

Bannon realigns Breitbart political strategy after removal from Trump administration

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In the wake of the formal break between the Trump administration and advisers Stephen Bannon and Sebastian Gorka in mid- to late August, the far-right is attempting to build a new political base outside the framework of the Democratic and Republican parties. In a series of recent interviews, Bannon and Gorka have indicated that their aim is to direct social opposition in an extreme nationalist direction and link it with powerful sections of the military, media, police and intelligence apparatus with which they made connections during their months in the White House.

The platform for this realignment is the website Breitbart News, to which Bannon, Trump's fascist former campaign manager and special adviser, has now returned as executive chairman. "In the White House I had influence," he told the *Economist* on August 25. "At Breitbart, I had power." The move has the support of powerful sections of the American aristocracy like the billionaire Mercer family, which has provided millions of its Wall Street profits to grease the wheels of American fascism.

Gorka has also rejoined Breitbart and aired his grievances with the "globalist" faction of the Trump administration in an interview published on Breitbart this past week: "People like myself, people like Steve Bannon, came into the building because of a very clear agenda, which was the MAGA agenda, Make America Great Again—and, in the last seven months, we've seen people who really had nothing to do with MAGA, who weren't affiliated with the campaign, rise in influence inside the building."

As a result, Gorka said, the far right must "take the game to the outside" where "we are starting MAGA Phase Two, and people like Steve and myself have a whole slew of tools." The Breitbart network retains connections on the inside, including senior policy

advisor Stephen Miller.

In the August 25 interview with the *Economist* titled "The Future of Bannonism," the former Trump adviser told the UK-based magazine, "you're the enemy," while pledging to oppose the "elites" in Trump's cabinet. He also said he would use the power of his far-right network to "light up" Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, a Republican, and advance a demagogic, right-wing policy of economic nationalism based on opposition to China ("let's go screw up One Belt One Road") and the "elites in Silicon Valley and Wall Street," who he called "a bunch of globalists who have forgotten their fellow Americans."

In their post-departure interviews, Gorka and Bannon laid out a similar message that sheds light on their political strategy. Both claim they will continue to support the Trump administration despite their disagreements with the "globalist" wing. These claims were bolstered by reports published Thursday in the *Washington Post* that Trump continues to call Bannon regularly for political advice, but only does so in White House Chief of Staff John Kelly's absence.

Gorka and Bannon both cited Trump's recent move to increase US troop presence in Afghanistan as a key reason for their departure from the White House, cynically taking advantage of popular opposition to war. Gorka advanced the unlikely story that he made the decision to leave the administration when Trump failed to use the words "radical Islam" in his August 22 speech announcing the Afghan troop increase. This term has become a symbol for fascist elements of the ruling class who advocate an open policy of genocide against the world's 1.6 billion Muslims.

The press has accepted the claims of the Trump administration and the military that Bannon and Gorka were fired, as opposed to having resigned, in response

to widespread outrage over Trump's comments in the aftermath of the August 12 Nazi riot in Charlottesville, Virginia. Bannon and Gorka, however, both claim they resigned or left the administration by mutual agreement with Trump.

Regardless of who broke up with whom, the Breitbart group sees an opportunity to strengthen the far right through the formal parting of ways. Aware of popular working-class discontent with Trump's pro-Wall Street policies, Bannon et al. hope to distance themselves from the administration in key respects.

Recent polls show Trump's support levels dwindling even in "rust belt" states like Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania, which provided him with the electoral votes required to win the 2016 election against Hillary Clinton. Beside the Afghan policy, Bannon has criticized Trump on a pseudo-populist basis for proposing a standard "Republican" tax plan and expressed frustration with the Trump administration's inability to quickly enact its infrastructure program.

These divisions have found expression in the closely-watched Alabama special Senate election slated for September 29, in which Breitbart and Trump have endorsed opposing candidates, both Republicans. Trump actively backs incumbent Senator Luther Strange, who temporarily holds the seat vacated by now-Attorney General Jefferson Sessions, while Breitbart denounces Strange as a stooge of McConnell and supports former Alabama Supreme Court Justice Roy Moore. Breitbart's support for Moore, who defied a 2003 federal court order mandating the removal of a statue of the Ten Commandments from a state courthouse, is aimed at building a base for Breitbart among ultra-religious evangelical and Catholic elements, particularly in the Southern states.

The overarching goal of Bannon's denunciations of Trump's "Wall Street" and "globalist" influences is to develop disaffected workers and pauperized sections of the middle class as a popular base for those sections of the police and state apparatus who already support Bannon's fascist policies.

"The American people understood [Trump's] foibles and understood his character flaws and they didn't care," Bannon told the *Economist*. "The country was thirsting for change and Obama didn't give them enough. I said, we are going for a nationalist message, we are going to go barbarian, and we will win."

Though Breitbart remains one of the most well-funded political sites in the US, Bannon does not have the "mass movement" of which he boasts. Trump's anti-immigrant and militarist policies, including Bannon's travel ban and border wall proposals, remain deeply unpopular. According to a *Politico* /Morning Consult poll from this week, just over a quarter of Americans would support using the threat of a government shutdown to force Congress to fund a border wall.

Bannon is a deeply unpopular figure in American politics, with just 10 percent telling *Huffington Post* /YouGov pollsters that they opposed his removal as chief of staff. His moves to distance himself from the policies of the Trump administration will be seen by millions as a flimsy attempt to bleach the indelible political stain his political brand bears for helping orchestrate Trump's rise.

The extent to which Bannon will be successful in building a base for his fascist policies depends on whether the working class and youth break with the Democratic Party and the pseudo-left groups in its orbit and take up an international socialist perspective.

Bannon himself acknowledged to the *American Prospect* on August 16 that he is better able to peddle his fascist snake oil provided the affluent middle class' politics of race and gender are accepted as the standard for "left-wing" politics. Referring to the Democratic Party, he said: "The longer they talk about identity politics, I got 'em. I want them to talk about racism every day. If the left is focused on race and identity, and we go with economic nationalism, we can crush the Democrats."



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