

IMPACT: During his tenure in the United States Congress, Tom Cotton has advocated the strengthening of surveillance and metadata collection programs, and the curtailing of immigration to the United States—ostensibly as a workaround of then-candidate Trump’s Muslim and African Ban proposal. Cotton has also voiced his support for torture and the Guantánamo Bay detention camp, described slavery as a “necessary evil,” and maintained connections with the David Horowitz Freedom Center, an anti-Muslim organization.

- Tom Cotton is currently serving his first term in the U.S. Senate (2015–), representing Arkansas. He served one term in the U.S. House of Representatives (2013–2015). From 2005 to 2009, Cotton served in the U.S. Army, with deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. **While a lieutenant serving in Iraq in 2006, Cotton called for the imprisonment of two *New York Times* journalists for breaking a major story about the U.S. government’s tracking of “terrorist financing.”**
- In May 2013, then-Representative Cotton **sought to introduce legislation based on “corruption of blood,”** a principle that is explicitly outlawed in the U.S. Constitution. According to reporting in the *Intercept*, the amendment was **“designed to punish the families of [Iran] sanctions violators,” including “parents, children, aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces, grandparents, great grandparents, grandkids, great grandkids.”**
- Also in May 2013, **Cotton spoke on a panel about “political warfare” alongside David Horowitz at the Freedom Center’s “Texas Weekend.”** Horowitz is cited as the “godfather of the anti-Islam movement” and a key funder of anti-Muslim organizations. In his speech at the 2013 Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), Cotton said: **“We’re fighting one war and it’s a war against radical Islamic jihad. ... It’s a war against specific people, radical Islamic jihadists.”**
- According to reporting in October 2014 by the *Washington Post*, **Cotton reinforced the conspiracy theory that Muslim “terrorists” are working with drug cartels in Mexico to infiltrate and attack the United States.** At a town hall during his campaign for the U.S. Senate, Cotton claimed, “Groups like the Islamic State collaborate with drug cartels in Mexico who have clearly shown they’re willing to expand outside the drug trade into human trafficking and potentially even terrorism. **They could infiltrate our defenseless border and attack us right here in places like Arkansas.”**
- During a February 2015 congressional hearing, Cotton stated: “In my opinion, the only problem with Guantánamo Bay is there are too many empty beds and cells there right now.” He continued: **“As far as I’m concerned, every last one of them can rot in hell. But as long as they don’t do that, they can rot in Guantánamo Bay.”** In an interview on *Fox News* about his remarks, Cotton said that the Muslims that remain imprisoned in Guantánamo Bay detention center **“are not innocent goat herders.”**
- In April 2015 during an interview on *CNN*, host Wolf Blitzer asked Cotton about the decision of Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson to not sign into law a so-called religious freedom bill without modifications from the state legislature. **Cotton responded by stating, “I think it’s important that we have a sense of perspective about our priorities. In Iran they hang you for the crime of being gay.”** As reported in the *New York Times*, “Civil rights advocates have come to argue that many of these [state and federal ‘religious freedom’] laws are increasingly used not to protect vulnerable religious minorities, but to allow some religious groups to impose their views on others,” particularly Indigenous Peoples, Jews, Muslims, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

- In May 2015, Cotton wrote an op-ed for *Fox News* with then-Representative Mike Pompeo, now U.S. Secretary of State, calling for congressional reauthorization of “vital counterterrorism tools” established in the USA PATRIOT Act (2001). **Cotton and Pompeo claimed that the scope of such surveillance and metadata programs poses “a much lower risk to personal privacy than...a typical grocery-store rewards program.”**
- In June 2015, **Cotton was one of twenty-one senators to vote against an amendment that would, according to reporting in the *Atlantic*, “make it harder for future presidents to torture prisoners like the CIA did during the Bush Administration.”** In an interview on *CNN* in November 2016, **Cotton asserted that, “waterboarding isn’t torture.”** He later went on to claim, “America does not torture. We never have and we never will.”
- In December 2015, Cotton stated that while he **“strongly disagree[s]” with then-candidate Trump’s “across-the-board ban” of Muslim immigration to the United States, he cautioned against “the small number of Muslims around the world who oppose Western civilization.”** Instead, Cotton advised, “We should be focusing on the Syrian refugee program, the visa waiver program from countries with radicalized Muslims in Europe who can come here without a visa, and programs like the fiancé visa.” In March 2016, **Cotton unsuccessfully introduced legislation that would prioritize refugee resettlement for “Syrian religious minorities”—in other words, non-Muslim Syrians.** Cotton also defended the then-incoming Trump Administration’s plans to reinstate the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS), describing it as a “visa-tracking system, nothing based on religion.” NSEERS registered and tracked men from twenty-four predominantly Muslim countries and North Korea, resulting in a database that contained 83,000 people. NSEERS also entered 13,000 men into deportation proceedings.
- In April 2016, Cotton delivered the “Weekly Republican Address,” stating that, **“the right strategy against the threat of radical Islam is to confront this radical ideology and defeat it on the battlefield.”**
- **Cotton was a vocal opponent of negotiations under the Obama Administration with Iran over its nuclear programs. Cotton described the negotiations as comparable to when “the West appeased Hitler.”** He has also said: “When your opponent is on his knees, you drive him to the ground and choke him out. But **President Obama extended a hand and helped the ayatollahs up.”**
- In February 2017, **Cotton and Senator David Perdue introduced the RAISE Act to end the Diversity Visa program and to reduce family-sponsored immigration and limit refugee admission**, among other reforms. In August 2016, President Trump held a press conference with Cotton and Perdue at the White House in support of the legislation.
- After the resignation of Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, Cotton played a central role in President Trump’s appointment of Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster. Early on, McMaster counseled the Administration against the use of the term “radical Islamic terrorism.”
- In February 2019, Cotton spoke at the Hudson Institute, a conservative think tank in Washington, DC, regarding “China’s brutality in Xinjiang Province.” Cotton stated, “No one suffers the oppressive weight of Chinese communism more than the predominantly Muslim minorities of far western China—especially the Uighurs.” He further called for collective action, stating, **“We all should raise our voices and ensure the**

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civilized world knows what China is doing in Xinjiang, where the ugly truth of communism is once again laid bare for all to see.” Cotton did not use the word genocide in his speech. Cotton is a co-sponsor of the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2020, which became law in June 2020. Some scholars have expressed concerns that such policy stances ultimately place more importance on geopolitics than the actual genocide in East Turkestan.

- In June 2020, Cotton published a now backtracked op-ed in the *New York Times* calling for the U.S. government to send in the military with an “overwhelming show of force” against the mass uprisings in cities and towns across the United States in response to the brutal murder of George Floyd in May 2020 by a white Minneapolis police officer. Cotton characterized the uprisings against racism and police brutality against Black people in the United States as “carnivals” and an “orgy of violence.”
- In July 2020, Cotton introduced legislation he titled the “Saving American History Act of 2020.” The bills seeks to limit federal funds to schools that teach the *New York Times Magazine* 1619 Project, an ongoing initiative that began in August 2019—400 years after the first enslaved Africans were kidnapped and trafficked to the shores of the British settler colony of Virginia on Indigenous Kecoughtan land. The stated aim of the project is to “reframe the country’s history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of our national narrative.” In his proposed legislation, Cotton described the 1619 Project as “racially divisive.” In an interview with *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, Cotton described the project as “left-wing propaganda” and “revisionist history at its worst.” Cotton stated, “Even a penny is too much to go to the 1619 Project in our public schools. The *New York Times* should not be teaching American history to our kids.” He further **claimed the curriculum teaches kids to “hate America.” Quoting this country’s “founding fathers,” Cotton described slavery as a “necessary evil upon which the union was built.”**
- In September 2020, **President Trump added Cotton to his shortlist of potential individuals to nominate to the U.S. Supreme Court.**