

The President Is The Nation: The Central Metaphor Trump Lives By

By George Lakoff

Metaphors in the Brain

We know from neuroscience that most thought is unconscious, carried out by neural circuitry. In *Metaphors We Live By*, Mark Johnson and I showed that much of that unconscious thought is metaphorical, and further, that we often live our lives according to those metaphors. A simple example, we understand time as a money-like resource, seen in expressions like *saving time*, *wasting time*, *budgeting our time*, and *putting some time aside to see friends*. Many of us budget our time, worry about wasting time, and try to save time. We not only take the metaphors as real but we act according to the metaphors — and in fact much our social and business reality is structured by those metaphors, which reinforces their effect. Given human brains, living by metaphor is normal and probably unavoidable.

The Central Trump Metaphor

Louis XIV, King of France, was famous for saying, *L'état, c'est moi* — I am the state — a metaphor that a king could live by, or at least try to. Roger Cohen, on May 19, 2017, in a NY Times op-ed titled *L'état, c'est Trump*, pointed out ways in which Trump has acted as if he had absolute power, like a despot. True. But there is a lot more to say. When John Lengacher and I closely analyzed language coming out of the White House, it became clear that Trump has internalized and has been living by a central metaphor: THE PRESIDENT IS THE NATION.

What Ideas and Actions Follow

1. The job of senior government officials is to serve the nation. Under this metaphor, their job is to “serve the President.”
2. The American people swear allegiance, that is, support to their nation. Under the metaphor, the phrase “the American people” comes to mean the supporters of the President. Thus, “The American people want ...” means Trump supporters want...” “The American People love the President” means the President’s supporters love the President.
3. National security becomes the security of the President. The security of the President can be threatened in many ways.
 - He could be shown by the Mueller investigation to be a criminal, doing money-laundering and associated racketeering with the Russian mafia and American mafia figures.
 - He or his closest associates and family members could be shown by the Mueller investigation to have colluded with the Russians in their attack on the 2016 election. The Mueller investigation thus becomes a threat to the President’s security, and an enemy attack to be countered and ended. That his why he has attacked Attorney General Jeff Sessions for recusing himself, which led to the appointment of Mueller.

- The President sees the Attorney General as having the job of protecting his security.
- Since revelations by the press also endanger the President's security, the President sees the press as his enemy and, via this metaphor, calls the press the enemy of the American people.
 - The President's tax returns could show Russian involvement or money laundering in his business, and so the revealing of his tax returns would be a threat to his security.
 - The legitimacy of his election could be questioned, for example, by the 3.5 million vote majority of Hillary showing that he is a minority president. The facts of Hillary's majority must therefore be shown to false, say, by show that the votes were fraudulent.
 - Trust in the President could be undermined by revelations of underhanded immoral or illegal things he is doing.
 - The Emoluments Clause of the Constitution makes it crime to profit from the Presidency. Therefore, showing that the President purposely acts so as to profit from the Presidency is unconstitutional and a possible basis for impeachment.
4. "Leaks." The "leak" frame is about national security leaks: truths that could harm national security is revealed to the public or enemies of the nation. Under the metaphor, "leaks" become truths that could harm the security of the President. Since national security leaks are crimes against the nation — unpatriotic and un-American, so under the metaphor, "leaks" threatening Presidential security become crimes against the nation that are unpatriotic and un-American, matters for the Justice Department and the FBI to look into and for the Justice Department to prosecute.
 5. This explains the much-publicized call that then-communications director Anthony Scaramucci placed to Ryan Lizza of the New Yorker, which Lizza recorded and later published. Scaramucci had gone on a rampage to stop leaks. Lizza had tweeted that "a senior White House official" informed him of an important meeting at the White House with Scaramucci, the President, Sean Hannity, and others. Scaramucci called Lizza and demanded that Lizza name his source. Lizza refused. Scaramucci then said, "You're an American citizen, this is a major catastrophe for the American country. So I'm asking you as an American patriot to give me a sense of who leaked it." This makes sense only if you assume that the "leak" was a breach of national security. That follows from the metaphor.
 6. The President and the conservative members of the Republican Party share what I have called Strict Father Morality and all the policy positions that follow from that view of what is right and wrong. But the Republican Party does not believe in the President-as-the-Nation metaphor, since it elects legislators and the Legislative branch is a check within the nation on the authority of the President. This created a potential threat to the security of the President and a tension between Reince Preibus and both the President and Anthony Scaramucci. The President depends on the Republican Party both to carry out the policies he shares with conservative Republicans. But, since they failed on health care, his rationale for keeping Preibus was no longer operative and Preibus had to go. He also depends on the Republican Party to help maintain his security. But in the case of Jeff Sessions' recusal, Republicans support Sessions, who is a former Republican senator and one of their own.

What the Metaphor Explains

From all of these considerations, it seems clear that the President is living by the

metaphor, with enormous repercussions for our nation and the world. We see this in his speeches, his tweets, and his official actions. It also explains the tension with Reince Preibus and why Preibus had to be replaced.

How Can Progressives Counter The Metaphor and Its Effect.

As one of the discoverers and principal analysts of conceptual metaphors and their power, I have an obligation to report how this metaphor works and the effects it has. As an American citizen, I have the obligation to make these findings public so that it can be countered.

How?

- We need to reveal the existence of the metaphor. That is why I have written this paper, and why the paper has to be sent out far and wide and its contents spread both by the mainstream media and social media. Pass this paper on to both the mainstream media outlets and to your friends on social media.
- We need to shift the frame to undermine the metaphor. We and the media have messages to be communicated. Each message must point out to the White House staff and members of the administration that they serve the nation, not the president, in a myriad of ways. Go through the list of nation's needs:
- On health care, the duty to the 22 million people whose needed care would be eliminated under republican plans
- On the environment, global warming, weather disaster, and sea level rise. Cite examples.
- On the rights of transgender people, 15,000 of whom are serving in the military.
- On gun violence and the need to keep guns out of the hands of the mentally ill and criminals.
- on Russia's threat to democracy both at home and in many other countries, from Ukraine and Georgia to the Baltic states;
- and on and on, go down the list.

In example after example, the job of those in the administration is to serve the nation first in all cases, rather than serving the president. The message must be constant in mainstream and social media every day, in every part of the country. And it has to become part of electoral campaigns in red districts. Patriotism is about the nation.

(3) Since the metaphor is inconsistent with the Republican role in Congress, press Republicans to choose to serve the nation over the President.