

## GOP foreign policy experts cool on Palin

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In state after state, rally after rally, Sarah Palin is generating record levels of enthusiasm among the Republican base. Crowds chant her name, congressional candidates cite her in their ads and there are numerous reports of a surge in grass-roots volunteers for the McCain campaign.

The acclaim for the vice presidential nominee is all but deafening within the GOP, except in one small but influential corner: the party's foreign policy establishment. Among that mandarin class, the response to Palin's nomination has been underwhelming, marked by distinctly faint praise or flat-out silence.

Consider Indiana Sen. Richard Lugar, the former chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee who currently serves as the committee's top-ranking Republican.

The day Sen. Joe Biden was announced as Barack Obama's running mate, Lugar, while en route to Tbilisi, Georgia, quickly issued a statement praising the choice.

"I congratulate Sen. Barack Obama on his selection of my friend, Sen. Joe Biden, to be his vice presidential running mate," he said. "I have enjoyed for many years the opportunity to work with Joe Biden to bring strong bipartisan support to United States foreign policy."

To date, Lugar has been silent regarding Palin.

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In a CNN interview over the weekend, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice declined to defend Palin's foreign policy credentials when asked whether Palin has "enough experience to handle the kinds of things that you need to handle?"

Rice replied: "These are decisions that Sen. McCain has made. I have great confidence in him. I'm not going to get involved in this political campaign. As secretary of state, I

don't do that. But I thought her speech was wonderful."

While none have come out and publicly questioned the Alaska governor's level of experience in foreign affairs, few have been willing to make the case that Palin is well-versed in the field.

John Bolton, a former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and conservative hawk on foreign affairs, segued from questions of Palin's inexperience to McCain's experience.

"You want your strength on national security at the top of the ticket," Bolton told Politico at the Republican National Convention in St. Paul, Minn. "I feel very comfortable with her as a vice presidential nominee, how it plays politically beyond that, I don't know."

“As somebody who spent a good part of his professional career on foreign policy matters, I was delighted by her nomination,” he later said. “What you have to look for is extensive executive experience.”

Last week, prior to Palin’s acceptance speech, former Secretary of the Navy and former Armed Services Committee Chairman Sen. John Warner (R-Va.) chose to accentuate the positive.

He told the Richmond Times Dispatch that Palin is “intelligent, she has a lot of tenacity, she is a risk taker and she is plenty energetic,” but he added “only time will tell” if Palin is the smart choice for McCain.

A McCain policy adviser, speaking on the condition of anonymity, acknowledged hearing from several worried GOP veterans immediately after Palin’s selection.

“To a lot of people it was a surprise choice, so there was caution,” the adviser said early last week. “There was a pause because they didn’t know her. My own personal view is I’m feeling more and more enthusiastic and I think they will too.”

Robert Kagan, a foreign policy adviser to McCain, derided criticisms of Palin as elitist.

“I don’t take this elite foreign policy view that only this anointed class knows everything about the world,” he said. “I’m not generally impressed that they are better judges of American foreign policy experience than those who have Palin’s experience.”

One top conservative foreign policy wonk who declined to be named said he believed some of the questions surrounding Palin’s experience are sexist.

“I don’t see why Tim Pawlenty has any greater knowledge of foreign policy, and nobody would have raised a peep about him,” he said

Max Boot, a Council on Foreign Relations fellow who also advises the McCain campaign, said that upon hearing McCain had tapped Palin, “like most people, I don’t think I had any impression at all.”

Boot said he soon decided that “she was a great way for McCain to generate excitement and interest in his campaign, one day after the Democratic convention.”

“I don’t know what her foreign policy views are. I’m not sure how important that is,” Boot continued. “No one thinks that a McCain administration would be guided by the foreign policy of a vice president. The office of the vice president is not set up to be a second national security adviser or secretary of state.

“The lesson of the last eight years is that we had a president who was not that well versed on foreign affairs coming into office and we had a vice president who was supposed to make up for that deficiency,” Boot added. “It seems to me the Obama campaign is trying to establish the Bush model.”

