

Sense of Urgency to Protect Israel at CUFI Summit

I was in a cab heading to Capitol Hill when I heard about the homicide bomber murdering seven Jewish tourists in Bulgaria on Wednesday. The terrorist attack underscored the work done by Christians United for Israel, which held a spectacular “Night to Honor Israel” Tuesday evening, concluding the two-day conference at the Washington Convention Center.

The evening gala was electric, with Rep. Michele Bachmann emphasizing her support for Israel. She called for the American embassy to be moved to Jerusalem (all embassies in Israel are located in Tel Aviv, since the international community considers the Holy City to be disputed territory).

“Jerusalem is without a doubt Israel’s undivided capital!” Bachmann said. One got the feeling that had she become America’s first female president, a genuine affinity for the Jewish state would have arrived at the Oval Office.

The attacks the following morning were an eerie connection to the “Israel Pledge” published by Christians United for Israel. In three parts, the pledge “represents the foundational principles for which this organization stands.” Those planks:

“We believe that the Jewish people have a right to live in their ancient land of Israel, and that the modern State of Israel is the fulfillment of this historic right.

“We maintain that there is no excuse for acts of terrorism against Israel and that Israel has the same right as every other nation to defend her citizens from such violent attacks.

“We pledge to stand with our brothers and sisters in Israel and to speak out on their behalf whenever and wherever necessary until the attacks stop and they are finally living

in peace and security with their neighbors.”

Included in the published materials is the “Defend America, Vote Israel” initiative. A list of those who signed the pledge will be sent to Barack Obama and Mitt Romney.

On Capitol Hill, attendees fanned out to meet with elected representatives, and there seemed to be a sense of urgency among them as they spoke to senators and congressmen. Especially in Washington, there is a heightened sense of concern about a looming showdown between Israel and Iran.

With what seems to be a new push by advocates for the Palestinians—within the American evangelical community—the work on Capitol Hill, and CUFI’s overall network among difference-makers gave this year’s Summit a sober backdrop. This past spring’s “Christ at the Checkpoint” conference in Bethlehem, which featured the Palestinian narrative, stands as a challenger for the likes of CUFI.

David Brog, CUFI’s executive director, seems to understand the stakes quite well. “This is a significant year for us, “ he said. “Significant social media presence. We are reaching, speaking to 1.5 million people. There are days when we’re reaching more people with our message than CNN is reaching people with its message.”

When I met with him Tuesday afternoon, the savvy Brog also directly acknowledged the challenges from those who advocate for the Palestinians.

“Enemies of Israel seem to finally get that the Christian community in America is a group to reach. They recognize even the evangelical church has a liberal influence. They are aggressively targeting churches in America.”

David Walker, CUFI’s eastern coordinator for CUFI on Campus, echoed that concern and understands that the competing claims of Israel and the Palestinians require something of a fluid

strategy.

“Israel is not a sound bite; it’s a narrative,” he said, adding, “If we’re going to have continued support for Israel, we have to reach the millennial generation [95 million people].”

I capped the day visiting with old friends Sarah Stern (EMET), Rabbi Benny Elon (former member of the Israeli Knesset), and Erick Stakelbeck, who’d delivered that powerhouse address the previous day at the Summit. Each of those people, and those in CUFI leadership, are bold in upholding our values.

In these uncertain times—with the forces supporting the Palestinians and their Arab League friends on one side, and the forces supporting Israel on the other side—it is clear that uncertainty about the short-term is on the minds of all. Standing strong was the unofficial theme of this year’s CUFI Summit.