

# The Trump Doctrine: Leading from the Gut

**Editor's Note: I'll be on assignment for a few days – leaving this space in the very capable hands of John Daly, whose column appears below. – Bernie**

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In 2011, one of President Obama's advisors famously described the president's approach to the Libyan Civil War as "leading from behind." The phrase, which was intended to downplay the extent of American



involvement in Middle Eastern affairs, became a favorite punchline for conservatives. They evoked it whenever the president appeared to abdicate leadership on important issues.

Columnist Charles Krauthammer even referred to the term as "The Obama Doctrine," calling it an accurate description of Obama's overall passivity on the world stage.

"To be precise, leading from behind is a style, not a doctrine," Krauthammer clarified. "Doctrines involve ideas, but since there are no discernible ones that make sense of Obama foreign policy...this will have to do."

Sure enough, President Obama didn't have many ideas outside of domestic passions like social justice and wealth redistribution. When it came to the rest of the world, he relied in large part on the value of his own grandeur. Like much of the American public, he viewed himself as a uniquely impressive figure – one of great historical significance. His charisma and his gift for connecting with people earned him huge, adoring audiences...not just in America but when he spoke

abroad.

Obama seemed to think that that alone (along with George W. Bush having left the White House) would somehow translate to a more peaceful, civil world. And he clearly wasn't the only one who thought that. The media treated him like Gandhi, and he was even awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in his first year in office for no identifiable reason.

The reality is that strong branding alone isn't how successful solutions to complicated problems are created. And the world Barack Obama left behind is ample proof of that.

Unfortunately, our current president doesn't seem to have learned a whole lot from Obama's failures.

Like Obama, Trump won the presidency on his larger than life persona. The two had very different styles, but both positioned themselves as outsiders running on a platform of populist change against a status quo that only they could conquer. They connected with voters on a personal level, and their charisma outshone their opponents. The products they were primarily selling weren't policies, records of achievement, or even an identifiable set of core principles.

What they were selling was messianic awesomeness – their own.

Of course, they weren't the only successful candidates to ever employ this method, but most politicians, once they take office, don't rely on it as a governing strategy.

Obama was grossly ill-prepared to deal with global threats, believing that his personality and grand stature would miraculously turn our enemies into allies, once we receded from a position of strength and perceived arrogance on the world stage. I didn't exactly work out.

Likewise, Trump is trying to govern as president through the *Trump brand*, incorporating familiar instincts like bullying,

demagoguing issues, trashing critics, threatening opponents, and throwing out false and reckless accusations.

He's leading from his gut (like his loyal supporters want him to), and though this approach certainly served him well on the campaign trail, it's not translating into effective leadership or positive results in our system of divided government. All it's doing is handing his detractors ammunition, making unnecessary enemies, and dragging down his own approval numbers.

Of course, the failure of the AHCA can't be blamed entirely (or even mostly) on Trump, but his 2018-primary threats against the Freedom Caucus will only make future collaborations (including on health care) more difficult. And with the pointless, politically-damaging mayhem Trump created with his Trump Towers wire-tapping accusation, Democrats (already seeing his lame-duck level approval numbers) feel more emboldened than ever to oppose anything with the president's name on it. This includes a possible filibuster of a highly qualified Supreme Court nominee.

None of this would matter if Trump could get everything done by appointment or executive order (as he's been doing in the business world his entire adult life), but that's not how things work in our system of government. And simply saying "drain the swamp" over and over again was never going to change that. The "establishment" that Trump ran so vocally against (and is now a big part of) is every bit as robust as it was before he became president, and it will remain that way. If he can't find a way to navigate through it, he won't be able to make many things happen.

Mike Allen wrote a piece on Friday, describing how Trump (according to friends and advisers) realizes that his approach thus far has flopped. If true, that's a good thing. Allen also wrote that Trump "feels baffled and paralyzed by how to fix it." That's not so good.

The other day, Justin Amash, a Michigan congressman, said something that caught my attention: “The point of principles is to help you make practical decisions when convenience compels you to make impractical ones.”

I’m not sure if that was an original quote, or something Amash borrowed, but it’s true. And President Trump’s lack of guiding principles (and government experience) worried a lot of people during the primaries for this very reason. It may be quick and convenient to filet someone or something you see as an obstacle, but it can often be counterproductive to good decision-making.

Such concerns ultimately fell on deaf ears during the election. And while liberal-media sycophants helped preserve Obama’s cult of personality and decent approval ratings (which are helpful in Washington), Trump’s limited number of media-conservative cheerleaders and angry Internet loyalists aren’t enough to do the same for him.

That means it’s up to Trump, himself, to get his act together. But when one spends a lifetime going with his gut, that’s not such an easy task.

Thirty years ago, Sean's father mysteriously abandoned his family in the Colorado mountains. He was never seen again. **This October, the truth comes home.**

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# Dick Cheney Interview a Reminder of Leadership with Conviction

✘ I like Dick Cheney, but more importantly I respect him. I know such a confession will earn me immediate, impassioned condemnation from our friends on the left, and probably even from some on the right. But that just goes with the territory of being a columnist who speaks his mind.

To add insult to injury, I'll even mention that there aren't a whole lot of politicians who I both like and respect, so my statement on Cheney is particularly complimentary.

Now, before slamming your fist down somewhere in the proximity of the "page down" key on your keyboard so you can quickly reply to this column with an angry, blistering tirade on Iraq, Halliburton, and neoconservatism, let me explain *why* I admire the man.

I admire him because he's one of the last representatives of a dying breed of political leadership that speaks boldly and with conviction, tells you *exactly* what they think, demonstrates a vast amount of knowledge and clarity when explaining their support for (or opposition to) controversial policies, and couldn't care less whether or not any of it makes them popular.

Until I watched Fox News Sunday this week, and listened to Chris Wallace's fascinating interview with the former vice president, I'd nearly forgotten what it was like to have someone from that mold in Washington.

Some would say it's a *good thing* that people like him are now scarce in D.C. They're wrong.

Conservatives like me often gripe about the damaging policy decisions the current administration has burdened the American people with. We watch the expansion of government and bureaucracies eroding away the fundamentals that made this country great. We see our kids' futures crumbling under the weight of an insurmountable national debt and our country's rapid decline on the world stage. We recognize the dire need to stand up and defend our side of the ideological divide.

But even when an administration does so many things that we're adamantly opposed to, we still expect the people in it to demonstrate a certain degree of knowledge and credibility when it comes to protecting our homeland from foreign threats in a post-9/11 world.

When Dick Cheney talks about the extensive measures the Bush administration took to protect our country, he's unquestionably knowledgeable (extremely knowledgeable, in fact) of the programs that were used. He explains those programs and policies with clarity, describes exactly why they are important in keeping Americans safe, and most importantly, he offers a bold defense of his implementation of them.

That's the kind of thing a leader does... even if you disagree with him.

In contrast, when President Obama or one of his high-ranking surrogates opens their mouth about national security, they often appear to have absolutely no idea what they're talking about.

That's not a partisan cheap-shot. My observation doesn't stem merely from the disagreements I have with them. It comes from that deer-in-the-headlights gaze of incomprehension that I often read in the eyes of our government's top security officials.

I'm talking about people like Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, who inexplicably hadn't even heard of the major terrorist arrests that had taken place in London in late 2010, until Diane Sawyer asked him a question about them several hours after the story had been widely reported in the media. There's nothing that instills confidence like watching one of our nation's top leaders squirm like an eight year-old child who's being quizzed by a teacher on a book he failed to read.

Clapper's been in the news again recently, after being exposed for apparently lying to Senator Ron Wyden about the scope of the NSA's data collection programs back in March. I feel compelled to offer an alternative explanation for his false statement. Maybe he honestly believed what he was saying. Maybe he's just a willfully uninformed, totally incompetent director, and his current attempts to spin his previous statement are more about covering up his own ineptitude than covering up a lie.

Another example is Secretary of Defense, Chuck Hagel, whose confirmation hearing had to rank up there with Sarah Palin's famous interview with Katie Couric, as one of the most embarrassing performances ever put on display by an aspiring cabinet member. There's something terribly wrong when Meghan McCain seems more informed about national security issues than the guy vying to become our nation's defense secretary.

And how can we forget Vice President, Joe Biden? Just a heartbeat away from the presidency is a man who speaks out on the big issues with more confidence than just about anyone, while routinely sending fact-checkers into overtime-hours as they painstakingly try to connect his improvised remarks with some semblance of reality. We're talking about the vice president of the United States... Not a cast-member from "Whose Line Is It Anyway?"

The biggest violator, of course, is President Obama himself.

As the *Wall Street Journal* astutely pointed out earlier this week, the president refuses to defend the very war powers he robustly uses. He distances himself from debate on the national security methods he emphatically vilified during the Bush era, yet continues to preside over today.

At a time when the public is demanding answers on the scope of the NSA programs, he shrugs his shoulders, dashes off to political fundraisers, and completely avoids questioning on the topic.

FNC's Brit Hume recently compared the president's leadership style to his notable history of voting 'present' in the Illinois legislature. Silence is "not a way to lead," Hume remarked. And he's absolutely right.

Offering up grandiose, emotionally-charged speeches may win you elections. Shameless demagoguery and the demonization of opposing viewpoints might scare people into voting for you. But none of that matters once it's time to govern. None of that matters when it's time to lead.

This president routinely demonstrates that he just hasn't the capacity to lead. He's a brilliant orator and politician, but neither him nor his administration have conviction. The fact that Dick Cheney, and even George W. Bush this week, offered a more impassioned, compelling defense of Obama's NSA policies than anyone in the actual Obama administration is just more evidence of that.

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## **Paul Ryan – A Role Model for**

# Washington Leadership

✘ I have exactly one bumper-sticker on the back of my car, and you're looking at it. I'm talking about the photo to the side of this column – the one featuring an image of Congressman Paul Ryan of Wisconsin. Most of my friends have absolutely no idea what point the sticker is making, which I suppose is understandable. Aside from the fact that we live in Colorado and not Wisconsin, a lot of them aren't nearly as engaged in politics as I am. Thus, they don't recognize his face. When one of them asks me the meaning of the sticker, I explain that it's a parody of the iconic "Hope" image from Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign. I tell them who Ryan is and what he's about. I describe why the "Math" mantra stands for the solving of our country's serious problems with logical, fact-based solutions, rather than with the empty, emotionally-driven slogans that our president has been relying on for four years now. Well, I try to sum all that up in layman's terms anyway. My friends politely nod and grin, but I'm pretty well convinced that they don't think the bumper-sticker is nearly as clever as I do. Oh well.

Needless to say, I'm a big fan of Paul Ryan and his leadership. I have been for some time. If he would have decided to run for the presidency as it was rumored last year, I would have been an enthusiastic volunteer for his campaign.

The reason why is simple: I believe he's quite possibly the only leader in Washington who both understands the dire state of our country's economic future AND has the guts, knowledge, and drive to actually fix it.

Ryan offered proof of this once again this week when he unveiled a GOP annual budget that dared to cut even more from our federal deficit than the one he proposed last year. Like last year, he put forth critical entitlement reform which has long been considered the *third rail* of our national politics.

It's also a *must* if we are to have any chance of avoiding economic armageddon in the foreseeable future. After all, the largest problem facing our economy today is our national debt, and our entitlement programs are indisputably the leading drivers of that debt. These programs are collapsing under their own weight. That's a fact. They're bringing in less money than they give out, and they'll all become insolvent within a matter of years.

Anyone with half a brain in Washington already knows this, but it hasn't stopped the Democrats from already decrying Ryan's plan with the same tired song of blatant misrepresentations and shameless fear-mongering that they performed last year.

Sadly, most politicians view their job as a profession and not a public service. Their primary goal is not to deal with problems, but to stay in power. So, if it's politically detrimental for them to deal with a problem, they'll have no qualms in running away from it... even if that means passing the problem on to future generations that include their children and grandchildren. They won't only hide from the problem but they'll attack whoever steps forward to try and solve it. Demagoguery is their weapon of choice and they'll use it relentlessly to scare enough votes out of the electorate to win more seats for their party.

Paul Ryan knows this all too well. He's pointed out such slander across both sides of the aisle, and he's been burned by it himself time after time.

Last year, President Obama challenged congress to come up with serious solutions for fixing our country's entitlement programs. He even pledged a truce on partisan sniping over the issue, saying, "We're not going to be able to do anything about any of these entitlements if what we do is characterize whatever proposals are put out there as, 'Well, you know, that's - the other party's being irresponsible. The other party is trying to hurt our senior citizens. That the other

party is doing X, Y, Z'".

Paul Ryan, who has become the Republicans point man on economic issues over the past couple of years, answered the challenge with his presentation of the GOP budget that included substantive reform to Medicare and a reduction of \$4 trillion from the deficit. Ryan was frank in his belief that critics would distort his proposal for their own political gain. He just didn't realize how far up the defamation would go.

To address Ryan's budget and the economy as a whole, President Obama invited the congressman to a speech he planned to deliver at George Washington University. He even reserved a seat for the Ryan directly in front of the podium. The congressman was reportedly hopeful that the president was going to take his budget seriously and perhaps offer additional ideas of his own. Instead, Obama proclaimed to the world that Ryan's budget would essentially lead to the destruction of America, including letting bridges collapse and forcing autistic and disabled kids to fend for themselves. It was truly a double-cross and one of the more shameful examples of demagoguery ever put on display by a president. A complete failure of leadership on the most important issue of our time.

It didn't end there. The Democratic party followed suit with a well-financed attack campaign on the GOP budget. The message coming out of the DNC was that the plan would end Medicare for the millions of senior citizens that depend on it – a completely false charge that the non-partisan, fact-checking organization, *PolitiFact* later labeled the "Biggest Lie of the Year." Despite the lies, the campaign was effective. Though the bill passed the House, it died in the Senate and the Democratic party even won some special-election seats by running on the issue.

If that wasn't bad enough, Ryan's own party threw him under the bus. Recognizing the political conundrum, the Republicans

in the U.S. Senate shied away from the budget and GOP presidential candidate Newt Gingrich went as far as claiming that it was "right wing social engineering."

One wouldn't have blamed the House Republicans if they stayed silent on entitlement reform this year, in hopes of waiting until after the 2012 election before removing their tails from between their legs. I'm sure the temptation was there. Thankfully, the GOP has at least one persistent leader who recognizes the urgency of the problem and did not let that happen. I'm not talking about any of the presidential candidates. Romney, Santorum, and Gingrich are still speaking in broad terms when it comes to entitlement reform because they're afraid of being put on the defensive the same way the Republicans in congress were last year. I'm talking about who I consider the de facto leader within the GOP, Paul Ryan.

With this year's budget, it seems the Republican party is firmly behind him. I hope the support sticks. If it doesn't, I'm convinced that the congressman won't be detoured. He'll continue to spit out as many bold bills as it takes to get this nation's fiscal house in order, whether it be through their passage or through forcing media attention to the severity of the problems we face. I'm convinced that he'll continue to reach across the aisle to people like Senator Ron Wyden and even former president Bill Clinton in hopes of building a consensus. I'm convinced that he'll remain a strong, articulate defender of the types of policies that will save this country from falling off a cliff, without worrying about how it will hurt him politically.

By now, it probably sounds like I've got a man-crush on the guy, but I think it's important to give credit where credit is due... especially when there's very little done in Washington that deserves credit. Paul Ryan's a genuine leader, and fiscal conservatives like myself couldn't ask for a better advocate than him. Now... If we could somehow figure out a way of getting him on the presidential ballot.