

Romney's Top Foreign-Policy Advisers: Moderates, Neocons

By SARA MURRAY | 7.22.12

BOSTON—With little foreign-policy experience of his own, Mitt Romney is relying on both moderate and hawkish neoconservative advisers as he embarks this week on his first overseas trip as the presumptive Republican presidential candidate.

Mr. Romney's campaign rhetoric suggests he isn't shying away from some of the tough policies advocated by his party's neoconservatives. He has issued sharp warnings about steps he would take to keep Iran from securing a nuclear weapon, dubbed Russia the nation's "No. 1 geopolitical foe" and has promised severe sanctions against China.

But his decision to tap several high-profile moderate advisers says that a President Romney might not adopt policies quite as tough as some of his campaign talk on issues such as Iran and China suggests.

Dimitri Simes, who advised Mr. Romney's campaign in 2008 and is an expert on Russia, says the fact that Mr. Romney was a pragmatic leader as governor of Massachusetts and in the private sector suggests he might adopt a more moderate approach. "You have to judge him less by what he said during the campaign and more by what kind of leader he was," Mr. Simes said.

In an election dominated by America's economy, the spotlight will turn to Mr. Romney's foreign-policy philosophy as he departs for his first public event Thursday in London and then to Israel and Poland.

Richard Williamson, a State Department veteran who was more engaged in the crisis in Darfur in the Bush years than the volatile Iraq war, stands at the intersection of the foreign policy factions shaping Mr. Romney's views. He helps coordinate the advisers working for Mr. Romney.

The campaign "is good at making sure that there is a range of views that are presented," he said. "There are times I don't agree with some of my colleagues among the advisers. But I've been married 39 years and I don't always agree with my wife."

Mr. Romney's advisers include some of the most exalted names in GOP foreign policy, including three former secretaries of state—Henry Kissinger, James Baker and George Shultz.

Veterans of George W. Bush's administration pepper the team, including Cofer Black, a former CIA official and executive at the controversial private-security firm Blackwater USA. Also on the list: Eliot Cohen, who worked in the State Department under Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and Paula Dobriansky, who served in both Democratic and Republican administrations, including as undersecretary for democracy and global affairs in the Bush years.

The neoconservative wing is represented but doesn't dominate the group. While former United Nations Ambassador John Bolton offers advice, he isn't one of the most prominent figures. John Lehman, who was Secretary of the Navy in the Ronald Reagan administration, bridges the worlds between the Bush and Reagan officials.

Mr. Romney has advocated spending a minimum of 4% of the nation's gross domestic product on military spending, which would amount to a roughly \$2 trillion increase in the next decade compared to the current budget, according to some experts' estimates. He wants to add 100,000 active duty troops to America's military.

The Republican candidate's hawkish tone holds risks at a time when Americans have tired of fighting multiple wars and watching the cost of those tick up.

"Does that mean he plans to fight more Iraq and Afghanistan-style wars?" asked Christopher Preble, a defense expert at the libertarian Cato Institute think tank. "He has a really tough road given that his positions are so at odds with public sentiment."

Some 60% of registered voters said they believed the U.S. should no longer be involved in the war in Afghanistan, according to a July survey by the Quinnipiac University Polling Institute. Nearly half, 47%, of those surveyed in a June Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll said the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have been the largest driver of the federal deficit.

More than a dozen foreign delegations—including the British, Japanese, Germans and South Koreans—have met with the Romney campaign for foreign-policy briefings. But it is hardly the campaign's dominant focus, given voters say they care most about the economy.

Mr. Romney made that clear at a July fundraiser in Montana as he rehashed the challenges Mr. Reagan faced when he took office. He recounted how Mr. Baker, a former secretary of state, held a national security meeting about Latin America during the first 100 days of Mr. Reagan's presidency.

"And after the meeting, President Reagan called me in and said, 'I want no more national-security meetings over the next 100 days—all of our time has to be focused on getting our economy going,'" Mr. Romney recalled Mr. Baker saying.

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