

Korea Experts Join Obama, McCain Camps

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Korea experts have been joining the camps of presumptive Democratic and Republican presidential nominees Barack Obama and John McCain.

Obama notably lacks experience in foreign and security affairs. But heavyweights in the area including former U.S. ambassadors to Korea have joined his camp to make up for this, Radio Free Asia reported. RFA said former U.S. ambassadors to Korea Donald Gregg, Stephen Bosworth, and Thomas Hubbard are involved in shaping Obama's policies regarding the Korean Peninsula.

His foreign policy strategies in Asia are being formulated by Jeffrey Bader, a former diplomat and director of the John L. Thornton China Center and senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. Obama is also assisted by Joel Wit, a former working-level official of the State Department during the U.S.-North Korea talks in Geneva in 1994.

He is also being advised by Frank Jannuzi, an assistant to Joseph Biden, who chairs the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, and by Gordon Flake, executive director of the Mansfield Foundation, who speaks fluent Korean.

The McCain camp, for its part, has Richard Armitage, former deputy secretary of state, as the top official in charge of Korean issues.

Michael Green, the Japan chair and a senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies who was senior director for Asian Affairs at the National Security Council for the Bush administration, has been deeply involved in drafting McCain's recent Asia policy outline for the Wall Street Journal Asia. He would likely be appointed as deputy secretary or higher level if McCain were to win the election.

Randall Schriver, a former deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, and Dan Blumenthal, a former Defense Department official and resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, have also been involved in working out policies toward the Korean Peninsula for McCain.

Both Obama and McCain share the view that a complete solution to the North Korean nuclear issue is a prerequisite to the normalization of Pyongyang-Washington relations. Obama is stressing the need for some flexibility for the issue, but McCain has bluntly called North Korean leader Kim Jong-il a "dictator" at every opportunity, while Obama has hinted at the possibility of meeting him. Obama, meanwhile, opposes free trade pacts including the Korea-U.S. free trade agreement to court the labor vote, whereas McCain actively supports them.

"Considering that the two candidates have different strategies toward the Korean Peninsula, the Korean questions could emerge as a hot campaign issue in the U.S. presidential election if the North Korean nuclear issue worsens and controversy flares up over the FTAs," a source in Washington speculated.