

Jonathan Pollard & Other Matters of Global Interest



**An exclusive interview
with former CIA director
R. James Woolsey
by Rabbi Yitzchok Frankfurter**

There is no confusion about where Martin Peretz, former editor in chief of *The New Republic*, stands regarding the campaign to commute Jonathan Pollard's sentence. Mr. Peretz believes that Mr. Pollard justly deserved the life sentence he received for spying for Israel and should remain in jail.

"There is no end in sight for the campaign to persuade President Obama to let convicted Israeli spy Jonathan Pollard go free," he wrote in an op-ed piece published in the *Wall Street Journal* on June 25, 2012, under the heading "The Mendacious Movement to Free a Convicted Spy: Pretending that Jonathan Pollard is a martyr makes a mockery of Israel." To quote: "It is also almost impossible to recall the beginnings of this campaign. But it started with his life sentence. All that one can say is that the agitation, a phobic mixture of fantasies of Pollard's innocence and imaginings of anti-Semitic motives on the part of an indeterminate officialdom, has been relentless—sometimes more noisy, sometimes less, but relentless.

"There is no cloud about Pollard's guilt," he continued, "no illusion of his innocence. And he did not spy for Zion out of idealistic motives. This is a retrospective improvisation.

"I believe," he says a few paragraphs later, "what substance there is in the matter is rooted in Israeli distrust of President Obama's attitude toward Jews. Hence, if the president doesn't

want to free Pollard it is because of his disdain for Israel. This is neither factual nor logical. The president needs no rationale; Pollard's crime is enough.

"What makes a mockery of Israel," Peretz wrote in closing, "is pretending that Pollard is a man of virtue, a martyr when he wasn't even a gull."

The reaction was swift, and came from quite a number of luminaries.

In a sharply worded letter to the *Wall Street Journal* published on July 5, 2012, former CIA director James Woolsey took issue with Martin Peretz's position and called for Pollard's release:

"Regarding Martin Peretz's 'The Mendacious Movement to Free a Convicted Spy' (op-ed, June 25):

"I recommended against clemency for Jonathan Pollard early in the first Clinton administration when I was director of Central Intelligence, but now, nearly two decades later, I support his release. What would I say has changed? The passage of time.

"When I recommended against clemency, Pollard had been in prison less than a decade. Today he has been incarcerated for over a quarter of a century under his life sentence.

"Of the more than 50 recently convicted Soviet-bloc and Chinese spies, only two—Aldrich Ames and Robert Hanssen—also received life sentences, and two-thirds of these—some 50 enemy spies—served or have been sentenced to less time than Pollard has already served.



Woolsey is a partner in a venture capital fund that invests in energy and biotechnology

“The recently convicted spies for such countries as Saudi Arabia, Ghana, Ecuador, Egypt, the Philippines, and South Korea are serving less than a decade. One especially damaging Greek-American spy, Steven Lalas, received a 14-year sentence, just over half of what Pollard has already served.

“Pollard has cooperated fully with the US government, pledged not to profit from his crime [e.g., from book sales], and has many times expressed remorse for what he did.

“There is absolutely no reason for Pollard to be imprisoned for as long as Ames and Hanssen, and substantially longer than spies from other friendly, allied, and neutral countries. For those hung up for some reason on the fact that he’s an American Jew, pretend he’s a Greek- or Korean- or Filipino-American and free him.

“R. James Woolsey”

The closing paragraph of the letter, which perhaps caused a considerable amount of discomfort to American Jews, many of whom have attempted to avoid public discussion of Pollard’s actions and heritage during the years he’s been in prison, is what piqued my interest. That paragraph contains a very powerful message.

Spying for a Friendly Nation

Robert James Woolsey, Jr., was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma on September 21, 1941. A foreign-policy expert, he served as director of the Central Intelligence Agency under the Clinton administration from February 1993 through January 1995. A neoconservative Democrat, Woolsey has held important positions in both Democratic and Republican administrations.

When I spoke to Woolsey the other week, I asked him how the evolution of his position, and its 180-degree reversal, had come about.

“In 1993, shortly after I took over as head of Central Intelligence, Pollard had been in prison about seven years. The Clinton administration asked several of us what we’d recommend. I asked to see the record, and I read it over thoroughly and talked to some people. I thought that he had in fact stolen some very important material, and the number of years he had already served at that point



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was not enough for me to recommend a Presidential pardon.”

I asked him whether he thought his recommendation made a difference.

“I’m not sure how essential my recommendation was. I’m sure that Clinton must have asked several people. In any case, he was not released. Several years ago, Caroline Glick, the columnist for *The Jerusalem Post*, asked me to look into it again. I did, and said that it was clear that at that point Pollard had served a substantial sentence. I understood that there were three criteria that had been set up somewhere along the process; I’m not sure if they were set up by the trial judge or at sentencing or what. Anyway, the three

criteria for clemency, which I thought were reasonable, were that he express regret for what he did; that he promise not to profit from his espionage, such as by writing a book, for example; and that he help the US government understand everything he had taken. I thought that once those criteria were met it would be an occasion for clemency. That was about four or five years ago.”

Were those criteria met?

“I asked to see the record and I discovered that [Pollard] had expressed contrition in writing; that he had promised not to profit from his actions; and that he had helped the US government understand the substance of what he had stolen. As a result, I wrote the letter to the editor of the *Wall Street Journal*. I was actually preparing to have a letter I had written released to the president, but it was then that the *Wall Street Journal* published the piece by the former editor of *The New Republic*. Although I have agreed with his views in the past, I did not on this occasion.

“When you look at the length of sentences served by others who have been convicted of espionage against the United States, particularly those who spied for friendly, neutral, or allied countries such as the Philippines or Greece, Pollard has been in prison much longer than they; most other cases [involved sentences of] about 10 years. Based on that, I now recommend his release. Whether his release comes about by parole or presidential pardon, I don’t see a reason for me to get into that. But I think he has served more than the length of time in prison that would be appropriate for someone who did the crime he did.”

“Is there anything in the court records that is unavailable to the public for intelligence purposes that may be a reason to keep Pollard behind bars?”

“I read the material in 1993, when it was already six or seven years old, so I don’t know. I don’t think anyone can answer that question without having familiarized himself with the material recently, and [becoming] familiar with the current situation with respect to what vulnerabilities might be exposed. I have a reasonably good memory, but I don’t remember the details of a report I read 19 years ago.”

"Is it true," I asked, "that initially it was believed that he committed a far greater crime than was subsequently discovered?"

"I don't know," was the response. "There were press reports that [Pollard] was blamed for some things that Ames or Hanssen committed. I haven't investigated that. I've been out of the government for 17 years. We caught Ames in '94. It was several years later when we caught Hanssen. It took years to go into their espionage fully and see what it betrayed for other agents. I just don't know."

"You wrote that we should ignore the fact that he's Jewish. How should that statement be interpreted? How has the fact that he's Jewish influenced the situation until now?"

"I don't know how it's influencing things in other people's eyes. In my eyes, the situation should be judged in the same way as for any other spy from a friendly country. We have spies from friendly countries from time to time. I think that what is out of line here is that Pollard is being dealt with more harshly than spies from coun-

tries like Greece and the Philippines. The fact that he's an American Jew has led to a number of articles, including the piece I was critiquing, which went into great detail about some members of the Jewish community in the US and Israel who supported Pollard and had other views that the author didn't agree with. I don't see how any of that is relevant. It's not relevant any more than whatever fraction of South Koreans would support a South Korean spy being released, or of Greek people for a Greek spy. What's relevant is that he has spent more time in jail than most Chinese spies. China is a serious security threat to the US, while Israel is a friend and ally. I just don't think the disagreements over other issues are really relevant to this."

"Do you think the Israeli government is in full support of Pollard?"

"From what I read

in the press, they have supported him, as I would expect. I don't know who's emphasizing it and to what degree. I'm an old Scoop Jackson Democrat who worked for John McCain in the last election, so I'm certainly not an intimate of this administration. I have absolutely no inside knowledge of what they are talking about in conversations with the Israeli government."

Going Nuclear

I took the opportunity to discuss Iran with



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him. "Do you think Iran is the biggest security threat to the US at the moment?"

"I think it's a very serious security threat, because they're working hard to get nuclear-weapon capability. Once they have that, they will throw their weight around in the Middle East even more than they do now. I think that when they say they aren't pursuing nuclear weapons they are executing an ancient diplomatic tactic known as 'lying through their damn teeth.' Israel and the US are threatened by Iranian nuclear capabilities, and not only because they might use them directly. In the next Mideast crisis you could have nuclear weapons in the hands of other countries such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Sectarian differences or border disputes would be far more chaotic and dangerous than we have today.

"I would be concerned about what Iran would do with nuclear weapons, and also with the instability that would follow."

"How would you suggest that the administration curtail Iran's plans?"

"They should recognize that every [American] administration since the Iranian regime came to power in 1979 has spent a lot of time and effort negotiating with Iran in one way or another. It has produced absolutely nothing, and will produce absolutely nothing. The Persians invented the game of chess, and they're good at it. They have one piece, a pawn, moving down the king's road to be converted to a queen, the most lethal piece—a nuclear weapon by analogy. Meanwhile, they're doing other things elsewhere on the board to try to distract their opponent. The whole purpose is to delay until they have a nuclear weapon. I think it's fanciful nonsense to think we'll be able to negotiate with them. We should also help the Syrian opposition, because it would seriously hurt the Iranian regime if Assad collapsed. We should be using every trick in the book to weaken the Iranian regime. I'm not quite ready to say it's time to launch the aircraft, but we certainly have to be ready and able to do that if we need to."



"There's been a lot of talk about when Iran will reach the 'point of no return.' Do you think they've already arrived at that threshold?" I asked.

"It could be very close. A lot of people misunderstand the nature of these curbs with respect to enriched uranium. Once you have 20 percent enriched uranium, which the Iranians say they need for civilian use, they've done about 85 percent of the work necessary to have 90 percent enriched uranium, which is what you'd need for a weapon. So 20 percent enriched is really 90 percent done toward creating a weapon. Accordingly, if they have substantial stockpiles of 20 percent enriched, they are well along the way to developing a weapon. If they are making a very simple weapon, like the one we dropped on Hiroshima, they could be very close to nuclear

capability. If they wanted something a little more sophisticated, it would require compression of plutonium and precise detonation, which would make it a little harder and take a little longer. But I'm afraid that they're already a great deal closer to having something than most people realize. Furthermore, they don't need a highly sophisticated weapon to become a recognized nuclear power. All they have to do is set off a very primitive weapon somewhere in the desert with a little radioactivity and a mushroom cloud and then, like North Korea, they have nuclear capability to some extent."

"How far away from that do you think they are?"

I think it's really kind of ridiculous not to explain that we are talking about a movement that is an outgrowth of one aspect of Islam.

"I don't know. You'd need someone who's more of a nuclear physicist and more up to speed on the latest intelligence to answer that. But I'm afraid it could be within a year or two."

Radical Islam

I share with him, "I had a conversation with Newt Gingrich, and he was very critical of the present administration for not calling the enemy 'Islamic extremists.' He believes that we can't fight the enemy if we don't identify them. Can you comment on that?"

"I tend to use the word 'Islamist' because it emphasizes the political ideological nature. I think it's really kind of ridiculous not to explain that we are talking about a movement that is an outgrowth of one aspect of Islam. If we're trying to understand and deal with the Islamists—whether Shiite or Sunni, the government of Iran, or the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafis—we cannot understand or deal with them without admitting they have something to do with at least one branch of Islam."

Why is that important?

"It would be like trying to explain the Spanish Inquisition without being allowed to say anything about its roots in Catholicism. Or, for that matter, trying to understand the Sicarii of the first century without understanding that they were Jewish, or the peasants' rebellion of the Middle Ages without understanding that Thomas Baker was basically a Protestant Taliban. You can't understand these things unless you talk about them. I think Newt is right. On the other hand, it's important to say that there are many different parts of Islam. I knew the late, marvelous Abdurrahman Wahid a little bit. He went around Indonesia with Indonesia's leading young rock star after he was president, putting on concerts and teaching songs to

children about religious liberty. A number of Muslim sects in the Middle East are not at all like the extremist Islamists in the Muslim Brotherhood or those ruling Iran. We have to be careful not to abandon those I call 'the real moderate Muslims.'"

"How concerned are you about the changes in the Middle East that resulted from the Arab Spring?"

"Revolutions tend to go through several phases. The first act is when enthusiastic young people in the streets get rid of a symbol of tyranny. The second act is when the liberals take charge and set up an institution that most of us would think is fine, such as occurred in the late '70s in Iran or the Mensheviks in Russia in 1917. Some revolutions stop at act two. We were lucky that ours did in the United States, and that the liberal institution of our Constitution has stayed in place. When revolutions get to act three—well, third acts are often very unfortunate, like the Bolsheviks in Rus-

administration would do with respect to energy. Obama has talked a lot about large-scale solar and wind projects as a way of moving away from oil. But in the United States, less than one percent of our electricity comes from oil. It's good to have clean electricity, but big solar and wind farms don't really do anything toward moving away from oil dependency.

"The Republicans talk a lot about drilling domestically for oil. While that would improve our balance of payments, it would cost us tens of dollars a barrel to extract the oil, whereas it costs the Saudis under five. Much of OPEC lifts oil very cheaply, and they have over three-quarters of the world's reserves. We're not going to break OPEC just by drilling more expensive oil in the US, although improving the balance of payments would be fine. I think that neither the Democrats nor the Republicans have a very effective program. I would very much like to



Obama



Romney

sia and the ayatollahs in Iran. It's hard to tell whether a revolution will stop at act two or move on to act three. Right now, it looks like Libya is stopping at act two. We all know that some of the others aren't. Nothing is sure. We don't know which elements of the Arab Spring will stop at act two and which will move on to act three."

Election Time

I asked him to comment on the upcoming election.

"I'm supporting Romney, but I'm not part of any inner circle and have no duties in the campaign. I have some substantial disagreements with the Obama administration and I'd prefer to see Romney win."

"Are your efforts for energy conservation something you're more comfortable with in a Republican administration?" I wanted to know.

"It's hard to tell at this point what each

see us use the products of natural gas, whether methanol—wood alcohol made from natural gas—or some other gas or liquids or biofuels. In any case, I'd like to see affordable substitutes for gasoline and diesel move to the fore. I think a very good way to do that is to require that our vehicles be able to use more than one fuel, one of which ought to be methanol."

Lastly, I asked what he does today.

"I'm a partner in a New York venture capital fund that invests a substantial share of its funds in innovative energy and innovative biotechnology. The energy part is the part I tend to work on the most. I'm also a partner in a startup consulting company that works a lot on energy projects. One way or another, I'm usually working on energy, particularly technology that will improve energy security and will draw us away from energy dependency." □

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