

## Foreign Policy Advisors to the Republican Presidential Candidates



As the roller coaster contest to determine a Republican presidential candidate continues to work its way across the country, it dominates the evening news, political blogs, and daily lives of those lucky enough to be living in states that hold an early and visible primary election. The television commercials and commentators are relentless as they describe the

candidates and seek to offer a glimpse into the psyche of the person that could be the next president of the United States. In the middle of this political whirlwind are the candidates themselves. They spend each day doing the obligatory glad-handing and stump speeches, while occasionally stopping to sample a local delicacy and pose for a photo op. In the midst of all of the distractions, one fact remains: the men remaining in the race are asking for a chance to be considered for the office of President of the United States. This is no small request and candidates know that their ideas will be subject to intense public scrutiny. While this is true, it seems clear that no candidate can be expected to be an expert in every issue that a president might face while in office. The 2012 Republican presidential campaign provides an opportunity to examine how candidates inform themselves on the issues and how they shape their message and potential policies. Each of the three leading candidates in recent polls, former governor of Massachusetts Mitt Romney, former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, and former Pennsylvania senator Rick Santorum has a distinctive strategy for developing their foreign policy plans and positions with hopes that the strategy will contribute to their success on the road to the White House.

Mitt Romney has built his campaign around his experience in business, as governor of the state of Massachusetts, and as president and CEO of the Salt Lake Organizing Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games of 2002. Each of these positions provided him with the opportunity to develop an agenda, build coalitions, and work with a large and complex budget. It should be noted though that none of these positions required Governor Romney to engage in the type of foreign policy debates and policy making that a president will face. Lack of foreign policy experience is not a new critique of Governor Romney. In January, 2012, Andrew Kaczynski posted John McCain's 2008 opposition research file on Mitt Romney on the BuzzFeed website. Almost 20 pages of the 200 page document are dedicated to Romney's experience, or lack thereof, in foreign policy. The section on foreign policy begins with the line, "Romney has no foreign policy experience." A short executive summary lays out various Romney positions and then the report moves to actual experience. Once again the analysis is not

favorable. In bold, underlined print, Romney's foreign policy experience is summed up with the line, "Romney's Foreign Affairs Resume is Extremely Thin, Leading to Credibility Problems."

Four years later, it is clear that Romney is familiar with the perception that he is weak on foreign policy. His surrogates routinely point out international business experience and Romney's successful leadership of the 2002 Winter Olympics; a position that provided an opportunity to interact with foreign officials and dignitaries on a regular basis. Former Governor Romney has made a concerted effort to show that he is serious about and understands foreign policy. His campaign website includes a prominent section dedicated to foreign policy. He also lists 24 "Special Advisors" and includes a two line bio for each person. He has also designated thirteen different working groups, each with its own Chair or Co-Chairs, to study and advise on a variety of issues including, Afghanistan/Pakistan, human rights, and Asia-Pacific. At first glance the list of advisors appears to be a collection of individuals that were active in the administration of President George W. Bush mixed with some new faces and personalities. Notable names include former CIA Director Michael Hayden, as well as former Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff. In an article that was published in the Washington Times shortly after the list of advisors was announced, Steve Clemons, a senior fellow at the New America Foundation, is quoted as saying, "It's an impressive array of talent that really covers the field. I may disagree with their views, but this is the kind of arrangement you want to have. There's going to be creative tension, some tugs of war, and that's healthy."

While much has been made of Mitt Romney's foreign policy experience and the extra large team of advisors he has organized, former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich has taken a different approach to his foreign policy platform. Speaker Gingrich holds a Ph.D. in modern European history from Tulane University and worked for eight years as an assistant professor in the history department of West Georgia College. He has founded and chaired several policy think tanks and he actively advocated for American positions in the world even while he was not holding elected office. According to a collection of papers released by former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Gingrich wrote policy memos during the Bush years and commented on U.S. actions in Iraq and the Middle East. He has also written and published several books on American history, the Cold War, and threats to America's position on the world stage. In short, Speaker Gingrich has on-the-ground foreign policy experience that Mitt Romney does not. He relies on his own studies and evaluations to develop many of his foreign policy positions, but he has also assembled a team of noted experts to advise him during the campaign. In November of 2011, at roughly the same time as Mitt Romney, Gingrich formally introduced his team of foreign policy advisors. The team was led by Herman Pirchner, the founding president of a conservative think tank in Washington called the American Foreign Policy Council. Also on his team is AFPC Senior Fellow for Asian Studies Stephen Yates and David Wurmser, both former staffers for Vice President Dick Cheney. The list also includes Robert McFarlane, Norman Bailey and Ken deGraffenreid, all with experience during the Reagan era. These advisors come from a list of

people that have known and worked with the former Speaker for many years and it seems natural that he would work these types of advisors into his campaign.

Of the three top contenders in the Republican presidential primary, former Pennsylvania senator Rick Santorum stands out as the one with the smallest foreign policy advisory team. As a senator, Santorum served for eight years on the Senate Armed Services Committee. He was also chair of the Senate Republican Policy conference. His work in the Senate put him in a position to support funding for AIDS research and African development. He staked out positions on the U.S. relationship with Israel, Syria, Iran, China, and the Middle East as a whole. While pushing a traditional hawkish agenda and advocated U.S. power in the world, he also defended humanitarian aid given out by the U.S. -- a position that he continues to defend in Republican debates. Senator Santorum draws upon these experiences in order to develop policy positions as a presidential candidate and he has sought very little outside help. Attempts to identify a foreign policy team for Santorum often include his former chief of staff Mark Rogers, but the overall feeling is that he is informed on the issues and he draws on his own experience when developing policy positions.

In spite of their differences in both experience and policy, both Mitt Romney and Newt Gingrich have constructed foreign policy teams to advise and guide them as their campaigns develop. The size of their teams differs, as will the requirement and desire for input, no doubt. Rick Santorum stands out as one who, like Gingrich, has extensive experience in foreign policy experience from his years spent working in congress, but he has chosen to develop his own positions and rely on a few trusted advisors. It remains to be seen whether Romney's strategy will help him overcome his perceived weaknesses by focusing on the issue and dedicating the resources necessary to assemble a team and make foreign policy a visible part of his campaign. The real test of strategy may come when the successful Republican candidate faces President Obama, who will no doubt try to use his experience and successes in foreign affairs to his advantage.