

Of Strategic Interest To NATO: The Militarization of Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf

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First Published in June 2012, this article confirms the nature of the Saudi-NATO relationship. Saudi Arabia is a NATO proxy force.

On June 18 Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen met with Saudi Arabia's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Nizar Madani at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Headquarters in Brussels, Belgium.

The head of the Western military alliance extended an invitation to the Persian Gulf kingdom to join NATO's partnership program in the region, stating "Saudi Arabia is a key player in the region and NATO would welcome the opportunity to engage the Kingdom's government as a partner in the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative."

The latter was launched in 2004 during the NATO summit in the Turkish city which gave the partnership its name, part of a series of sweeping measures that also saw the largest-ever one-time expansion of NATO membership – the absorption of seven new nations in Eastern Europe, including the first former Yugoslav and first three former Soviet republics – as well as committing the bloc to upgrading its other Middle Eastern military partnership program, the Mediterranean Dialogue (whose members are Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia), to that of the Partnership for Peace, which was used to elevate NATO's 12 new post-Cold War members to their current status.

The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) is aimed at the West's political and military partners in the Persian Gulf, the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. All but Oman and Saudi Arabia have joined the ICI.

Over the past six years NATO naval groups have visited Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. Leading NATO officials have paid visits to and the bloc has held conferences in ICI member states.

Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates have troops serving under NATO command in Afghanistan, and Qatar and the United Arab Emirates supplied warplanes for NATO's six-month air campaign against Libya last year.

Now, with the U.S. and its Western allies refocusing on the Persian Gulf and the threat of Western military action against Syria and Iran mounting, it is clearly NATO's intention to recruit Saudi Arabia for the Persian Gulf partnership.

The Saudi diplomat, in addition to meeting with NATO chief Rasmussen, also met with the

bloc's deputy secretary general, the Atlantic Council (which consists of the permanent representatives – ambassadors – of its 28 member states) and other alliance officials “who provided him with an overview of NATO's outreach and cooperation programmes with partner countries in the Mediterranean and in the Gulf region.” That is, with the seven Mediterranean Dialogue and four Istanbul Cooperation Initiative members. (To date, Libya will be the next member of the first, with Syria and Lebanon to follow if the West succeeds in overthrowing the government of Syria. Iraq and Yemen are prospective members of the second.)

As the NATO website wrote concerning the visit of the Saudi official, “For NATO, the security of its partners in the Gulf is a key strategic interest to the Alliance.”

Precisely how strategically important the Persian Gulf is to NATO and its leading member, the U.S., and in part why it is so was indicated on June 14 when Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs Andrew Shapiro gave a briefing via teleconference on Global Economic Statecraft Day in which he demonstrated what the State Department in large measure exists for: To drum up business for American arms manufacturers.

His comments included:

“Global Economic Statecraft Day is a global event that we're holding to highlight America's commitment to put strengthening American jobs at the center of our foreign policy...Our work in the Political-Military Bureau, to expand security cooperation with our allies and partners, is critical to America's national security and economic prosperity. And it is also an important part of the State Department's economic statecraft efforts...[It is] the Secretary of State that is given the authority to oversee and authorize all arms sales in order to ensure they advance U.S. foreign policy.”

He also boasted:

“Today, I can confirm that this is already a record-breaking year for foreign military sales, which are government-to- government sales. We have already surpassed \$50 billion in sales in Fiscal Year 2012. This represents at least a \$20 billion increase over Fiscal Year 2011, and we still have more than a quarter of the fiscal year left.

“To put this in context, Fiscal Year 2011 was a record-setting year at just over 30 billion. This fiscal year will be at least 70 percent greater than Fiscal Year 2011...”

Sixty percent of the arms sales abroad so far this fiscal year resulted from a \$30 billion weapons contract with Saudi Arabia signed last December for 84 F-15 fighter jets and assorted weaponry. Which is part of a \$67 billion deal struck with the Saudis in 2010 for the multirole warplanes, 2,000-pound bunker-busting bombs, 72 Black Hawk and 70 Apache Longbow attack helicopters, Patriot Advanced Capability-2 and other missiles, and warships. The largest bilateral arms transaction in history.

And that in turn is part of an \$123 billion arms package with Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates announced in the same year. The “Iranian threat” may be the most lucrative public relations scheme ever devised.

Last December 25 the U.S. signed a deal to sell 96 Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) interceptor missiles to the United Arab Emirates, the first THAAD missiles to be deployed outside the U.S. It was also announced last year that the United Arab Emirates will become the first Arab state to open an embassy at NATO Headquarters.

On June 11 the U.S. and Turkey began the second round of this year's Anatolian Eagle air combat exercises in the second country, whose purpose is, in the words of the Pentagon's press service, "to conduct a variety of air missions to include interdiction, attack, air superiority, defense suppression, airlift, air refueling and reconnaissance. "

The joint U.S.-Turkey Anatolian Eagle-2012/1 was held in March. The ongoing Anatolian Eagle-2012/2 also includes the participation of NATO and warplanes from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Pakistan and Italy.

A U.S. Air Force report, not mentioning Saudi Arabia's involvement, offered this description of the exercise:

"The Blue Force, consisting of the United States, Italy, the United Arab Emirates, Spain, Turkey and NATO, will perfect their large force employment skills against the Red Force of F-16s, F-4s and F-5s piloted by Turkish pilots."

The same source quoted a U.S. Air Force official as contending, "If there's ever another (Operation) Allied Force, these are the people we're going to fight with side by side."

There can be little doubt about who the victims of the next Allied Force, the name of NATO's 78-day air war against Yugoslavia 13 years ago, would be in the current geopolitical context. Turkey borders Syria and Iran, which are the two main impediments to Turkey and Saudi Arabia further expanding their influence in the Middle East

Late last month the two nations, both invested in overthrowing secular, republican Arab governments from Libya to Syria and beyond, signed a military training agreement in Riyadh. The pact provides for training Saudi soldiers in Turkish (NATO standard) military schools for participation in joint military operations.

In initiating her campaign against Russia and China over Syria in February, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton invoked the Arab Spring and the Arab Awakening (the capital letters are hers): "They must understand they are setting themselves against the aspirations not only of the Syrian people but of the entire Arab Spring, the Arab Awakening."

What in fact she and her Western counterparts are promoting in the Arab world from the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian Gulf is a lethal mixture of militarism, monarchism and theocracy.

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