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Physicist Stephen Hawking Joins Academic Boycott Against Israel

Hawking Accused of Hypocrisy Over Israel Conference Boycott

Stephen Hawking's decision to boycott an Israeli conference in protest of the state's 46-year occupation of Palestine was derided as hypocritical by some, who pointed out that the celebrated scientist and author uses Israeli technology in the computer equipment that allows him to function.

Hawking, 71, has suffered from motor neuron disease for the past 50 years, and relies on a computer-based system to communicate.

According to Shurat HaDin, an Israel law centre which represents victims of terrorism, the equipment has been provided by the hi-tech firm, Intel, since 1997.

"Hawking's decision to join the boycott of Israel is quite hypocritical for an individual who prides himself on his whole intellectual accomplishment. His computer-based communications system runs on a chip designed by Israel's Intel team. I suggest if he truly wants to pull out of Israel he should also pull out his Intel Core i7 from his tablet," said Nitsana Darshan-Leitner of Shurat HaDin.

Intel could not be reached for comment, but their website quotes Justin Rattner, chief technology officer, as saying earlier this year: "We have a long-standing relationship with Professor Hawking." He added: "We are very pleased to continue to ... work closely with Professor Hawking on improving his personal communication system."

Cambridge University declined to comment on allegations of hypocrisy regarding Dr. Hawking's communications system.

[The Guardian]



Stephen W. Hawking (photo), the physicist and cosmologist, has pulled out of a high-profile conference to be held in Israel during June in order to support an academic boycott of Israel.

Hawking, who is also a cosmologist, astronomer, and

mathematician, is the author of books including the best-seller, "A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes."

The academic and cultural boycott, organized by international activists to protest Israel's policies toward the Palestinians, is a heated and contentious issue; having Dr. Hawking join it is likely to help the anti-Israel campaigners significantly.

"Never has a scientist of this stature boycotted Israel," said Yigal Palmor, the spokesman for Israel's Foreign Ministry.

Organizers of the fifth annual Israeli Presidential Conference, held under the auspices of President Shimon Peres, said they had received a letter from Dr. Hawking, a longtime Cambridge professor, announcing his decision.

Cambridge issued a statement indicating that Dr. Hawking had told the Israelis that he would not be attending "based on advice from Palestinian academics that he should respect the boycott," according to The Associated Press. Earlier, the university's director of communications, Tim Holt, said by telephone that Dr. Hawking, 71, had withdrawn from the Israel trip for health reasons. The university later said it had been told otherwise by Dr. Hawking's office.

Israel Maimon, the chairman of the conference, strongly criticized the professor's decision, saying in a statement, "The academic boycott of Israel is in our view outrageous and improper, certainly for someone for whom the spirit of liberty lies at the basis of his human and academic mission." Mr. Maimon, a lawyer and a former Israeli government cabinet secretary, added: "Israel is a democracy in which all individuals are free to express their opinions, whatever they may be. The imposition of a boycott is incompatible with open, democratic dialogue."

(Continued)

Israel Asks Russia Not to Sell Missiles to Syria



Israel has asked Russia not to sell Syria an advanced air defense system which would help President Bashar Assad fend off foreign military intervention as he battles

a more than two-year-old rebellion, Israeli officials said recently.

Citing US officials, the Wall Street Journal reported that Israel had told Washington that Syria had already begun payments for a \$900 million purchase of the S-300 (photo) and an initial delivery was due within three months.

The S-300 is designed to shoot down planes and missiles at 125-mile ranges. It would enhance Syria's current Russian-supplied defenses, which recently did not deter Israel from launching devastating air strikes around Damascus.

"We have raised objections to this (sale) with the Russians, and the Americans have, too," an Israeli official told Reuters. There was no immediate comment from Moscow or Damascus.

In 2010, Russia backed out of a tentative S-300 sale to Iran that had been in the works for years. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev cited UN sanctions imposed that

year over Iran's defiance of international demands to curb its nuclear program. Israel and the United States, which threaten military attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities if diplomatic alternatives fail, had lobbied Moscow to drop the deal with Tehran.

Israel is alleged to have recently bombed sites near the Syrian capital which intelligence sources said held Iranian-supplied missiles destined for Hezbollah guerrillas in neighboring Lebanon. The heavy presence of Israeli warplanes reportedly in Lebanese airspace suggested they may have eluded Syrian defenses by launching long-range missiles across the border at the targets.

Robert Hewson, an IHS Jane's air power analyst, said that were Syria to receive the S-300 it would probably take several months to deploy and operate the system. But he suggested it would not pose a big challenge for Israel's hi-tech air force. "It's a fairly well-established, fairly well-understood system, so there is a corpus of knowledge, particularly among Israel's friends, about how to deal with this system," he said. Once activated, the S-300 could easily be spotted thanks to its distinctive radar signal, Hewson said, "and from there it's a fairly short step to taking it out. It's not a wonder-weapon."

Cyprus bought the S-300 and eventually positioned it on the Greek island of Crete. Israel, which has close ties with Nicosia and Athens, may have tested its jets against that S-300's capabilities during Mediterranean overflights, Hewson said.

[JPost]

(Continued from previous page)

The Guardian newspaper first reported Dr. Hawking's change of mind and cited a statement by the British Committee for the Universities of Palestine, which The Guardian said was published with Dr. Hawking's approval. It described the cancellation as "his independent decision to respect the boycott, based upon his knowledge of Palestine, and on the unanimous advice of his own academic contacts there."

Dr. Hawking last visited Israel and the Palestinian territories in 2006 at the invitation of the British Embassy in Tel Aviv.

Matthew Gould, the British ambassador to Israel, spoke out against the academic boycott when he received an honorary doctorate from Ben Gurion University of the Negev in December. "We believe that boycotts divide people and reduce understanding," he was quoted as saying, "when what we need is to bring people together."

The Oxford University Student Union decisively rejected a motion supporting a boycott of Israel in a vote in February.

Under pressure from pro-Palestinian activists, a string of high-profile artists have canceled performances in Israel in recent years, among them the Pixies, the American alternative rock band; the British rocker Elvis Costello; and Gil Scott-Heron, the American rap poet and musician who died in 2011.

Other performing artists, like Rihanna, Elton John, Rod Stewart and Madonna, have given concerts in Israel in the last few years. Barbra Streisand is slated to give two concerts in Tel Aviv in June and to perform at the Israeli Presidential Conference in honor of Mr. Peres's 90th birthday this summer.

The conference, called "Facing Tomorrow 2013," is billed as a meeting place for exploring the developments shaping the future of Israel, the Jewish people and the world. Its program includes former heads of state, academics, artists and business executives.

Former President Bill Clinton is to receive an award from Mr. Peres. Soviet-era President Mikhail Gorbachev and former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair are also expected to attend.

[NYTimes and CNN]