



## Sebastian Gorka, the West Wing's Phony Foreign-Policy Guru

**Gorka's a former Breitbart editor with Islamophobic views and ties to neo-Nazi extremists – and he has the ear of the president**

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The Breitbart News headline, back in November 2014, rang like a five-alarm fire bell: MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD OVERRUNS NATIONAL CATHEDRAL IN DC. Its author, Breitbart's national-security editor, was Dr. Sebastian L. v. Gorka, who currently occupies a top White House post as "deputy assistant" to President Donald Trump. And like just about anything Gorka has said or written, the Breitbart headline was wrong in every way. It wasn't the Muslim Brotherhood at all, and no one overran anything. Despite his characteristic hyperventilation, the event in question was a dignified, interfaith prayer service organized jointly by the leaders of Washington National Cathedral and five mainstream Muslim organizations seeking to unite "voices of moderation."

But critics charge that Gorka's hyperbole and his hands-off relationship with the truth have lately sent his stock skyrocketing with the president. Renowned for his disdain for the media and his blithe readiness to defend Trump to the last tweet, Gorka – who apparently tools around Washington in a Mustang with a license plate that reads ART [OF] WAR – has become a nearly ubiquitous presence on television and radio as a spokesman for the White House. "Did you see Gorka?" Trump reportedly said after Gorka took part in figurative fisticuffs on CNN. "So great. I mean, really, truly great!"

Gorka views himself as a "utility infielder, especially in the field of counterterrorism," and claims to provide behind-the-scenes advice to Trump on how to fight terrorism, while serving under the wing of Steve Bannon, his former boss at Breitbart. "It's surreal and quite horrifying that someone who's such an amateur has reached such heights," says David Ucko, associate professor in the Department of War and Conflict Studies at National Defense University. Adds Michael S. Smith II, a veteran terrorism analyst who's had unpleasant run-ins with Gorka, "This

is not somebody who should be working anywhere near the White House." Even more bluntly, a colleague of Smith's, Cindy Storer, an ex-CIA terrorism analyst, said, "He's nuts."

It's not easy to find out exactly what Gorka does in the White House for his \$155,000 salary. In terms of policy, according to *The New York Times*, Trump's recent pro-Saudi Arabia tilt was "driven by two advisers, Stephen K. Bannon and Sebastian Gorka." But a former top White House official tells *Rolling Stone*, "His only job appears to be to go on talk radio or Fox News to defend the indefensible." That he does constantly, spinning the administration's confused, roller-coaster ride of a foreign policy; slamming "the fake-news industrial complex," on CNN; supporting a Supreme Court decision as "a slap in the face" to critics of Trump's Muslim travel ban, on talk radio; and, on MSNBC, explaining Donald Trump Jr.'s secret meeting with a team of Russians peddling dirt as "a massive nothingburger."

Early this year, his wife and partner, Katharine Cornell Gorka, took up a post at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, where she is now an adviser to the department's policy office. Almost as soon as they entered the Trump administration, the Gorkas absorbed withering incoming fire from national-security experts and in a series of exposés in LobeLog.com and *The Forward*, a progressive Jewish periodical. By late April, White House sources told *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* that Gorka was on the way out. Yet so far – likely thanks to support from Bannon – both Gorkas have defiantly stayed in place. According to one insider, Gorka's dubious qualifications may have saved him. "The White House tried to find him a job at another agency," says the source. But no luck: "Nobody wanted him."

In person, Gorka is always nattily attired, sporting a distinguished-looking splash of facial hair to go with his precise, deep-baritone, British-accented English. Insisting everywhere that he be referred to as "doctor," Gorka began his rise with a 2008 Ph.D. awarded by little-known Corvinus University of Budapest, an institution that several scholars who spoke to *Rolling Stone* described as having a questionable reputation. "Corvinus is pretty low-tier, maybe third- or fourth-tier," says Daniel Nexon, a scholar at Georgetown University who has reviewed Gorka's dissertation. "He might as well have mail-ordered his Ph.D." Nexon ran its text through plagiarism software and found that portions of it were "repurposed."

"Gorka's thesis is about as legitimate as if he had been awarded it by Trump University," says Andrew Reynolds, a professor at the University of North Carolina who looked into Gorka's background. He says that of the three people who served as endorsers of Gorka's Ph.D., two didn't have any academic credentials whatsoever, and a third was György Schöpflin, a right-wing Hungarian politician who, Reynolds adds, was a Gorka family friend and once suggested studding a Hungarian border fence with pig heads to send a message to Muslim refugees. (Gorka said later that Schöpflin was "making a joke"; Gorka, whom *Rolling Stone* reached out to repeatedly, declined to comment for this article.)

Perhaps even more worrisome, Gorka's thesis proposed a dramatic restructuring of the national-security apparatus to create a police state. He suggests a radical reform of "internal barriers between the police force, the army and various intelligence services." This could also be seen as the start of a Gestapo-like, all-powerful national system of repression. "That's about as Nazi

Germany- or Soviet Union-like a proposal as I've ever heard," says Patrick Eddington of the conservative Cato Institute. "The net effect would be to suspend the Bill of Rights, if his proposal ever saw the light of day."

During the decade and a half Gorka spent in Hungary, he was enmeshed in a web of ultraright, anti-Semitic and even Nazi-like parties, politicians and media outlets. For most of the 2000s, the Gorkas ran a think tank in Budapest called the Institute for Transitional Democracy and International Security (ITDIS). For funding, Gorka received at least \$27,650 in U.S. federal grants, according to government records. "We worked for ourselves," Katharine Gorka tells *Rolling Stone*.

In the mid-2000s, Hungary's left-leaning government found itself besieged by right-wing street protests. Many of the protesters were affiliated with ultranationalist leader Viktor Orbán, who's been called a "neo-fascist dictator" by Sen. John McCain, and who leads Hungary today. Gorka served as adviser to Orbán, and later wrote for an overtly anti-Semitic newspaper, *Magyar Demokrata*. By all accounts, Gorka's own writing and statements at the time included no anti-Semitic comments, and neither *The Forward* nor other reporters who've investigated his background in Hungary have turned up any evidence that Gorka himself participated in anything that could be called anti-Jewish. "What you can say for sure is that he was allied with people who have very extremist views," says Péter Krekó of the Political Capital Institute in Hungary. "He was an opportunist, and he cooperated with figures who were very marginal."

For his part, Gorka denies any knowledge of the anti-Semitic backgrounds of his colleagues. Katharine Gorka says that all of the charges about her husband's years in Hungary have been debunked. "He has never in any way been associated with the far right," she says. "One of the reasons why we left Hungary was because of Sebastian's discomfort with the far right."

Yet these denials are hard to square with Gorka's family background. Having fled Hungary for London after 1956, Gorka's parents joined a raucous mix of anti-Communist, right-wing exiles, including those who belonged to the Order of Knights (Vitézi Rend), an organization with an unsavory past. Vitézi Rend was created by the Nazi-backed ruler of Hungary, and many of its members were involved in the slaughter of Jews during the Holocaust. Today, members of the Order fall under an immigration watch by the State Department on groups that have violated human rights. Gorka and his father were reported to have joined (Katharine says this is false). And in photographs, Gorka has been spotted sporting a Vitézi Rend medal that, he insisted, he wore only to honor his father.

**Since this affiliation was exposed by *The Forward***, Gorka has been engulfed in a storm of criticism, with members of Congress writing the White House to demand that he be fired. "Our main concern is that Dr. Gorka is a member of certain anti-Semitic Nazi groups such as Vitézi Rend," says Rep. Jerry Nadler, a New York Democrat. "There's a lot of evidence that he was a member: He swore a lifelong loyalty, he's used the honorific initial v., he's been photographed with some of their insignia." So far, Nadler and his colleagues haven't heard back from the White House.

In 2008, the Gorkas moved to the United States. They established a network of organizations in the Virginia area: the Westminster Institute, the Council on Global Security, the Threat Knowledge Group and TheGorkaBriefing.com. According to Katharine Gorka, the council was a nonprofit "doing work on extremism," and the Threat Knowledge Group was a business "providing training to law enforcement and the military." Katharine founded the Westminster Institute as a think tank to do research "on the rise of radical Islam."

In his published biographies, Gorka provides a long list of places where he peddled his views, including the FBI, the U.S. Army Special Operations Command, the National Counterterrorism Center, West Point and more. Gorka's most-touted position was a two-year stint at Marine Corps University in Quantico, Virginia. James Joyner, a retired Army officer and associate professor of strategic studies at MCU, who saw Gorka in action, wasn't impressed, saying that Gorka was hardly an academic: "He's kind of the guy you see on TV. He's bombastic." Gorka's views, adds Joyner, were well out of the mainstream. "To the Bush administration's credit, one thing that they got right was, they said, 'This is not a war against Islam.' But Gorka is like, 'No, these people are very dominant within the religion, their religion leads this way, and even though most Muslims aren't terrorists, they at least lean that way.' And that's wrong."

In many lectures, Gorka lumps together Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, Hamas, Hezbollah, the Taliban, Iran's clerical rulers and the Muslim Brotherhood in one box: as proponents of a world-dominating Muslim caliphate that must be crushed. Even the differences between Sunnis and Shiites don't faze him. "Today, the Global Jihad has two brands," he wrote for Breitbart. "It is a war of the 'Sunni Coke' versus the 'Shia Pepsi.'" Gorka insists that everyone in Washington is wrong, and only he understands the fearsome nature of the enemy. "He is speaking the truth, and if you disagree with it," Joyner says, "you're an idiot."

Mia Bloom, a widely published expert on terrorism and a professor at Georgia State University, recalls an encounter with Gorka on a terrorism panel at the Defense Intelligence Agency. "Gorka knows virtually nothing," she says. "His views are a mixture of Islamophobia and racism. We'd been given questions in advance, we were paid for our appearance, and he just bullshitted his way through it – and he brought books to sell!" All of which is why Paul Pillar, a former national intelligence officer for the Middle East, says Gorka is too dangerous to be allowed to remain in the White House: "Gorka represents an intolerance that offends American values and is likely to gain the United States more enemies than friends."