

# Israel to join NATO Mediterranean patrols

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JERUSALEM: The Israeli navy will join a NATO force patrolling the Mediterranean Sea as part of the “global war on terror,” a military spokesman said on Tuesday.

The spokesman confirmed a report by the Maariv newspaper which said the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation headquarters last week approved the Israeli Navy’s inclusion in Operation Active Endeavour.

“The navy will participate in the activities,” the spokesman said.

The announcement came as a major boost just days after Turkey scrapped a joint aerial exercise that was to have included Israel, Maariv said.

Bilateral relations have taken a downturn since Israel launched a devastating military offensive in Gaza in December.

Operation Active Endeavour was launched one month after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York.

As part of the operation, NATO ships patrol the Mediterranean to monitor shipping “to help detect, deter and protect against terrorist activity,” according to the transatlantic alliance.

Task Force Endeavour consists of surface units, submarines and patrol aircraft and regularly uses frigate forces.

Israel had first requested to deploy a vessel as part of the force two years ago to participate in the “global war on terror,” Maariv said.

“In Israel’s international situation today, with legitimacy for its military actions shrinking, even a patently minor development, such as the inclusion of an Israeli ship in the alliance’s naval police force, is big news,” the newspaper said.

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