



GCC-NATO Relations: Prospects for the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI)

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July 2024

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Introduction

June 2024 marks the 20th anniversary of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Given its two-decade existence, it is necessary to reflect on ICI's significance and impact, particularly as geopolitical tensions in the Middle East continue to rise and as the GCC states seek new security arrangements in light of a shifting order that threatens their security.¹ As competition in the region has intensified, the GCC states have established themselves as relevant political and economic power brokers, both regionally and internationally.

The GCC countries are directly impacted and, as such, are involved in many regional conflict situations, including in Syria, Sudan, and Yemen. Moreover, they stand front and center of efforts to de-escalate tensions, including with Iran and in regard to the Palestinian issue. These mediation and bridge-building efforts even extend to Ukraine and Russia, where prisoner exchanges have resulted from Arab Gulf involvement.

As the GCC states continue to seek to enhance their defense capabilities and address regional security challenges, and as NATO continues to adapt to evolving security threats, the idea of continued and even enhanced cooperation and partnership between them continues to garner attention.

To be sure, the availability and use of alliance formats are still required to resolve many conflict situations in the Middle East and beyond despite the GCC's de-escalation efforts. While the ICI could serve as such a mechanism, it has yet to establish itself as a permanent feature of a new regional security order in its current format. As it stands, the ICI requires a more explicit strategy on how to deliver more comprehensive security and diplomacy to the GCC states. This paper will analyze the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, its evolution over the past two decades, its achievements, shortcomings, challenges, and future prospects. The paper will explain that the expansion into GCC-NATO cooperation will be only natural due to mutual interests between the two sides and the urgency for Gulf security given the rapidly changing security environment in the region.

¹ The idea of enhancing GCC-NATO ties is not a new topic, especially within the Gulf Research Center (GRC). One of the GRC's research programs is Gulf Foreign Relations. A primary focus of the GRC research program on Gulf Foreign Relations is the interaction of the Gulf states with the rest of the world, both regionally in the broader Middle East and globally. Dr. Abdulaziz Sager, Chairman of the GRC, has been among the notable promoters of stronger GCC-NATO relations since participating in the 2004 NATO Summit in Istanbul, which led to the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. Since then, the GRC has held numerous workshops related to GCC-NATO relations, such as the NATO Looking for

Partners in the Middle East Conference in September 2004 and the NATO and the GCC Countries Symposium held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in January 2007. The GRC has also published reports and papers on GCC-NATO relations and participated in numerous NATO Defense College Foundation Conferences. Most recently, the GRC hosted a dinner in honor of the Secretary General of NATO, H.E. Jens Stoltenberg, and his delegation in December 2023, in Riyadh. The discussion focused on the potential for enhanced dialogue and cooperation between NATO and the Gulf, including in areas such as maritime security, energy security, and counterterrorism.



Establishment and Objectives of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative

The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) is a NATO initiative launched in June 2004 at the NATO Summit in Istanbul to foster dialogue, political consultation, and practical cooperation on various security-related issues with member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council. The Initiative addresses common security challenges, such as counterterrorism, energy, maritime, and nuclear security. Furthermore, the ICI aims to enhance interoperability between NATO and its Gulf partners, contributing to the region's overall security architecture.

The Initiative was launched one year after the United States' invasion of Iraq in 2003, which had numerous consequences on regional stability. At the "NATO's Role in Gulf Security" conference held in Qatar in 2005, then NATO Secretary General H.E. Jaap de Hoop Scheffer emphasized three reasons that motivated NATO to launch the ICI: the changing security environment (security challenges such as terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, human trafficking, weapons, and drugs, that cannot be addressed individually), the changing nature of NATO itself (i.e. NATO's transition from deterring a major war in Europe throughout the Cold War from tackling new threats and challenges, and the new dynamic in the Gulf region with the region positioning itself as the center for regional conflict situation rather than the more traditional Arab-Israeli conflict (NATO, December 2005). The Secretary-General's visit was the first by a senior NATO official to any of the GCC states in the organization's history.

The Istanbul Summit Communique of June 28, 2004, stressed that the NATO initiative is a "cooperative initiative, based on joint ownership and the mutual interests of NATO and the countries of the region, taking into

account their diversity and specific needs" and is intended to complement other regional or international initiatives such as the European Union (EU), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and NATO's own Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) which includes seven countries on and around the southern rim of the Mediterranean (NATO, June 2004; Webb, December 2019).

The document explicitly states, "the need to avoid misunderstandings about the scope of the initiative, which is not meant to either lead to NATO/EAPC/PfP membership, provide security guarantees, or be used to create a political debate over issues more appropriately handled in other fora" (NATO, June 2004). Instead, NATO allied leaders stated in the communique that "this initiative is offered by NATO to interested countries in the region, starting with the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, to foster mutually beneficial bilateral relationships and thus enhance security and stability." The document specified that the ICI "will be developed in a spirit of joint ownership with the countries involved. Continued consultation and active engagement will be essential to their success."



Closing remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the North Atlantic Council – ICI seminar celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, Doha, Qatar, 11 December 2014.

Source: [NATO](#)



From a NATO perspective, the ICI is based on a foundation of six fundamental principles:

1. **Non-discrimination:** All ICI partners are offered the same basis for cooperation and discussion with NATO.
2. **Self-differentiation:** The initiative allows for a tailored approach to the specific needs of each partner.
3. **Two-way engagement:** The ICI is a two-way street, wherein the Alliance seeks contributions from partners for the success of the Initiative through a regular consultation process, and partners express their needs and goals to NATO.
4. **Non-imposition:** Partners are free to choose the pace and extent of their cooperation with NATO.
5. **Diversity:** The ICI respects and takes into account the specific regional, cultural, and political contexts of the respective partners.
6. **Complementarity:** This partnership forum complements those of other international organizations in the region (NATO, September 2022).

Following the 2004 Summit, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar formally joined the ICI in the first three months of 2005, followed by the United Arab Emirates in June. Oman and Saudi Arabia have to date not joined the Initiative although both countries do have participated in selected ICI-related activities. Many analysts attribute this to the fact that, until recently, NATO did not necessarily have a positive image in the region, and some of its actions were seen as controversial. Previously, as numerous researchers and analysts point out, NATO's intervention in the Gulf was tied to the US, and its image has been adversely affected by the policies of the US administrations, particularly policies by the Bush administration in the region until 2008 (Razoux, January 2010).

Consequently, the Gulf traditionally has had a cautious approach to NATO's engagement in the region. However, increased dialogue has demonstrated more readiness from both ends to engage more in a more substantive manner. The following section will examine the achievements and shortcomings of the ICI.

Achievements and Shortcomings of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative

At NATO's 60th Anniversary Summit in Strasbourg/Kehl in April 2009, the Heads of State and Governments of the member countries of the North Atlantic Alliance stressed that "the security and stability of the Gulf region is significant to the Alliance. We are pleased with the significant progress achieved in the framework of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) since its establishment in 2004. Political consultations and practical cooperation have intensified, and new opportunities have been created in key areas such as energy security, maritime security, and training and education" (NATO, April 2009).



It can be argued that in terms of institutional developments, at least initially, the ICI produced several positive results: follow-up groups consisting of political advisors from delegations of NATO member countries were established to review procedures and activities; the NATO Secretary General and his deputy



visited all the ICI capitals and received numerous ambassadors of ICI member countries in the NATO Headquarters in Brussels; the NATO Defense College paid an official visit to Qatar and the UAE in December 2009; and the number of activities carried out increased by 70%, rising from 33% in 2005 to 57% in 2008 (Razoux, January 2010). One of the most significant developments was the first NATO+4 meeting held in November 2008, which started the multilateral dimension of the partnership.



In 2012, the UAE became the first and only country in the Middle East to open a mission to NATO Headquarters in Brussels. In April 2014, the Initiative held the first meeting at the level of Foreign Ministers, one decade after its official launch. According to then NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, “The launch of our initiative ten years ago was a clear signal that the security and stability of the Gulf region is of strategic interest to NATO. Just as the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic area matters to the Gulf region” (NATO, April 2014).

Additionally, in 2016, NATO announced that it would name the embassies of Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar as accredited missions to NATO. One year later, in 2017, the NATO-ICI Regional Centre was established in Kuwait City in 2017 with the objective to act as a “hub for the enhancement of practical cooperation between NATO and its Gulf partners” (NATO,

September 2022). The goal of the Regional Centre is to develop a shared understanding of security concerns and, through increased interoperability and standards, facilitate closer collaboration and encourage practical collaboration in a variety of fields, including strategic analysis, civic preparedness, military-to-military cooperation, and public diplomacy (NATO, September 2022). Its activities are open to all members of the ICI but also to Saudi Arabia, Oman, and the Gulf Cooperation Council as an institution.

Operationally, ICI partners have contributed to many NATO-led operations and missions:

Bahrain contributed to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. Kuwait signed the first-ever transit agreement in the Gulf with NATO in 2012, allowing for the movement of military equipment through the country; it is also part of the Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE) mechanism, an international initiative to combat piracy in the Indian Ocean. Qatar participated in Operation Unified Protector in Libya in 2011. The UAE has also contributed substantially to NATO operations and missions over the years, deploying Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom, which started in 2003, and joining ISAF in 2008; the UAE also participated in Operation Unified Protector in 2011 (NATO, September 2022).

Other areas of security and military cooperation between NATO and the Gulf ICI members include:

- NATO has signed security agreements with each GCC member in the ICI, namely the cooperation agreement on



the security of information between NATO and Kuwait in 2006, the agreement on the exchange of security information between NATO and Bahrain in 2008, the agreement on the exchange of information between the United Arab Emirates and NATO in 2009, the agreement on exchange confidential information between NATO and Qatar in 2018.

- NATO also signed a military agreement with Kuwait in 2017 to facilitate the transit of NATO personnel and forces through Kuwait.
- Additionally, numerous joint military exercises have been held between NATO, the ICI countries, Saudi Arabia, and Oman (Keshk, July 2021).

In terms of cooperation on softer themes and security, NATO provided numerous programs and courses at the NATO Defense College in Rome, which were open to all GCC states, whether they had joined ICI or not. The ten-week courses are held twice a year and were launched after the Riga Summit in 2006. According to Dr. Ashraf Keshk of Derasat, “the Istanbul Initiative, as a security framework between some Gulf Arab countries and the NATO alliance, has succeeded in introducing the concept of soft security to the Gulf Arab states through training and consultations. For instance, approximately 600 officers from alliance countries, the Middle East, and the Gulf Arab region participated in specialized courses held by the Istanbul Initiative College between 2000 and 2020.”²

According to the Secretary General’s Annual Report 2023, released by NATO Secretary General H.E. Jens Stoltenberg on March 14, 2024, NATO has continued to strengthen its political dialogue with its partners in the Middle

East and North Africa. Specifically, the report states: “Senior NATO officials conducted visits to Bahrain, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Mauritania, Qatar, Tunisia, and the United Arab Emirates. They also engaged with other relevant actors in the region, including Lebanon, Oman, and Saudi Arabia.” Moreover, the document reaffirmed: “NATO and Kuwait continued to leverage the opportunities provided by the NATO-Istanbul Cooperation Initiative Regional Centre based in Kuwait. The Centre provides a forum where Allies and Gulf countries can meet to discuss topics of mutual interest and relevance. It also offers education and training for Istanbul Cooperation Initiative partners as well as Oman and Saudi Arabia.”

While the ICI has been a measure to foster practical security cooperation among GCC countries during the past twenty years, with the implemented programs being lauded by Dr. Abdel Aziz Aluwaisheg, the Gulf Cooperation Council’s Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs and Negotiation (Aluwaisheg, May 2023), the Initiative has fallen short of transforming into a more comprehensive multilateral program and producing an overall security framework. Many Gulf academics have argued that the region expected more of the Initiative. For example, the GCC states anticipated a more specific defense commitment by NATO. This would include clearly identified deliverables from NATO to defend GCC countries in the event of external aggression. The Gulf countries also expected NATO to be more proactive in offering defense-related commitments. They wanted NATO to initiate detailed discussions and propose comprehensive defense agreements.

Instead of greater clear-cut defense commitments, ICI however has limited itself to select areas of technical cooperation, which, in

² In an email correspondence with Dr. Ashraf Keshk of the Bahrain Center for Strategic, International, and Energy Studies (Derasat).



turn, questioned the validity of the value-added of ICI as opposed to bilateral agreements the GCC states have with individual countries. The inability of ICI to meet expectations now represents one of the challenges of the Initiative going forward.

Challenges of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative

Within the Gulf region, NATO's efficacy has been limited by two primary factors: its inability to maintain consistent priorities and its inability to assess the feasibility of its commitments appropriately. In other words, a continued challenge between NATO and its Gulf partners is the divergence of threat perceptions and security priorities.

As NATO prioritizes specific global or regional threats in the West, Gulf states often have different, sometimes more immediate, security concerns. For instance, from the Gulf perspective, there have been four priorities when it comes to the recent regional situation in the wider Middle East: Iran's use of proxies that impact regional security, the heightened escalation regarding Red Sea security, the situation in Yemen, and the economic challenges that Arab countries in the Levant and North Africa face. Outside of the immediate challenges, the GCC states wanted greater assiduity from the Alliance on various issues, including food, water, and cyber security.

The misalignment between NATO's often broad, strategic objectives and the Gulf states' specific, localized concerns has led to the view within the GCC states that continues to see the Alliance as hesitant, focused almost exclusively on soft rather than hard security, especially through the NATO-ICI Regional Centre.

NATO's commitments and its ability to respond to the GCC's security interests, as well

as the shortcomings of ICI, have further come to the forefront after the Russian attack on Ukraine in February 2022. On the one hand, the crisis has put back NATO's focus on the primacy of deterrence and defense in Europe and, in particular, supporting Ukraine. The crisis has led NATO to focus inward, addressing immediate security concerns and ensuring member cohesion. The expansion of membership to Sweden and Finland is one example of this. This expansion, in response to heightened security concerns, has necessitated a long process of integrating new members and associated strategic planning, demanding considerable attention and resources. This, in turn, has caused NATO's outreach to other regions, such as NATO's southern neighborhood, to diminish somewhat with less resources available than before the crisis outbreak.



On the other hand, the instability of the wider Middle East has not gone away, and due to the attacks of October 7 by Hamas on Israel and the subsequent Israeli incursion into Gaza, the threat of a regional war has actually increased. The exchange of missile attacks between Israel and Iran in March 2024 highlighted this danger explicitly. Moreover, Iran has become deeply involved in support of Russia in the Ukraine crisis, thus complicating the war effort further. Thus, while NATO has stated that "the Russian Federation is the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area," all 32 NATO members now also understand that a new approach is needed when it comes to NATO's southern neighborhood.



Part of this reflection includes the recognition that the GCC states stand out because they have the political and other resources to play a role in shaping situations in the Gulf region and beyond. While the ICI has contributed to areas of soft security and acted as a deterrent against regional threats through statements by its officials regarding the security of the Arabian Gulf, these statements have not always translated into practical steps. For the partnership to be effective, it must have a clear strategy regarding the Gulf in terms of actual security. This includes cooperation on regional maritime security, particularly with the rise of instability in the Red Sea, increased collaboration on enhancing air defense capabilities at a time when the region is witnessing an increase in the number of drones being used, and the ongoing issues and mutual concern about counterterrorism (Coffey, December 2023).



Within the GCC, the region expects NATO member states to listen more closely to the Gulf's concerns when it comes to nonproliferation issues, nuclear safety, and air and maritime security. This can best be done if there is an effective and wide-ranging engagement with all six of the GCC states. Currently, only four of the six GCC countries are members of the ICI: Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). While Saudi Arabia and Oman participate in selected activities, they are not formal members

of the Initiative. The expansion of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative memberships to both Saudi Arabia and Oman is, therefore, more crucial than ever, as the region, particularly Saudi Arabia, continues to play a key role in regional and international diplomacy.

For NATO to have an effective role in the Middle East, it should focus on building its relationship with the Kingdom. The visit by NATO Secretary-General H.E. Jens Stoltenberg to Saudi Arabia (the first ever by a sitting Secretary General of NATO) in December 2023 is a perfect example of this. In a public discussion at the Saudi Armed Forces Command and Staff College, the Secretary-General highlighted Saudi Arabia's leadership position in the Arab and Muslim world and identified areas in which the Kingdom and the Alliance could work together more closely, such as innovation and military education, maritime security, the defense of vital infrastructure, climate change, and counterterrorism, stating, "I believe there is huge potential for NATO to do more with Saudi Arabia because we have mutual challenges" (NATO, December 2023).

Another challenge for the Alliance is that, until recently, NATO did not necessarily have a positive image in the region, and some of its actions were seen as controversial. Previously, as numerous researchers and analysts point out, NATO's intervention in the Gulf was tied to the US, and its image has been adversely affected by the policies of the US administrations, particularly policies by the second Bush administration in the region until 2008 (Razoux, January 2010). The policies implemented during this period, such as the invasion of Iraq, were contentious and had widespread repercussions, affecting how NATO was viewed. As a result, NATO's image was often conflated with that of the US, leading to skepticism within the region about the Alliance being simply US+.



One example is NATO's Resolute Support Mission (RSM) in Afghanistan, widely regarded as a failure in its objectives. The RSM, which was launched in January 2015, was aimed at training and assisting Afghan security forces to counter terrorism in their country. The withdrawal of all RSM forces in August 2021 has had a profound impact, leading to a range of instabilities in the region. This has also intensified doubts within the Gulf on whether the Alliance is still committed to the region.



On the more positive side, increased dialogue and events have demonstrated more readiness from both ends to engage more substantively to discuss new arrangements. At an event in Brussels on May 7, 2024, NATO's Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geoană underlined the importance of the southern neighborhood to NATO, stressing that "What happens in the region directly affects the security of the Euro-Atlantic region" (NATO, May 2024). NATO itself has undertaken a review of its policies in the southern neighborhood thus acknowledging the need for an adjustment in its approach.

The final report by the expert group states that "Overall, NATO must listen harder, better and more actively to partners, and invest in skills and people to do this" through "strengthening of NATO's political dialogue *about* and *with* the region, through the language of partnerships, concrete cooperative solutions to

shared interests and concerns, and a sustainable long-term commitment" (NATO, May 2024). The report states, "An effective approach must prioritize deeper understanding of partners' needs and perceptions, based on trust, credibility and clarity about NATO's purpose. This entails embracing flexibility without compromising NATO's interests, principles and values or undermining Allies' security. It also requires better coordination within NATO and between Allies, to avoid duplication and dispersal of efforts and resources" (NATO, May 2024).

Future Prospects of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative

As the GCC states continue to see how to best enhance their security cooperation with external partners, NATO remains a relevant actor to consider. Dr. Abdel Aziz Aluwaisheg, the Gulf Cooperation Council's Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs and Negotiation, explained that:

NATO is seeking out wider cooperation with other GCC states that are not currently ICI members and with the GCC organization. The GCC and NATO have been discussing for some time possible formal instruments for cooperation. GCC-NATO cooperation would be in parallel with and not a substitute for cooperation among the current ICI partners, although they will likely overlap at times. Some of the proposals currently under discussion for GCC-NATO engagement include political dialogue, as both organizations are concerned with regional crises and their spillover effects globally, such as the conflicts in Yemen, Sudan, Palestine/Israel and Syria/Lebanon. Security dialogue is also important, as both are also concerned about Iran's nuclear



program and the proliferation of missiles and drones, cyberwarfare and threats to maritime security and freedom of navigation. (Aluwaisheg, May 2023).

The starting point for a more substantial partnership is a regular, high-level, and serious political and security dialogue in which both sides understand the other's strategic and security concerns. NATO should engage with the region on three levels: with individual countries, as each country has its own partnership program with NATO, with NATO's four Gulf partners in the ICI, and with the GCC as a subregional organization. A new version of the ICI with a unified GCC vision, as opposed to its current bilateral approach, might lead to a strategic partnership between the GCC and NATO (Beshr, February 2015).

The release of the document entitled "Vision of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) for Regional Security" in March 2024 can be a basis for discussions to move forward. While the statement outlines the principles of regional security, as well as a number of positions on regional concerns, the vision cannot be realized only by the GCC states. The document itself asserts that "establishing a solid international relationship is vital in enhancing regional security and stability and upholding international peace and security." Thus, a strategic partnership between the GCC and NATO only makes sense.

At the political level, it is essential for both the GCC states and NATO member countries to demonstrate a shared commitment to deepening their partnership and leveraging their respective strengths to address common security challenges. One option here for the Alliance is to put its Gulf partners in Article 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which states that "The Parties will consult together whenever, in the opinion of any of them, the territorial integrity, political

independence or security of any of the Parties is threatened" (Razoux, January 2010).

On a security level, NATO should emphasize its value in improving Gulf security, especially as the Gulf countries already have security partnerships with prominent NATO members such as the United States, Britain, and France. From a Gulf perspective, the region is looking for a clear-cut commitment to mutual defense. The closest seen so far to such an agreement is the Comprehensive Security Integration and Prosperity Agreement signed by the United States and Bahrain in September 2023, which aims to "enhance cooperation across a wide range of areas, from defense and security to emerging technology, trade, and investment."

According to Dr. Keshk: "What is required from NATO is to find ways to intervene in crises by modifying intervention conditions according to Article 5. Moreover, the security of the Arabian Gulf should be an integral part of NATO's strategic concept, issued every ten years, and there must be a security commitment from NATO to confront security threats in the Arabian Gulf."



While it would be difficult for NATO to present such guarantees under present conditions, the two sides should discuss the search for new arrangements. Drawing on and echoing the final report by the expert group to enhance GCC-NATO relations, a revised ICI structure could include the following elements:



First, enhance thematic conversation through high-level political and security dialogue. There is a wide range of topics to be discussed here: the ongoing issues in Iran, Sudan, Lebanon, Yemen, and Syria, the war in Palestine as Gaza is still in flames, maritime security in the Red Sea as the Gulf continues to be threatened by piracy and attacks on the region's waters between the Suez Canal and the Strait of Hormuz, climate change and security, particularly after the UAE's successful hosting of COP28, as well as nonproliferation, combatting terrorism and extremism, cybersecurity, stable global energy markets, and water and food security.

Second, both sides should work to establish a collective partnership, similar to the GCC-EU Strategic Partnership, in addition to fostering regular high-level political dialogue between NATO and the Gulf states to discuss regional security challenges, common interests, and potential areas of cooperation.

Third, establish working groups for practical collaboration on issues of mutual concern to complement bilateral dialogues. These working groups will have a substantive role in advancing more concrete actions and will deepen dialogue with the Gulf states through the GCC and bilaterally.

Fourth, provide the NATO-ICI Regional Centre in Kuwait with the necessary financial and personnel resources, as well as clear political direction, so that it may play an even more significant role in strengthening ties, exchanging knowledge, and developing capacity with all ICI partners and other GCC nations. Here, enabling avenues of cooperation at the mid-level, parallel to high ministerial level cooperation, is essential in advancing GCC-NATO relations. This includes partnerships among think tanks, universities, R&D centers, business-to-business forums,

research collaboration, and training and exchange programs to address regional and international issues.

Fifth, prospects for closer naval collaboration between NATO and the GCC should be explored, especially given that GCC member states are developing their naval capabilities and enhancing their experience in coastal and naval protection. Intelligence sharing and information collaboration are essential for safer maritime security in the Red Sea. NATO should exert more significant political pressure and action regarding maritime attacks in the Gulf, including a more robust presence in the region's waters and an additional supply of naval equipment and collaboration.

Sixth, strengthen awareness and training in various issues, such as nonproliferation and emerging technologies, through projects and tailor-made courses to better comprehend the more immediate and medium—to long-term implications.

Over the past two decades, the ICI has fostered dialogue and cooperation between NATO and some GCC states. However, as geopolitical tensions continue to rise and the security environment in the region undergoes rapid changes, the ICI must adapt and play a more significant role in addressing the security concerns of the Gulf states. This will require a more explicit strategy and comprehensive approach to offering the GCC states robust security. The expansion to a GCC-NATO cooperation aligns with the mutual interests of both sides and is essential for addressing the evolving security challenges in the region.



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