

NATO Chief comes to Study Israeli Military Tactics

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Criticism of Israel in the United Nations-commissioned Goldstone Report did not prevent Chairman of NATO's Military Committee Admiral Giampaolo Di Paola from visiting Israel this week to study IDF tactics and methods that the military alliance can utilize for its war in Afghanistan.

Di Paola left Israel on Thursday after a two-day visit as the guest of IDF Chief of General Staff Lt.-Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi. The timing of Di Paola's visit was considered significant since it comes at a time when the IDF is under increasing criticism in the wake of the Goldstone Report on Operation Cast Lead as well as a decision by Turkey – a NATO member – to ban Israel from joint aerial exercises.

This is Di Paola's third visit to Israel in the past four years, both in his current position as well as in his last post as top military commander of Italy.

During their meeting on Wednesday, Ashkenazi and Di Paola discussed ways to upgrade Israeli-NATO military ties as well as the plan to include an Israeli Navy vessel in Active Endeavor, a NATO mission established after the 9/11 attacks under which NATO vessels patrol the Mediterranean to prevent illegal terror trafficking.

This will be the first time that IDF troops actively participate in a NATO operation in the Mediterranean Sea as part of the Active Endeavor maritime counter-terror operation.

Defense officials said that Di Paola used his meetings with the IDF to learn about new technology that can be applied to the war in Afghanistan. Israel is a known world leader in the development of specialized armor to protect against improvised explosive devices (IEDs), otherwise known as roadside bombs.

Di Paola was also interested in Israeli intelligence-gathering capabilities and methods that the IDF uses when operating in civilian population centers. He noted that NATO and the IDF were facing similar threats – NATO in Afghanistan and Israel in its war against Hamas and Hizbullah.

"The one thing on NATO's mind today is how to win in Afghanistan," a senior defense official said. "[Di Paola] was very impressed by the IDF, which is a major source of information due to our operational experience."

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