

A NATO Official: Britain will send troops to Afghanistan

Brussels, 30th September – UPI: A senior NATO official confirmed that Britain would send additional troops to Afghanistan next May.

The official, who asked to remain anonymous, said at a briefing to a number of Arab journalists at NATO headquarters in Brussels on Friday, “Britain, who will take over the NATO Command in Afghanistan from Italy at the beginning of next year, will deploy additional troops and special forces in southern Afghanistan next May.” But he did not specify the size of the deployment.

He commended the Atlantic Dialogue that NATO initiated, and the Istanbul Initiative that was launched last year, hoping it would expand to include several Middle East countries.

In reply to a question by United Press International on the possibility of the success of NATO initiatives in the Middle East in the light of the difficult circumstances there, he said, “We attach a special importance to those initiatives, and hope there will be some development in the region because NATO will not be able to bring about changes in the Middle East on its own.”

He added, “We at NATO are now interested in introducing some reforms in the Middle East - as we do in Europe using our expertise, and in developing the capabilities of the military forces in the countries involved in the Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Initiative, and helping in the field of counter-terrorism. But at the same time we contribute to the Middle East reform programmes and work alongside national reform initiatives”.

However, the official ruled out the possibility of NATO co-operation with Libya at the present time.

Ends.

NATO Secretary General denies reports that Israel requested joining the NATO

Brussels, 30 September – UPI: NATO Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, denies reports about Israel applying to become a member of NATO.

In reply to a question from United Press International on whether Israel had actually submitted an application for membership or expressed interest in joining the western military coalition, Mr Scheffer said, “I know such a suggestion is repeated in certain academic circles in Israel every now and then”, but he did not reveal who in particular.

He added in a briefing to Arab journalists on Friday at NATO Headquarters in Brussels, “Israel did not submit any application to join NATO. When I visited Israel and was asked this question, I gave a similar answer”.

However, he pointed out that Israel was “aspiring to work with NATO, as Egypt and other Arab countries are, but aspiration is not enough for our partners, and this applies to Israel as well. What is important in my opinion is that NATO can go to Israel and talk to the Prime Minister, and go to Egypt and talk to the President, and talk to others as well”.

To be continued/...