



THE WHITE HOUSE  
PRESIDENT  
GEORGE W. BUSH

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Office of the Press Secretary  
June 12, 2008

## President Bush Participates in Joint Press Availability with Prime Minister Berlusconi of Italy

Salla della Loggia  
Villa Madama  
Rome, Italy

 [Trip to Europe 2008](#)

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7:39 P.M. (Local)

PRIME MINISTER BERLUSCONI: (As translated.) Good evening to all of you, and welcome to our American guests. And of course I would like to extend my warmest welcome to President Bush, who is a friend, a personal friend of mine and also a great friend of Italy. I also wish to thank him because Rome has the very great privilege of being the European capital that President Bush has visited more than any other capital in Europe, if I'm not mistaken. This is the sixth time that he's here in Rome and we are certainly delighted to have always seen that he is an ally who has always helped our country have strong relations with the United States. And I must say that this has never been the case.

I also wish to thank him for all the efforts which he has undertaken during his administration in order to safeguard democracy and freedom. We have been the first government to support one of his initiatives within the U.N., i.e. the community of democracies, which aims at spreading democracy throughout the world. We are both fully convinced that it is only through a real democracy that we can have true freedom, and it is only through freedom that individuals can tap their potentials fully, and this is how we can all help our families overcome any poverty. And obviously this is how people can overcome poverty and therefore become evermore prosperous. And this is what we need to aim for in order to establish long-lasting peace throughout the world. This, in fact, is one of the issues that we have worked on and which we continue to pursue in the future.

We've discussed many issues this afternoon, and we've



also had the opportunity to discuss two programs, two initiatives, which I think have commonalities. The University for Liberal Thinking, we think -- or, are thinking of establishing one of these universities here in Italy, in fact. And I had the opportunity to show President Bush some of these photographs which I already have. And President Bush is thinking of doing something very similar in Texas, and therefore we've decided that we'll perhaps have a professor exchange program in Italy. I've also invited President Bush to come to act as visiting professor, and I've already told him that many of our colleagues, prime ministers, and heads of states, in fact, have okayed that, as well.



I know that you'll all have questions. You obviously are curious about what we've discussed, and that's very legitimate. We've gone over the international situation, and we've also reported some of the decisions taken by our government with regard to our presence in Afghanistan, Kosovo, Lebanon, and also our position vis-à-vis some international developments; and of course Iran is a very, very sensitive issue and is among these.

Now, we are certainly in agreement on all these issues, as we always have been. And I wish to wind up by thanking President Bush wholeheartedly. I thank America, and I, again, was able to address the U.S. Congress a couple of years ago, and this is something that I'll never forget. And the Italians, especially those who are members of my generation, will never forget that this is a country that has sacrificed many lives to save us from totalitarianism, communism, fascism, Nazism, and this is a country that has given us back our dignity and has ensured freedom and well-being for all Italians. Now this is something that I shall never, ever forget.

**PRESIDENT BUSH:** You're right, we're good friends, and I appreciate that very much. I also have enjoyed coming to Rome. I always leave with a little extra culture -- and a little fatter. Thank you for your hospitality.

**PRIME MINISTER BERLUSCONI:** President Bush doesn't know what's for dinner yet this evening.

**PRESIDENT BUSH:** Turning to the meeting, I want to say something about the severe weather that has affected so many of the citizens back in the United States. There's been some terrible storms and a lot of destruction and some death. Throughout the trip I've been updated on the devastation.



I've spoken with the governors of three affected states, Iowa, Wisconsin and Indiana. Our government is in touch with the authorities. We will assist these states in any way we can to help people recover from the devastation. My thoughts and prayers are with the victims of the terrible tornados and flooding, especially those who lost loved ones. We've been inspired by the stories of heroism, neighbors helping neighbors and communities coming together. It's really a tough time for people in

the Midwestern part of the United States. They'll have the prayers of the American people, and we'll help them recover.

We did have a wide-ranging discussion. I appreciate very much the fact that Italy is meeting international obligations. I don't think the citizens at home really understand how many troops Italy has deployed to help troubled spots of the world, and we thank you for that, Mr. Prime Minister. You've got about 8,700 troops in places like Kosovo and Chad.

You've got a very significant presence in Afghanistan. I appreciate very much the fact that the government announced to the parliament, with your instructions, Mr. Prime Minister, that the caveats that had restricted your forces in Afghanistan have been removed, and that you've committed additional Carabinieri to help train the Afghan police. Your Carabinieri are excellent professionals, and they're needed. And I want to thank you for that commitment.

We talked about Iraq, how Iraq is changing for the better, how people are beginning to realize the blessings of a free and peaceful society. And you've been very helpful to the NATO mission there of training as well.

I want to thank you very much for our discussion on Iran. We discussed how we can work effectively together to solve this issue diplomatically. I told the Prime Minister what I said yesterday in Germany, that all options are on the table, but the first choice, of course, is to convince the Iranians that they must give up their ambitions to develop the capacity to make a nuclear weapon, for the safety -- for our own safety, and for the sake of peace. And I'm confident we can continue to work together in a constructive way.



We did talk about the climate change issue. I talked to him about our strategy for the major economies meeting, which will run concurrently with the G8. The United States is committed to convincing those of us that have got economic development and produce greenhouse gases to agree to a long-term goal.

Now, I remind the Prime Minister our objective is to get nations like China and India to sign up to the goal, and that we'll develop our own strategies that will be firm strategies within the U.N. framework. Over dinner we'll talk about the Doha Round, how the United States is committed to completing a successful round at Doha.

And finally, today, I was real proud that Laura represented us at the food agency, the food summit. The United States is committed to helping people who don't have food. Over the next -- in '07 and '08 we'll have committed about \$5 billion to help. I really think our strategy can be a lot more effective than just giving people food; I think we ought to be buying food from affected nations so they develop their own agriculture. I firmly believe it's in the world's interest that nations that prevent the export of food stop doing so.

And we ought to let sound science make the decision about genetically modified crops; be really

interested in helping people in dry areas develop agriculture so they don't have to rely upon the world. And they ought to look at these GMAs with science in mind so that agriculture, sustainable agriculture, can be developed in the places that are -- where the people are suffering.

And so we've had a good agenda, Mr. Prime Minister. It's great to be with you again. And looking forward to one of your famous meals -- after we answer a few questions.

Ready to answer some questions?

PRIME MINISTER BERLUSCONI: Thank you, yes. We've been told that we'll have two questions from our U.S. guests and two questions from Italian journalists. And I would ask the President to just go ahead and start with the American journalists.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Oh, there you are, yes.

Q Mr. President, also back home, the Supreme Court ruled that Guantanamo detainees have rights under the Constitution to challenge their detention in U.S. civilian courts. Doesn't this rebuke of your policy on detainees validate the criticism that Gitmo has gotten all over the world, especially here in Europe?

And for the Prime Minister, sir, who do you want to come see you as the next U.S. President?

PRESIDENT BUSH: First of all, it's a Supreme Court decision; we'll abide by the Court's decision. That doesn't mean I have to agree with it. It's a deeply divided Court, and I strongly agree with those who dissented, and their dissent was based upon their serious concerns about U.S. national security.



Congress and the administration worked very carefully on a piece of legislation that set the appropriate procedures in place as to how to deal with the detainees.

And we'll study this opinion, and we'll do so with this in mind, to determine whether or not additional legislation might be appropriate, so that we can safely say, or truly say to the American people: We're doing everything we can to protect you.

PRIME MINISTER BERLUSCONI: As far as my question is concerned, well, of course I cannot express any preference with regard to an electoral campaign going on in another country. However, I suppose I could express my own personal preference for one of the candidates, the Republican candidate, and this is for a very selfish reason, and that is that I would no longer be the oldest person at the upcoming G8, because McCain is a month older than me, 29th of August, 1936 -- 29th of September, which is when I was born. There you go. (Laughter.)

The second question now from the American journalist, please.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Jeff Stinson.

Q First of all, for you, Mr. President, the Saudis in about 10 days will be hosting a summit on oil prices and supplies. Prime Minister Gordon Brown has said that he will go to this. With \$4 gallon gasoline back home, would you go?

PRESIDENT BUSH: You know, I'm going to go back home and take a look at the intentions and purpose of the meeting. There will be a high-level official, for certain, from my administration. We ought to be at the table as producers. My call on Congress is to recognize the seriousness of the problem, and pass law that encourages exploration for oil and gas in the United States so that down the road an American President will go as a producer, not a consumer.

And our policies, frankly, have been -- are now coming home to roost. For eight years I have been saying to the Congress, we ought to be exploring in ANWR, we ought to be drilling on the Outer Continental Shelf. And the Democratically led Congress has prevented that from happening. And now the prices of gasoline are high, and the American people don't like it. And I can understand why they don't like it. In the interim term, we need to be finding more oil and gas. In the longer-term, we ought to be diversifying away from our reliance upon oil.

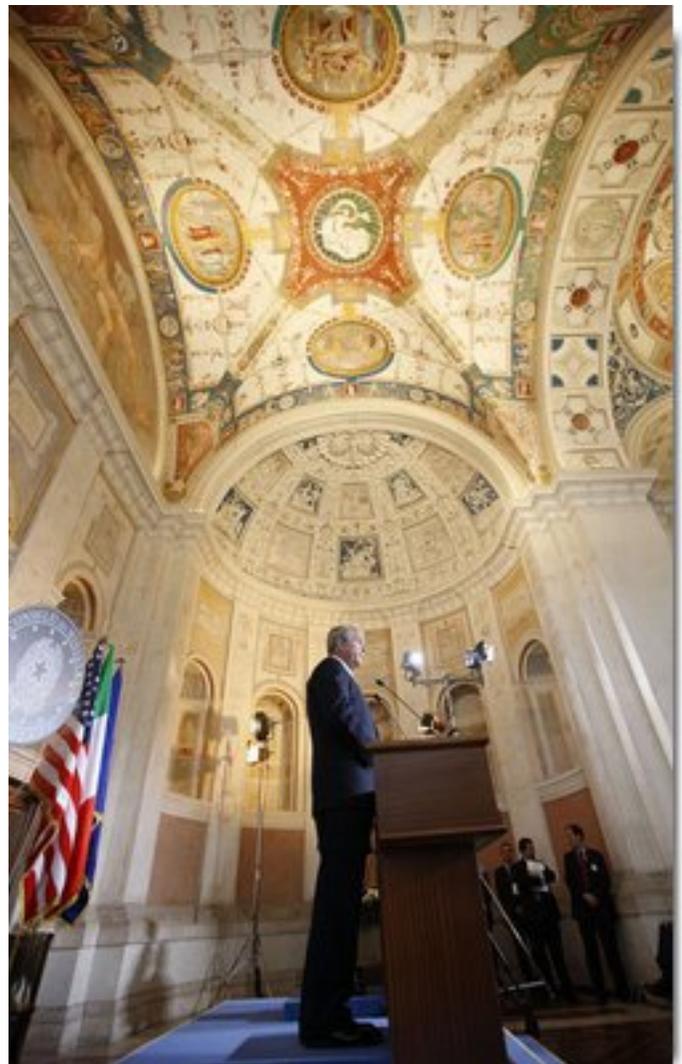
And so, yes, I mentioned it in the meeting. I said it's an interesting idea. And I'm going to get home and take a look. We'll send somebody high-level there.

Thank you.

Q (As translated.) Two very quick questions. One for President Bush and the other for Prime Minister Berlusconi. Now, we know that you are in sound agreement, and President Bush, I think that you were recently interviewed by my newscast, and you said that you were in favor of Italy being part of the 5-plus-1 group, which is handling the Iranian crisis issue.

Now, Stephen Hadley said today that your position is that of waiting to see what might happen. Now, the White House was backing Italy's participation in the 5-plus-1 group, so an answer on that.

And Prime Minister Berlusconi, will there be changes in Italy's presence in Afghanistan and other



trouble spots after your talks with President Bush this afternoon?

**PRESIDENT BUSH:** We discussed the P5-plus-1. And I told Silvio I'd seriously consider it. I also made it clear, however, that all of us, P5-plus-1 or not, need to be sending the same message to the Iranians, which is: Verifiably suspend your enrichment program or else you will face further sanctions and further isolation. And the sad thing about this issue is that the Iranian people are suffering. They could be doing a lot better. Their lives could be much more hopeful, except their government has made the decision to defy the demands of the free world, has made the decision to ignore the IAEA, and has continued to enrich in a way that we think is dangerous.

And so the choice is theirs to make. Foreign Minister Solana is going to see the Iranian here very shortly, and his message is one that is the one I just delivered, and it's -- I hope for the sake of the Iranian people that their government changes course. There is a better way forward.

I want to remind you something about this Iranian issue. Vladimir Putin, our mutual friend, went to the Iranians and said, you have a right to have civilian nuclear power. I have said the same thing publicly, as well. I'm a big believer in nuclear power. I think the best way to deal with climate change is the spread of nuclear power. The best way to become less dependent on foreign sources of energy is nuclear power. And I believe Iran should have civilian nuclear power; I don't believe they can be entrusted to enrich.

And therefore Vladimir Putin went and said -- and he believes that -- and he said, we'll provide the fuel for you, and we'll not only provide the fuel, we'll gather the spent fuel -- so you don't need to enrich. So the argument of the Iranian government that "we have a right to have civilian nuclear power" has been undermined by the Russian proposal.

So it will be interesting to see their decision. But what they need to hear is, is that we are firm in our resolve to prevent them from having the capacity to make a nuclear weapon.

**PRIME MINISTER BERLUSCONI:** And with regard to the question addressed to me, we've offered to join the other European countries, plus China, plus Russia, in order to make our contribution to the negotiations which are underway with the Iranian government. Now, our offer is based on the fact that we know Iran very well from the inside. We have some leading companies that are operating in these countries, and therefore we think that this would be very useful in helping President Bush and Vladimir Putin to pursue the strategy that they've determined for that country.

Now, we obviously need to make sure that nuclear energy is being used for only peaceful reasons. With regard to the sanctions proposed by the United Nations, we have always abided by those. And the presence of our businesses have to do with agreements and contracts, which date back several years.

Now, with regard to our willingness to remove or lift any caveats with regard to Afghanistan, we discussed that. And we also said that we are willing to keep our troops in other fronts, as it were, in other areas -- in Kosovo and Lebanon and wherever it is that our Italian soldiers are today.

And I thank President Bush for his appreciation and acknowledgment of the Italian commitment in these international fronts. And, in fact, there are 40,000 troops that are currently operating in our foreign missions. And we obviously have a turnover, and we always manage to keep that very large number of troops there. And we will continue therefore to pursue this because we are fully convinced that it is extremely important to be able to establish democracy in Iraq. This is a very important country in that region, and we'll obviously continue to pursue our other efforts. And we obviously back any agreement that will help us to overcome any divisions in Lebanon.

And we're also working on the agreements -- on the negotiations for an agreement in Israel and the Middle East. And we are hoping that in all these countries it will be possible to establish peace and that they will certainly be able to become fully established democracies.

Q Good evening to all of you. I also have a couple of questions, one for President Bush -- good evening, sir -- and it is about Iraq. You've spoken about a change in the country. Do you think it might be at all possible to have a withdrawal, maybe a partial withdrawal, of U.S. troops? And if so, when do you think that might be?

My second question is for you, Prime Minister Berlusconi. Today the President talked about the fact that Italian foreign policy might change pace, as it were, thanks to the dialogue that has been established among the political forces in Italy. Do you think that is so, and if you do, how do you think you can uphold the dialogue with the opposition in Italy?

PRESIDENT BUSH: The progress is such on the security front that we are bringing troops home. We anticipate having the troops that went in for what's called the "surge" back home by July. General Petraeus will come back, he'll assess the situation -- come back to the United States -- and make further recommendations. I don't know what those recommendations will be. I have told the American people, though, that conditions on the ground, the situation in Iraq, should determine our troop levels.

And so we are in the process of what's called "return on success." I had the honor of going to see the 82nd Airborne that had been in Iraq, and they came home. And it was -- I am constantly amazed at the courage and the commitment of our troops. I'm also pleased with the courage and commitment of the Iraqi government and the people of Iraq. The situation is dramatically different than what it was a year ago. And the United States and our allies must send a clear message to the Iraqis: We'll stand with them as their democracy continues to evolve and their economy continues to grow.

PRIME MINISTER BERLUSCONI: And now my question. I'm very happy to acknowledge the forecast made by the President of Italy with regard to the attitude being shown by the opposition. And we are happy to think that the opposition might like to support our foreign policy, and our foreign policy will go along the same lines that we pursued in our previous government for those five years.

And this is a pro-European integration foreign policy; it is a foreign policy which is based on the idea that we don't have two western worlds, we don't have Europe on one side and the U.S. and Canada on the other. When we talk about the West, we mean only one West. And our foreign policy aims at being based on cordial relations with an important country such as the Russian Federation.

So our policy is going to require our effort to strengthen the ties and the cooperation between the European Union and the Russian Federation, and it is a policy that will consider NATO to be the vehicle which will help to maintain and uphold peace throughout the world, as it has done over the past decades.

Now what about the wounds in the world, where we know that they're going to need our generosity? Democracies are going to have to help those people who cannot establish freedom on their own. And as I said earlier, we think that this is the only way that we can possibly pursue in order to enable and ensure peace throughout the world, after having fully eliminated terrorism.

Now let me also acknowledge your vision, Mr. President, your policy, and the courage that you have shown throughout all the years of hard work on the part of your administration. You've always expressed your ideas with great courage, your ideals for the future, your vision for the future. I have gotten to know President Bush very well. I consider him to be a very close friend, a very unique person. And when he says no, he means no; when he says yes, it means yes, and he's always shown that he has been able to be very close to those friends of his who have shared his ideals.

I thank you very much, Mr. President, for your friendship between the two of us, on a personal level, your friendship shown to our country, and I thank you for the very courageous role that you have always taken as the leader of the most important country in the world, which is able to determine peace and freedom throughout the world.

Thank you once again. Thank you for being here this evening. And thank you to all our American friends who are accompanying the President. (Applause.)

END 8:06 P.M. (Local)

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