

Allen West to 'Post': IDF action on 'Mavi Marmara' was justified; Barak's apology to Egypt makes Israel look bad

Israel owes no apology to Turkey over the Mavi Marmara incident, and should not have issued any type of apology to Egypt over the killing of three security officers there, outspoken US Congressman Allen West (RFlorida) said in an interview with The Jerusalem Post on Wednesday.

West, 50, a Tea Party-associated freshman congressman from South Florida already being touted as a possible presidential candidate in the future, is in the country with a delegation of 27 Republican congressmen. He spent 22 years in the US military, including fighting in the First Gulf War and in Iraq, and retired with the rank of lieutenant- colonel.

"Not only does Israel not owe Turkey an apology, but I think the fact that [Defense Minister] Ehud Barak apologized for the [killing of] three Egyptian soldiers before we knew the circumstances of their deaths are the types of things that get played out in the international media that end up making you being castigated as the bad guy," West said.

"You have to be very careful with words, and how words are used in the international arena," he said.

Israel need not issue "any type of apology to Egypt. When these terrorists [who carried out Thursday's attack] transferred through Egypt, they obviously felt safe and secure doing that. And then they launched a very well-coordinated ambush – this was not just a bunch of guys getting lucky in the middle of the night, this was a well-coordinated event – that meant the routes were wellplanned out as well," West said.

He said if you take that incident, coupled with Iranian war ships transiting the Suez Canal since the fall of Hosni Mubarak and the repeated attacks on the natural gas pipeline to Israel, "I think Israel has every right to be concerned about what they are seeing in Egypt."

Regarding Turkey, West said Israel had the "right to uphold that blockade [of Gaza], which is very important, and you shouldn't have to apologize when your military has been attacked."

Asked whether it might not be wise for Israel to swallow its "national pride" for the long-term strategic benefit of good ties with Turkey, West said, "It does come back to your national pride and your stature. Because if someone is going to look at you in a negative light anyhow, you don't need to throw more dirt upon yourself. Turkey knows you had every right to do what you did, and I think you need to be able to express that to Turkey."

Regarding the Mavi Marmara incident, West said that the fact that the IDF commandos landed on the ship carrying paint guns showed that the country did everything necessary to try and have "less of a confrontation, but yet you were attacked. What I told people in America is that they should think about what if America was participating in a sanction-led blockade, and all of a sudden we boarded a ship, 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."

West, who along with the rest of the congressional delegation will be meeting Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Salam Fayyad on Thursday, said his message to the PA was "not to try and back door" the Israeli- Palestinian diplomatic process.

"I think they need to reject this reconciliation pact with Hamas, because Hamas's Charter is definitely anti-Israel and talks about Israel's elimination, and never its recognition. I think the PA has to present itself as a credible peace partner," he added.

The congressman also said that "for us to believe that there can be a return to pre-'67 lines is not a viable alternative for the security of Israel."

By HERB KEINON

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