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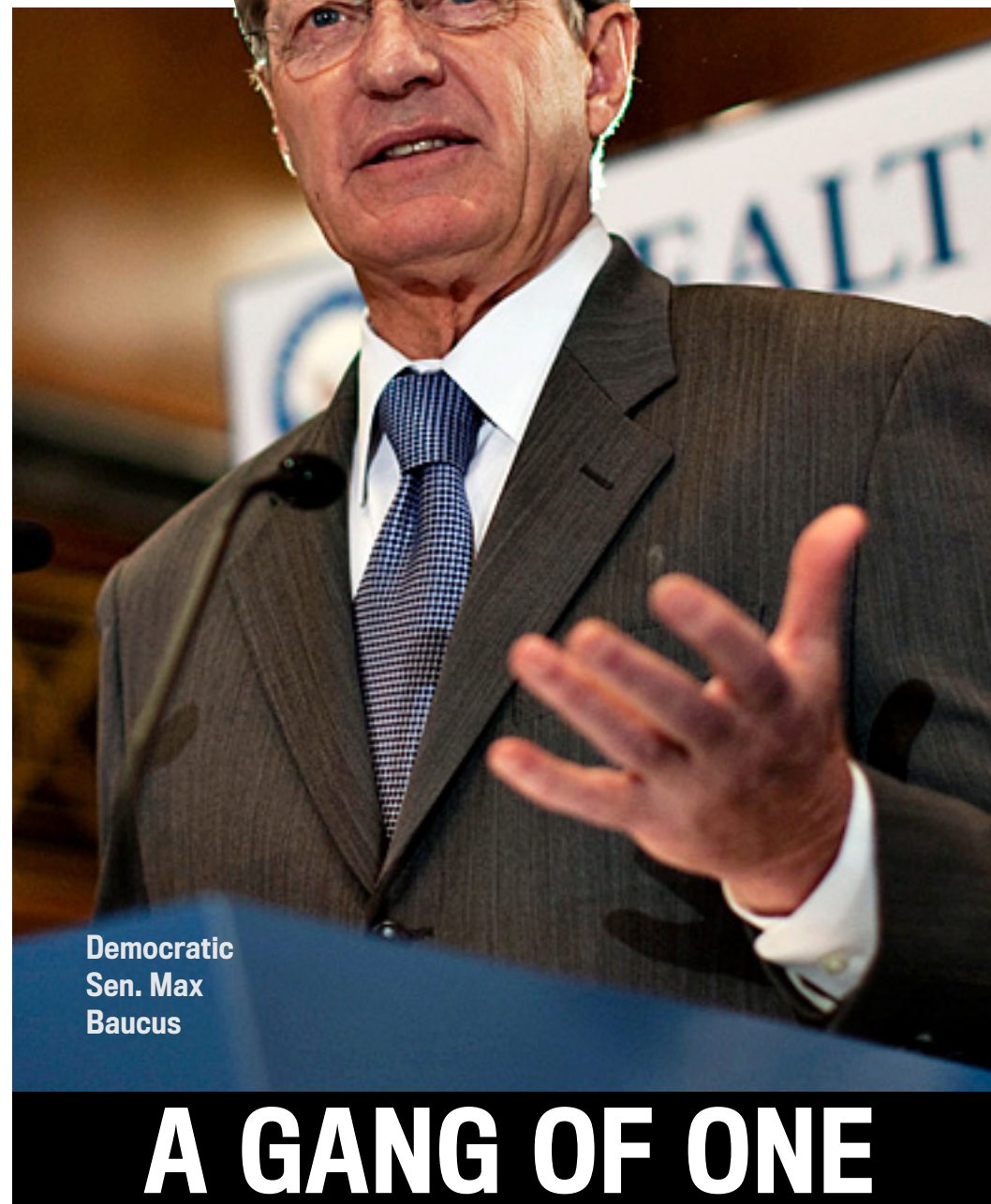
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heads provoking one another. In one recent 24-hour news cycle, you could watch endless replays of Wilson, Serena Williams, and Kanye West all having ugly public outbursts. It was one tantrum after another on one channel after another, interspersed with Viagra ads.

Maybe it would help if no one watched these shows anymore, so the cable networks would have to find new programming and new ad revenues. Maybe the network bookers should invite the few moderates in Congress to appear more regularly. Maybe more states should hold open primaries so that independents can bring more votes to moderate candidates. Maybe more independents will go to the polls. Maybe there should be a third party, on the center-right, as I hear so many people suggesting lately. Maybe people should work passionately to get their proposals enacted without impugning their opponents' characters. And maybe people who oppose them should do so without screaming and yelling.

On *60 Minutes* recently, the president said that one of the things he's trying to figure out is how to make sure that "civility is interesting." There's a whole

crowd of us who still think civility is interesting, and we miss it.

"The truth of the matter is that there has been a coarsening of our political dialogue that I've been running against since I got into politics," Obama said. "I still remember in the speech that I gave announcing that I was running for president. I said, 'We can disagree without being disagreeable.' And I think that the vast majority of the American people, that's exactly what they want. They want people to be polite; they want people to listen to each other. They want people to engage in serious, vigorous debate and passionate debate. But they want to make sure that it doesn't get personal. That people's motives aren't questioned."

You can't have it both ways. Threatening that more people will die as a result of a "No" vote on healthcare is not serious debate. It's corrosive hyperbole. Saying people are lying is questioning their motives in a deeply personal way. You can't lament a coarsening of the political dialogue and then be silent when people use words like *racist* and *swastikas*.

What happened to disagreeing without getting disagreeable? |

Is bipartisanship dead? Weigh in at letters@usnews.com.

A Simple Guide to Fighting Terrorists

By Alex Kingsbury



The slim size (fewer than 60 pages) of Howard Clark's book *How You Can Kill al Qaeda (in 3 easy steps)* belies its ambitious goal. The book echoes much of the latest thinking in the counterterrorism and intelligence community regarding the best way to fight al Qaeda over the long haul. Clark's answer is to both amplify the nihilism of its message and promote moderate Islamic voices. Clark, a former marine who served two tours in Iraq, now works as a consultant on counterterrorism problems for the Department of Defense. He is also president and founder of Seventh Pillar, a nonprofit that seeks to combat al Qaeda's ideology. He recently spoke with *U.S. News* about his three-part plan for strengthening moderates and defeating extremists in the Muslim world—"identify, translate, disseminate." Excerpts:

Why should people read this book?

Since 2001, the country has spent half a trillion dollars to defeat al Qaeda, and it has been a largely unsuccessful effort. The only way to defeat them in a permanent way is to sever their public support. We have to drive a wedge between the Islamic terrorists and the majority of non-violent Muslims in countries around the world. Then, al Qaeda will wither and die. Right now, al Qaeda is winning the war of ideas in many parts of the world. This is a populist and permanent solution.

Let's hear it.

We need to identify, translate, and disseminate on the Internet a moderate message that runs counter to the messages of al Qaeda. That's the only way we are going

to win the war of ideas in the primary place where al Qaeda markets its message. That message will spread from the Internet, which not all potential adherents can access, to the market and the mosque. It is something that anyone can do, and it doesn't even need the permission of those countervoices.

Who are these countervoices?

Some of the most effective voices countering al Qaeda's message focus on the heresy and horror of terrorist violence. Sometimes those voices are former extremists; other times they are clerics that issue religious edicts against violence. Counter-al Qaeda writers, to be effective, will normally be anti-United States, anti-Israel, anti-West, and even antidemocracy. Such views are necessary evils and often the only way for speakers and writers to claim independence from the West and maintain credibility.

Aren't we already fighting the war of ideas?

Not really. Even this long after the 9/11 attacks, there is no coordinated and organized public effort to fight the messages coming from al Qaeda. The government is much more focused on stopping individual attacks, rather than looking at the strategic picture. If you look at the images of Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib, they show the U.S. humiliating Muslims,

which plays into the al Qaeda narrative of the Islamic world under attack. They are winning the war of ideas, and yet a majority of those people killed by al Qaeda are Muslims. Al Qaeda is very good at distributing their message around the world, online, and through word of mouth at mosques in many languages. Meanwhile, the countervoices that are out there are not translated and distributed nearly as widely.

How can we counter those negative perceptions of the United States?

Amplifying moderate voices in the Muslim world is the most important thing we can do. Showing what al Qaeda's true desires are, what they actually say and do when they control an area like in Afghanistan, is also a powerful way to encourage moderate Muslims to oppose them. Once people see what al Qaeda is really like, for instance with the Sunni Awakening in Iraq, they end up breaking with al Qaeda. There's already evidence that the deaths of innocents turn Muslims off of the al Qaeda message. Muslims in Africa and Asia are increasingly rejecting suicide bombings and violence against civilians. Widely disseminated

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counterviolence messages would deepen the effect.

Can't our government do this?

This is something that anyone can do, but not the government. In many ways, the government getting involved only undermines the message. The Muslim world distrusts the U.S. government.

Yet you do work for the U.S. government and were once a marine.

First, I need to be clear that this book was written without any direction or comment from the government or the military. They played no part in it. Second, I am not making any money on this book. All the profits will be donated to Afghan Health and Development Services, which works to rehabilitate Afghanistan's healthcare infrastructure. I joined the Marines after 9/11 out of a sense of revenge and served two tours in Iraq. When I was in Ramadi, we heard about an Iraqi

woman that kicked some al Qaeda fighters out of the city because their presence brought U.S troops to their neighborhoods. Things like that made me come to understand that we needed to fight the war against al Qaeda in a different way.

So how do we beat al Qaeda?

We need to plant seeds of doubt among their supporters and affiliated groups and strengthen the beliefs for those already opposed to them. We need to stop people already on the fence from taking their side. And we need to waste al Qaeda's time by forcing them to fight an ideological war on the defensive. Make them respond to a constant stream of criticism from other Islamic leaders, theorists, and moderates who can shrink their base of support.

What does victory look like?

Websites with counter-al Qaeda messages should litter the Internet with speeches, powerful quotations, pictures, videos, and promotion of sources' credentials and independence. Arguments that killing innocents is core to al Qaeda's mission will sway Muslims worldwide. Sites can use anonymous host servers (there are plenty) and be designed to optimize results so that they pop up when someone in Jakarta or Cairo types "al Qaeda" into a search engine. It is a strategy that foreign governments would also likely support. |

Is Clark right about how to deal with al Qaeda? Weigh in at letters@usnews.com.