

Tom Cotton Will Undermine U.S. Foreign Policy

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It is no secret that Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and President Trump haven't been getting along. According to the *New York Times*, the administration has developed a plan to replace Tillerson with current CIA director Mike Pompeo. If ousted, Tillerson would have one of the shortest stints as secretary of state in US history – not the worst consequence of that position, though an embarrassing one for Tillerson, and perhaps the administration. But the most troubling consequence of Tillerson's departure would be to replace Pompeo with Senator Tom Cotton as CIA director.

To begin with, it's difficult to believe Cotton is being considered for the position because of his qualifications. Cotton is a freshman senator with no experience in intelligence. Instead, it seems he is being considered for the prestigious role as director because of his "easy" relationship with President Trump.

His support for Trump has indeed been unflinching: he consistently endorses the president's incoherent foreign policy, and exhibits what seems like blind loyalty rather than objective analysis. For example, on October 9, on The Global Politico podcast, when speaking about Iran, Cotton seemed to indicate that Tillerson and Defense Secretary Mattis should resign if they are unwilling to execute the president's policies. Trump's promotion of Cotton also highlights the president's own desire to surround himself with yes-men who will tell him what he wants to hear.

Second, he supports torture and other extreme interrogation techniques, like waterboarding, and voted against anti-torture safeguards. Cotton has gone as far as to say that waterboarding, currently illegal, is not torture. If Cotton becomes CIA director, he may push to end restrictions around it, which would contradict the assessments of experienced intelligence professionals.

Third, even though his support for the prison at Guantánamo Bay – referred to as Gitmo – is along party lines, it indicates his erroneous thinking on terrorism. Not only does he routinely inflate the threat of terrorism, but his 2015 statement that "there are too many empty beds and cells there right now" ignores the fact that the prison has served as a rallying call for terrorist groups, and has undermined US counterterrorism efforts worldwide.

Also, his support for Gitmo, in general, is puzzling considering his legal background: he's a graduate of Harvard law, clerked for a federal judge Jerry Smith of the 5th Circuit, and practiced law at Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher before joining the Army and holding political office. His

defense of a detention facility whose very existence and jurisdiction has caused the Supreme Court to step in at least four times raises questions about his positions on the executive's power during wartime.

And fourth, his commitment to a hawkish foreign policy is unwavering. For example, his opposition to Iran is so strong that in 2015 he penned an open letter to Iran's leadership, directly contradicting and undermining ongoing US diplomacy. This summer, he said, "The policy of the United States should be regime change in Iran." As head of the CIA, his hawkish tendencies will likely result in more military intervention, risking similar disasters like the never-ending wars of Iraq and Afghanistan. Also, intelligence should be driven by objectivity and empirical evidence, and when it is not, disasters like Iraq occur.

In other words, the administration should take pause before appointing Senator Cotton, an overtly hawkish politician, to the coveted position of CIA Director.

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