

CBS News Political Director to Barack Obama: Destroy the GOP

✘ John Dickerson is the political director at CBS News. It's an important and prestigious position because the political director's observations – on the air and in internal conversations with correspondents and producers – influence how political events, like presidential elections, are covered. The political director at a mainstream news organization like CBS News has to be impartial, fair and objective.

But John Dickerson has another job. This one is at the liberal on-line magazine Slate, where his title "chief political correspondent." In that role, he can write columns and offer opinions, which in the news business often masquerade as "analysis." Whatever you call it, it's not down the middle, just the facts ma'am reporting.

The other day Dickerson wrote a piece for Slate under the catchy headline, "Go for the Throat!" The sub-headline was more explicit. It read: "Why if he wants to transform American politics, Obama must declare war on the Republican Party."

The headline was certainly provocative – aimed, as all headlines are, at drawing a crowd. But it was also an accurate description of Dickerson's column. In it, he seems to be giving President Barack Obama advice on what he has to do in his second term if he wants to leave a lasting legacy.

Here's part of what Dickerson wrote:

"Enhancing the president's legacy requires something more than simply the clever application of predictable stratagems.

Washington's partisan rancor, the size of the problems facing government, and the limited amount of time before Obama is a lame duck all point to a single conclusion: The president who came into office speaking in lofty terms about bipartisanship and cooperation can only cement his legacy if he destroys the GOP. If he wants to transform American politics, he must go for the throat."

It sounds like something David Axelrod, the president's political hatchet man, would advise his boss. That should have been a warning bell to Dickerson. It wasn't.

"Obama's only remaining option is to pulverize," he continued. "Whether he succeeds in passing legislation or not, given his ambitions, his goal should be to delegitimize his opponents. Through a series of clarifying fights over controversial issues, he can force Republicans to either side with their coalition's most extreme elements or cause a rift in the party that will leave it, at least temporarily, in disarray."

Let's review: John Dickerson is advising President Obama to destroy the GOP, to go for the throat, to pulverize Republicans, to delegitimize them, and to leave them in disarray.

And his day job is political director of CBS News.

As you might imagine, Dickerson's column got more than a few conservatives riled up. And that prompted Dickerson to write a second piece, saying – take a guess? – that those dopey conservatives got it all wrong, that he wasn't advising the president about anything, that he was just *analyzing* the situation.

The new piece, under the headline, "They Hate Me, They Really Hate Me" says this: "For me, this was a math problem with an unmistakable conclusion. Some people thought I was giving the president my personal advice. No. My goal was to make a compelling argument based on the facts. ... This is the only

plausible path for a bold, game-changing second term for a president who has positioned himself the way President Obama has.”

So Dickerson wasn't giving Mr. Obama advice at all. He was simply doing math and coming to an unmistakable conclusion: If the president wants to be bold, he must destroy Republicans. Now I get it.

“Some assume I hate Republicans,” he also wrote. “This latter charge will confuse my close relations, who are not only proud conservatives but among Fox News' most ardent fans”

How in the world could we have thought that John Dickerson hates Republicans? Where did we ever get such a crazy idea? After all, he has close relatives who are Republicans. Maybe, John, it was because you said that Barack Obama should go for the throats of Republicans and pulverize them.

I remember way back in 1996 when I wrote a piece for the Wall Street Journal about liberal bias in the media, an op-ed that touched off the media version of World War III. Dan Rather, Bob Schieffer, their nominal bosses in the front office, and even my fellow reporters had plenty to say to the press about what I had done – and none of it was good. One colleague actually called me a “traitor” – and that was one of the nicer things they said about me.

Pointing out something obvious – that liberal bias permeates network news – was a crime against humanity as far as my CBS News colleagues were concerned, a crime worthy of public condemnation. But when their political director advises the president to destroy his opponents, that doesn't even warrant a yawn – not from Scott Pelley, the anchor of the CBS Evening News, not from Mr. Schieffer who is still there, not from anybody!

Maybe something is going on behind the scenes. Let's hope so. I'm told the new management of the news division is well aware

of the liberal culture of the place – and doesn't like it. I'm told they're trying to make CBS News more balanced and less biased. All I can say to that is good luck. They're going to need it, so ingrained is the liberal culture at CBS (and the other networks).

But right now CBS News has a problem with Mr. Dickerson. He's either a political director who doesn't take sides or he's a political columnist who does. Being both is not a viable option, not for an organization that wants to be taken seriously as honest, objective and fair.