

## Scheffer discusses NATO role in the region

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By Jamal Al Majaida

Abu Dhabi-The Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), Jaap de Hoop Scheffer disclosed that discussions are underway with the UAE to establish cooperation in line with the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI).

Scheffer told Emirates News Agency (WAM) in an exclusive interview on Jan, 26 that "As secretary general of NATO, it is my responsibility to make myself known with the UAE authorities prior to any formalities. It is very important that I pay my respect to the leaders of the UAE. That is what one does first in diplomatic relations. And that is what I have been doing in the region."



He added that NATO has relations with Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar and it is now negotiating with the UAE, reiterating that NATO is no longer a Cold War organisation, and is evolving to meet the needs of the current era.

Scheffer stressed that it is necessary that the relationship between the region and NATO is based on trust and confidence in order to achieve full understanding. Many still have erstwhile concept of war-situation NATO.

"NATO does not want a political or military interest in the region, what it looks for is a common interest based on common understanding", Scheffer said.

He added that "as we speak the ICI is a cooperation between NATO and the region, though Saudi Arabia and Oman did not yet join, indicating that "we have 35, 000 soldiers in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to defend Islamic values and integrity.

Scheffer reiterated that NATO is a military and political alliance with membership from 26 democracies. NATO is present in Afghanistan, Kosovo and in Iraq, training the Iraqi security forces on the United Nations' mandate, indicating that the UAE is the only Asian country involved in Afghanistan in regard to humanitarian work.

He underscored that NATO is not an organisation that gets into any political debate in the world as it is not the EU or UN, adding that it will not discuss any economic aspects in the region. However, the most pressing issue is energy security.

Scheffer said that NATO, which is a military alliance, cannot replace UN, though it works in some volatile areas in the world upon request and mandate of the UN's Security Council, indicating that "we do not want to come to the region uninvited, therefore, we have to build relationships based on confidence."

He disclosed that there is no intention at the moment for NATO to enter into dialogue with Iran, adding that "Iran is a great nation, but as a military and political organisation there is no point to enter into dialogue with Iran".

Scheffer emphasised that NATO can only play a role in the Arab- Israeli conflict in case a viable Palestinian state is established through mandate of the security council, where the Middle East actors are involved, admitting that NATO has not yet played a role in the Arab-Israeli conflict as of yet.

About Darfour, he said African Union made a formal request for technical assistance-NATO pledged to offer such help.

The visit of NATO secretary general will strengthen pace of cooperation between NATO and the countries in the region.

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