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Veteran Paul Chappell On The Ne

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LESLEE GOODMAN

Paul Chappell was born in 1980 and raised in Alabama, the son of a Korean mother and a half-white, half–African American father who'd served in Korea and Vietnam. Though Chappell had seen how his father was troubled by his war experiences, he chose to pursue a military career himself, graduating from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 2002 and serving in Iraq as an army captain in 2006 and 2007. But even as he signed up for a tour of duty, Chappell was starting to doubt that war was ever going to bring peace in the Middle East, or anywhere else.

A year later, while still an active-duty officer, he published his first book, Will War Ever End? A Soldier's Vision of Peace for the 21st Century. *"I am twenty-eight years old," he writes, "and I have been obsessed with the problem of war for most of my life." He went on to write* The End of War: How Waging Peace Can Save Humanity, Our Planet, and Our Future. *Both books are written in a direct, accessible style that avoids blaming the Left or the Right, and his arguments for peace have appealed to people of all political persuasions.*

Chappell now works at the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation and travels the country talking about the necessity of ending war and "waging peace." He has a website (www.paulkchappell .com) and is involved with the American Unity Project (www .americanunityproject.com), which features a free online series of documentaries about waging peace. He also trains peace activists — a pursuit he believes should be undertaken with at least as much forethought and strategy as training soldiers for war. He emphasizes that activists must learn to be persuasive, to control their emotions, and to empathize with their opponents. Finally they must take their calling seriously — as seriously as soldiers going into battle. In The End of War, *Chappell quotes civil-rights activist Bernard Lafayette: "Nonviolence means fighting back, but you are fighting back with another purpose and other weapons. Number one, your fight is to win that person over."*

Chappell teaches through example. I met him at a weekly peace vigil on a downtown Santa Barbara, California, street corner, where he demonstrated how to engage even strident opponents with empathy and respect. I had lost patience with one such person after ten minutes of unproductive dialogue. Then Chappell showed up. He respectfully engaged my critic for a full forty-five minutes. Their conversation ended with the man thanking Chappell for listening to him and accepting a copy of The End of War. *A few weeks later Chappell ran into the man and learned that he had read the book and had changed his mind about war as a means of ending terrorism.*

Goodman: Your father was traumatized by his experiences in the Korean and Vietnam Wars. Given that knowledge, why did you pursue a career in the military?

Chappell: Growing up, I was taught that you must wage war to end war. Comic books, action movies, video games, politicians — all said that if you wanted to make the world safe, you needed to use violence to defeat the bad guys. War was presented to me as the price you had to pay for peace, and I thought that peace was a goal worth fighting for.

My father didn't talk much about his wartime experiences, but I do remember him telling me about the suffering children he saw during the Korean War. The message I got was that if soldiers had to be traumatized to save children in Korea, or to save the Jews in Europe, or to protect innocents elsewhere, that's a sacrifice they were prepared to make. I saw soldiers as people who are willing to give their lives in order to protect others.

I think a lot of people join the military believing they're going to make the world safer. In the abstract the idea makes sense, because if you had a murderer in your home, of course you'd want an armed police officer there to protect you. But war is a completely different matter. It creates massive casualties — mostly civilian. It wasn't until I got to West Point that I learned war isn't the best way to make the world safe.

Goodman: This is something they taught you at West Point?

Chappell: Yes, West Point teaches that war is so dangerous, it should be used only as a last resort. I learned that the United States needs to rely more on diplomacy; that politicians don't understand war and are too quick to use it as a means of conflict resolution. West Point also teaches that if you want to understand war, you have to understand its limitations and unpredictability. World War I and World War II both started out as limited conflicts and grew into global blood baths. War is like a natural disaster. You can't control it.

Propaganda has made the word *war* synonymous with *security,* but in fact *peace* is synonymous with *security.* In the twenty-first century war actually makes us *less* secure. The United States has military bases in about 150 countries; we spend more on war than the rest of the world combined; we have the most powerful military in human history; *and* we're some of the most terrified people on the planet. War and military occupation haven't made us more secure. They've made us more hated in many parts of the world.

Goodman: Some say we're hated because we're free.

Chappell: If that's the case, then how come the terrorists aren't attacking the many other free countries around the world that *don't* have soldiers deployed in the Middle East? How come they're focusing so much on us and, to some extent, our NATO allies? Look who Osama bin Laden was fighting before he fought us: the Soviets. They weren't free. Moreover, when bin Laden was our ally, he apparently didn't care that we were free.

Another factor to consider is that wars are now fought on CNN, Fox News, Al Jazeera, and the Internet as much as they're fought on the battlefield. Admiral Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said recently that the future of war is about perception, and that how we are perceived in the Middle East is vital to American security. It's just common sense that the more we are in the news for invading Muslim countries, the less safe we are, because terrorism is not a government we can overthrow or a country we can occupy. Terrorism is an idea, a way of thinking. A terrorist can plan an attack from New York or San Francisco or Miami. Terrorism is a transnational criminal organization, and you cannot defeat it by invading a country. In fact, when you invade countries, you make the problem worse, because you kill civilians and create more resentment, more hatred, more enemies. I am increasingly of the mind that there are always preferable alternatives to war. Even if war could be justified, it's just not effective.

Goodman: Why do politicians miss this point?

Chappell: When you have the strongest military in history, you want to use it. That's our country's strength, and people tend to rely on their strengths. Diplomacy puts us on more of an equal footing with other countries, and we don't want to give up our advantage. Another reason is that there's so much money to be made from war. In wartime the few make huge profits at the expense of the many. Major General Smedley Butler, a veteran of World War I, said, "War is a racket. It always has been. . . . It is conducted for the benefit of the very few, at the expense of the very many."

Goodman: But don't we all benefit from our military securing the world's resources?

Chappell: I'm not sure that the Iraq War is *just* about oil, but I think most people will agree that if there were not a single drop of oil in the Middle East, we would not be over there. It's a strategic economic interest, but only a very small group of people benefit from it.

It's not about Americans having access to oil. The primary reason we want to control the oil tap in Iraq is because we know that China, Russia, India, and other emerging industrialized nations need oil, and we want to be the ones who sell it to them. The problem is how much these wars cost. Consider what President Eisenhower said about all the other things we could invest in — schools, hospitals, highways, houses, food — if we weren't spending so much money on the war machine, and you realize that the majority of the population is hurt by

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war. General Douglas MacArthur said that if humanity abolished war, the money could be used to wipe poverty from the face of the earth and produce a wave of economic prosperity around the world.

It's not just the ones who go into battle who are harmed. We're all hurt by mounting national debt and lack of funding for social programs and infrastructure, while most of the people who benefit from military buildups are already rich. You and I are not getting rich off the war in Iraq.

Goodman: You've said that the military is a "socialist" organization. How so?

Chappell: The military gives you three meals a day, pays for your healthcare and your college, and even pays for your housing. On an army field exercise, the highest-ranking soldiers eat last, and the lowest-ranking soldiers eat first. Leaders are supposed to sacrifice for their subordinates. In civilian society we're told that the only thing that makes people work hard is the profit motive. The army's philosophy is that you can get people to work hard based on the ideals of selflessness, sacrifice, and service. It demonstrates that people will even sacrifice their lives for the sake of others. The military also has a motto: "Never leave a fallen comrade."

If I said to most Americans that we should have a society that gives everyone three meals a day, shelter, healthcare, and a college education, and that it should be based on selflessness, sacrifice, and service rather than greed, they'd say, "That's socialism." But that's the U.S. military. A lot of conservative Republicans who think socialism is the ultimate evil admire the military.

Goodman: What do they say when you point out to them that the military is socialist?

Chappell: I don't usually use the word *socialist* with them. When I try to persuade people that America should have universal healthcare, I say, "You know, in the military we have universal healthcare, and the military believes that you should never leave a fallen comrade behind. You take care of everyone." They usually agree that this makes sense.

Goodman: When did this idea first occur to you?

Chappell: When I was at West Point. I don't think I really knew what socialism was at that point, but I knew that West Point was different from how I'd grown up. You have a sense in America that you're all alone. It's survival of the fittest. But at West Point they have a saying: "Cooperate and graduate." Your classmates will tutor you in chemistry, physics, calculus — whatever you need. If anyone fails a class because of not understanding the material, his or her fellow students are partly responsible, because they didn't aid a classmate who needed help. Every professor has to give you his or her home phone number and allot two hours a day to additional instruction for any students who need it. So you feel as if people care about you. There's a sense of camaraderie and solidarity. Your classmates aren't trying to get a better grade than everyone else; they'll actually help you excel and graduate.

I am not saying that the military is a utopia — far from it. The military as an institution has a lot of things wrong with it, but it also has some admirable characteristics.

Goodman: After you graduated from West Point, were you initially happy to be sent to Iraq? When did you really start to change your mind about the war?

Chappell: A lot of my friends at West Point were reading Noam Chomsky's and Howard Zinn's critiques of American foreign policy, and that's what started to change my mind. In 2006, while I was stationed in Iraq, West Point invited Chomsky to give a lecture about whether the war in Iraq was a "just war." I'd never believed that the war in Iraq was just. It violated international law, the United Nations Charter, and the Nuremberg Principles. It also violated the U.S. Constitution, which says that treaties are the supreme law of the land. I did see the war in Afghanistan as a necessary evil — at least, initially. As I studied Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., however, I learned that waging peace is similar to preventive medicine: a more effective healing method than the drastic step of war.

Goodman: It's surprising to me that West Point has students critically analyze current military conflicts. How can soldiers risk their lives or kill people if they think the conflict they're engaged in is wrong?

Chappell: Soldiers are always supposed to be thinking. That's what West Point teaches its cadets, who are officers in training. You're supposed to question the orders you're given, to see whether they conform to the Geneva Conventions and the laws of war. Nevertheless it can be difficult to go against your fellow soldiers. Take the example of Hugh Thompson Jr., the U.S. helicopter pilot who tried to rescue Vietnamese civilians during the My Lai Massacre, in which hundreds of unarmed women, children, and elderly men were killed by U.S. soldiers. He told his machine-gunner to open fire on the Americans if they shot at the people he was trying to save. He was given the Soldier's Medal and brought to West Point to lecture, as a way of saying, "Do the right thing." But that was about thirty years after the fact. For the first twenty years or so he was an outcast. He received death threats from people in the military. So really the message was "Do the right thing, and in twenty or thirty years people might appreciate it."

Goodman: You actually volunteered to deploy in Iraq in 2006.

Chappell: Yes, the mission I volunteered for was to install a new system called "Counter Rocket, Artillery, and Mortar." A mortar is a projectile bomb launched from an upright tube. The radar system would detect incoming rockets or mortars, and machine guns would shoot the explosives down in midflight. So it was a defensive role. If I did my job properly, fewer people would be killed.

The way I rationalized my choice was that Gandhi had volunteered as a medic in the Boer War and the Zulu War. He didn't believe in violence, but if these wars were going to happen, he thought he should do what he could to minimize the loss of life. I don't know if I made the right decision, but that was the way I thought about it at the time.

Goodman: Were you ever in a situation where you felt that your values were compromised?

Chappell: No, the biggest dangers I faced were mortar attacks, IEDs [improvised explosive devices] while we were traveling from base to base, and sniper fire while we were installing the radar on the perimeter of the bases. I worked closely with a small team of soldiers, and unfortunately one of them was killed by a sniper not long after I left Iraq.

I have a good friend who changed his job in the army from being a shooter to explosive-ordnance disposal — disarming bombs, like the soldiers in the movie *The Hurt Locker*. He wanted a role that was more defensive; he didn't want to kill anybody. You might ask why he didn't leave the military if he was opposed to fighting, but in his position is he any more culpable than the rest of us who are paying taxes that support the war? Not many Americans are willing to risk going to prison to voice their opposition.

Goodman: You said you originally thought the war in Afghanistan was justified.

Chappell: At the time I thought some wars might be necessary, and I thought that the Taliban were training terrorists. I didn't understand the nature of terrorism then as well as I do now. Terrorism is an ideology, a way of thinking. To fight it, we need to change U.S. foreign policy. Eisenhower, the first president to identify Middle Eastern unrest as a threat to the United States, said that the reason people in the Middle East hate us is that we suppress freedom there. We support dictatorships. We prevent democratic progress, which is the opposite of what we say we're doing. We have to practice what we preach, which means we can't talk about human rights and also support dictators.

The seed of terrorism grows in the soil of hopelessness, depression, and fear; of poverty, hunger, and injustice. Killing civilians and occupying countries only exacerbate terrorism. Even the middle-class or affluent terrorists feel oppressed and estranged from their native culture. We need to fight terrorism the way we go after the Mafia: break up their networks, attack their funding, arrest the leaders, put them on trial, and send them to prison.

Imagine if America's reputation around the world were strictly for providing humanitarian aid and disaster relief; if, whenever there was a disaster, the Americans came, helped, and left. Then, if terrorists attacked the U.S., world opinion would be on our side. We wouldn't have to defend ourselves against terrorists; the rest of the world would do it for us.

Another big problem with the war in Afghanistan is that the Karzai government is corrupt, because any government that cooperates with an occupying foreign power is always going to be corrupt. Think of the Indians who cooperated with the British. Think of the French who cooperated with the Germans. The Karzai government is notoriously full of warlords and drug lords. Many Afghans prefer the Taliban — that's how bad it is. Marine lieutenant colonel Christian Cabaniss, interviewed on *60 Minutes* last year, said that if you kill a thousand Taliban and two civilians, it's a loss. General Stanley McChrystal, former commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, has said the same. That was the whole point of the counterinsurgency doctrine:
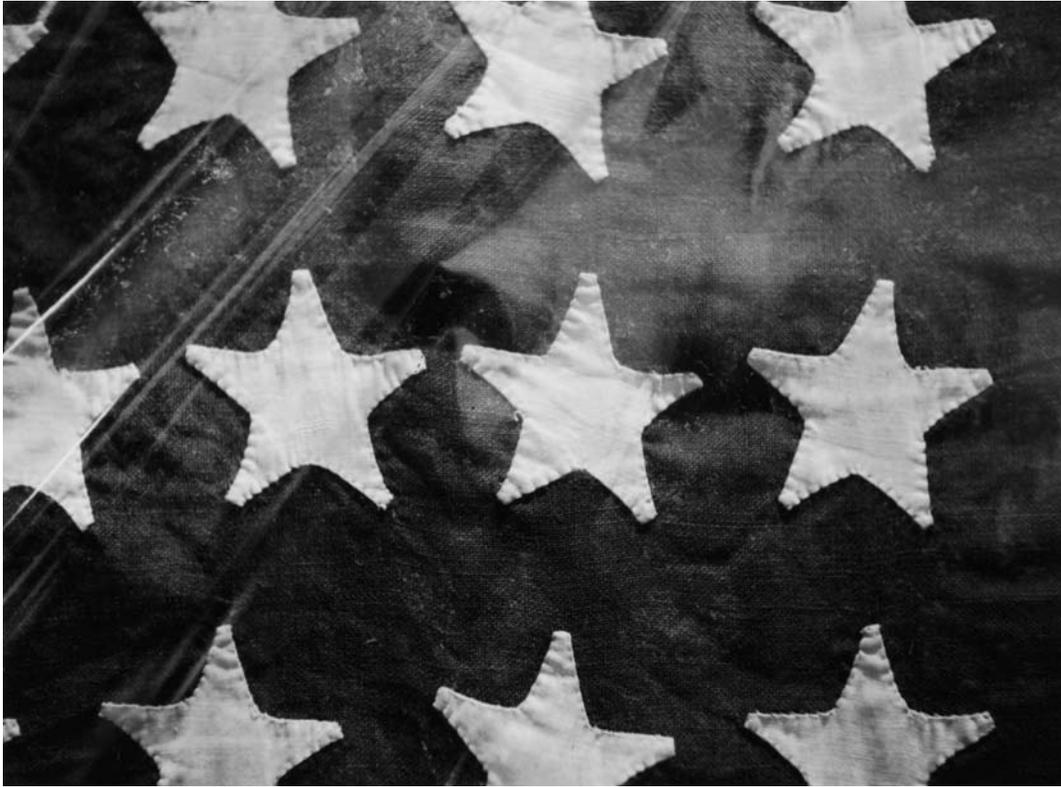
to avoid killing civilians, because it creates more insurgents. But when you realize that most of the people killed in modern war are civilians, you see that we're fighting a losing battle.

One thing I learned at West Point is that in order to think strategically, you must be able to see the world from your opponent's point of view. And from the point of view of the average Afghan, the U.S. military is there to keep a corrupt government in power. Many don't see us as peacekeepers.

Goodman: What about in the capital, Kabul? The non-governmental aid organizations there seem to value our presence.

Chappell: We are providing some security in the cities, but Afghanistan is predominantly a rural country. If you don't win the hearts and minds of the rural population, you can't win over the Afghan people. The Taliban have a lot of influence in the vast rural areas, which are more difficult for American forces to occupy and control.

Goodman: What will happen to the rights of Afghan women if we leave the country to the Taliban?

Chappell: I think we have to look at why the Taliban came to power in the first place. After the Soviets left, the warlords took over, and many of them were raping women and pillaging villages. The Taliban gained support by stopping the rapes. The leader of the Taliban, Mullah Omar, reportedly led his soldiers in the rescue of two girls who had been kidnapped and raped by a warlord. So if you're a villager, and you have to choose between your daughter not being able to go to school and your daughter being raped by a warlord, which is the better alternative? It's not that the people want the Taliban. They just fear the warlords more. Now the Karzai government is

treating segments of the population so badly that it is making the Taliban look like a better alternative. Moreover, the Karzai government is no champion of women's rights.

Greg Mortenson, the author of *Three Cups of Tea* and *Stones into Schools*, went to Afghanistan in the 1990s and asked the people what they wanted, and their reply was schools, especially for their daughters. He says that if you educate Afghan girls to fifth grade, three things will happen: birthrates and infant-mortality rates will drop; the quality of village life will improve; and mothers will say no when their sons ask for permission to make jihad, or holy war.

Americans have a difficult time imagining ways of solving problems that don't involve bombing. That is why many countries question whether our intentions are truly to promote liberty, human rights, and women's rights, or whether our motivations are imperialistic in nature. If we are occupying Afghanistan to liberate women, for example, how do we explain our close alliance with the Saudi Arabian government, which oppresses women? Other countries notice that when governments cooperate with us and give us access to their oil, we couldn't care less about their human-rights records, and that makes us look like hypocrites. Saddam Hussein was executed for crimes he committed while he was our ally. We actually increased our support for him *after* he committed those crimes. The only way our actions appear consistent is if you assume our foreign policy is about protecting our own economic interests.

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