

# Biden welcomes fascist Italian premier to the White House

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Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni was President Joe Biden's guest at the White House Thursday, the first time that an outright fascist has been accorded such a welcome by the US president since he took office. Press reports noted that other advocates of authoritarian rule, including Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil and Viktor Orban of Hungary, never received such invitations.

But Biden was effusive in addressing Meloni as they sat down for a closed-door meeting, declaring, "It's a delight to welcome the prime minister. We've become friends, and it's good to have you back. Thank you for coming."

Meloni's party, Brothers of Italy, won the largest number of votes in a September 2022 election and now heads a three-party right-wing coalition government, including Forza Italia, the party founded by the late billionaire Silvio Berlusconi as his personal instrument, and the Liga (League), headed by Matteo Salvini, an unrestrained advocate of maximum repression against immigrants and striking workers.

Brothers of Italy was founded by former supporters of the various parties that emerged out of the fascist party of Mussolini, which was dissolved after Italy's defeat and occupation by the United States and Britain in World War II, when Mussolini was allied with Hitler. Mussolini's more than two decades of rule came to an end in 1943, and he was ultimately executed by left-wing partisan forces in 1945.

Meloni claims not to be a member of the "fascist cult," but her ultra-right politics are indistinguishable from those of Marine Le Pen in France or Donald Trump, only substituting Italy for France or America as the focus of her chauvinist appeals.

She espouses the same viciously anti-democratic bigotry against gays and lesbians, acting immediately

to forbid gay couples from registering as parents when they adopted a child. (Only a biological parent may do so.) Other restrictions have followed, as well as attacks on immigrants.

Her government is also moving to outlaw surrogate parenting for Italian citizens living outside the country. It is already illegal within Italy, in keeping with the reactionary dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church.

None of these actions has stopped her from being welcomed into the leadership of the European Union, and next year, since it is Italy's turn, she will be the host for a meeting of the G-7, the exclusive club of wealthy capitalist nations, to be held in the southern province of Puglia, the heel of the Italian boot.

As for Biden's embrace of the most right-wing Italian government since Mussolini, as the *Washington Post* put it, Meloni's "broad acceptance largely boils down to one word: Russia."

Unlike Berlusconi and Salvini and her co-thinkers like Orban in Hungary, Meloni is a fervent supporter of the NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. She has delivered billions in military aid, including the training of Ukrainian troops on Italian soil and traveling to Kiev in a show of solidarity with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Meloni cited this stance in brief remarks as she sat down with Biden to begin the White House meeting. "After the Russian aggression against Ukraine," she said, "we decided to defend international law, and I am proud that Italy from the beginning played its part in it."

"We did it simply because supporting Ukraine means defending the peaceful coexistence of people in states everywhere in the world. Contrary to what some claim, Ukrainian resistance distances a world war and does not bring it closer. As some say, those who

believe in peace should be the first supporters of the Ukrainian cause.”

She then got down to the real business of her trip, which was primarily to discuss Italian interests in Africa, including its former colony of Libya, directly across the Mediterranean Sea. “President Biden knows I take care a lot about Africa, about the role that we can play in these countries that can help us building with them a new relation ...”

This was necessary both to stop the flow of immigrants across the Mediterranean, as well as to open up opportunities for lucrative investments by Italian corporations in the oil and other natural resources of the vast region.

Meloni and the Italian ruling class clearly expect that their support for the US proxy war in Ukraine will be rewarded by American backing for Italian operations in Africa, particularly concentrated in North Africa and the countries of the Sahara and Sahel, further to the south. Italian diplomats told the *Washington Post* that Meloni would focus on “security and energy challenges in the Mediterranean,” which means giving Italy access to the oil wealth of Libya, its former colony, as well as sanctioning the crackdown on migration by Italy and the EU.

Biden was expected to extract in return both continued Italian backing for Ukraine but also a quick withdrawal by Italy from the Chinese-led Belt and Road Initiative. In 2017, under Premier Giuseppe Conte of the populist Five Star Movement, Italy became the first member of the G7 to enlist in the Chinese infrastructure building project, giving Beijing its deepest incursion into Western Europe. Since then, Washington has been exerting increasing pressure on Italy to pull out.

John Kirby, spokesman for the National Security Council, said before the meeting that “The president has enjoyed working with her. ... Certainly on issues of foreign policy, there’s been a lot of overlapping and mutually reinforcing approaches that we’re taking with Italy. ... Italy is a NATO ally, and they are a very competent NATO ally, and they’ve been a tremendous supporter of Ukraine.”

He suggested that Biden would not raise issues of domestic policies with Meloni. “The Italian people get to decide who their government is,” Kirby said. “It’s a democracy, and the president respects that.”

One sign of this deference to Meloni’s ultra-right policies at home was the decision not to hold a joint press conference, usually held after the visit of a leader from a major country, where Biden and his guest would stand side by side and alternate taking questions from the media of both countries.

It is likely that both Meloni and Biden rejected such an appearance out of concern that the press might raise embarrassing questions about domestic policies in Italy. At a subsequent press briefing, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre was peppered with questions about why there was no joint press appearance. But she could give no coherent answer, claiming this was a decision worked out between the Italian embassy and the US State Department, not by her office.

While the transactions being discussed behind closed doors at the White House largely concerned foreign policy, Biden’s meeting with Meloni has significance in terms of US domestic politics.

Apologists for the Democratic Party claim that it is the last bulwark against a takeover of American politics by the fascistic Republicans led by Donald Trump. But Biden is perfectly willing to welcome an Italian version of Trump to the White House, provided her government is in sync with US foreign policy in relation to its major targets, Russia and China.

Meloni was an honored guest speaker at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in both 2019 and 2020, speaking on the same day as then-President Trump in 2019 and reportedly gushing on social media while listening to his remarks. She regards NATO and the United States as her allies against the threat of communism, which primarily means the Italian working class.

Biden would have no problem working with similar forces in the United States provided they lined up, like Meloni, behind the US war drive against Moscow and Beijing.



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