

Jeb Bush Risks 'Own Man' Image With Foreign Policy Team

Republican presidential contender Jeb Bush has drawn heavily from the administrations of his brother and father in picking his nascent team of foreign policy advisers, a choice that may undercut his assertion that he is his "own man" on international affairs. Former officials and scholars caution that the list of 21 advisers announced ahead of Bush's first big foreign policy speech on Wednesday was preliminary and would not necessarily form the core of a third Bush presidency. It is also common for leading Republican and Democrat presidential candidates to lean heavily on experienced hands from former administrations – in this case a mix of party hawks and pragmatists. But by including 19 advisers who served under President George W. Bush, or his father, President George H.W. Bush, Jeb risks criticism during the 2016 campaign that he will represent a continuation of his family's legacy on foreign policy. Among his advisers is Paul Wolfowitz, a former deputy U.S. defense secretary who was a lead architect of the 2003 invasion of Iraq and once famously asserted that Iraq would be able to finance its own post-war reconstruction. And he included John Hannah, a top aide to former Vice President Dick Cheney and Bush deputy national security adviser Stephen Hadley. But he also picked James A. Baker III, Secretary of State under George H.W. Bush who co-chaired a blue-ribbon panel that in 2006 called the situation in Iraq "grave and deteriorating" and recommended a phased withdrawal of U.S. troops. Republicans said that showed how Jeb was taking a broad approach, casting a wide net across party views as he presents himself as tougher on foreign threats than President Barack Obama ahead of party primaries that start early next year. "He's taking a big tent approach,"

said Peter Feaver, a Duke University political science professor who served in the younger Bush's White House. Jeb Bush could have declared "if you worked for my brother, you won't work for me. That would have been a dumb choice," Feaver said. "It reinforces a cartoon critique that the Bush administration was a foreign policy disaster." Democrats characterized Bush's foreign policy plans as mirroring that of George W. Bush, who launched the war in Iraq that became deeply unpopular. The Democratic National Committee said in a statement that Bush was relying on advisers who "were the architects of George W. Bush's cowboy foreign policy agenda that damaged the country's reputation abroad." Democrats accuse George W. Bush of giving rise to the current turmoil in the region with the 2003 invasion of Iraq over weapons of mass destruction that were never found. The Bush administration said the war was justified by the available intelligence and the security threat that Iraq posed. Jeb Bush, a former Florida governor, faces a unique foreign policy challenge among Republican candidates. He needs to quickly build up foreign policy credibility and show how he would be more assertive abroad, while avoiding getting entangled in the presidential legacies of his father and brother. His speech on Wednesday offered a vision of a more robust U.S. foreign policy as he insisted: "I'm my own man." But he stopped short of offering specifics on how to do it. **Early Days** One of his advisers, Otto Reich, a former assistant secretary of state and U.S. ambassador to Venezuela, stressed the nascent nature of Bush's national security team, saying the group had not met to plan strategy. "It's very early," he said. Bush "just reached out to a few people that he's known for a while." Also present in the team are two former CIA directors: Porter Goss and Michael Hayden. Hayden, a retired general and former National Security Agency director, has vigorously defended torture-like interrogation techniques used on detainees after the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. This suggests Jeb Bush is "not someone who's going to try to uncover problems and abuses of the CIA, or limit its power really," said James

Mann, author of books on both the Obama and George W. Bush foreign policy teams. Jeb Bush's advisers include two former officials focused on Latin America, Reich and Roger Noriega, who are on record strongly opposing Obama's diplomatic opening to Cuba. Bush himself harshly criticized the policy on Wednesday. Feaver stressed that any presidential candidate compiles three lists of national security advisors: one of veteran officials who can provide "wise counsel," a second larger "army" of individuals who act as proxies and prepare decision papers on specific issues, and an inner circle of decision-makers. "What was released today was that first list, not the other two lists," he said. © 2015 Thomson Reuters. All rights reserved.