

## NATO's Role In The Military Encirclement Of Iran

By [Rick Rozoff](#)

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Following on the heels of identifying himself as the “Commander-in-Chief of a nation in the midst of two wars” and moreover the head of state of no less than “the world’s sole military superpower” [1] while being presented with what is still curiously called the Nobel Peace Prize, U.S. President Barack Obama in his first State of the Union address on January 27 asserted “the international community is more united, and the Islamic Republic of Iran is more isolated” and threatened: “As Iran’s leaders continue to ignore their obligations, there should be no doubt: They...will face growing consequences. That is a promise.”

Two days later his secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, delivered an address at a major French military academy, revealingly enough, and while there she coupled excoriation of Iran with an anything but diplomatic dressing down of China, stating “China will be under a lot of pressure to recognize the destabilizing impact that a nuclear-armed Iran would have in the [Persian] Gulf....” [2]

Pressure from Washington, of course. On the very day of Clinton’s speech in Paris the White House confirmed the completion of a \$6.4 billion weapons transfer to Taiwan.

On February 9 U.S. Department of Defense spokesman Geoff Morrell told the press that his boss, Pentagon chief Robert Gates, wants the United Nations to impose sanctions on Iran within “weeks, not months” and “clearly thinks time is of the essence.” [3]

During the First World War Austrian journalist and dramatist Karl Kraus lamented: “What mythological confusion is this? Since when has Mars been the god of commerce and Mercury the god of war?”

If he were alive today he would be equally bemused by the U.S.’s top diplomat delivering an address at a military academy (and condescendingly admonishing the world’s most populous nation) and its defense chief pressuring the world to impose punitive sanctions against a country that has not attacked any other in centuries.

The secretary general of the U.S.-led “world’s sole global military bloc” – Anders Fogh Rasmussen – spoke at the annual Munich Security Conference on February 7, delivering himself of a ponderous and grandiose screed entitled NATO in the 21st Century: Towards Global Connectivity, during which he touted the role of the military bloc in intruding itself into almost every interstice imaginable: The ever-expanding war in Afghanistan, terrorism, cyber attacks, energy cut-offs – the last two references to Russia if not formally acknowledged as such – nuclear non-proliferation, climate change, piracy, failed states, drugs, “humanitarian disasters, conflicts over arable land, and mounting competition for natural resources,” [4] North Korea and Iran.

In repeating Alliance and other Western leaders' demands that "NATO should become a forum for consultation on worldwide security issues," Rasmussen stated that "to carry out NATO's job effectively today, the Alliance should become the hub of a network of security partnerships and a centre for consultation on international security issues....And we don't have to start from scratch. Already today, the Alliance has a vast network of security partnership[s], as far afield as Northern Africa, the Gulf, Central Asia, and the Pacific." [5]

Indeed NATO has a broad and expanding network of members and military partners throughout the world. It has one member, Turkey, the second largest contributor of troops to the bloc, which borders Iran, and a partnership ally, Azerbaijan, which does also.

Rasmussen's allusion to the Persian Gulf refers to increasing military contacts, visits and joint activities between NATO and the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which parallel the intensification of the U.S. buildup in the region [6] and is conducted within the framework of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) launched in 2004. [7]

The project received the name it did as it was inaugurated at the NATO summit in Istanbul which, after almost completing the absorption of all of Eastern Europe into the bloc, introduced the same graduated partnership process used earlier to incorporate ten new European members for the seven Mediterranean Dialogue nations in the Middle East and Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia) and six states in the Persian Gulf (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates). All thirteen are covered under the ICI, but extending NATO military partnerships to six Persian Gulf nations for the first time was the most ambitious and significant aspect of the program.

It marked the commencement of NATO's drive into the Gulf to complement the U.S. strategy of containing and eventually confronting Iran.

One of the stated objectives of the ICI was to "invite interested countries...to join Operation Active Endeavour (OAE)," [8] the NATO naval surveillance and interdiction operation (a de facto blockade) throughout the Mediterranean Sea which will be nine years old this October. The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative links control of the Mediterranean with expansion through the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden, where the NATO Ocean Shield naval operation is currently being run, and the Arabian Sea into the Persian Gulf.

An earlier article in this series listed the main objectives of the ICI:

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

- [I]ncorporating the Gulf states into a global missile surveillance and missile shield program.

- Bringing the GCC nations not only under the U.S.'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. [9]

In 2006 NATO signed both military intelligence and transit agreements with Kuwait and

initiated a new faculty for the Middle East at the NATO Defense College in Rome. NATO held a conference on the ICI in Kuwait in December attended by all six Gulf Cooperation Council states.

The next year four of the six GCC members – Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates – formally joined the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative.

NATO's penetration of the Gulf continued steadily and in May of 2009 Admiral Luciano Zappata of the Italian Navy and NATO's Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Transformation (based in Norfolk, Virginia), while speaking of the new NATO Strategic Concept currently in progress, praised the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative as a "successful example" of the new model of "partnership and cooperation" the Alliance plans for most of the world.

What Zappata had in mind – the Iranian pretext for Western military expansion into the Persian Gulf for once wasn't evoked to hide NATO's real interests – was detailed in discussion of what was described as the "maritime dimension of the new strategy."

He said that "the network of ports, infrastructure and pipelines as well as vessels sailing along sea lines of communication supports trade and is vulnerable to disruption.

"With the beginning of the exploitation of the resources at the bottom of oceans, there is a shift in security and strategic focus."

The admiral added that the United Arab Emirates are "a significant trading partner and energy supplier in the global economy. The new French military base opening at Port Zayed will be an important addition to the increasing international efforts in support of maritime security." [10]

On the same day as the above report appeared, May 26, 2009, French President Nicolas Sarkozy was in the United Arab Emirates to open a new military base, his nation's first in the Persian Gulf and the first major foreign base in the UAE. The French facility in Port Zayed, on the coast of the Strait of Hormuz, "contains a navy and air force base and a training camp." [11]

"The base will host 500 personnel from the French navy, the army, and the air force. It will be able to simultaneously accommodate two frigates of the French fleet operating in the region....[T]he French base is the first of its kind in the Arabian [Persian] Gulf."

A Gulf analyst was quoted on the occasion as saying, "The US has a number of military, air and maritime bases in Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain. The Abu Dhabi French Maritime Base is the first foreign military base for a friendly army in the UAE." [12]

"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." [13]

The following month Sarkozy pushed a deal with the UAE for the purchase of 60 Rafale

fighter jets at a cost of \$8-11 million.

The previous year France led war games in the UAE, the 12-day Gulf Shield 01, with military counterparts from the host country and Qatar. 4,000 troops participated in the exercises, which “simulated a war pitting two regional countries and their ally against a neighbouring state which has invaded one of the two countries.” [14]

In late October of 2009 a two-day conference called NATO-UAE Relations and the Way Forward in the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative was held in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates. It gathered “together 300 participants, including the Secretary General of NATO, NATO Permanent Representatives on the North Atlantic Council, the Deputy Secretary General of NATO, the Chairman of the NATO Military Committee and high level NATO officials with government representatives, opinion leaders, academics and senior scholars from countries in the Gulf region invited in the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative.” [15]

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen told an Al Arabiya correspondent that “NATO considers the Gulf region a continuation of the Euro Atlantic security area,” and in reference to Iran - which of course was not invited to the conference - “we all are seriously concerned about nuclear ambitions and about the nuclear domino-effect they could cause in a region that is pivotal for global stability and security.” [16]

In recent weeks the United States announced the sale of land-based interceptor missiles to Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. It has supplied both Patriot Advanced Capability-3 and Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile systems to GCC states and has deployed sea-based Standard Missile-3 interceptors in the Gulf on Aegis class warships.

In early February the deputy secretary general of NATO, Claudio Bisogniero, was in Qatar and, “Lauding the support extended by Qatar to Nato since the Istanbul Initiative in 2004,” said “Qatar has become an active participant in most deliberations held under the aegis of Nato....” [17]

GCC states being integrated into international NATO operations are being recruited for the war in Afghanistan. A U.S. armed forces publication disclosed in late January that 125 security personnel from Bahrain were guarding “the headquarters for U.S. military operations in volatile Helmand province, where more than 10,000 Marines are stationed and more are on the way.” [18] The U.S. and NATO are launching the biggest and bloodiest battle of the more than eight-year war in Afghanistan in Helmand.

Troops from the UAE have been serving under NATO command in Afghanistan for years.

The Kuwait News Agency wrote on January 28 that the chairman of NATO’s Military Committee, Admiral Giampaolo Di Paola, said “the Alliance is in discussion with a Gulf state to deploy AWACS planes for reconnaissance mission[s] over Afghanistan in support of its ISAF mission and also for anti-piracy off Somalia.”

In addition, Di Paola was quoted saying “The Alliance is close to closing the basic issue with one of the Gulf countries” and “We are looking forward to be in a position to follow on the temporary deployment that we have today in Oman with a more permanent long-term deployment.” [19] Oman directly overlooks Iran on the Strait of Hormuz.

The true military powerhouse in the Gulf region, Saudi Arabia - armed to the teeth with

advanced U.S. weapons – has been engaged in its first-ever war since last November. Riyadh has launched regular attacks with infantry, armor and warplanes in the north of neighboring Yemen against Houthi rebels. Hundreds of Yemeni civilians have been reported killed in the assaults, which rebel spokesmen claim have been accompanied by U.S. air strikes. [20] 200,000 civilians have been uprooted and displaced by fighting in the north since 2004.

The Saudi government acknowledges over 500 military casualties, both dead and wounded.

The population of northern Yemen is Shia in terms of religious conviction, and the Saudi offensive is not only fraught with the danger of being converted into a war with Iran once removed but in fact can serve as a rehearsal – and training – for the genuine article.

In other countries bordering Iran, last July NATO Deputy Secretary General Claudio Bisogniero signed an agreement with the Iraqi Minister of Defense to train the nation's security forces. The NATO website reported: "This agreement represents a milestone in the cooperation between the Republic of Iraq and NATO and demonstrates the Alliance's strong commitment....The agreement will provide the legal basis for NATO to continue with its mission to assist the Government of the Republic of Iraq in developing further the capabilities of the Iraqi Security Forces." [21]

Last month NATO started recruiting ethnic Kurds for Iraq's national security force in the north of the country near the Iranian border.

On Iran's western border, during meetings of NATO defense ministers in Turkey late last week Pentagon chief Robert Gates met with Chief of Turkish General Staff General Ilker Basbug and Gates said that he had "discussed, with General Basbug, Turkey's role in the missile defense system and relations between our armies." [22]

Former NATO secretary general George Robertson, arguing that U.S. nuclear warheads should be kept in Germany, recently divulged that there are between 40 and 90 American nuclear weapons stored at Turkey's Incirlik Air Base under NATO arrangements.

To Iran's northwest, Azerbaijan is increasingly being developed as a NATO outpost in the South Caucasus and the Caspian Sea Basin. Early this month "A working group of the Azerbaijani Defense Ministry and the United States European Command (USEUCOM) held a meeting in Stuttgart, Germany....The meeting [was] held within the framework of the Azerbaijan-US action plan for military cooperation" and lasted five days. [23]

The country has been granted a NATO Individual Partnership Action Plan as have other former Soviet states like Georgia, Ukraine and lately Moldova. In January Azerbaijan hosted a planning conference for the NATO Regional Response 2010 military exercise. Last year "the Regional Response 2009 military training was held within the NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme in April 2009 in Baku.

"Commander of US Land Forces in Europe Carter Ham participated in the training." [24]

Azerbaijan has doubled its troop strength in Afghanistan and will train Afghan National Army personnel at its military schools. The nation's Foreign Ministry recently announced that Azerbaijan is interested in joining the NATO Response Force along with Ukraine, regarding

which the Alliance provides this description:

“The NATO Response Force (NRF) is a highly ready and technologically advanced force made up of land, air, sea and special forces components that the Alliance can deploy quickly wherever needed.

“It is capable of performing missions worldwide across the whole spectrum of operations....” [25]

In late January a former Azeri presidential adviser, Vafa Guluzade, spoke at a seminar called NATO-Azerbaijan Cooperation: A Civilian View and said, “The territory and people of Azerbaijan are ideal for military cooperation with NATO. The country has a favourable geostrategic location....Azerbaijan has military aerodromes suitable for NATO bases.” [26]

To Iran’s east, the U.S. and NATO will soon have over 150,000 troops, and according to a recent study 400 bases, in Afghanistan and both Western belligerents are coordinating military actions with Pakistan, the Alliance through the Trilateral Afghanistan-Pakistan-NATO Military Commission.

The chain is being tightened around Iran from every direction and NATO is forging several of the key links.

#### Notes

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4) NATO, February 7, 2010

[http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions\\_61395.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_61395.htm?selectedLocale=en)

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7) NATO In Persian Gulf: From Third World War To Istanbul  
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## [NATO In Persian Gulf: From Third World War To Istanbul](#)

8) NATO, Istanbul Cooperation Initiative

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10) Khaleej Times, May 26, 2009

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12) Gulf News, May 23, 2009

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15) NATO, October 28, 2009

16) Al Arabiya, November 1, 2009

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19) Kuwait News Agency, January 28, 2010

20) Yemen: Pentagon's War On The Arabian Peninsula  
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