AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

made up of—also of celebrities and personalities from United Nations which will help preparing the elections to be held in January.

And we have discussed also other issues, and over dinner we'll have the possibility of discussing additional initiatives which I think should be taken. Since I have the possibility and chance of talking to the President of the Russian Federation, Putin, and to Tony Blair and other leaders, I also submitted to President Bush the possibility of organizing an international conference on Iraq, which could be held before the elections in Iraq in January.

And I can say that we agreed on all of these future possibilities, and we fully share the strategy which needs to be followed. The West must defend itself against international terror. We can think—we are winning this battle if we remain united. Should we leave, abandon Iraq before a democracy takes hold, should we abandon it before this takes place, then we would leave this country to chaos and to a lengthy—to many, many years of civil war, with thousands and thousands of casualties and victims, and this country would probably be a authoritarian country, a fundamentalist country, and certainly an exporter of terror.

I think we've started the work which cannot be left halfway. We have to complete it and until we are sure that we can guarantee the unlucky Iraqi people democracy and freedom, founded in democracy and freedom.

President Bush. Good job. Thank you, sir.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:18 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Lakhdar Brahimi, Special Adviser to the U.N. Secretary-General. Prime Minister Berlusconi referred to President Vladimir Putin of Russia; and Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom. The Prime Minister spoke in Italian, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Remarks at the Sons of Italy Foundation Gala

May 19, 2004

The President. Thank you all. Please be seated.

Audience member. Mr. President!

The President. I promised the Prime Minister you'd behave yourselves. [*Laughter*] It's great for the son of Barbara to be here with the Sons of Italy. [*Laughter*] Thank you for having me. I'm honored.

It's a privilege for me to join you all as we celebrate the achievements and contributions of Italian Americans. I'm especially pleased to join you in welcoming our great friend the Prime Minister of Italy, Silvio Berlusconi. At this crucial moment in history, America and Italy are standing together as proud friends and strong allies in the cause of freedom. Our two peoples are bound together by affection and respect, and today, Americans feel respect and gratitude for the leadership of the Prime Minister.

I appreciate Charlie; thank you for being the honorary chairman of this event. I thank Phil as well for being the host. I want to thank Joe Sciame, who is the chairman of the Sons of Italy Foundation, Paul Polo, who is the president. Our Ambassador to Italy is with us, Mel Sembler. I appreciate the job he is doing on behalf of the American people. Sergio Vento is with us, who is the Italian Ambassador to the United States. And Sergio, I appreciate your leadership.

I know there are some Members of Congress and the Senate here. I see Santorum and Lieberman, and I appreciate you both being here. Thanks for coming. I would recognize the other Members of Congress by name, but you evidently are not here or have lousy seats. [*Laughter*]

I appreciate the fact that we've got scholarship and award recipients who are with us, and I appreciate the distinguished guests who are here as well.

This annual event is an opportunity to express well justified pride in the Italian ancestry of millions of Americans. The immigrant journey to America could be difficult. Families were often separated, and life in a new country brought its hardships. But this country, the United States, is fortunate that generations of Italian families made the journey. They brought to our country strength of character, a deep faith in God, love of family, and an appreciation of freedom. Without question, America is a better place for the influence of the sons and daughters of Italy.

In so many aspects of American life, it is hard to think of this country without the Italian influence. The life of our country has been richer because of names like DiMaggio and Lombardi, Capra and Sinatra, LaGuardia, Scalia, and Giuliani. Countless of other Italian Americans, less well known, have excelled in every field, from the artisans who carved the figure of Lincoln that overlooks the Mall right here in Washington, to business leaders, to educators, to many good priests and nuns who have kindly looked after Italian parishes here in America. It was an Italian American, Mother Frances Cabrini, whose mission to build hospitals and orphanages for poor immigrants made her America's first saint. Of course, that's the official count—every Italian American man will tell you his mother is the saint. [*Laughter*]

From our Nation's beginnings, the sons and daughters of Italy have been fierce defenders of American liberty. Italians crossed the Atlantic to fight with us in the Revolutionary War. In later struggles, dozens of Italian Americans would receive the Medal of Honor. One of these was Marine Sergeant John Basilone. For 3 days, he battled an entire enemy regiment at Guadalcanal with nothing but his own machine gun, leading General Douglas MacArthur to call him "a one-man army."

Sixty years ago, Allied troops freed Rome, and next month the Prime Minister and I will meet in that city to commemorate its liberation. The sacrifices of that terrible war were shared by both our countries and helped to forge our determination to resist tyranny wherever it exists. For more than five decades, Italy has shown great resolve and courage as a member of NATO. In the past 3 years, America and Italy have been steadfast allies in the war on terror.

The war on terror continues in Iraq. We're standing together in that desperate country as a part of a strong coalition. America appreciates the contributions and sacrifice of nearly 3,000 soldiers that Italy has deployed in that country. We honor the memory of 19 Italians killed by a terrorist's bomb last November and the memory of the Italian soldier killed this week.

And we honor the courage of men like Fabrizio Quattrocchi, a baker who went to Iraq to work as a security guard. He was kidnaped by terrorists and faced his killers with the bravest defiance. Just before he was murdered, he stood up and shouted, "Now I will show you how an Italian dies!" In that moment, this good man from Genoa showed us that and more: He showed us how a hero lives.

Now all our efforts in Iraq are approaching a crucial moment. The Prime Minister and I had a strategy session on how to help the Iraqis realize their liberty. I appreciate his good, strong advice. On June 30th, our coalition will transfer its authority to a sovereign Iraqi government. With the assistance of the United Nations and our coalition, Iraqi citizens are currently making important decisions about the nature and the scope of that interim government.

In time, Iraq will be a democratic nation at the heart of the Middle East. This will send a powerful message from Damascus to Tehran that democracy and freedom can bring hope to lives in every culture. And this advance of freedom will bring greater security to America, to Italy, and to all who love freedom.

As June 30th approaches, the enemies of freedom grow even more desperate to prevent the rise of democracy in Iraq. That's what you're seeing on your TV screens, the desperate tactics of a hateful few, people who cannot stand the thought of free societies in their midst. They're targeting brave Iraqis who are leading toward democracy, such as Mr. Salim, who was assassinated in Baghdad on Monday. They're murdering Iraqi policemen, who stand as symbols of order. They kill foreign aid workers who are helping to rebuild Iraq. They attack our military. You see, their goal is to undermine the will of our coalition and to drive us out before our mission is complete. They will not succeed. They will not shake the will of America or our coalition.

My resolve is firm. The resolve of the Prime Minister of Italy is firm. The resolve of the American people is firm. Our military is skilled and determined. We all understand the stakes are high for America and the world. We will not be intimidated by thugs and assassins. We will win this essential victory in the war on terror.

These are historic times. This is an historic moment. The world watches for any weakness. They will see no weakness in America. They will see no weakness in Italy. We will answer every challenge. U.S. soldiers and Iraqi security forces are systematically destroying the illegal militia in the south of Iraq. Coalition forces are working with Iraqis in Fallujah to end control by Saddam loyalists and foreign fighters. We're building up Iraqi security forces so at some point, they can safeguard their own security. We're flexible in our methods, but our goal is unchanging. Iraq will be free. Iraq will be a democratic nation.

The sons and daughters of Italy who are serving and sacrificing with us in this cause have earned the gratitude of the American people. We're honored to call the Italian Republic one of our closest friends and strongest allies in the world. We are proud of the great Italian heritage in America. I thank each of you for carrying this heritage forward.

I thank you for your warm welcome tonight. And I ask for God's blessing on the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:50 p.m. at the Grand Hyatt Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Charles Gargano, honorary gala chairman; Philip R. Piccigallo, executive director and chief executive officer, Joseph Sciame, chairman, and Paul S. Polo, president, Sons of Italy Foundation; Rudolph W. Giuliani, former mayor of New York City; Iraqi Governing Council President Izz al-Din al-Salim, who was killed in a suicide car bomb attack on May 17 in Baghdad; and former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq.

Interview With Al Zaman

May 18, 2004

Q. Mr. President, I'd like to thank you very much for this opportunity that you provided to Al Zaman newspaper and the Iraqi media. I hope that this meeting and interview with you will be meaningful and will give the Iraqi people the answers they're looking for.

The President. Yes, I look forward to answering your questions. I want to thank you for coming. Welcome to the White House, and welcome to America.

Assassination of Izz al-Din al-Salim/Iraqi Freedom

Q. Mr. President, a few days ago there was an assassination attempt of—an actual assassination of Mr. Izz al-Din al-Salim, and you have described this as a terrorist act. Are there particular groups behind this assassination? And what are they, specifically? Who is behind this assassination attempt?

The President. Well, I don't know. I can't name a person yet. We're looking to find out who did this terrible, terrible deed. The facts will come out. We'll find the truth.

But one of the truths we do know is that there are some people who are trying to stop Iraq from being a free country. They hate the thought of Iraq being free, and so therefore, they're trying to kill people, innocent lives, to shake our will and to frighten Iraqi people. America will not be frightened, and I hope that those who love freedom in Iraq will not be frightened. We must continue to work together to achieve the objective, which is an Iraq which is free, whole, and at peace, so people can realize their potential.

We'll find the truth about who killed this good man, and he will be brought to justice by the Iraqi citizens.

Transition to Iraqi Interim Government

Q. Mr. President, what are your future plans regarding Iraq and the Iraqi people in developing both their political life and their civic life?

The President. Sure. June 30th is an important day in modern Iraqi history, because it's the day that sovereignty will be passed to an interim government. And when America says something, we mean it. So on that day there will be a new government, which will begin—which will replace Mr. Bremer and the Governing Council. At the same time, America will set up an Embassy, headed by a very distinguished diplomat named Ambassador Negroponte. He will have the responsibility for seeing to it that the reconstruction aid approved by the American people through the Congress is spent properly. So in other words, we'll continue with the reconstruction aid.

We will work with the new interim government on security matters. It's going to be