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Scowcroft Protégés on Obama's Radar

By YOCHI J. DREAZEN and SIOBHAN GORMAN

WASHINGTON -- Many of the Republicans emerging as potential members of the Obama administration have professional and ideological ties to Brent Scowcroft, a former national-security adviser turned public critic of the Bush White House.

Mr. Scowcroft spoke by phone with President-elect Barack Obama last week, the latest in a months-long series of conversations between the two men about defense and foreign-policy issues, according to people familiar with the discussions.

The relationship between the president-elect and the Republican heavyweight suggests that Mr. Scowcroft's views, which place a premium on an Israeli-Palestinian peace accord, might hold sway in the Obama White House.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates, who was deputy national-security adviser under Mr. Scowcroft in the George H.W. Bush administration, is almost certain to be retained by Mr. Obama, according to aides to the president-elect. Richard Haass, a Scowcroft protégé and former State Department official, could be tapped for a senior National Security Council, State Department or intelligence position. Mr. Haass currently runs the Council on Foreign Relations.

Other prominent Republicans with close ties to Mr. Obama -- including former Secretary of State Colin Powell, who endorsed the Democrat in the final days of the campaign, and Indiana Sen. Richard Lugar, a senior member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee -- share Mr. Scowcroft's philosophy.

"I think most of my close associates have a generally similar view," Mr. Scowcroft said in an interview. "What's the old story about birds of a feather?"

Mr. Scowcroft said his biggest piece of advice for the new administration was that it should make a renewed push to help broker an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal. He also endorsed Mr. Obama's call for diplomatic engagement with Iran.

"Compared to the other alternatives we face with Iran, we ought to give it a really good, sincere try," Mr. Scowcroft said. "I have a hunch that we'll be more successful than a lot of detractors think."

Obama aides declined to comment on the substance of the conversations. A

transition aide said the president-elect has "deep respect for Brent Scowcroft."

Mr. Scowcroft's re-emergence caps a tumultuous few years for the 83-year-old former Air Force general. In the run-up to the Iraq war, Mr. Scowcroft wrote an opinion column in *The Wall Street Journal* arguing against an invasion and warning that it would "seriously jeopardize, if not destroy" the Bush administration's war on terrorism. In speeches and interviews, he regularly criticized both the decision to invade Iraq and the Bush team's handling of the war effort.

The White House responded by removing Mr. Scowcroft from his position as chairman of a foreign intelligence advisory board. Defenders of the Bush policy say the president has planted the seeds of democracy in the Middle East and preserved strong ties with Israel, which had a tense relationship with the elder President Bush when Mr. Scowcroft was national-security adviser.

Mr. Scowcroft, who stayed neutral in this year's presidential campaign, is a prominent advocate of a "realist" approach to foreign policy that favors deal-making over the ideological commitments the second Bush administration was known for.

"He said before the war that this is a war of choice that we shouldn't be engaged in. I think that has resonated with Obama," said Amy Zegart, a public-policy professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, who served as an adviser on national-security matters to Mr. Bush's 2000 campaign.

In the interview, Mr. Scowcroft said the Bush administration's two terms were "difficult years."

"The general mood of the last administration has been more a combination of idealism and self-assertion," he said. "And if the election was a vote on foreign policy -- and I'm not sure it was -- then you can say, yes, that idea has been rejected in favor of realism."

Sen. Lugar, in an interview, said the president-elect appears to have a "pragmatic" view of foreign policy. The Republican lawmaker took himself out of the running for secretary of state shortly after the election, but he said that he hoped to use his perch on Capitol Hill to help the new administration retool U.S. foreign policy.

—Gerald F. Seib contributed to this article.

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