [Associated Press, April 3, 2007)

Two months later someone NATO called its Weapons of Mass Destruction Centre head, Ted Whiteside, asserted “We have to organise our efforts and move towards global integration to improve our performance. ” (Gulf Daily News [Bahrain], November 20, 2007)

In September of 2007 the aforementioned NATO Deputy Secretary-General Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo, while in Bahrain, stated that nation would “host a meeting of the North Atlantic Council, the most important decision-making body in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)....” (Gulf News [United Arab Emirates], September 12, 2007)

By 2007 four of the six Gulf Cooperation Council members had formally joined the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative – Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates – and Oman and Saudi Arabia had not.

Oman’s possible objections have been alluded to earlier, to wit that the ICI could embroil GCC states in a regional war should the US and its NATO allies stage a provocation against Iran.

A not unlikely scenario at a time when then US Central Command chief Adm. William Fallon was in Bahrain, enroute to Oman, Qatar and Kuwait, “pressing Arab allies to form a more united front against Iran,” “seeking to quietly galvanize Gulf leaders while letting others sharply escalate pressure on Tehran” and “express[ing] support for a possible \$300 million upgrade for the nation’s [Bahrain’s] F-16 fleet.” (Associated Press, September 18, 2007)

Two weeks later NATO chief Scheffer was in the Israeli capital meeting with the Knesset’s Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee where they discussed “developments in the enhanced Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative launched at the 2004 Istanbul Summit.” (NATO International, October 4, 2007)

Several months earlier “a Centre for Strategic Studies is to be established in one of the GCC countries,” the Chairman of NATO’s Military Committee General Raymond Henault announced while in Qatar. (Gulf Times [Qatar], May 16, 2007)

Later in the year, this time in the United Arab Emirates, the same Henault “noted that intensive consultations are going on with Qatar and Bahrain in an effort to pen a security agreement, close on the heels of a similar agreement signed with Kuwait last year.” (Gulf News [United Arab Emirates], November 26, 2007)

Pressure was brought to bear on seemingly refractory Saudi Arabia early in the year.

In January “NATO appealed to Saudi Arabia...to consider entering a cooperation agreement with the Western alliance” and its Deputy Secretary-General Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo effused “I do want to stress here today that NATO would very much value the participation of Saudi Arabia.” (Reuters, January 21, 2007}

The following day a NATO and the Gulf Cooperation Council Security Cooperation Forum opened in Riyadh which focused on “how to strengthen security cooperation within the framework of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative.” (Xinhua News Agency, January 22, 2007)

By early 2008 NATO had succeeded in recruiting the first troops from the GCC, Emirati ones, for the war in Afghanistan. To date they are the only contingent from an Arab country doing so.

And no later than January NATO had appointed a head of a bureau for Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative and Contact Countries, one Dr. Alberto Bin, who was in Kuwait to finalize the Alliance’s military transit agreement with his host as part of a delegation that “came to enhance already existing military and diplomatic relations with

Kuwait.” (Kuwait News Agency, January 17, 2008)

At the same time the new Sarkozy government announced that France was “Setting up a permanent military presence in the Gulf region, where they had no such presence before,” by establishing a base in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates.

With this unprecedented move, both countries being part of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, one observer opined that “we can assume that a military base in Abu Dhabi would contribute to a better NATO-GCC understanding. ” (Gulf News [Saudi Arabia], January 27, 2008)

“For France, the military base certainly improves its status within NATO as well as with the US as it would become the only NATO member other than the US that is stationed in the Gulf.” (Ibid)

A couple of days before NATO’s Secretary General Scheffer signaled his approval of the initiative in advance by visiting the UAE, when it was noted “that his first ever official visit to this region showcases the strengthening pace of cooperation between NATO and the countries of this region.”

On that occasion Scheffer emoted that “Even before the launch of the ICI, the UAE displayed strong cooperation with NATO in the Balkans during the 1990s” and threatened that “The issue of nuclear proliferation has again taken center stage owing to the ambitions of Iran and North Korea....” (Dubai City Guide, January 24, 2008)

And it was added, not that it needed to be, “The United Arab Emirates and Nato mull the establishment of cooperation in line with the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI), said the secretary-general of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato), Jaap de Hoop Scheffer.” (Khaleej Times [United Arab Emirates], January 27, 2008)

On January 29 NATO Assistant Secretary Jean-Francois was in Qatar where he told the local press corps:

“Our practical cooperation has intensified as well, especially at the military-to-military level. There has been a growing number of participants from Qatar in NATO courses and seminars. Besides, Qatar was the first ICI country to appoint a Liaison Officer to NATO in Brussels, in order to facilitate our cooperation, ” after which the press reported that “A NATO team recently visited Doha to discuss...the possibility of elaborating an Individual Cooperation Programme with the Alliance.... ” (The Peninsula [Qatar], January 29, 2008)

Not to be left out, the Pentagon announced the following month that it was establishing a permanent Army command in Kuwait. Its commander described it as “a permanent platform for ‘full spectrum operations in 27 countries around southwest Asia and the Middle East’ and added, ““That’s full spectrum operations. We’re able to adapt better ... and go from high-intensity to regular warfare....” (Stars and Stripes, February 19, 2008)

Among the command’s objectives was “facilitating Patriot missiles in Qatar and Bahrain to discourage attacks from Iran.” (Ibid)

Five months later Kuwait placed a \$156 million-order with the US’s Raytheon to purchase the Patriot air and missile defense system.

The same month, July, the Director of the Security Office of NATO was in Kuwait to complete the joint security accord negotiated in 2006.

"The current security situation in the region and means to promote Kuwait-NATO ties within the Istanbul Initiative for Cooperation were also discussed." (Kuwait News Agency, July 10, 2008)

In April NATO held its second international conference in Bahrain and which was the first occasion in which it openly identified Iran as the target of its Istanbul Cooperation Initiative.

"A 110-member NATO delegation, including ambassadors from all of Nato's 26-member countries, will discuss the changing security landscape of the Gulf from a Bahrain and regional perspective, as well as Gulf-Nato relations." (Gulf Daily News [Bahrain], April 24, 2008)

During the gathering, which included "Ambassadors from all of [NATO's] 26-member countries... including the head of NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Co-operation Initiative Nicola de Santis," it was announced that "Bahrain is on the verge of signing a security agreement with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. " (Gulf Daily News, April 24, 2008)

But the major policy statement would come from Jaap de Hoop Scheffer:

"NATO's secretary-general told Gulf Arab states on Thursday that Iran's nuclear ambitions were a major threat to regional stability. "Iran's pursuit of uranium enrichment capability in violation of its U.N. Security Council obligations is a serious concern not just for Iran's neighbors but for the entire international community,. Jaap de Hoop Scheffer told a conference to promote ties between NATO and Gulf Arab states." (Reuters, April 24, 2008}

The following month, right on cue, the US, France, Italy, Australia, Egypt, Jordan and all six Gulf Cooperation Council member states – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – conducted a joint air force exercise in Bahrain.

In October NATO would drop the last veil and expose what the ultimate purpose of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative was: Preparing for possible military action against Iran.

Jean-Michel Boucheron, then outgoing chairman of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's Mediterranean and Middle East Special Group, said "that while Nato states did not have the same obligation to defend GCC countries as they would other alliance members in the event they were attacked, Nato would 'not remain indifferent' if a Gulf country were subject to aggression. "'Gulf countries are friends of Nato countries and of other western countries, notably France, for example,' he said, citing Nato's involvement in the First Gulf War when Iraq invaded Kuwait, as well as French overtures towards establishing a military base in the UAE. "'An attack against a country of the Gulf would be very, very badly viewed because it would be against the security interests of all.'" (The National [United Arab Emirates], October 9, 2008)

Another account of Boucheron's comments is even more revelatory of NATO's role in the region for the past nineteen years:

“For example, when Kuwait was attacked in 1990, we were unanimous in condemning this and taking part in the first war....Kuwait was attacked and therefore we were in agreement with the war.” (Gulf News [United Arab Emirates], October 10, 2008)

At practically the same moment NATO parliamentarians were holding a seminar on Middle East and Global Challenges in the United Arab Emirates, whence the following statement was issued:

“This strategic meeting contributes to creating a common understanding between NATO countries and the GCC region, and will address the global challenges faced by Middle East.” (Emirates News Agency, October 6, 2008)

Within weeks, matching the action to the word, NATO held its first ever operation within the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, a multinational naval exercise, described by a Gulf newspaper:

“German, Turkish and US ships are expected to hold their first joint exercise with the Bahraini Royal Navy today. “The exercises will be repeated with other Gulf navies following visits to Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE. involves the U.S., France, Italy, Australia, Egypt, Jordan and the six Gulf Cooperation Council member states – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.” (The National {United Arab Emirates}, November 2, 2008)

Note that all six Gulf Cooperation Council were brought into the war games.

Two weeks later “Rear Admiral Ignacio Horcada, Deputy Chief of Staff (DCOS) Support CC-Mar Naples, who is currently in Doha leading a three-vessel fleet of Standing Nato Maritime Group 2 (SNMG2), told Gulf Times that they would like to expedite the level of co-operation between Qatar and Nato.” ““This is our first practical activity as part of the Istanbul Co-operation Initiative (ICI) in the region’....” (Gulf Times [Qatar], November 14, 2008)

NATO’s penetration of and military buildup in the Persian Gulf continues apace into this New Year.

After a meeting of Kuwaiti Deputy Premier, Foreign Minister and Acting Oil Minister Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah with NATO’s Deputy Secretary General Claudio Bisogniero on January 27, the former said that he had been “briefed on Nato’s role, which was to form a defense mechanism and ‘prepare for the Third World War, which was the ‘mindset’ from which the alliance expanded” and on “Nato’s training of Iraqi security forces, as well as exercises with armed forces in Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE, noting Nato’s relations with all countries of the region.” (Kuwait News Agency, January 27, 2009)

Preparing for the Third World War remains NATO’s mindset and no better proof of it exists than the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative.

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