

Advisers cut Carter Center ties over book: Protest statements on the Israeli-Palestinian stalemate

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Fourteen members of a 200-member advisory group to the Atlanta-based Carter Center have resigned in protest over former president Jimmy Carter's recent book and statements on the Israeli-Palestinian stalemate.

At the same time, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, a group that represents nearly 2,000 Reform rabbis, has canceled plans to visit the Carter Center during the group's March convention in the city.

Kenneth W. Stein, an Emory University professor who was the center's first executive director, detailed publicly January 11 why Carter's best-selling book, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, caused him to resign in November as a fellow at the center.

Speaking at a Los Angeles synagogue, Stein said his objections arose from what he called Carter's "gross inventions, intentional falsehoods and irresponsible remarks." Stein, who made Middle East trips with Carter in 1983, 1987 and 1990, coauthored a book with Carter, *The Blood of Abraham*, published in 1985.

Carter's most egregious error in the current book, Stein said, concerned a 1990 meeting with former Syrian president Hafez Assad, which Stein attended. Carter wrote that Assad had said he was willing to negotiate with Israel on the status of the Golan Heights, which Israel has occupied since the Six-Day War in 1967. But Stein, reported the *Los Angeles Times*, said that his own notes of the Damascus meeting show that Assad, answering a question from Carter, responded that Syria could not accept a demilitarized Golan without "sacrificing our sovereignty."

Stein also disputed Carter's statement that Assad expressed willingness to move Syria's troops farther from the border than Israel would be required to do. Stein

asked his synagogue audience: “Why does Carter do that? To make Israel appear intransigent.”

A spokesperson for Simon & Schuster, the publisher, noted that Carter has said “that if there are any factual errors, they will be corrected in subsequent editions.” Carter has defended the book as fair and thorough.

There was no immediate comment from Carter over the resignations of the 14 advisers, although the center’s executive director, John Hardman, thanked them for “their years of service and support . . . in advancing peace and health around the world.” Hardman noted that the advisory board of local business and civic leaders is distinct from the center’s board of trustees.

The advisers’ letter to Carter, released on January 11, accused him of turning “to a world of advocacy, even malicious advocacy.” In portraying the conflict as a one-sided affair, “you have clearly abandoned your historic role of broker in favor of becoming an advocate for one side,” the letter said.

Among those resigning were William B. Schwartz Jr., who served as U.S. ambassador to the Bahamas during the Carter administration, and Michael Coles, the chief executive of Caribou Coffee Company, the nation’s second-largest coffeehouse chain.