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EXCLUSIVE: Controversial Trump Aide Sebastian Gorka Backed Violent Anti-Semitic Militia

By [Lili Bayer](#)

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[Getty Images](#)

As a Hungarian political leader in 2007, Sebastian Gorka, President Trump’s chief counter-terrorism adviser, publicly supported a violent racist and anti-Semitic paramilitary militia that was later banned as a threat to minorities by multiple court rulings.

In a video obtained by the Forward of an August 2007 television appearance by Gorka, the future White House senior aide explicitly affirms his party’s and his support for the black-vested Hungarian Guard (Magyar Gárda) — a group [later condemned](#) by the European Court of Human Rights for attempting to promote an “essentially racist” legal order.

Asked directly on the TV interview program if he supports the move by Jobbik, a far-right anti-Semitic party, to establish the militia, Gorka, appearing as a leader of his own newly formed party, replies immediately, “That is so.” The Guard, Gorka explains, is a response to “a big societal need.”

Hungary’s official military, he stressed, “is sick, and totally reflects the state of Hungarian society.... This country cannot defend itself.”

Sebastian Gorka Announces Support for a Violent, Anti-Semitic H...



As he speaks during the program, a banner headline reading “UDK Supports The Hungarian Guard” runs across the screen. The Hungarian acronym is a reference to Gorka’s own party, known in English as the New Democratic Coalition.

Both the interviewer and Gorka refer to the move to establish the paramilitary outfit as “the Fidesz-Jobbik initiative,” reflecting Gorka’s contention that Fidesz, a larger right-wing party, was quietly backing Jobbik in its effort.

Gorka’s affirmation of support for the far-right militia echoed statements his party posted on its website that same month, backing the Guard’s establishment and referring to it as “the Fidesz-Jobbik initiative,” an apparent attempt by Gorka and his party to somewhat distance themselves from the controversial militia at the same time. In [one such statement](#), a party faction indicated its awareness of the Guard leaders’ extremism, declaring bluntly, “We support the establishment of the Hungarian Guard despite the personalities involved.” [Another August statement](#) spoke more generically of “a need for guards” in discussing the new militia’s establishment.

The following month, another party [statement](#) attacked critics of the Guard, alleging that they opposed the militia to please U.S. Rep. Tom Lantos, a Hungarian-born Holocaust survivor who had proposed legislation to bar Guard members from entering the United States. Lantos, a California Democrat, cited the Guard’s affinity for “the fascist Arrow Cross regime” that ruled Hungary at the end of World War II, when it participated in the deportation of Hungarian Jews into Nazi hands and killed thousands more.

Above, the Arrow Cross militia marches in Budapest during World War II. Below, the Hungarian Guard militia assembles in Budapest at Hero’s Square in October 2007.

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On the TV presentation, when his interviewer notes the ways in which the Guard “echoes October 1944, or sometime around then” through its uniforms, arms training and street marches, Gorka strongly defends his party's support for the Guard, though not without some ambivalence.

“I'm not saying it's a good solution, but neither shooting training nor using the Arpad flag [is] unconstitutional,” he replied. The Arpad red-and-white flag, a nationalist symbol emblazoned on the Guard's uniform, was also used by the Arrow Cross during World War II.

As for the Guard's black vests, which the interviewer cited as reminiscent of the Arrow Cross's black shirts, Gorka said: “When the police shows up to deal with bank robbers in black uniforms, who talks about a fascist police in Hungary? Nobody! Now, it is possible that when they put together all these things, the effect in the end will be very bad, but it's not my problem. It would be Fidesz and Jobbik's problem.”

During the 11-minute interview, which aired on Hungary's Echo TV, Gorka dismissed concerns expressed by the Jewish community, and in particular fears that the Guard provoked among Hungarian Holocaust survivors. As is often the case in Hungary, the interviewer refers to Holocaust survivors obliquely, as “people who experienced 1944” — when hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews were deported to Nazi concentration camps — or as those who experienced “the Arrow Cross regime.”

Many such people, the interviewer noted, “are saying now is the time to leave Hungary. So in effect [the establishment of the Hungarian Guard] is facilitating the flaring-up of anti-Semitism?”

“This is a tool,” Gorka replied. “This type of accusation is the very useful tool of a certain political class.”

Sebastian Gorka: What Is The Evidence, And Why Does It Matter?

Dan Friedman March 17, 2017 Edit

The Guard was well known for its members' anti-Semitism. Members often attended memorial ceremonies for World War II-era Hungarian fascists. In a 2008 speech, István Dósa, who served in the Guard as a high-ranking captain, referred to Jews as “Zionist rats” and as “locusts” while also discussing “Zionist-Bolshevik genocide” and calling Hungarian Jews “nation-destroyers.”

In his current position as deputy assistant to the president, Gorka, who immigrated to the United States and became an American citizen in 2012, serves as Trump's chief consultant on counter-terrorism issues, and in particular on fighting jihadists. He has characterized the United States in this effort as a country "at war" and, in a recent interview, reaffirmed Trump's call during his presidential campaign for surveillance of American Muslim communities. Neither Gorka nor the White House responded to emailed requests from the Forward for a response to the information the video reveals about Gorka's support for the Guard.

Critics have questioned Gorka's expertise in the field of terrorism, which was the subject of his doctoral thesis at Budapest's Corvinus University, where he received his doctorate. Some have cited serious flaws in his thesis and noted his failure to publish any scholarship on the issue in peer-reviewed journals. But his August 2007 TV interview also raises questions about his understanding, at least at that point in time, of basic security structures and legal realities in key countries that are fighting terrorism.

Asked during the interview if it was "normal" for a political party in "developed democracies" to establish "in reality, a paramilitary group," Gorka responded: "Well it depends on which country. If we look at the Swiss or Israeli example, then it's completely natural.... Even in America, where the largest and wealthiest military exists, there are such programs where people can access weapons almost for free if they attend an organized shooting training and always belong to an organization."

Gorka dismisses the interviewer's objection that the units in these countries — military reserve units in Israel and Switzerland, or, in the United States, National Guard forces — "are in effect under the military's control."

"It is clear after the disturbances in Hungary last year [that] a need has arisen" to which Jobbik is responding, Gorka says.

Gorka discusses his support for the Hungarian Guard on Hungary's Echo TV in August 2007. The banner across the screen is translated from the original Hungarian.

Echo TV

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Jobbik, which announced its establishment of the Hungarian Guard in June 2007, has a long record of anti-Semitic and anti-Roma positions and statements. One of the Guard's founding members was Gábor Vona, Jobbik's leader. Another was András Bencsik, editor-in-chief of the Hungarian weekly newspaper Magyar Demokrata, which had been condemned by the U.S. State Department three years earlier for its longtime publication of "anti-Semitic articles and featured articles by authors who have denied the Holocaust."

The organization's declared aim was to defend "ethnic Hungarians," which implicitly excluded Hungary's minority populations, since, its founders argued, Hungary lacked other means of "physical, mental or spiritual self-defense."

The Guard was formally banned in 2009, with the country's highest court ruling that its anti-Roma marches violated the rights of the Hungarian Roma community. In 2013, two of its members were found guilty in a string of racially motivated murders of Hungarian Roma, including the killing of a 5-year-old, committed in 2008 and 2009.

In 2013, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that Hungary's unusual blanket ban on the group was legal. "The movement's activities and manifestations were based on the racial conflict between Hungarian majority and Roma minority," the court ruled.

EXCLUSIVE: Nazi-Allied Group Claims Top Trump Aide Sebastian Gorka As Sworn Member

Lili Bayer and Larry Cohler-Esses March 16, 2017 Edit

Gorka's interview was aired about three weeks before the Guard's first official swearing-in ceremony. But at the time, many observers and Jewish groups were already protesting against the Guard and calling for a ban.

In an August 2007 open letter, World Jewish Congress President Ronald S. Lauder and European Jewish Congress President Moshe Kantor warned then-Hungarian Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány that the "impending creation of an armed guard, under the false guise of 'sporting and shooting clubs,' with uniforms resembling those worn by fascists in World War II" was a danger to democracy and should be stopped.

Gorka's party, which he had launched only recently, was competing intensely with Jobbik and Viktor Orbán's Fidesz party at the time. While confirming his support for the Guard, its uniforms and its paramilitary nature, when asked whether the Guard would, indeed, resolve the problems he outlined in Hungary's military and society, Gorka remarked: "Ah, it's not that sure. With some kind of presentable organization, or several organizations, it could be possible."

Following the interview, the New Democratic Coalition posted a link on its own party website, under the heading "UDK Supports The Hungarian Guard: Sebestyen [Sebastian] Gorka on EchoTV." But nearly two weeks later, the party complained in a post on its website that his comments had been "misinterpreted."

A posting of the website of Gorka's party, the New Democratic Coalition (UDK) announces its support for the Hungarian Guard.

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During the TV exchange, Gorka’s interviewer alluded to a popular conspiracy theory in Hungary regarding Israeli security companies maintaining an armed presence on Hungarian territory to back the government. “As you all mention in the analysis you wrote as well, Israeli-owned security companies which also do government tasks have to be liquidated,” the interviewer told Gorka.

The coalition’s leader did not contradict his interviewer’s account.

The televised interview was not the only time Gorka defended the Guard. A month later, [in an interview](#) with a Hungarian online portal, Gorka said that when it comes to the Guard, “it’s not worth talking about banning or a national security risk.”

Gorka left Hungary shortly thereafter, as his efforts to build a career in politics there failed. In 2008, after a report surfaced in a German-language publication about his support for paramilitary organizations, he wrote a letter denying that he had ever supported the Guard.

EXCLUSIVE: Senior Trump Aide Forged Key Ties To Anti-Semitic Groups In Hungary

[Lili Bayer](#) February 24, 2017 [Edit](#)

The new information about Gorka’s support for the Guard comes on the heels of [earlier news](#), first reported by the Forward, about his partnership with prominent former members of Jobbik in founding the New Democratic Coalition. The Forward has also reported on Gorka’s writing for a far-right, anti-Semitic Hungarian publication, Magyar Demokrata — whose editor-in-chief was one of the Guard’s founding members.

In [a subsequent report](#), leading members of the Vitézi Rend — an organization the U.S. State Department has designated as having been under Nazi control during World War II — told the Forward that Gorka was a sworn lifetime member of their organization. Gorka has on several occasions worn a medal associated with the Vitézi Rend in public, including to an inauguration ball this past January. Members of the Vitézi Rend who apply for visas to come to the United States are “presumed to be inadmissible,” according to the State Department’s Foreign Affairs Manual. Gorka has not responded to inquiries about whether he disclosed his own Vitézi Rend affiliation when he immigrated to America or when he applied for U.S. citizenship.

There is no evidence that Gorka himself has ever engaged in overtly anti-Semitic acts or participated in any of the Guard's activities. But Gorka and some of his political supporters have argued that he has fought anti-Semitism throughout his career. The newly available video footage signals that Gorka not only failed to fight anti-Semitism, but also supported an openly intolerant paramilitary group and publicly rejected the Jewish community's concerns about their own safety and the safety of other minorities due to the group's founding.

Watch the full interview below:

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