

The 22-year US military veteran, freshman congressman, Tea Party darling and passionate Israel advocate talks to Herb Keinon from the Jerusalem Post

Allen West doesn't move through the lobby of Jerusalem's David Citadel like most of the other 20 or so freshmen congressmen in his delegation visiting Israel – anonymously, with no one really knowing the difference between them and the regular tourists.

No, West walks through the lobby almost like a rock star – not the world's most famous rock star, but one that enough people have seen, and heard, to attract attention.

"Excuse me," a seemingly star-struck woman in her late 20s-early 30s bursts out, interrupting the interview with West in a semi-isolated corner of the hotel. "I love you so much," she gushes, "thank you for coming." Then she bends down to give the Republican congressman from South Florida a hug around the neck.

And she is not alone. Some four other people stopped West, introduced themselves and wished him well in the two minutes it took to meet him in the hotel and find a private place to sit.

The attention is not surprising.

When the Republicans trounced the Democrats in last year's congressional election, some 84 new Republicans – most of them Tea Party folks like West – went to Washington.

Most, in the public's mind, just melded into one.

Not West.

First, he is an African-American who for months, until he bucked the movement's orthodoxy on the recent budget deficit debate earlier this month, was one of its darlings.

Second, he is a 22-year US military veteran, having spent 43 months of active duty in the Middle East, including combat in Iraq and during the first Gulf war. He retired with the rank of lieutenant-colonel after being questioned over the manner in which he had conducted an interrogation: While stationed in Iraq, West fired a pistol near a detainee's head to extract information. He was fined \$5,000 for the incident, and when asked later whether he would have acted differently, he said, "If it's about the lives of my soldiers at stake, I'd go through hell with a gasoline can."

And third, he is outspoken, having garnered American media attention for telling a Muslim activist who challenged him at a town hall meeting in February, not to "blow smoke up my butt and tell me it's warm and fuzzy."

More recently he sent Florida Democratic colleague Debbie Wasserman Schultz an email in July after she chided him on the House floor, calling her the most "vile, unprofessional and despicable" member of the House.

He is also a politician many believe has a very bright future.

Only this week did he officially announce he would not run in 2012 for the Senate, despite a great deal of speculation to the contrary, and some have even mentioned him as possible presidential contender down the line. In 2010, West defeated Ron Klein, a strongly pro-Israel Jewish incumbent Democrat, to represent Florida's 22nd district – a district that includes West Palm Beach and Fort Lauderdale and has an estimated 10-percent Jewish vote.

This week, West sat down with The Jerusalem Post and pulled no punches when talking about his view of the Palestinians, Iran, Israel and the African-American community, and Jonathan Pollard.

What follows are excerpts of the interview.

You are meeting tomorrow with the Palestinian Authority leadership. What is your message to them?

There is one very simple question I would ask: Do you really believe you are a credible peace partner? Because I think with the reconciliation pact with Hamas, that is a very telling thing. The fact is that they are trying to back-door the process by going to the UN for a unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state, when we don't have a firm recognition of Israel, we don't have the renouncing of terrorism. I would also ask, what is a Palestinian state? It is something that never existed before.

And even the word Palestine.

You take it back to Palestina – which comes from Philistia – which was nothing but a declaration by Roman Emperor Hadrian in 73 AD.

This is a region, it is not anything tied to a certain group of people; it would be just the same as saying we should have an Appalachian state, separate from North Carolina. It's those questions I'd like to ask.

Do you support two states for two peoples?

I think that you have to first of all support the modern-day state of Israel. I think you have to support Israel post the '67 borders. Now, I am not going to sit here and dictate to Israel what their policies should be, but my perspective on it is that I have never seen a Palestinian state, and I think before that ever gets talked about, there are some concessions that have to be made on their side: the recognition of Israel and the renouncing of terrorism.

And once again it comes back to those very important words: a credible peace partner.

I think the last thing you need to have is an erosion of your state of security. Look at what is going on right now. You gave back Gaza and the only thing you got in return were Kassam rockets and 220-millimeter [mortar shells]. You pulled out of southern Lebanon, and what did you get? You got a more militant Hezbollah, which during the Second Lebanon War rained down rockets and missiles.

So I think the other side needs to come to the table and show they are a credible partner before we continue to say to Israel, "This is what you must do, and that you must believe in a two-state solution."

And I think the other thing we have to do is a better job on the information, propaganda side of this thing... I remember during the flotilla incident, I was sitting there looking at the TV with my wife, and I said, "They have paint guns on their backs." She said, "How can you tell?" And I said, "I can tell the silhouette of a paint gun." So you did everything necessary to try and have less of a confrontation, but yet you were attacked.

What I told people in America was to think about what if America was participating in a sanctioned blockade, and all of a sudden we boarded ships, and our Navy SEALs were attacked, what would you expect our Navy SEALs to do? We should allow Israel to do the exact same thing.

If you have rockets and missiles coming in out of Mexico over into the Texas territory, guess what we are going to do? We are going to defend our sovereignty. So why should we expect Israel to do anything less?

Why do you think that much of America, much of the world, does treat Israel differently?

It comes back to exactly what I said: The information-operations war. In the military, in strategic studies, they teach you that there are four elements to a nation's power. It's called the DIME theory: diplomatic, informational, military and economic.

It is the "I" portion where we are not doing very well. It is the "I" portion where Israel is not doing

very well.

No one is talking about the fact that half a million Israelis were in bomb shelters last night... But as soon as you go and defend yourselves, then that is all over the place, and you are made out to be the aggressor when what are you doing – you are protecting your sovereignty. I can't understand why when it comes to the case of Israel you are not allowed to defend yourselves.

People come in and always talk about proportionality. I was a soldier. If a guy shoots at me, I am shooting everything back at him – anyone will tell you that offensive operations are three-to-one, it is not supposed to be one-to-one.

There are those who argue, however, that no matter how good the messenger, the message won't be received because there is a double standard toward Israel and the Jews.

Yes, there is a horrific double standard. We, as your best ally, need to help you on that.

Because a lot of our media sources follow that duplicitous hypocrisy as well. We need to do better in our country.

Look, there is no better bond than the bond between American and Israel. I grew up in Georgia. I grew up knowing probably more about this country through Sunday school, Bible study and everything before I was a high school graduate, than maybe a lot of people who live here in this region. So that when I came here in 2009, it was just the same as me coming home.

A part of me is here.

This is my wife's first time here, and a part of her is here because of the Judeo-Christian faith heritage that we share, the values that we share, the democracy that we share, the sense of liberty and freedom.

We need to understand that we are in this fight together and what is being done to Israel is also being done to America, so as Israel falls, then guess who is the next target – America. Because America and Israel are truly the beacons and shining light in this world.

I call it a sea of darkness of despots, dictators, theocrats and autocrats. If we let the light go out here, there is no doubt that the next target is the next shining light. So I think we have to do a better job with Israel in helping getting that message across.

You mention the strong Israeli-US bonds. Has President Barack Obama hurt those – have they been weakened over the last three years?

I won't say that it has been weakened; it has definitely been shaken. I think that when you make the declarations that he has made in some instances, that is very hurtful.

I would have thought that going into his third year [as president], he would have come to visit Israel and show that support, show that bond, show that closeness and stand here. It was a great event when Prime Minister [Binyamin] Netanyahu came and spoke at the joint session of Congress [in May], and I would expect the American president to come here and address the Knesset just as well – to show that inextricable bond, to show that we are two countries which have roots that are just so intertwined.

Do you think President Obama has hurt Israel?

I think that President Obama has left a question mark with a lot of the Israelis. They are really not sure which direction things are going. You may see this, but then you get that. So there is a lot of uncertainty, and really when you talk to people in the US, that is the big theme, uncertainty – be it in our financial markets, our unemployment situation, debt deficit, foreign policy, whatever, there is just a lot of uncertainty.

What do you answer those who say that the great ovation Netanyahu got in Congress just

shows that the US is in Israel's pocket?

I don't think we are in each other's pocket. We have a shared history, and I'm not going to be ashamed of that or deny that. Read the writings of the founding fathers: There is a Judeo-Christian faith heritage that helped establish the United States of America.

When you go back to May 1948, I believe it was 16 minutes after the declaration that the US recognized the modern- day State of Israel.

As I said, every kid that grew up with me knew all the stories of the Old Testament and the Bible, and the stories of the prophets. So I am not ashamed to say that we have this close relationship, and I don't think that we should allow any other nation, or any other type of criticism to try to separate us.

But can the US be a fair broker?

I think we are a fair broker, and I think Israel is a fair broker, and I think it is kind of like baseball: We will call a ball a ball, and a strike a strike. We will call each other out if we don't do something right, but I think there are a lot of things we have to be proud of about our two countries.

I think that one of the great gestures that we should send forth – and I wrote a letter about this to President Obama – Jonathan Pollard has been through enough. Let him go home. It is a point beyond understanding right now.

Jonathan Pollard has been in prison now for 25 years. Back in my inner-city neighborhood in Atlanta, Georgia, we had a saying when we played basketball: "No blood, no foul." I think he has sat in the penalty box for long enough.

He should come home... And I think it would be a fantastic gesture, it would be a fantastic

showing of our mutual respect and bond, to say enough is enough.

There are a lot of concerns here about Israel's relations with the Afro-American community. Polls show that support there lags behind support in other communities. Why is that, and what can be done to change it?

It is so interesting, and that is probably one of the most perplexing things, because the most conservative, pro-Israel people on Sunday is the Afro- American community. But then something happens from Monday to Saturday, and I think that if we can solve the riddle of what happens from Monday to Saturday, then we can reverse that situation.

Because as I said, growing up, my life was understanding the Bible and the prophets, and understanding the history of Israel and how that formulated my own Christian faith....

Look what happened in the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s in the South. Those were Jewish Americans who were down there working with the black community, and we have to reestablish that, because that was incredible.

Look at what happened in Mississippi.

Those were young Jewish men [Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner] who were killed [in 1964] with the black kid [James Chaney] there in Mississippi, so why did we get away from that, and why do certain people like Louis Farrakhan have a greater voice? We have to reverse that.

But how do you explain that?

I think there is a desire in the Afro-American community to connect with something. You see Islam coming into the prisons, where unfortunately you have a high degree of incarcerations.

You see it going into the neighborhoods and preaching discipline and things of that nature.

I think you have had a breakdown of the church – its importance and role in the black community. You've had a breakdown in the black family.

When I was growing up, I sang in the youth choir.

Wednesday night was Bible study. All of those very basic things we have to go back and reestablish, and when we do that, I think the Afro-American community will once again reconnect.

I'd like to see more Afro- Americans come to Israel, because this is part of who we are. This is our holy land, just as it is your traditional homeland.

Often you hear parallels made between the Palestinian struggle and the American Civil Rights movement. Former secretary of state Condoleezza Rice once made such an allusion. Do you see any parallels?

No, I don't see it that way.

Again, when you are a student of history, history does not lie.

You go all the way back to the Peel Commission. There were things offered to the Arabs that were living here in Palestine, back when the British were here after World War I.

Everyone who lived in this region had a passport that said "Palestine" – it had nothing to do with Arab or Israeli. So this is a region, not about a certain people. And then once again, if you want to understand the true evolution of this word Palestine, it's because Hadrian changed the name

from Judea to Palestine. So really, if you want to free Palestine, it belongs to the Jewish people, if you want to look at it historically.

I think that trying to make those kinds of parallels is very dangerous, and I don't think they are the correct types of parallels. And I think we have to look historically at what happened here.

The Palestinians will say they are looking for freedom and equality just like the American blacks were looking for equality.

Yes we were looking for equality, but in America my forefathers were brought there for what? I don't think any Jewish person brought the Arabs here for the purpose of slavery. So I think you totally blow that parallel right there.

Like I said, you look at the Peel Commission, you look at the 1947 UN mandate – every opportunity was given to have this peaceful coexistence, but it was continuously rejected. That would be the same as the United States saying, "Okay, these are going to be the Afro-American states – South Carolina, Georgia and Alabama," and we say, "We don't want that, we want Tennessee." So that parallel does not work very well for me. There can be peaceful coexistence here, but it comes down to who is a credible peace partner.

Since you are a military man, I want to ask you about statements General David Petraeus made last year to the effect that Israel was costing the US both blood and treasure.

That was not a good statement.

I know Gen. Petraeus personally, and I think that was a faux pas, because Israel is not costing the United States anything.

You are associated with the Tea Party. Should we be concerned that its members will want to cut US aid to Israel?

When you look at the Tea Party, one of the things that I have said they have to focus on as well is national security – not just constitutional movement, fiscal responsibility, free market for enterprise, but national security is part of it.

The Tea Party is a constitutional conservative grassroots movement. It is only 18 months old, it's getting better, stronger, more credible, and more knowledgeable each and every day.

But how about the demands to cut back on spending? Won't foreign aid be at risk?

It is not so much on cutting back on spending, but on prioritizing spending. It is understating what are the constitutional mandates of the US government, and when you go back and look at what are the five basic mandates of the Constitution – to establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, promote general welfare, provide for the common defense and secure the blessings of liberty – providing for common defense is without a doubt probably the most important thing the federal government has to do. There is some waste in the foreign aid spending we have out there, no doubt about it. But when you look out at who your true allies are, there is no better ally out there than Israel.

What about Iran? Are sanctions working?

You know, Iran is not that concerned about the effects of sanctions on its people.... I think we have to take Iran at face value and understand that it is a theocracy; they do believe in the return of the Mahdi, the 12th Imam, by an apocalyptic event. They are pursuing this nuclear capability.

Just think if [Libyan leader] Muammar Gaddafi had not given up his nuclear program in 2003, and how that would have changed what happened with NATO in 2011. That's the message these guys have learned, that this [nuclear arms capability] is your trump card. I look back in history – we must start taking people for who they are. The world did not take Adolf Hitler for who he was, and they continued to try to appease and compromise with him, and look what happened after six years, and the devastation to the Jewish people.

So I think we are going to have to understand at some point that if you want this part of the world to respond in a way conducive to your security, you have to have a credible military option on the table. It is about strength in the Middle East. No one respects words; they respect your projection of strength.

Is now the time, then, for the US or Israel, or in tandem, to take military action against Iran?

I'm not privy to a lot of intel briefings, but I will say this: Iran has two Americans, and I think right now there should be a very definitive statement that they will release those two American hikers, or else. We don't need to define "or else," but it comes back to what I said, a credible military threat.

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