

Waiting for Turkey's Apology

October 4, 2012, 4:42

Gerald Steinberg is professor of political science at Bar Ilan University and president of NGO Monitor

The Turkish government's forceful response to the killing of five of its citizens in an artillery barrage fired by Syrian government forces is understandable. Turkey's counterattack began with two days of artillery counter-strikes that reportedly killed a number of Syrian soldiers, and there are indications that an expanded operation is being planned. The Turkish parliament has given the government advance approval for a ground incursion into Syria, in response to the "aggressive action" that posed a serious threat to national security.

In the wake of this attack and the swift response, surely the Turkish government, headed by Prime Minister Erdogan, will understand and support the Israeli response to far more violent attacks on its civilian population. If Turkey is justified in conducting a major military response following the accidental cross-border killing of five civilians, its leaders will understand Israel's right and need to act militarily in order to stop the thousands of deadly rocket attacks from the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip.

In retrospect, perhaps Erdogan and other Turkish leaders will realize that their venomous attacks on Israel during and after the anti-terror operation in Gaza that began at the end of December 2008 were wrong. The false accusations of "massacres" and "human rights violations," which were part of the ongoing political warfare against Israel (including the discredited Goldstone report), should never have been repeated by the Turkish leaders. Now, the same strategy is readily available for allegations against Turkish military forces operating in Syria (although the type of political coalition arrayed against Jerusalem to pursue human rights warfare and lawfare is unlikely to be formed against Ankara).

In this context, instead of demanding an apology from Israel for the unfortunate events related to the 2010 "Free Gaza" flotilla, Prime Minister Erdogan might consider apologizing to Israel for his unjustified and vitriolic attacks. This flotilla, which departed from Turkey with the support of the government, was designed to give assistance to Hamas and terror attacks against Israeli territory and citizens. One boat, the Mavi Marmara, included members of the IHH terror organization, and when this armed group violently attacked the IDF landing party, who were carrying paint-ball guns, and threatened to kill them, the soldiers defended their lives, resulting in the deaths of nine IHH members. Since then, Erdogan has repeatedly attacked Israeli leaders, and demanded a public apology.

But in light of the Turkish government's efforts defend the nation and its citizens against Syrian attacks, the Israeli response in 2010 turns out to have been entirely consistent with Turkish policies. Erdogan needs to acknowledge this in order to avoid the appearance of double standards, in which one set of morals is seen to apply to Turkey, while entirely different requirements are demanded of Israel.

An apology to Israel would mark a good beginning.