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RIGHT WING WATCH



THE MYTHICAL MARTYRDOM OF JERRY BOYKIN

A CASE STUDY IN RELIGIOUS RIGHT PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUES



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EVER SINCE RETIRED LT. GEN. JERRY BOYKIN WITHDREW AS THE SCHEDULED KEYNOTE SPEAKER AT THE FEBRUARY 8 NATIONAL PRAYER BREAKFAST AT WEST POINT MILITARY ACADEMY, RELIGIOUS RIGHT LEADERS HAVE TRIED TO TURN THE CONTROVERSY OVER HIS PLANNED APPEARANCE INTO A CAUTIONARY TALE OF POLITICAL CORRECTNESS TRUMPING RELIGIOUS LIBERTY. IN REALITY, THE EPISODE PROVIDES A CASE STUDY OF RELIGIOUS RIGHT PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUES IN ACTION – AND OF RIGHT-WING LEADERS’ UNWILLINGNESS TO LET THE TRUTH GET IN THE WAY OF A GOOD STORY.

FACTS FIRST: BOYKIN IN BRIEF



Retired General William “Jerry” Boykin had a long military career, much of it spent in charge of special forces units.

So why would his selection as a speaker at West Point be controversial? Almost ten years ago, when Boykin was still on active duty, he generated criticism for public comments, given while he was in uniform, indicating that he saw U.S. military engagement in religious terms, as “our God” (Christian) vs. Satan or the “idol” God he said was worshipped by Muslims. It was widely feared that such comments could endanger U.S. troops. Boykin was criticized publicly by then-President George W. Bush and in a 2004 report by the Pentagon’s inspector general; critics worried that his remarks could put servicemembers’ lives in jeopardy by suggesting that the American military saw regional conflicts in religious terms. Since he retired, Boykin became an ordained minister and has been a regular speaker at Religious Right and right-wing events, where he has not only demonized Muslims, but also

BOYKIN CHARGES THAT PRESIDENT OBAMA IS CREATING A HITLER-LIKE CADRE OF BROWNSHIRTS TO FORCE MARXISM DOWN AMERICANS’ THROATS.

claimed that since Islam is not a religion but a “totalitarian way of life,” and since Muslims are under an “obligation to destroy our Constitution,” American Muslims are not protected under the First Amendment’s guarantees of religious liberty. More explicitly, he said there should be no mosques allowed in America. Boykin works through his organization Kingdom Warriors. He also serves on the board of the dominionist Oak Initiative. Boykin is a co-author of *Sharia, the Threat to America*, popularly known as the Team B II report. He has charged that President Obama is creating a Hitler-like cadre of Brownshirts to force Marxism down Americans’ throats.

BOYKIN AT THE BEACH

In January, People For the American Way’s Right Wing Watch blog noticed that Boykin was scheduled to be the keynote speaker at the “Mayor’s Prayer Breakfast” in Ocean City, Maryland. PFAW President Michael B. Keegan wrote to the mayor and city council members offering details about Boykin’s promotion of religious bigotry and his advocacy for religious discrimination. PFAW’s letter argued that city officials should not give Boykin’s extremism an implied endorsement. Other organizations, including the Council on American Islamic Relations, the Auburn Seminary, and Standing on the Side of Love, asked that Boykin be disinvited; at least 2,000 people contacted city officials to express their opposition. *The Baltimore Sun* weighed in with a strong editorial, which concluded:

Make no mistake: This is not an issue of freedom of speech or of any of the constitution’s protections for religious expression that Mr. Boykin seems so eager to deny to those who don’t share his own Christian faith. Mr. Boykin has every right to say whatever outrageously offensive and hateful things about Muslims pop into his head, and the private organizers of an Ocean City prayer breakfast have the right to invite him to speak. Likewise, Ocean City Mayor Rick Meehan and the town council can attend the breakfast if they so choose. What they cannot do, however, is pretend that their presence there won’t reflect badly on them and the resort town they lead. They need to make clear whether they agree with Mr. Boykin’s views, they need to do it immediately and they need to do it publicly.

In the end, Boykin addressed the breakfast, focusing on his experiences as a military commander and his belief that God had repeatedly intervened to save him and his men. Boykin concluded with the equivalent of an altar call, asking participants to join him in a prayer recognizing Jesus Christ as lord and savior.



Jerry Boykin, The Oak Initiative Board Member

The New York Times

Plans for a talk at West Point by a retired general known for his harshly anti-Muslim remarks were abruptly canceled on Monday after a growing list of liberal veterans' groups, civil liberties advocates and Muslim organizations called on the Military Academy to rescind the invitation.

-The New York Times, January 30, 2012

BOYKIN AT WEST POINT

As the controversy over Boykin's invitation to lead the Ocean City Mayor's Prayer Breakfast picked up steam, it was revealed that Boykin was also scheduled to be the featured speaker at the National Prayer Breakfast at West Point military academy – a much higher-level platform that would directly suggest approval by the nation's military leadership of Boykin's extremism, religious bigotry, and calls for discrimination. Vigorous opposition to Boykin's invitation to keynote the West Point prayer breakfast was led by veterans utilizing research from Right Wing Watch, as well as West Point cadets and faculty, military chaplains, and religious and civil rights organizations. Said a faculty member writing on behalf of his colleagues:

Suffice it to say that the horrible consequences of the prejudiced message sent 'round-the-world by this official

West Point invitation to Boykin is all but incalculable. The true price to be exacted, by granting this high profile speaking engagement to the bigot Boykin, will shamefully be paid in blood, and the blood of innocents.

VoteVets argued that Boykin's views were incompatible with Army values, inconsistent with Army doctrine, and disrespectful of the service of Muslim-Americans serving in the Armed Forces. VoteVets leaders Jon Soltz and Richard Allen Smith said the kind of anti-Muslim remarks Gen. Boykin has made "threaten our relationships with Muslims around the world, and thereby, our troops serving in harm's way."

Members of the Forum on the Military Chaplaincy also opposed Boykin's invitation. "Chaplains are sworn to serve all in the military," said retired Chaplain (Colonel) Paul Dodd, co-chair of the Forum. "It sends a poisonous message to have chaplains sponsor someone so strongly associated with speech that condemns one particular religious group."

Although West Point officials initially defended the plan to have Boykin speak at the "pluralistic" breakfast, saying cadets were "purposefully exposed to different perspectives and cultures," the retired general withdrew a few days before the breakfast, reportedly after speaking with West Point officials.

CRANKING UP THE “CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION” PROPAGANDA MACHINE

Right-wing leaders and pundits lost no time in trying to turn a defeat into victory by portraying Boykin as a martyr for free speech and religious liberty. This is one of the Religious Right’s go-to strategies: to dishonestly portray policy disagreements – or in this case, an effort to hold officials accountable for promoting irresponsible behavior – as attacks on religious liberty. Said the Family Research Council’s Tony Perkins, “He has done so much to defend the ideals and the freedom that America stands for. Yet his own freedoms – that he fought to protect for others – have been taken from him.”



PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUE 1: DISTORT THE ISSUE AS A QUESTION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND FREE SPEECH

Boykin supporters immediately began portraying opposition to his appearance as an attack on Boykin’s Christian faith and his freedom of speech. Ken Blackwell and Ken Klukowski of the Family Research Council declared that Boykin was kept from speaking at West Point “because of his Christian beliefs.” Frank Gaffney, himself a font of anti-Muslim bigotry, railed in *The Washington Times* against “the suppression of Gen. Boykin’s right to express himself – and, for that matter, to enjoy freedom of religion.” The Family Research Council sent an action alert to members blaming Boykin’s withdrawal on “the Obama Administration’s continuing

track-record of hostility toward Christianity.” FRC’s Tony Perkins urged activists to “Sign our petition urging Congress and the Obama administration to take action to end the purging of Christianity from the military.” Diana West, one of Boykin’s co-authors on the “Team B II” report, argued that the issue was about freedom of inquiry: “Boykin’s opinion about a legitimate topic of discussion is cause for ejecting him from West Point. The effect is to marginalize further the quest for open debate about Islam and its threat to liberty – and to marginalize further those who seek it.”

Boykin himself pushed this line of attack, saying “The message is that people of faith and conservative Americans are losing our voice to a very well-organized and very well-funded group of very passionate people – those being the atheists and the Muslims. They want to change the nature of our culture – and they are succeeding.” On a radio show with Religious Right leaders Tony Perkins and Tim Wildmon, Boykin said:

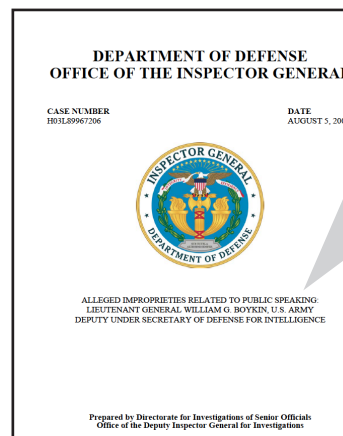
This is going to get worse unless the American people - and particularly people for faith, Christians - rise up and say that we’re going to draw a line in the sand ... They contact their congressman, they let their congressman know that this is not their values, that they believe in the First Amendment, not only free speech, but the freedom of religion. And I think they have to get the leadership involved in this and I think that the Administration needs to hear through the Congress that there are a lot of Americans who do not endorse this sort of thing. Where’s it going to stop?

The Washington Post

“A Defense Department investigation has determined that Lt. Gen. William G. ‘Jerry’ Boykin, the Pentagon’s senior military intelligence official, violated three internal regulations while delivering controversial speeches that linked the war on terrorism to what he depicted as an enduring battle against Satan. The 10-month internal investigation, conducted by the department’s deputy inspector general for investigations, confirmed news accounts that Boykin said in his speeches that President Bush had been placed in his post by God, that radical Muslims hate America because it ‘will never abandon Israel’ and that the U.S. military is recruiting a spiritual army that will draw strength from a greater power to defeat its enemy.”

*-The Washington Post
August 19, 2004*

ALLEGED IMPROPRIETIES RELATED TO PUBLIC SPEAKING: LIEUTENANT GENERAL WILLIAM G. BOYKIN U.S. ARMY DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR INTELLIGENCE



BOYKIN IN HIS OWN WORDS

“

“ISLAM IS EVIL.” - 2/27/2012

“NO MOSQUES IN AMERICA.” - 9/7/2011

“THERE IS NO CREATIVITY IN ISLAM.” -5/12/2011

“WE NEED TO REALIZE THAT ISLAM ITSELF IS NOT JUST A RELIGION - IT IS A TOTALITARIAN WAY OF LIFE... IT SHOULD NOT BE PROTECTED UNDER THE FIRST AMENDMENT.” - 9/24/2010

“WE’RE AFRAID OF BEING LABELED AS A RADICAL OR INTOLERANT, LET ME SAY SOMETHING, I AM INTOLERANT.” - 8/15/2011

“LET ME SAY I HAVE SIX GRANDCHILDREN AND THREE OF THEM ARE FEMALES AND I MUST TELL YOU, I AM GREATLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE DAY COMING WHEN THEY WILL BE WEARING BURKAS.” -2/18/2011

“WE MUST GO ON THE OFFENSIVE...DON’T WAIT FOR THE COMMUNITY TO BUILD A MOSQUE AND THEN GO AND WALK THAT GROUND AND PRAY AGAINST IT, NO GO AROUND AND LOOK AT EMPTY LOTS, LOOK AT PLACES WHERE THAT COULD HAPPEN AND CLAIM IT.” -11/27/2011

**“ISLAM IS NOT A RELIGION.
ISLAM IS A TOTALITARIAN WAY OF LIFE.”** -2/17/2011

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SOURCE: <http://www.rightwingwatch.org/category/people/jerry-boykin>



CHARLESTON, SC - JANUARY 17: Republican presidential candidate, and former U.S. Sen. Rick Santorum (R), is introduced by Gen. William Boykin Ret. during a campaign rally aboard the U.S.S. Yorktown on January 17, 2012 in Charleston, South Carolina. Mark Wilson / Getty Images

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PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUE 2: MISCHARACTERIZE THE OPPOSITION

Gaffney's *Washington Times* op-ed pushed a silencing-of Christians interpretation of the controversy by focusing only on opposition to Boykin by the Council for American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), which he described as "the organization demanding that [Boykin] be silenced." Todd Stearns of Fox News & Commentary headlined an article "Muslims, Atheists Pressure Military to Remove Christian Speaker." The Family Research Council told its activists, "The Academy moved Boykin to pull out of the event when a handful of atheist and Muslims cadets complained about Boykin's beliefs. The message to this elite, three-star warrior was obvious: You and your faith aren't welcome." These claims ignore the vigorous and well-articulated opposition to Boykin's appearance from VoteVets, the Forum on the Military Chaplaincy, and a group of 27 West Point faculty and 74 cadets working with the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, the vast majority of them self-identified as Christians.

Boykin has even blamed the media, claiming that the nation's leaders are afraid to take on radical Islamists "because of the liberal media. The media is going to support the enemy. That's the bottom line -- the *mainstream* media is."

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PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUE 3: WHITEWASH HISTORY

After his Ocean City speech, Boykin told a reporter, "The Muslim people are a precious people and I respect them and their right to worship, so long as they don't fall into the category of a radical who wants to destroy the Constitution." When asked by Fox News anchor Megyn Kelly about his past statements, including his view that Muslims should be barred from immigrating to, and building mosques in America, Boykin claimed he had misspoken and that he had merely been opposing the so-called "Ground Zero Mosque." He complained to the Christian Broadcasting Network that his views "have been grossly misrepresented." Unfortunately for Boykin, whitewashing history is a little harder in the YouTube era; People For the American Way's Right Wing Watch has full documentation of Boykin's statements.



PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUE 4: BLAME OBAMA

Since the primary goal of the Religious Right political movement today is the defeat of President Obama, and Religious Right leaders routinely and falsely characterize the administration as anti-religious and anti-Christian, it is not surprising that Religious Right officials have tried to blame the controversy on the president. Tony Perkins said, “There seems to be pressure coming from within the administration to sweep Christianity off the face of military bases.” Ken Blackwell echoed the charge: “This sad episode is yet another example of the Obama administration’s ongoing hostility to people of faith, especially Christians.” The Family Research Council’s Tony Perkins wrote, “The Obama Administration is advancing an environment of religious disarmament among the military – and it must be stopped quickly for the sake of our soldiers’ spiritual lives.” Boykin himself has joined in, saying that the administration has “shown favor to Islam at the same time that they have denigrated both Christianity and Judaism.” Perkins said that even if the order did not come from Obama’s desk, “The President has created an environment that has become hostile to Christianity in this country.”

There has been no indication that administration officials were involved in conversation about the prayer breakfast. Indeed, West Point officials initially defended the invitation to Boykin; he himself said he withdrew after a conversation with West Point’s chaplain about the pressure that had been put on the school’s leadership.



PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUE 5: SHOUT “SHARIA!”

Boykin is part of a brigade of right-wing activists who claim that the U.S. is under dire threat of having the Constitution supplanted by Sharia law. As noted earlier, Boykin is a co-author of “Sharia, the Threat to America,” popularly known as the Team B II report. American Family Association spokesman Bryan Fischer made the nonsensical claim that criticism of Boykin’s invitation to address West Point was somehow a sign that “Sharia law is gaining a preferred place in the United States military.”

THE TRUTH

No one has challenged retired Gen. Boykin’s freedom of religion or freedom of speech. He is like all Americans free to speak, preach, and proselytize. He is free to continue to travel around the country promoting religious bigotry and calling for legalized discrimination against some Americans based on their religious beliefs. He is free to make his case in the media, as he has continued to do since withdrawing from the West Point prayer breakfast. And he is even free to claim that criticizing his outrageous statements is the equivalent of an attack on his personal freedom.

But General Boykin has no “right” to be free from criticism. And he has no “right” to have his irresponsible positions promoted by public officials. Indeed, Americans who value free speech and religious liberty have good reasons to challenge Boykin’s assertions, and to hold accountable public officials who give his extremism credibility it does not deserve.

RIGHT WING PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUES: HOW TO MAKE A MARTYR

1

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Claims ignore the vigorous and well-articulated opposition to Boykin's appearance from VoteVets, the Forum on the Military Chaplaincy, and a group of 27 West Point faculty and 74 cadets working with the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, the vast majority of them self-identified as Christians.

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People For the American Way is dedicated to making the promise of America real for every American: Equality. Freedom of speech. Freedom of religion. The right to seek justice in a court of law. The right to cast a vote that counts. The American Way.

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