

Seeking office, and advice

Foreign policy will be a big deal for the next president. So who is shaping their opinions?

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Published January 6, 2008

In an interview last fall, Rep. Peter King complained that "we have too many mosques in this country." That caused a stir, especially since the New York Republican is among those advising presidential candidate Rudy Giuliani on foreign affairs.

King denied his remarks were Islamophobic. But they left some wondering what kind of advice he might give Giuliani on dealing with Iran and other Muslim countries.

"It's a big concern for us," says Corey Saylor, legislative director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations.

Former chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security, King is among an often overlooked group of players in presidential campaigns - the foreign policy advisers. This year's bumper crop includes think-tank scholars, TV pundits, a Pulitzer Prize-winning expert on genocide advising Sen. Barack Obama and ex-secretaries of state (Madeleine Albright for Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton and Colin Powell, Henry Kissinger, George Shultz and Alexander Haig for Sen. John McCain).

"A lot of these people are going to give a lot of different advice and a lot of it will be ignored," says Dennis Jett, dean of the University of Florida's International Center.

Still, the advisers often say much about the way candidates would approach foreign affairs if elected. And in an era when Iraq, Iran and Pakistan will severely test a president's mettle, advisers are getting more scrutiny than usual.

By far the most controversial team is that of Giuliani, New York City's mayor at the time of the Sept. 11 attacks. With a campaign heavily based on defeating Islamic terrorism, he has amassed a group of hawkish advisers who, as the New Yorker put it, "got Iraq spectacularly wrong (and) seem determined to make up for it by doing the same thing in Iran."

Among those in Giuliani's camp are historian Daniel Pipes, who predicted that war with Iraq would reduce terrorism, and writer Norman Podhoretz, who is urging the United States to attack Iran.

The latter's writings have raised such concern that Giuliani's chief foreign policy adviser, Yale professor Charles Hill, has tried to downplay them. "This is not the view of Mayor Giuliani," Hill told National Public Radio.

Others remain skeptical. "He has people who are obviously famous for being pro-Israeli and anti-Islam, anti-Iran," says Hooshang Amirahmadi, director of Middle Eastern Studies at Rutgers University.

Giuliani did almost no campaigning in Iowa, opting to concentrate on Florida where he will vie with former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney for the Cuban-American vote. In hopes of winning on Jan. 29, Romney has an entire "Latin American policy advisory group."

"On the international front, his basic ideas on free enterprise and free trade made it comfortable for me to join (Romney's) team," says Jorge Arrizurieta, a Miami businessman and major Republican donor.

But Jett, of the University of Florida, says too many of Romney's advisers are wedded to the "ridiculous" Cuban embargo policy that has failed to dislodge Fidel Castro in half a century.

"The only thing it's going to do is leave us totally unprepared to influence or even know about the post-Castro political situation in Cuba," says Jett, former U.S. ambassador to Peru.

Jett himself is a foreign policy adviser to New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson, a former U.N. ambassador-turned-Democratic presidential long shot.

"I worked on a major speech he gave and I'm occasionally feeding him some ideas, though he has so much foreign policy experience he doesn't need a lot of advice," Jett says.

That has been true of several other Democrats, including Joe Biden and Christopher Dodd, veteran members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Both withdrew after poor showings in Iowa, but are possible vice presidential contenders.

"The Democrats have a deep bench on foreign policy issues," says Robert McMahon, deputy editor of the Council on Foreign Relations Web site. "They speak from a certain degree of authority right down the line while the Republicans are very much a mixed bag. Foreign policy is a net plus for McCain, but some don't have much of a world view."

Not unusually, many of the best-known advisers have gone with the best-known candidates. But what has surprised observers is how many top figures from previous administrations, including President Bill Clinton's, are advising Obama instead of Hillary Clinton.

Obama's roster even includes Lawrence Korb, assistant secretary of defense in the Reagan administration. Korb campaigned for the first President Bush, but doesn't like the way American foreign policy has been conducted by the second one.

"Obama is something special and can inspire a new generation," says Korb, a national security expert at the Center for American Progress. "Quite frankly, he reminds me of John Kennedy."

Though he applauds Obama for having some diversity, Amirahmadi of Rutgers regrets that virtually all candidates choose foreign policy advisers only from their own party. "I thought advisers should be a little more bipartisan because you're advising for the good of the country, not the party," he says.

Even the best advice can't keep frazzled candidates from embarrassing gaffes. Commenting on the assassination of Pakistani opposition leader Benazir Bhutto, Republican Mike Huckabee said Pakistan was still under a state of emergency. (It had been lifted nearly two weeks earlier.) Clinton said Pakistan was holding presidential elections this month. (They were held in October.)

And Obama said that if elected, he would "immediately call the president of Mexico and the president of Canada" to work on amending the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Canada has a prime minister, not a president.

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