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Donald Trump picks anti-Muslim intel officer to be national security adviser

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Donald Trump has tapped an immigration hardliner and a former intelligence officer to be top members of his administration. President-elect Trump's transition team announced today that Senator Jeff Sessions will be his attorney general, and that Michael Flynn, the anti-Muslim former head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, will be his national security adviser. The moves signal that Trump is rewarding those who remained loyal to him during his tumultuous presidential campaign—and that he has no intention of backing down from his hardline positions on Muslims and immigrants. Sessions is perhaps the most anti-immigrant senator in Congress.

And he will have to face a Senate confirmation process that will dig up past allegations that once felled his bid to be a federal judge—accusations that he called a Black prosecutor “boy,” that he said a white lawyer who represented Blacks was maybe a disgrace to his race and that he called the ACLU and NAACP “un-American.” Sessions has also associated with virulent Islamophobes. He has accepted accolades from the David Horowitz Freedom Center and from the Center for Security Policy, both of which are Islamophobic think tanks. Sessions has expressed support for Trump's proposals to limit Muslim immigration to the U.S, and has come out against accepting Syrian refugees. Still, Sessions has a good shot of being confirmed, especially since the Republicans have a Senate majority. Flynn would have had a tougher job of being confirmed, in part because he has been paid by the Russian government and a close ally of Turkey's president. But Flynn is serving as national security adviser—a position that is not a

cabinet pick, though it is one of the more powerful positions in the national security bureaucracy. As national security adviser, Flynn will run the National Security Council, a powerful internal division in the White House that coordinates national security policy. Flynn will take his strident beliefs on Islam and war into the Oval Office. Flynn has said that “Islamic ideology” is “sick,” that Islam is like “cancer,” and that “fear of Muslims is rational.” He also said, “I’ve been at war with Islam, or a component of Islam, for the last decade.” Flynn is an adviser to ACT For America, an anti-Muslim group that has pushed anti-Sharia laws and built ties with anti-Muslim politicians. And he is a harsh critic of the Iran nuclear deal, and has also called for “regime change” in the country. In Congressional testimony, Flynn said “Israel lives under the threat of total annihilation from Iran and other Islamic radical elements in the region—something the United States must never allow.” Flynn is not just an anti-Muslim ideologue, though. He was the director of intelligence for Joint Special Operations Command, the shadowy elite military unit credited with decimating al-Qaeda in Iraq and went on to kill Bin Laden. He’s also the former head of the Defense Intelligence Agency. Flynn will now get to fuse his anti-Muslim beliefs with his deep experience in intelligence and the military to meld Trump’s thinking on U.S. foreign policy and national security. That has human rights groups worried about what the Trump administration will do on issues like detention, torture and drones—a lethal and shadowy architecture that the Obama administration will now hand over to Trump. Human Rights Watch today criticized Flynn for not condemning Trump’s repeated calls to torture terrorist suspects and kill the family members of terrorists. When asked about these statements, Flynn has said he believes in leaving open all options. But the human rights group said in doing so, “Michael Flynn has shown a stunning contempt for the Geneva Conventions and other laws prohibiting torture. By offering this key post to Flynn, President-elect Trump is undermining US commitments to international laws that have been broken to America’s detriment