

NATO Deepens Military Ties With Gulf Cooperation Council

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Brussels: A North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) senior official has reiterated the alliance's keenness to reinforce its cooperation and relations with individual members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), through the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI).

He clarified that no decision on ideas circulating for the deepening ICI, such as for example a Nato-ICI centre in the region, have been taken.

"We do want to deepen our engagement with our Gulf partners, through the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative," James Appathurai, Nato's Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs and Security Policy, said. "I do stress that our engagement with Gulf partner countries is a two-way street. The moment has come for us to work more closely with our partners in the Gulf and we are confident there will be opportunities to deepen our political and practical cooperation," he said.

Dialogue, consultations

Plans include more regular dialogue and political consultations to promote a better mutual understanding with the region and engaging in shared strategic analyses, he said.

"We can see how we can enhance military-to-military cooperation, interoperability and public diplomacy so that we can better explain Nato and what it does and we at Nato can better understand the region," he told Gulf News.

Appathurai said that ideas could be floated in the meetings between Nato and ICI countries to boost the culture awareness.

"We will have a series of meetings and several ideas will be discussed, in coming months with our ICI countries. No decision on a specific proposal has been taken. There has never been a formal discussion or a formal decision about establishing any kind of a centre in the Istanbul Conference Initiative (ICI) states. There is no formal paper. There are just a number of ideas, but there is nothing concrete yet," said Appathurai who was Nato's spokesperson from 2004 until 2010.

The ICI was launched at the Alliance's Summit in the Turkish coastal city in June 2004 to

contribute to long-term global and regional security by offering Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries practical bilateral security cooperation with Nato. The ICI with Gulf States is complementary and yet distinct from the Mediterranean Dialogue NATO launched in December 1994, with countries in North Africa and Eastern Mediterranean.

Kuwait joined the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) in December 2004, followed by Bahrain and Qatar in February 2005 and the UAE in June 2005.

Arab countries who have contributed to Nato operations in the Balkans, Afghanistan and Libya have been invited by Nato to attend and “witness very frank and open discussions and how policies are shaped or endorsed,” he said.

“Libya is a good illustration of what we can do together to promote international security and restore peace,” he said. “There was invaluable understanding and remarkable interoperability between Nato and Arab partner countries who participated in the UN mandated and Nato-led operation in Libya. It was plug and play and Arab pilots were flying wing to wing with our airmen from Nato countries, to protect the civilian population of Libya,” he said.

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