

## Communicating National Security

*A Companion to the Truman National Security Manual*

How to: Retake control and show principle, build a brand that is tough, responsible, strong, and principled, and paint conservatives as reckless, out of touch, and prone to losing their cool.

### **Your Goal: Retake Control and Show Principle**

For 40 years, conservatives have convinced Americans that progressives can't be trusted on national security. They have called us weak and unprincipled, while building their brand on the foundation of two basic ideas: strength and decisiveness.

As we head into the 2010 elections, Americans are worried about their nation's ability to control events around the world and at home. These fears are driven by their inability to control events in their own lives and a number of events that have undermined the President's

demonstration of control: an oil spill that couldn't be stopped, an economy that won't restart, rogue nations that are unpredictable, a war that seems stalled, attempted domestic bombings, and growing foreign-held debt. All of these combine into a generalized sense that our leadership is unable to provide control and direction.

*Americans are worried about their nation's ability to control events around the world and at home.*

In times of uncertainty like these, progressives do not get the benefit of the doubt because we don't have a positive brand to fall back on. Polling shows that Americans view progressives as more interested in popularity than principle on issues of security. Our interest in popular opinion is not seen as democratic, but as indecisive and lacking a moral compass. In the fight between the strong and decisive conservative and the weak and waffling liberal, we will always lose. This must change. To win this fight, we must show responsibility, control, and foreign policy principle.

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Thankfully, conservatives have given us the chance to prove our ability. In recent years, we have started to close the gap with them on security issues – not because we are seen as strong, but because they have been so spectacularly bad. The legacy of the Bush administration allows us to successfully define conservative foreign policy as reckless and out of touch. From invading Iraq under false pretenses to nuclear brinksmanship with Iran, they have proven that when all you have is a gun, everything starts looking like a target.

*To win this fight, we must show responsibility, control, and foreign policy principle.*

You can provide a principled alternative. While rebuilding trust in progressive leadership is a long-term goal, it can have short-term gains. Progressive policies will put America back in the driver's seat, but only if we are tough and smart – responsible and principled.



## Build the Brand with a Character that is Tough, Smart & Responsible

Messaging, stories, and self-presentations that stick are built around character types that are familiar to the American people – characters that embody their own values and don't require a lot of explanation. This approach has worked exceptionally well for conservatives – consider their caricature of us: weak and waffling, effeminate and elite, naïve dreamers in the best case, and coddling our enemies in the worst. Even our own characterizations of conservatives – as “bullies” for instance – can reinforce the stereotype of progressives as weak.

*If the fight is purely about “strength,” Americans will always choose John Wayne, not his “me-too” shadow.*

To escape this trap, too many progressives counterproductively try to “out-tough” conservatives. Instead, your counter-narrative has to provide a clear distinction between yourself and your opponent. If you let the fight be purely about “strength,” Americans will always choose John Wayne, not his “me-too” shadow. And this will only make it obvious that progressive politicians are picking policies by sticking a finger in the wind – not from principle.

**The progressive national security character should embody four characteristics: tough, smart, responsible, and principled.** At the risk of making a cartoonish analogy, we should not remind voters of a weaker version of John Wayne, but instead, aim to be more like Spiderman – a “character” that plays to our strengths. Progressives...

*Your character should embody four characteristics: tough, smart, responsible, and principled.*

- ➔ **Can keep American safe and secure.** We believe in freedom from fear and understand the threats of a dangerous world. That's why we support a strong military that is powerful enough to both deter and respond to threats.
- ➔ **Understand the burden and responsibility that comes with American power.** Our power comes with the requirement to use it responsibly, credibly, and in a measured and judicious way. Progressives do not send young men and women into harm's way recklessly. We pay attention to the impact that military intervention may have on civilians, knowing that civilian deaths undermine our values and our effectiveness. And we work with allies so that America does not bear the global burden alone.
- ➔ **Are smart as well as strong.** Reckless foreign policy will bankrupt America and make us less effective. We can't bomb terrorist cells hidden in London – the old answers aren't the right answers any more, and our military can't solve every problem. Sometimes it's worth knocking on the door before you kick it in. Outsmarting an enemy can be more effective and less costly than confronting them in battle.
- ➔ **Are willing to fight for our principles.** Protecting America's interests and values means working with allies, and protecting those who are unable to defend themselves. We know that exercising our values around the world creates friends and allies, making action on the world stage easier for us in the future.



## Define Conservatives by Using Networks of Association

**Paint a picture of conservatives as reckless, simplistic, and prone to losing their cool.** Conservatives, rather than being strong and decisive, make serious errors. They like to think they're the Terminator, but their simple answers, in today's complex world, make them more a sad combination of the Hulk and Sarge from Beatle Bailey – bumbling, reckless, simplistic, and prone to losing their cool.

Your branding of conservatives relies on more than simple labels -- you are building a network of associations. Just as “latte sipping” and “elite” imply a set of associations that create a character, we must build a coherent set of labels connecting concepts such as “simplistic,” “stuck in the past” and “out of touch.”

*Conservative character: a sad combination of the Hulk and Sarge from Beatle Bailey – bumbling, reckless, simplistic, and prone to losing their cool.*

We must define Conservatives as...

- ➔ **Irresponsible, reckless and hasty.** They don't think before they act, and their hasty decisions risk the lives of men and women and uniform. Military action and our military deserve more respect.  
Concepts in this network: Foolhardy, fly off the handle, lose their cool, not trustworthy, bumbling, bull-headed.
- ➔ **Simplistic & unable to see the big picture.** The American people know that keeping America strong requires many tools, such as reducing our oil addiction. Security is about more than the size of the military – it's also about keeping us strong at home. For example, their belief that they could run two wars without raising taxes or cutting spending put America in debt to China, making America weaker, not stronger.  
Concepts in this network: Narrow-minded, simplistic, out of touch, not modern, can't handle complexity, don't get the 21<sup>st</sup> century, can't solve big problems, no reasonable answers.
- ➔ **Undermining the values Americans have fought for.** Countless Americans have made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of the values that make America great – respect for our law, our liberties and freedoms, and democratic governance. Conservatives' hastily passed laws and knee-jerk reactions discount these liberties and undermine the timeless wisdom of our Constitutional values.  
Concepts in this network: Betrayal of founding principles, losing touch with American values, disrespecting sacrifices.



## Going on the Offense

*Issue-specific contrast language for the issues where we have an advantage*

### **Winning the War Against al Qaeda**

We're tough and fixing the problems... President Obama's ordered more attacks on terrorist leaders in just eighteen months than Bush did in his entire second term. The result is clear: We've killed more of the terrorists who actually attacked us – including bin Laden's lieutenants and top Taliban leaders. We're breaking records and breaking the enemy.

They're irresponsible and hasty... They took their eyes off our real enemies by invading Iraq and losing years in Afghanistan. They started a war with no plan for long term success and now the chickens are coming home to roost. They wasted years; we're making up for it... and winning.

### **Keeping Promises in Iraq**

We're smart, responsible and follow through... We've kept the promise to responsibly finish the job in Iraq, winding down with a winning strategy to end combat missions by the end of August. Casualties are down and Iraqis are taking control of their own country. Even after years of errors made by the previous Administration, we've been able to fix their mistakes and bring our troops home.

They're irresponsible and didn't think it through... Conservatives made the reckless decision to invade Iraq and put our troops' lives on the line without even writing up a plan for how to win. Their disrespect for our troops was the biggest mistake we've had to fix.

### **Be Strong at Home to be Strong in the World**

We're smart and connect the dots... National security is about more than the military. You don't win games with a good quarterback alone. Someone's got to hold the line at home and make sure the economy is growing, too. It's about competition on all fronts – economic competition, military strength, and giving Americans the tools (like education) to be successful. You need a good passing game and a good running game to win – keeping America strong at home and strong around the world.

They're simplistic and don't understand the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Conservatives don't have the answers for a modern world. Their narrow-minded focus meant the rest of the team fell apart, making us vulnerable to attacks from all sides. The wars they wouldn't pay for forced us to go begging to foreign countries for money – making us less strong. And without investing at home, they let China race ahead of us.



## Handling Iran Responsibly

We're responsible... We're taking the threat of Iran seriously. And because we offered to talk, other countries could see that Iran was the problem, not us. Now, Russia, China, and Europe are on our side, tightening the vice around Iran with smart new sanctions so they can't get ahold of a nuclear weapon. Sometimes you should knock before you kick down the door.

They are reckless and foolhardy... Iran got stronger when conservatives were in charge. Their reckless threats and sabre rattling isolated America, while Iran made friends all around the world. Today's smarter approach means it's not just us out there alone, and we're not threatening to start a third war while we're still fighting two.

## Working with Allies Makes Us Safer & Stronger

We're smart and get the big picture... We're making America more secure by working with our friends and allies. Other countries, from China to Europe, are helping us sanction and isolate Iran, sharing intelligence, and working with us against al-Qaeda. This means America is safer, while our allies bear more of the shared security burden.

They're reckless and hasty... Conservatives' go-it-alone routine led us right into the quicksand of Iraq. By thumbing their nose at the rest of the world, conservatives tarnished America's reputation. And since we bore nearly the full cost of two wars, they drove us into massive debt, too.

## Honoring our Veterans and Helping Their Families

We're tough... Progressives are doing right by our troops. We've raised their pay, provided them better weapons, and given them the benefits they earned with a new GI Bill and a better VA when they return home. We're trying to keep the sacred trust we have with America's veterans with the support they deserve and the respect they've earned.

*Highlight the expanded GI Bill, new funding for the VA, and an increased emphasis on new problems, like PTSD.*

They're irresponsible with the military and stuck in old ways of thinking... Their irresponsible actions put men and women needlessly at risk, forcing them to fight a 21<sup>st</sup> century war with 20<sup>th</sup> century weapons. And because they didn't think things through, they weren't ready for returning troops with problems like PTSD, and didn't react when these problems started surfacing. It showed a real disrespect for the men and women who serve.

## Immigration: Taking the Smart & Responsible Route

We're tough and responsible... America is a welcoming place, but it's also a nation of laws. We have to be tough on border enforcement, and then make sure the illegal immigrants who are here get right with the law, learn English, and go to the back of the line to become a citizen. We need to make a smart, secure way for people to come here legally, not the broken system we have now.



They're simplistic and out of touch... Conservatives only plan is “kick everyone out,” – it’s rhetoric, and is not reasonable. It won’t work, it’s an irresponsible use of law enforcement, and it betrays our values as a nation built by immigrant families. Illegal immigration is a problem we must solve together.

## **Energy and Climate: Stop Funding Terrorists**

We're tough and smart.... We know that oil money funds terrorism around the world. Staying addicted to oil weakens America and enriches our enemies. Even the Department of Defense, not exactly a bastion of tree-huggers, is telling us that climate change is a threat multiplier that will make the world a more dangerous place. It’s time to move beyond oil and start creating clean energy jobs here at home: from weatherizing our homes to creating new manufacturing jobs. It’s energy we control.

*Former CIA Director James Woolsey has said this is the first time since the civil war that we are funding both sides of a conflict.*

They're out of touch... The American people know that it’s time to move beyond oil to clean energy that we control. But conservatives are more interested in protecting oil companies than putting America back in the drivers’ seat. Even after the worst oil spill in American history, not one of them voted to stop sending billions of dollars to our enemies for oil. Conservatives just can’t connect the dots: our addiction to oil makes America weak and vulnerable.



## On Defense: Find Footing on Rocky Ground

*Structured answers for difficult topics that frame the issue our way*

**"Apologizing" for America.** Americans feel that their leaders should represent us as the most powerful nation, which is why when the President "apologizes" for something we've done or "bows" to a Japanese leader, conservatives blow it out of proportion as a demonstration of weakness.

*Frame: Their view of power and self-respect is simple-minded. We're responsibly rebuilding a tattered reputation.*

- Be trusted by expressing patriotism... America is the greatest/most admired/strongest nation on earth. With the most ingenious/creative/generous/good-hearted people.
- We're being responsible... We have the strength to show respect for other nations – to patch up old friendships that were broken during the last administration. It's responsible and it's smart, because they will help share the security burden with us.
- Nail them for being simplistic... After all the mistakes the last Administration made, and all the allies they pushed away, it's silly and simplistic for conservatives to focus on [this accusation, i.e.: greeting a foreign leader in a way that shows respect]. It's our values that matter and we'll never step back from those on the world stage.

**America's "declining role" in the world.** A majority of Americans believe our nation is falling behind so-called "rising powers" like China. This concern is often couched in economic terms related to jobs going overseas.

*Frame: Smart progressives get the big picture and conservatives don't know how to solve the problem.*

- Be optimistic... America has faced tough times before, but we're strong and hard-working. We will rebound, as we always have, and come out stronger than before.
- Strong at home... But we can't sit on our hands and just hope for a better future. America has the fundamentals already – innovative people, a dominant military and, even now, we make up a quarter of the world's economy. The question is how to rebuild so we can compete against rising powers and regain leadership. And that doesn't mean going back to the old ways of doing it!
- Run smarter plays... We've got the fundamentals; it's time for some smarter plays – like creating new jobs by getting off of oil, investing in people so they can compete around the world, and working with allies to confront shared threats. These are the policies people want – conservatives don't get that.



**Trials for terrorists – civilian or military?** You want to avoid setting this up as a fight between two options -- voters instinctively believe the “military” option is the tougher option. Civilian courts are tough to message, since they equate terrorists with American citizens and remind people of the accusation that progressives don’t take threats seriously.

*Frame: Be tough by focusing on capturing and killing terrorists. Show how conservatives don’t understand that civilian courts have worked for years. We can make this a fight about not giving terrorists the honor of a military trial, rather than toughness.*

- Gain trust first... What’s most important is that we catch terrorists, kill them on the battlefield or lock them up and throw away the key.
- Inject new facts... We don’t need to give terrorists the honor of a military tribunal. Hundreds of terrorists have been put behind bars through American courts and none of them have ever escaped – even the worst of the worst, like Ramzi Yousef who planned the first World Trade Center bombing.
- Focus on results... What matters is that right now we’re defeating terrorists and dismantling their networks at record pace.

**Torture.** There are two main arguments against torture: 1) It’s against our values and 2) it doesn’t work. Unfortunately, so many people want to punish terrorists that they discount the first argument. Your goal is to be sufficiently tough to overcome fears that you’re weak on terrorism and then make your case.

*Frame: We’re tough on terrorists and smart in how we get info from them. Conservatives lose their cool and think the world is an episode of 24.*

- Be tough... We’ve got to defeat, disrupt and dismantle terrorist networks with everything we have – from drone attacks to special operations. And under President Obama we’re killing terrorist leaders in record numbers.
- Be smart & listen to our military... The military has told us that torture isn’t effective. You can’t be sure you have the right person, and torture makes it less likely that you’re getting accurate intelligence than regular interrogation. This is the real world, not an episode of 24.
- Conservatives undermine our values... Our officers take an oath to defend the constitution, and many men and women fight and die for those values. Torture just doesn’t fit with the values that have kept this country strong since our founding.
- Close strong... what’s important is that we’re killing and capturing these people and using the most effective methods to get the most accurate intelligence from them. That’s what saves lives.

General David Petraeus has strongly opposed torture, saying “Some may argue that we would be more effective if we sanctioned torture or other expedient methods to obtain information from the enemy. They would be wrong. Beyond the basic fact that such actions are illegal, history shows that they also are frequently neither useful nor necessary.”



**Afghanistan.** Americans are worried about the war in Afghanistan and, for most, it has gone on too long. The most important thing to do is remind people that the war in Afghanistan is about our security. That gives you the frame to talk about it as difficult but necessary.

*Frame: They were irresponsible; we're tough and smart.*

- Acknowledge the difficulty... Afghanistan will not be easy. For years, the Bush administration took its eye off the ball and now we have to make up for lost time.
- Define us as tough on terror... The fight in Afghanistan is necessary to assure it never again becomes the terrorist safe-haven that attacked us. The President has decisively taken the fight to al Qaeda and the Taliban -- with a strategy built on the one that's working in Iraq and is letting us leave there this year.
- Define the alternative as risky... But it would be irresponsible to leave tomorrow -- Afghanistan would fall backwards and become a home for terrorists again.

