

Ties with Nato on mutual respect: FM No ulterior motives, says Scheffer

Staff Reporter

THE strategic partnership between Nato and the Gulf states requires an agreement that provides practical solutions to the security needs of both sides, based on mutual respect, the First Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister HE Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor al-Thani said on Thursday.

The First Deputy Premier was delivering his inaugural address at a conference on "Nato's Role in Gulf Security," which saw the participation of Nato officials, civil society representatives and officials from the GCC states.

"The Gulf region has its special circumstances, which must be taken into consideration when talking about the Nato's role in the region," he stated while pointing out that the American-led military presence in the Gulf was a result of two Gulf wars to secure the stability in the region.

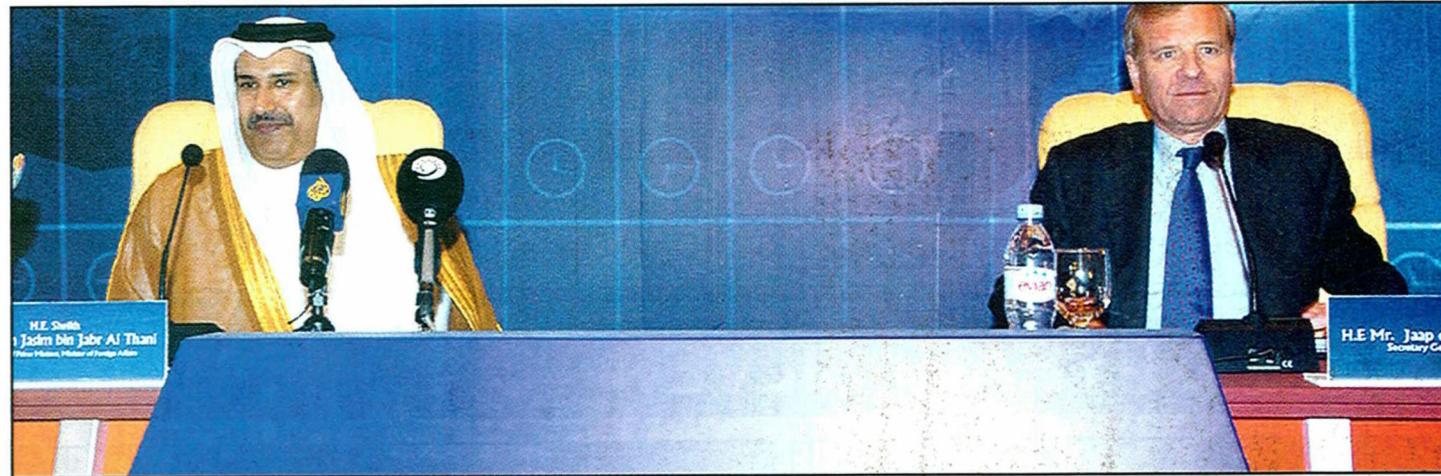
"The Gulf area has been an attraction for the super-powers in the East and West due to the rich sources and the strategic geographical position," he recalled. HE Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor al-Thani said that Qatar reiterates the principles of peaceful co-existence and international co-operation to establish stability based on the values of justice and tolerance.

The stability of the region requires protection of the region from the potential external menaces resulting from the circumstances during the last two decades.

He said that political security will not be achieved without the economic security. Therefore, "we have to stride towards democracy and reform in parallel with the development in all fields".

Among the challenges are solving chronic and new conflicts, especially the Palestinian question, stability in Iraq, and the destruction of weapons of mass destruction.

"We can't ignore the challenges in the region despite the fact that security of the Gulf will remain the responsibility of its people," he added.



First Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister HE Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor al-Thani and Nato Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer at the opening session of the conference on Thursday.



Dignitaries including GCC Secretary General HE Abdulrahman bin Hamad al-Attiyah and Qatari Armed Forces Chief of Staff HE Maj Gen Hamad bin Ali al-Attiyah at the opening session of the conference.



Former Nato supreme allied commander General Wesley Clark, Kuwait's Strategic Studies Centre director Dr Sami al-Farag, and the Nixon Centre's regional strategic programme director Dr Geoffrey Kemp on the dais during a session.

By Bonnie James

THE Nato (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) is not coming to the Gulf region to have a heavy political footprint and it does not have any ulterior political motives, Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer has said.

"But the challenges and the threats we face are so common and what happens here in this pivotal region is also relevant for the security of other regions as well," he explained in an interview on the sidelines of the conference on "Nato's Role in Gulf Security", held on Thursday.

On the first official visit by a Nato Secretary General to the Gulf region, Scheffer was of the view that Nato, which has a membership of 26 nations, and the Gulf countries can jointly fight threats including terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Referring to the Istanbul Co-operation Initiative (ICI) that Nato launched in June last year, the official had said in his keynote address earlier that it was an invitation to countries in the region to help promote security and regional stability through bilateral co-operation with Nato in areas where the Alliance has particular skills and expertise.

"I am very happy with the way the nations in the Gulf have responded (to the ICI)," remarked Scheffer. Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, and the UAE have joined the ICI.

"We have made good progress in developing individual work programmes with each of them," recalled the official while pointing out that there have been expressions of interest in the ICI from Saudi Arabia and Oman.

The relationship between Nato and ICI member-countries can be developed on the basis of a menu which is focused on the individual nations.

"We should recognise the specificity of each and every nation (in the Gulf) and what the nation wants. We want to build trust and confidence and work together in the practical domain, do that on a bilateral basis," he maintained. The co-operation between Nato and ICI member-countries can relate to training, and working for more inter-operability between armed forces.

It can involve having Qatari or Bahraini observers at Nato exercises or Nato coming to this

region to observe exercises," the Secretary General suggested.

This rapport can be used to combat terrorism also. "If you want to be effective in the fight against terrorism we need to exchange information. I see a lot of possibilities in this form of co-operation," said Scheffer while stating that he discussed the topic with HH the Heir Apparent Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and the First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister HE Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor al-Thani.

However, the Nato Secretary General stressed that ICI is a two-way street based on the value added for both parties. "It should never be a one-way street," he said.

Asked about Nato's stand in the Iranian nuclear issue, the top official said the Alliance is not seeking a direct role in the discussions between the EU-3 (Britain, France, Germany) on the matter of uranium enrichment. "The Nato allies of course follow with great interest what is happening because it is a very relevant problem we are facing and I sincerely hope that they can find a solution in these consultations, discussions and negotiations," he said.

Nato is not seeking a role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict either. In Iraq, Nato is running a training mission in Baghdad, which opened two months ago, and 1,000 officers are being trained. Another 500 are being trained in Nato's schools outside Iraq.

"We are equipping the Iraqi army with tanks, rifles and ammunition so that the country has a decent army, and can stand on its own feet as soon as possible," he added.

Meanwhile, at a separate meeting earlier in the morning HE Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor al-Thani and the Nato Secretary General Scheffer discussed the situation in the region and reviewed the ties between Qatar and Nato.

The meeting was attended by the Director of the First Deputy Premier's Office HE Sheikh Jabor bin Yousuf al-Thani, Qatar's Ambassador to Belgium Abdullah Falah al-Doussary and HE Sheikhha al-Mayassa bint Hamad al-Thani, Assistant Director of Organisations, International Conventions for Conference Affairs Department at the Foreign Ministry.

FOR RENT

Golden Chance for Petroleum Co., Government & Reputable Companies



Residential Building at Prime location behind Jaidah Motors at Farij Abdul Aziz

Consist of 15 flats, in 10 flats, 2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms hall & kitchen in 5 flats; 3 bedrooms, 3 bathrooms, hall, kitchen & car parking

Contact: 5535654