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Use Mutually Assured Destruction to Break Political Logjam

By Matt A. Mayer

During the Cold War, the doctrine of mutually assured destruction arose which held that because a nuclear war would devastate both sides neither the United States nor the Soviet Union would, in fact, use such weapons. MAD incentivized American and Soviet leaders to keep the fight between them a “cold” one. Though proxy wars were fought throughout the Cold War, a direct military confrontation between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. never occurred.

Republicans and Democrats today relentlessly vie for voters by employing a zero-sum game approach in which one side scares key voting demographics by telling them the other side will take actions contrary to their personal interests. Slips-ups and gaffes are leveraged to create massive echo chambers on social media and the 24-hour news channels chime in for ratings.

As a result of this trench warfare, neither party moves to solve the various problems we face and the date of reckoning draws closer each passing year.

With the ever-increasing partisanship and polarization, perhaps MAD can play a role in uniting our warring policymakers and reinvigorating America. Specifically, on several critical issues, the politics ensures that neither political party will do what needs to be done to solve the problems.

Maybe a bipartisan group of elder statesmen can use MAD to forge a deal that apportions accountability equally so neither party can be blamed by voters at the next election.

First, for decades federal spending has far exceeded federal revenues, leading to growing annual deficits and a skyrocketing national debt. The national debt stands at \$22 trillion, with the deficit projected to hit nearly a trillion this year. America is literally placing an enormous financial burden on our children and grandchildren, as the tab must get paid at some point in the future.

Whether it is a balanced budget amendment, truth in budgeting or finally forcing the federal government to make tough choices about what it funds and what can be properly returned to the states to fund, something must be done to put America’s federal credit card away.

Next, inherently entwined in the spending fiasco is the role entitlements play in driving up our national debt. Setting aside defense and other programs, more than 60% of the annual budget goes to Medicare, Social Security and Medicaid. The Congressional Budget Office projects that by 2025, entitlements and interest on our national debt will swallow

roughly 100% of all federal revenues. All three entitlement programs are projected to run out of funds in the next 15 years, thereby requiring a massive increase in taxes, a large cut in benefits, a reduction in spending on other federal programs like defense or a combination of all three options.

The solutions to fix these problems aren’t hard; namely, with Americans living longer, healthier lives, the eligibility age for the programs need to be adjusted up, some means-tested components likely need to be introduced and partial or full privatization should be utilized to get more bang for our bucks. It is the political will to avoid being blamed by older Americans receiving or about to receive benefits that makes reforming our entitlement programs impossible.

Finally, when it comes to immigration, we simply can’t let good television drive the debate. America already has too many illegal immigrants living in the shadows, victimized by criminals and greedy employers. Our porous southern border is controlled by drug cartels and human traffickers. Our broken policies increase human suffering and encourage the wrong behavior by those who want to reach our shores.

A comprehensive solution is not hard to define: effective border security that shifts the advantage back to our border patrol, visa reform that brings in the workers we need at the low and high end of the economy, interior enforcement that focuses on criminal elements and a grand bargain that trades amnesty for those already here in exchange for an end to birthright citizenship.

MAD kept the world safe from nuclear Armageddon for 40 years. Leveraging the concept of MAD, both parties could agree to stand down long enough to forge consensus to solve some of our biggest problems. The alternative is to spend another 30 years fighting a war for incremental political gains in which neither side can do entirely what it wants to do or where change lasts only as long as one side controls the presidency, with the problems getting worse and worse.

That would be mad. Americans deserve far better.

Matt A. Mayer is President of Opportunity Ohio.