

Trump welcomes Hungarian far-right prime minister Orbán to the White House

Clara Weiss
14 May 2019

On Monday afternoon, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán was welcomed by US president Donald Trump at the White House. It was the first time in 20 years, since Bill Clinton welcomed Orbán in 1998, that the leader of the Hungarian far-right government has met with a US president in Washington.

At a brief session with reporters after the discussion with Orbán, Trump praised the latter saying the Hungarian leader had “done a tremendous job in so many ways,” and that he was a “tough man,” that had done “the right thing ... on immigration.”

Trump continued, asserting that Europe had “tremendous problems” because other governments had handled immigration differently “than the prime minister.”

Orbán added, “We are proud to stand together with the United States on illegal migration, on terrorism,” and in helping “Christian communities all around the world.” Both Trump and Orbán stressed that the primary goal of their meeting was “to strengthen our strategic alliance.”

The visit, following an invitation by the White House, took place just 11 days before the European elections in which far-right parties like Orbán's party Fidesz are expected to make significant gains. More than any other head of government in Europe, Orbán is associated with the rise of far-right, authoritarian movements in Europe over the past decade.

Under his second term as prime minister since 2010, the Hungarian government has cracked down on freedom of the press and freedom of speech, significantly expanded the powers of the prime minister and president and undertaken far-reaching efforts at falsifying history.

The glorification of the fascist Horthy regime, which was in an alliance with Hitler's Nazi Germany during

World War II, has become official state policy. The government-sponsored “House of Terror” in Budapest deliberately minimizes the Nazi genocide of 6 million European Jews, including about half a million Hungarian Jews, in World War II, claiming instead that “Communist occupation” was in fact worse than the crimes of the Nazis and those of the Horthy regime and insinuating that the Communist movement was led above all by Jews.

Since 2015, the Orbán government has spearheaded far-right rhetoric against and attacks on refugees by governments and parties throughout Europe. Orbán has publicly endorsed the anti-Semitic conspiracy theory of “The Great Replacement,” widely promoted within European and international far-right and fascist circles, that claims that the white Christian population of Europe is being replaced by Muslims coming from Arab countries and Africa.

This theory is considered one of the main ideological influences on Brenton Tarrant, the fascist perpetrator of the recent terrorist attack in New Zealand, who named his manifesto “The Great Replacement.” In a speech last year, Orbán said: “We must state that we do not want to be diverse. We do not want our own color, traditions and national culture to be mixed with those of others.”

Trump's meeting with Orbán was a deliberate signal that his administration is actively endorsing and promoting the European far-right in the upcoming elections and the coming period more generally. In the US itself, the Trump administration has been systematically fostering fascistic forces, seeking to build an extra-parliamentary movement that could be mobilized against the working class.

The visit also indicates that Steve Bannon, the one-time head of Trump's 2016 campaign and later a top

White House aide, remains a central figure in his counsel. After leaving the White House in 2017, Bannon turned much of his attention to building what he calls “The Movement,” an attempt at an alliance of the different far-right parties and forces in Europe.

Orbán has explicitly endorsed Bannon’s initiative. In the fall of 2018, Bannon announced that he would be Orbán’s advisor in the European elections, and that both already worked with the same pollster, John McLaughlin. Bannon argued that the European elections would evolve around a clash between pro-EU members like Germany and countries like Hungary with EU-skeptic, extreme nationalist governments.

Apart from Bannon, another former Trump adviser, Sebastian Gorka, also maintains close ties to the Hungarian far-right. In early 2018, Trump appointed his close friend David Cornstein as US ambassador to Hungary, who has since openly defended the Orbán government. In addition, the news website *Politico* reported a number of organizations funded by the Hungarian government in Washington are working with circles around the Trump administration.

The shift of the Trump administration toward a much closer strategic alliance with the far-right Hungarian government is bound up with its push toward a war with Iran, which puts the US at loggerheads with leading imperialist powers in Europe like Germany, and the preparations for war with China. (See also: Iran conflict intensifies transatlantic tensions)

When asked a mildly-worded question about Hungary’s “democratic backsliding,” Trump interjected while Orbán beamed: “They’re a member of NATO, and a very good member of NATO, and I don’t think we can really go into too much of a discussion, unless that’s mentioned.”

Monday’s meeting follows an earlier visit by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to Budapest in February, where he dined with Orbán just before he flew to Warsaw for a war summit, that was directed against Iran and held with the support of the far-right Polish Law and Justice (PiS) government and Israel’s Benjamin Netanyahu. In the spring, the US and Hungary renewed the Defense Cooperation Agreement on the sidelines of events marking the 70th anniversary of the founding of NATO.

During his visit in Budapest, Pompeo emphasized the dangers of Chinese influence in the region and said:

“Too often in the recent past, the United States was absent from Central Europe. That’s unacceptable. Our rivals filled those vacuums.” Hungary has developed extensive economic ties with both Russia and China in recent years.

Hungary is considered a key country in Europe for the realization of China’s One Belt, One Road initiative, which US imperialism regards as a major challenge to its geopolitical and economic interests. In April, Orbán travelled to Beijing to attend the Belt and Road Forum where he met with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang. Orbán stressed that Hungary was ready to resist “all outside ideological pressure” and continue the cooperation with the Chinese project. The countries’ foreign ministers also signed a five-point development plan to advance bilateral relations.

The journal *Foreign Policy* stressed earlier in May that persuading Hungary to move away from China was a central objective of the meeting of Trump with Orbán at the White House.

The US administration’s efforts to develop a strategic alliance with the Orbán government is part of its orientation toward building an alliance of far-right government throughout Eastern and Central Europe as a counter-weight to not only Russia and China, but also to Germany. This alliance stands in the tradition of the so-called “Intermarium” strategy (or Between the Seas) which was pursued by right-wing governments in that region in the pre-World War II period.

In June 2017, Donald Trump explicitly endorsed this strategy in a visit to Warsaw, where he not only praised the far-right policies of the ruling PiS-government, but also visited the government-funded “Three Seas Initiative” (referring to the Baltic, Black and Adriatic seas). As discussed by strategists and foreign policy pundits of US imperialism, this alliance would include Poland, Romania, the Baltic States, Croatia and Slovakia as well as Ukraine and Hungary.



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