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Political Paralysis Is Deadly

By Matt A. Mayer

No matter your age or technological sophistication, your world is driven by the convergence of 24-hour news channels, ubiquitous social media and immediate access to any and all information a simple Google search will bring to a device that you have within arm's reach at all times. At the same time, the era of a trusted national news source has ended. All of us find sources of information we deem trustworthy and dismiss information from elsewhere. This fragmented instant information reality has transformed domestic politics in a fundamental way.

Similarly, our foreign policy occurs in real time as missiles are fired, bombs explode and events unfold. Measured exchanges via diplomatic backchannels and deliberative official responses are overtaken by tweets and media-driven pundits citing high-level unnamed sources eager to look relevant inside the Beltway. An already unstable environment quickly becomes more unstable.

When it comes to solving our toughest challenges, this dynamic makes finding solutions exceedingly difficult. Both parties, their affiliated allies and their media proponents can alert their supporters and produce information and misinformation to kill reforms before a vote is ever taken. With razor-thin majorities in the U.S. House of Representatives over the last two decades and the maintenance of the 60-vote majority to kill a filibuster in the U.S. Senate, we are ruled by a tiny, but very powerful, tyranny of the minority in Congress.

Nothing gets done except through sheer united power. The left, as evidenced by the passage of Obamacare, is always far better at using its power than the Right, which typically makes perfect the enemy of the good enough. Speaker Paul Ryan's and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's failures to get any major legislation passed for President Donald Trump to sign is Exhibit A on the right's inability to act in unity.

When it comes to our national security, access to instant information creates potentially deadly political paralysis.

Moments after every terrorist attack in a major city, you can watch live coverage, as satellites send video feeds from anywhere in the world to your home. You can follow witnesses on the scene describe what happened and what is happening on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. Shortly thereafter, leaks will begin occurring that note who the perpetrators likely were, law enforcement's knowledge of their radicalism, and the encrypted technology they used to

plan the attack. In the next few hours, you'll see reports of large numbers of arrests of possible accomplices.

This pattern has become all too familiar.

As the response unfolds, you move from shocked to angry without skipping a beat. You demand our policymakers act to keep the bad guys far away from our shores. Because of the sheer scale of the death and destruction of the Sept. 11, 2001, attack, it was easy to pass the USA Patriot Act, create a new federal department charged with keeping us safe and launch a war or two.

The attacks now, however, are small-cell operations using trucks, knives and guns to inflict as much death and destruction in an unprotected public place as possible. The bad guys communicate via encrypted technology. They keep things simple to avoid detection. A rental truck without an improvised explosive device may not bring down a building, but it can mow down dozens of tourists within minutes.

Finding constitutionally sound solutions to keep us safe from this type of threat is hard.

Despite our demands for action spurred on by what we watch and read in real time, Congress hasn't passed a single piece of legislation in the last two years to improve our security. Why? Because both sides scare their supporters into believing we are on the verge of Big Brother. The bases of the left and right come together over concerns that our civil liberties are at risk. Our technology channels push out these concerns and, as quickly as we wanted action to keep us safe, we demand they do nothing to undermine our liberties.

These are real concerns citizens have over what our government does and how it does it. The obvious solution to this paramount issue is to gather the right people from across the spectrum to serve on a national commission on terrorists' use of technology to identify what we should and can do that balances law enforcement's needs with our core constitutional rights. I, along with others, [proposed such a commission](#) over a year-and-a-half ago. Had Congress acted, the commission already would have wrapped up its work and Congress could have [enacted the reforms necessary to make America safer](#).

Unfortunately, Congress couldn't even manage to take that small but vital step. It appears our policymakers likely

won't act until terrorists successfully attack us in a manner that produces large enough consequences making inaction politically unfeasible. Those after-the-fact reforms, however, will provide cold comfort to the dead, injured and their families who had to pay for Washington's multiple failures to act.

Matt A. Mayer is President of Opportunity Ohio and Contributor to U.S. News & World Report.