

Christian Group Calls on White House to End 'Unnecessary' Crisis With Israel

✖ Christian supporters of Israel flooded the White House this week with e-mails urging the Obama administration to end what some have called a crisis in relations.

Some 20,000 e-mails calling on the administration to "end this unnecessary crisis, return to a more productive approach, and stand with our ally Israel" had been sent in the first 24 hours after Christians United for Israel (CUFI) launched the initiative Tuesday.

"By choosing to employ unprecedented pressure to stop building in Jerusalem, you do not further the cause of peace," the e-mail states. "Instead, you embolden those who wish to place new preconditions on negotiations. And you give great comfort to Israel's enemies-who are also our enemies."

"I've read that in a typical day the White House gets around 100,000 e-mails," said CUFI executive director David Brog. "We hit 20,000 within the first 24 hours. That means if it was a typical day, 20 percent of the e-mails they got, one-in-five, was from us on this issue. That speaks very loudly."

The e-mail campaign came on the heels of a heated exchange between Israel and the Obama administration that began last week while Vice President Joe Biden was in Jerusalem to restart peace talks. During the visit, Israel's interior minister announced that permits would be issued for new homes in East Jerusalem.

The Palestinians want East Jerusalem to be the capital of a

future state, and the Obama administration wanted Israel to stop all settlement building in the area to restart peace talks. Israel in November agreed to a 10-month partial freeze on new settlement building in the West Bank, but exempted Jerusalem from the moratorium because it considers East Jerusalem part of its united capital.

In an effort to get peace talks back on track, the Obama administration on March 12 pressured Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to reverse the approval of the housing units, make a significant gesture toward the Palestinians, and declare that all of the “core issues” in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including the final status of Jerusalem, be included in upcoming talks, the *Washington Post* reported.

Washington canceled a planned trip to the region by its special Middle East peace envoy, former Sen. George Mitchell, “pending the Israeli response.”

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton took a softer tone on Tuesday, saying the U.S. has “an absolute commitment to Israel’s security,” the Associated Press (AP) reported.

In an interview with Fox News Wednesday, President Obama said there was no strain in relations. “We and the Israeli people have a special bond that’s not going to go away,” Obama said. “But friends are going to disagree sometimes. There is a disagreement in terms of how we can move this peace process forward.”

Brog said the change in the president’s tone is welcomed, but the fact that the exchange took place is a cause for concern.

“I think what we saw earlier in the week was troubling,” Brog said Thursday. “We saw a willingness to manufacture a crisis out of something that was not in any way new and which has never before been a barrier to relations or negotiations with the Palestinians. Making an issue out of it now and manufacturing a crisis out of it now was a troubling sign. We

just have to be aware and be wary that this kind of thing may happen again in the future. We hope not."

Although the president got an overwhelming percentage of the Jewish vote in 2008, Brog said those who were suspicious that Obama did not have the "pro-Israel instincts" of previous presidents may have had those suspicions confirmed this week. "I'm not sure," Brog said of the administration's stance toward Israel. "All I can say is we need to be careful and we need to continue to communicate with the White House."

Brog worries that the exchange between the U.S. and Israel contributed to Palestinian riots and protests in Israel this week, and CUFI is urging the president to "be a more careful steward of relations."

Although Brog believes the campaign has been successful, CUFI will continue to forward e-mails to the White House.

"It does look like things are starting to go in a more positive direction," Brog said. "But it doesn't hurt to send the message that I think we're sending, and our message is that if you're going to create an unnecessary crisis with Israel and if you're going to exaggerate what has never been a real barrier to close relations in the past, it's going to be viewed unfavorably by a very large segment of the Christian community."