



(Left) Participants in the Roman Roundtable included Hon. Antonio Martino, U.S. Ambassador to Italy Ronald P. Spogli, NIAF Chairman Dr. A. Kenneth Ciongoli, and Italian Senator Marcello Pera. (Right) Ciongoli and Pera chat outside the conference.

Roundtable discussion

explores U.S.-Italy cooperation

By Monica Soladay

Hosted by U.S. Ambassador to Italy Hon. Ronald P. Spogli at his residence, Villa Taverna, this year's NIAF Roman Roundtable was held June 20 in cooperation with the Fulbright Commission's 60th Anniversary distinguished lecture series. The conference brought together internationally known experts who discussed the challenges faced by the United States and Italy and cooperation strategies for today's world.

The round table international relations conference was moderated by NIAF Chairman Dr. A. Kenneth Ciongoli. Spogli, former president of the Italian Senate, Senator Marcello Pera, and former Italian minister of defense Hon. Antonio Martino, addressed the audience during a session on "The United States – Italy: Transatlantic Cooperation and Challenges." The conference particularly focused on military and diplomatic cooperation between our two nations in the face of continued violence in the Middle East.

"With a new Italian government having just recently taken office, and a new American president due to enter the White House in January, this is an excellent moment to take stock of U.S.- Italian cooperation on security challenges," noted Spogli. "But if you expect me to tell you that, because governments are changing, there will be changes in our security cooperation as well, let me tell you right off the bat that you will be disappointed."

Spogli lauded Italy as "our most important ally for projecting security to the Middle East, North Africa and the Mediterranean." Under the NATO flag, the Italian government hosts more than 15,000 U.S. troops and Department of Defense civilian employees plus 17,000 of their family members on six Italian military bases. The troops, officers and personnel at these facilities provide support to U.S. missions in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as key logistical support to NATO missions in the Balkans and the Mediterranean, Spogli said.

Additionally, Spogli highlighted cooperation between the U.S. and Italy in Iraq and Afghanistan, noting that Italy has about 2,500 troops serving in Afghanistan through NATO. With 80 troops on the ground in Iraq, Spogli said Italy is the single-largest contributing nation, in terms of personnel, to NATO's critical Training Mission in Iraq, which was founded in

2004 at the request of the Iraqi interim government.

Expanding on Spogli's points, Pera turned his eye to Islamic terrorism. "After the fall of communism, we in the West... thought that we no longer had serious enemies, that the world was marching on toward a predetermined goal," he told the crowd. "Several recent dramatic events, especially terrorism and the resurgence of fundamentalist Islam, have proved that this was an illusion. Freedom continues to have enemies, because freedom itself is the true enemy of those who are afraid of it."

Martino further explored terrorism, noting that the U.S. and its allies learned a hard lesson during World War II that "the threats of a lunatic must not be ignored." Consequently, Martino urged the U.S. and Italy to take seriously threats from the head of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. "Why shouldn't we believe Ahmadinejad when he says that 'the end of days will come when the last Jew is killed?'" Martino asked. "...We should be taking his words seriously; it's not idle talk."

Citing Italy's relatively low defense spending, Martino argued that Italy needs the U.S. now more than ever. "After all, it can be argued that Europe is demographically moribund, militarily much less relevant than it was the case in the past and economically far less dynamic than it has been," he said. "If you add that European leaders tend to be rather testy in dealing with the U.S. and reluctant to assume their share of responsibility in the field of international security, what is surprising is not that some Americans are impatient with Europe but that they are not more numerous and vocal."

In closing, Martino urged both Italians and Americans to remember that "we are not friends because we are allies, we are allies because we are friends. We share the same values and together, not separately, we make up the West... That's why I am confident that the friendship and cooperation between our two countries will continue to be as strong in the 21st century as it has been in the 20th." ▲

To read the speakers' unedited comments from the NIAF 2008 Roman Roundtable, visit www.niaf.org and select "NIAF Roman Roundtable Conference" under "News & Events."