



Bannon, Flynn and Sessions: How Trump's top advisers view Muslims, in their own words

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Months before they became two of President Trump's top advisors, Steve Bannon and Sebastian Gorka, engaged in a winding conversation about Islam on Bannon's talk-radio show.

"The dirty little secret, Steve, that nobody wants to tell you, (is) what the bad guys do — what Al Qaeda does or what ISIS is doing right now — is not fundamentally un-Islamic," said Gorka, who at the time of the April 2016 show was a Breitbart writer, but today is a deputy assistant to the president.

The recordings of Bannon's Breitbart News Daily radio show shed light on how a cadre of top Trump Administration officials view immigration and, more specifically, Muslims.

Reporting by USA TODAY and other news media about the recordings of Bannon's statements in 2015 and 2016 prompted White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer to address Trump's views on Islam last week, suggesting "there's a difference" between Bannon's and Trump's views on the religion. Yet in the recordings from Bannon's shows, other people who've ascended to top jobs in the West Wing and the Cabinet openly aired controversial views about Muslims, immigrants in general, and their threat to America.

"We must acknowledge that we are at war," Michael Flynn, now Trump's national security advisor, told Bannon during a discussion of Islamic terrorism in July 2016.

Steve Bannon's own words show sharp break on security issues

During an appearance on Bannon's show in December 2015, after then-candidate Trump proposed a "total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States," newly-

confirmed Attorney General Jeff Sessions said America's "classical" principles about religious freedoms don't apply to immigrants seeking to come into the country.

While Americans are "deeply committed to freedom of religion," Sessions told Bannon, "we are in an age that's very dangerous. And we are seeing more and more persons enter, and a lot of them have done terrorist acts."

"It's time for us to think this through," said Sessions, a former U.S. Senator who now will lead the Justice Department as it defends the White House's immigration, refugee and travel ban in federal court. "And the classical internal American religious principles I don't think apply — providing constitutional protections to persons (who are) not citizens who want to come here."

According to a recent Cato Institute report, out of more than 3 million refugees admitted to the U.S. from 1975 to 2015, three committed terrorist acts that killed Americans. They were Cuban refugees in the 1970s.

Recordings show many of the newly-installed Trump figures who made regular appearances on Bannon's show share the host's ominous views on Islam and a hardline stance on legal and illegal immigration that is at odds with decades of U.S. domestic and foreign policy.

Then-presidential candidate Ben Carson, who is now Trump's housing secretary, said in February that he thought Mohammed was "somebody who lives a life who is in no way comparable to Jesus Christ."

Former Breitbart reporter Julia Hahn, who has been hired to work in the White House, told Bannon in August that Trump opponent Hillary Clinton could not claim to care about women's issues "if she wants to bring large flows of unassimilated Muslim migrants who, you know, don't have the same values toward women that western culture does."

Corey Saylor, spokesman for the Council on American-Islamic Relations, said the statements indicate White House officials "have bought into false notions that Islam itself somehow endorses the actions of devil-inspired groups like ISIS."

"It's sort of like holding all Christian groups accountable for Jim Jones or for the actions of Joseph Kony's militia," Saylor said. "And that would normally reasonably be considered fringe thinking. But now we have those fringe thinkers directly in the White House."

Those views are particularly apparent among Trump's top national security advisors. Flynn told Bannon — in a discussion of Islamic terrorism in July 2016 — that it was time for the U.S. to declare war.

"Our enemies have declared war on us and we have to take this on with all the resources that the United States of America can bring to bear," Flynn said. "There is no doubt."

"You think Congress should declare war on, on — you want to declare war on them?" Bannon probed.

"That's right," Flynn replied. "I think we need a declaration of war."

In the April interview, Gorka and Bannon describe the basis of their beliefs about Islam and other world religions. Gorka laughs when Bannon mockingly notes that former President George W. Bush said Islam “means peace.”

“Let me tell you how it means peace,” Gorka says. “The word Islam actually means submission. It means surrender. Surrender to what? The will of Allah. The only way it means peace is a derivational way.”

The discussion between Bannon and Gorka revolves around their belief that Islam is fundamentally different than Christianity and other faiths, saying the Koran is meant to be taken literally while other religious texts are meant to be interpreted.

At the end of the discussion, Bannon appears to play a voice of moderation to the rhetoric of both Gorka and Trump.

“One of the things about Donald Trump — and I’m not arguing for Donald Trump here — but one of the reactions when you see in this firestorm in the media against him is that he has brought up some elements of fighting ISIS and some of it has been incredibly immature and a lot of it has been heavy-handed and, quite frankly, stupid,” Bannon said. “However, he has brought into the conversation (the idea of) winning.”

“How bloody, how nasty, how divisive...how awful is it going to be?” Bannon asked his guest.

“You have to go to war,” Gorka replied. “You cannot win if you do not go to war, and we have not gone to war. That’s the reality.”