

Trump puts Steve Bannon on the National Security Council.



Trump demoted the highest-ranking military officer in the United States, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the highest-ranking intelligence officer in the United States, the director of national intelligence. In previous administrations, those positions or their equivalent (before the creation of the director of national intelligence, the CIA director occupied that role) held permanent positions on the NSC.

Now, those key officials will be invited only when their specific expertise is seen to be required. Hard as it is to imagine any situation in which their views would not add value, this demotion is even harder to countenance given the threats the United States currently faces and the frayed state of the president's relations with the intelligence community. A president who has no

national security experience and can use all the advice he can get has decided to limit the input he receives from two of the most important advisers any president could have.



The president compounded this error of structure with an error of judgment that should send shivers down the spine of every American and our allies worldwide. Even as he pushed away professional security advice, [Trump decided to make](#) his top political advisor, Stephen K. Bannon, a permanent member of the NSC. Although the White House chief of staff is typically a participant in NSC deliberations, I do not know of another situation in which a political adviser has been a formal permanent member of the council.

Since election day Trump has drawn criticism, however, by relying on lobbyists to [advise his transition team](#), by stocking the government with [potential conflicts of interest](#), and by [refusing to divest](#) or [publicly account](#) for his own ethics risks.

Trump has said he wants government officials to concentrate on their duties, rather than influence they may gain by dint of their position. Before his inauguration, he [ordered a similar ban](#) on lobbying for transition officials, but lobbyists have said that the order did nothing to close [loopholes](#) or stop undisclosed “[shadow lobbying](#)” or “strategic consulting”.

President Donald Trump granted controversial adviser [Steve Bannon](#) a regular seat at meetings of the National Security Council on Saturday, in a presidential memorandum that brought the former Breitbart publisher into some of the most sensitive meetings at the highest levels of government.

The president named Bannon to the council in a reorganization of the NSC. He also said his chief-of-staff Reince Priebus would have a seat in the meetings.

Trump also said the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff and the director of national intelligence, two of the most senior defense chiefs, will attend meetings only when discussions are related to their “responsibilities and expertise”. Barack Obama and George W Bush both gave the men in those roles regular seats on the council.

In an interview with the New York Times this week, Bannon [called the press](#) “the opposition party” and said it should “keep its mouth shut”. He has previously described himself as “[a Leninist](#)” and an “[economic nationalist](#)”.

Before he caught the ear of Trump while the businessman was a candidate, Bannon oversaw Breitbart news, a website that has featured [racist and sexist articles](#). Like Trump, he entered government with no experience in public service.

Also on Saturday, Trump ordered a lifetime ban on administration officials lobbying for foreign governments and a five-year ban for domestic lobbying, in an executive order signed on Saturday.

John McCain is harshly criticizing the elevation of White House strategist Steve Bannon to President Donald Trump's National Security Council, calling the move "radical" because it minimizes the role of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

"I am worried about the National Security Council. Who are the members of it and who are the permanent members? The appointment of Mr. Bannon is something which is a radical departure from any National Security Council in history," McCain said on "Face the Nation" on CBS on Sunday morning.

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As the Senate Armed Services chairman, McCain said it's concerning that Trump has centralized power around Bannon, a former executive at Breitbart who is credited with developing Trump's form of populist and combative politics. The Arizona Republican said the most important decision-maker on the National Security Council, Gen. Joseph Dunford, is now being shut out of critical meetings.

"The role of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has been diminished, I understand, with this reorganization. The one person who is indispensable would be the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in my view," McCain said of Dunford. "So it's of concern, this 'reorganization.'"



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