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BRANCACCIO: Welcome to NOW.

We have two unforgettable voices tonight on what lies at the center of America's attitude toward war and peace.

When I use the phrase "the military industrial complex" who do you think coined that? Left-wing Philosopher Noam Chomsky, perhaps? It comes from a card carrying Republican and military hero, President Dwight David Eisenhower.

Eisenhower's vivid warning about the danger to democracy of military armaments manufacturers and Congress coming together to guide the country's destiny forms the frame of a new documentary, called WHY WE FIGHT. The film — which plays out against the backdrop of 9/11 and the war in Iraq just opened in theaters after winning the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance last year.

DAVID BRANCACCIO: The film's director is Eugene Jarecki. Thanks for coming in.

EUGENE JARECKI: Thanks for having me.

BRANCACCIO: The film is suffused with the current war in Iraq. But is this a film about Iraq?

EUGENE JARECKI: It very much is not, I would say. I mean, our goal was to really put Iraq in a historical context and really take a look at what is it about a number of US wars over the past half century that unites them? Because invariably wars are about different things.

This war is about many things. The Vietnam War was about a different set of challenges and so forth. But what we did find when we looked at the wars was that all too often the wars seemed to have the same quality that the Iraq War has in that what the public was told when the war began turns out to be very different than the real reasons that were being discussed behind closed doors. And that gap between what the public thinks is happening and what's really happening I think is at the heart of the concerns of the film WHY WE FIGHT.

BRANCACCIO: Were we lied to?

EUGENE JARECKI: Well, I think invariably, and this is sort of gives me hope about people, I think that what you notice is that we have a peace-seeking electorate. All of us, I think at the end of the day, want to see force as a last resort. And what happens is that the powerful all too often see politically expedient reasons for going to war.

And you can almost see how necessary policy makers feel it is to lie to the public, to go against our better judgment-- to give us reasons like WMDs or the Gulf of Tonkin, equally powerful illusions, to convince us against our better judgment that going to war is necessary.

BRANCACCIO: You say we're peace-seeking. But we also, we, as the public, get confused. I mean, you went around asking people "Why do we fight?" the title of the film. And look at some of these answers.

CLIP #1 WHY WE FIGHT

"What are we fighting for?"

"Fighting for continued freedom that's the only way we're going to have it I think."

"Why do we fight? I think that the, I honestly don't have an answer for it."

"It's just the people who start the war who know what they're fighting about."

"I think we fight for ideas and what we believe in so I hope that's what it is."

END CLIP #1 WHY WE FIGHT

EUGENE JARECKI: Invariably, almost to a man or child, the answer-- the first word out of people's mouths was "freedom."

And so you sort of stop and wonder, you say, "Well, in a free society what does it say if everybody gives the exact same answer to the question?"

So I'd ask another question. I'd go farther. I'd press. And I'd say, "Well, what do you mean by that? You know, what does that mean to you?" And right away you would discover people's doubts. That right beneath that veneer of freedom that we've all been taught to feel and we all do feel and wanna feel, there are doubts. There are sort of black clouds hovering.

CLIP #2 WHY WE FIGHT

"Why do we fight? I'm not quite sure, but I think it's for power and control for greed."

"I'm not sure if we're fighting for the oil or not we could be we could not be."

END CLIP #2 WHY WE FIGHT

EUGENE JARECKI: We spoke to people in their middle age who clearly grew up at a time of great American hope and aspiration. And today they're struggling with how they feel about it. And they hear too much in the news about motives for going to war or motives for American adventurism overseas that aren't quite consistent with what they hoped it would all be about.

And you might think that would be disillusioning for me. It really wasn't. I actually find that very inspiring because in that sort of combination of hope and doubt is the very fabric of how Americans think and how we can take our own view of the time in which we're living. And I think out of that will come real change and real inward looking sort of tough love.

BRANCACCIO: Still, it's a little problematic. And you have that Pentagon analyst who expresses the idea that if you're gonna go to war so that some of our men and women die in war, you better have a consensus from the public on these issues.

EUGENE JARECKI: Yes, that's Lieutenant Colonel Karen Kwiatkowski, who's a remarkable American and gives a kind of a really firsthand look at what it's like to be in uniform at a time where the policies are being driven in ways that are inconsistent with your beliefs.

Remember that the film is really driven by Dwight Eisenhower. And it's Dwight Eisenhower who warns us of the kinds of dangers we face in this society when there are motivations for going to war. There are drives toward militarism that are inconsistent with the beliefs of everyday Americans.

BRANCACCIO: Let's actually look in on that famous Eisenhower speech. He was on his way out of office. And look how essentially radical he sounded.

CLIP # 3 EISENHOWER'S FAREWELL SPEECH

"My fellow Americans this evening I come to you with a message of leave-taking and farewell and to share a few final thoughts with you my countrymen.

We have been compelled to create a permanent armaments industry of vast proportions. Three and a half million men and women are directly engaged in the defense establishment. The total influence economic, political and even spiritual is felt in every city, every statehouse, every office of the federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications.

In the counsels of government we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence whether sought or unsought by the military industrial complex, the potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist."

END CLIP # 3 EISENHOWER'S FAREWELL SPEECH

BRANCACCIO: Did it surprise you when you went back to the footage of this just how far Eisenhower went?

EUGENE JARECKI: It's jaw-dropping. I mean, when I know first found this speech, which was really the inspiration for making the film, I believe I can say I have never seen an American president speak as truthfully to the American public before or since on any subject, let alone a subject as grave as why we fight.

And it seems to me, you know, things have gotten to a point in Washington where this kind of candor, this kind of deep inward-looking concern that isn't just caught up in this sort of shouting match of Washington politics. It has just become so rare. And that's why I cling to this moment by Dwight Eisenhower.

BRANCACCIO: He had such profound fears of a system arising in which military contractors got together with Congress to essentially become a kind of self-perpetuating armaments machine. You argue that that's what is driving America's move to war in many cases.

EUGENE JARECKI: Yes. I mean, I think it has to be looked at very carefully. And the danger, of course, is that this becomes the stuff of some kind of mad conspiracy theory where we imagine that there are evil geniuses sitting in dark rooms somewhere.

BRANCACCIO: Well, that's often how the phrase is used. "The military industrial complex." Like a whacko idea.

EUGENE JARECKI: And it's a big mistake. I mean, one has to go back to Eisenhower and understand his analysis. And he's not a conspiracy theorist. He's not a dove. He's a person who knew very well from the battlefield firsthand how war works. And then he learned firsthand in the Oval Office how policy works.

And what he was afraid of was not that there would be some evil genius somewhere. He was afraid simply that your emphasis as a society can shift toward militarism if you, essentially as he said, if you create an imbalance in and among national programs. That's what he calls it. By, for example, doing what we're doing today, which is taking so much of our national resources and diverting them away from crucial parts of our national life like health, education, transportation and diverting all of that in the name of security into our defense apparatus.

You can almost see the picture. It tilts the society. And it tilts it ultimately toward militarism. Why? Because it suddenly looks like for every problem there needs to be a military solution. Because the military is so over-developed and the other parts of your national life have been so emaciated in the process.

BRANCACCIO: But our dependence on this system runs extremely deep. I mean, take a look at a state like California. Its prosperity, the California dream in the '60s, '70s and '80s was in large part due to intense military spending out there. Jobs depend on this system.

EUGENE JARECKI: Yes. And if that were an organic phenomenon, it would almost be one thing. But one of the things we discovered, and this does get a little bit shadowy, and it's an unfortunate thing to learn about the defense industry, is that there's a thing called political engineering.

You would think if you run a bomb-making company, for example, or you run the company that makes the B2 bomber, it would be really smart to build the whole thing under one roof, right? Not so. That's not how the defense business looks at it. In fact, a part of the B2 bomber is made in every single state in the United States. Why? Because what they wanna make sure is not just that they get the program going, but that they keep it going. And that whenever that B2 comes up for review, everybody on the commission is getting a piece of the action.

CLIP #4 WHY WE FIGHT (CONGRESSIONAL SPEECHES)

"I believe in this military. I am urging the Senate to support this bill, 66 billion dollars for our men and women in uniform."

"I just want to thank the chairman for working with me and adding a hundred million dollars to upgrade an additional 10 B-1 bombers."

"And that B-1 has been a great asset for the projection of power..."

"The F35 joint strike fighter, the FA22 raptor."

END CLIP #4 WHY WE FIGHT (CONGRESSIONAL SPEECHES)

EUGENE JARECKI: Everybody in that Congress has a job in their home district that they're trying to protect, has a contract they're trying to protect, getting funding that they're trying to protect.

So you notice that the Hall of Congress is eerily silent when that thing comes up for review. That's called political engineering. It works against the fabric of our very delicate democracy.

BRANCACCIO: You have some very strong characters we really get to know. You see their narrative arc. And one of them is a retired New York City cop, Wilton Sekzer.

EUGENE JARECKI: Yeah.

BRANCACCIO: And when you first see him. He's on the subway?

EUGENE JARECKI: Yeah, he is. Wilton was a New York City police officer — before that had been a Vietnam veteran and spent his life serving his country. And on the morning of 9/11, he was on his way into the city on the L train.

And he turned a corner and caught sight of the World Trade Center on fire. And maybe unlike the other people on the train who sort of were gripped with horror, Wilton's horror was doubled. His son Jason was in the building, and he had to wonder at that moment would Jason, you know, make it out alive. And what was gonna happen? And Jason died that day.

BRANCACCIO: Well, like a lot of us when we lose somebody, there's grief clearly. But also, in his case, intense anger.

EUGENE JARECKI: Yeah.

BRANCACCIO: He says somebody has to pay for taking his son. He says, "I wanna see bodies stacked up," to what end?

EUGENE JARECKI: Well, I think we all feel momentary revenge at times in our lives. But Wilton, in sort of response to 9/11, himself having been a soldier, becomes directly engaged in the Iraq War in a very unique way.

BRANCACCIO: Well, he has-- he has this idea. He wants to put his son's name on a bomb essentially.

EUGENE JARECKI: Yeah.

BRANCACCIO: And first he gets the runaround.

EUGENE JARECKI: True.

BRANCACCIO: But then he persists.

CLIP # 5 WHY WE FIGHT (WILLIAM SEKZER)

"Sirs, we do not take personal requests. Son died on 9/11 wants to know if we could put name on bomb." Passing it up "Harry this is Jerry do you think we can do something like that?" "Joe fairly easy don't you think?" "Well we'll look into it, let me go ask Harry" and you read this whole list of emails.

"Sorry for the delay but business is booming. The weapons don't stay long enough to write on them." And finally it goes to this Marine air division. "Can do, Semper Fi." boop boop boop. I get back the pictures. I'm loving the pictures and I'm saying holy smokes there's this picture of a bomb and then a close up of the same bomb and on the side of it, in loving memory of Jason Sekzer."

END CLIP # 5 WHY WE FIGHT (WILLIAM SEKZER)

BRANCACCIO: Let's just say he's on a journey of discovery and he doesn't end at the clip that we just saw.

EUGENE JARECKI: Yeah.

BRANCACCIO: There's more to it and we'll have people see the film to see how that plays out.

EUGENE JARECKI: And very inspiring. Wilton's one of the most inspiring people I've ever known. It's a very eye opening journey he goes on.

BRANCACCIO: Now I saw the other night you were up at West Point talking about the film?

EUGENE JARECKI: We were. Yes.

BRANCACCIO: How were you received?

EUGENE JARECKI: Wonderfully. I have deep regard for people in the military. I have met with a great number of them in the making of this film. And, in fact, it's changed me as a person. It's made me understand far more deeply how our American situation works and the very huge difference between who makes policy, many of whom have never heard a shot fired in anger, and who is actually having to do with dying and the fighting for those potentially misbegotten ideas. It makes me feel great sympathy for men and women in uniform.

I mean, I look at us as carrying the hopes of global democracy. And that's why I hold a standard here. I care deeply about how this turns out. And I take my cue really from Frank Capra, whose title I stole for the movie.

BRANCACCIO: The legendary filmmaker.

EUGENE JARECKI: Yes, see, and I love Frank Capra. And I love him because Frank Capra always made films that were out to protect democracy, particularly the little guy, in his struggle against the great powers that can, you know, look at IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE.

And in World War II, he made films that took that concern global. My film WHY WE FIGHT, I am doing the same thing, I hope. Frank Capra's a lot better movie-maker, let's say for disclaimer. But the reality is I hope I'm doing something in the Capra tradition. He asked Americans at one time when World War II was upon us to stand up and fight for democracy, to join that war with vigor and be willing to die for democracy. I too am asking Americans to stand up and fight for democracy. And I'm doing it at a time that I feel — and I think a lot of us feel — that democracy here at home is in peril.

BRANCACCIO: Well, Eugene Jarecki, Why We Fight, thank you.

EUGENE JARECKI: Thanks for having me.

BRANCACCIO: One of voices in Jarecki's film is Franklin "Chuck" Spinney. For 30 years Spinney worked inside the Pentagon trying to expose what he saw as the outrageous waste of taxpayer money in ways that often undermined the security of America. Spinney's work for the Pentagon's Office of Program Analysis and Evaluation seldom earned him the love of senior Pentagon officials, but he managed to stick it out until his retirement two years ago. Since then, Spinney says things have only gotten worse.

Mr. Spinney, good to see you.

CHUCK SPINNEY: Thank you.

BRANCACCIO: You look at the Defense Department budget-- I mean, these are gargantuan figures. You add everything in, you start to get something close to maybe a half a trillion dollars this year. What do we get for that kind of cash?

CHUCK SPINNEY: Not a whole lot. Certainly not what we're paying for. The Defense budget is basically being governed by Cold War priorities and we're buying very, very little in terms of the kind of weapons that we need to fight the kind of wars we're actually fighting.

And we're not actually fighting a very big war. I mean, if you compare today's war in Iraq and Afghanistan to Vietnam, in Vietnam, at the height of Vietnam, we were spending less than we are today. We had 550,000 troops in Vietnam. We also were fighting the Cold War. We had probably over a million troops forward deployed in Asia and Europe besides Vietnam. We had a strategic air command with hundreds of bombers and thousands of nuclear warheads on instantaneous alert, many of them flying continuously and we had a huge rotation base of almost two million people at home to keep things going. And we were spending less than we are today.

And the war in Vietnam was a much more intense operation. I mean, today's operation is miniscule in terms of daily activity compared to that. And, yet, we're spending more money. And the military is stretched to the breaking point.

BRANCACCIO: Just think of the paradox you just presented to us. We're spending all this money, yet we're stretched?

CHUCK SPINNEY: Yeah. Kind of amazing, isn't it?

BRANCACCIO: It's clear that the money is going, in your view, to the wrong things.

CHUCK SPINNEY: Absolutely-- that-- that's correct. It--

BRANCACCIO: What? Fancy technology?

CHUCK SPINNEY: It's going to technologies — I'm not against technology. I'm an engineer by training— but, it's going to technologies that don't necessarily provide a valid war fighting capability, an effective war fighting capability. It's going to technologies that are basically holdovers from the Cold War and we have no business-- using today. And it's not going to the kind of capabilities that we need to fight this fourth generation war of state versus non state thing, which basically requires very skilled people. Not large numbers of them. But, people that are culturally attuned to their local conditions.

I mean, if you're gonna be really serious about this, we might wanna build units around specific regions of the world where they have-- culturally, they can speak the language. They understand the culture. They don't do dumb things when they go in.

BRANCACCIO: Cold War ends, could be an opportunity for reform without — since we're the only super power left standing — but then 9-11, September 11th happens. Do you see much evidence of a strong reform movement for fixing what is wrong with the military--

CHUCK SPINNEY: No and--

BRANCACCIO: --industrial complex?

CHUCK SPINNEY: No, no and it and remember 9-11 occurred 11 years after the Cold War ended. There was an opportunity in that interregnum to do things, to fix things. And in fact if you go look at some of the writings of the reformers, of which I am proud to have been a member, we were actually predicting the kind of war that we're in now.

The central question is why, with the end of the Cold War, didn't we start looking in this direction when it seemed pretty clear at the time that the prospect of a large nation versus nation conflict like we had envisioned during the Cold War-- or groups of nations allied against groups of nations was just not foreseeable any time soon.

BRANCACCIO: This time after the Cold War. And you have writing from--

CHUCK SPINNEY: Right.

BRANCACCIO: --thinkers within the military saying you know the new kind of war--

CHUCK SPINNEY: But it was never translated into money. And money is what talks in Washington. And the problem is, is that this military industrial Congressional complex is woven so deeply in-- into our fabric of life, you pulled out the whole justification for it, the threat, the Soviet threat - literally evaporated before our eyes. And the thing just keeps going on as if nothing happened.

And basically, it was because this thing is woven so deeply into our body politic, it would take decisive leadership.

Now when Clinton became president, he basically brought in, for his defense policy, a bunch of Cold Warriors. They were part of the military industrial Congressional complex. Basically, they just started priming the pump with new programs. And we tried to warn — I

personally tried to warn them. And essentially, they just blew it off. They said, "Well we're different. We're gonna manage this better than anyone else." You know? Pat me on the head. Go away.

BRANCACCIO: But Chuck, I hear two parts of this. I hear the budgetary time bomb.

CHUCK SPINNEY: Right.

BRANCACCIO: But I also hear a military industrial, and as you put it, Congressional apparatus that is so resistant to any kind of reform--

CHUCK SPINNEY: Right.

BRANCACCIO: --that it put us more at risk when the world changed on 9/11.

CHUCK SPINNEY: Absolutely. Remember what was the top priority in the Pentagon in the Bush administration. It was ballistic missile defense, you know? They were accelerating deployment of it.

BRANCACCIO: So called Star Wars.

CHUCK SPINNEY: Star Wars. It was Star Wars. And what would what would that capability have given to us? Nothing. It's just a drain on resources.

BRANCACCIO: Yet, you do see Star Wars being pitched in the wake of 9/11 as somehow relevant.

CHUCK SPINNEY: Yeah, it's totally bizarre. I mean--

BRANCACCIO: You don't think the anti ballistic missiles would have stopped the planes into the towers?

CHUCK SPINNEY: Well no one would have shot at them with those systems. First of all, they're all in Alaska, to satisfy Ted Stevens, Senator Stevens from Alaska. They weren't-- so they weren't in the right position if it had been deployed. And the other thing was, they wouldn't have done it until it was too late anyway, cause they wouldn't have realized what was happening. And no one would have pulled that trigger before the first World Trade Center got hit.

And there wouldn't have been time to do it on the second.

BRANCACCIO: Now you were still in the Pentagon during the 9/11 attacks--

CHUCK SPINNEY: Right.

BRANCACCIO: But you've been retired for a couple years now.

CHUCK SPINNEY: Right.

BRANCACCIO: So you're thinking it's in a pretty bad state--

CHUCK SPINNEY: It's worse.

BRANCACCIO: --here in 2006.

CHUCK SPINNEY: It's far worse.

BRANCACCIO: So, where does the money go? If the budget's not going down, but you got less planes, you got less soldiers, I wanna understand this.

CHUCK SPINNEY: It's going into cost growth. And, basically, you have cost growth in weapons. And we have an economic system that reimburses contractors for cost. So, basically, the way you maximize profits in the defense industry is to maximize cost. It's a very simple

relationship. We buy cost and that's what we're getting.

BRANCACCIO: But, for you and me, the taxpayer, it means we are paying a fortune for a military--

CHUCK SPINNEY: Exactly.

BRANCACCIO: --that may not be getting stronger.

CHUCK SPINNEY: Right-- right.

BRANCACCIO: Chuck, when you finally get a chance to see the film WHY WE FIGHT, first of all you'll admire just how handsome you are in the film. But, you'll also be struck by many things including — there are those that make the argument in the film — that the fact that we've spent all this money for fancy, new weapons actually makes us more likely to want to use them.

CHUCK SPINNEY: I agree with that completely.

BRANCACCIO: Isn't that pretty cynical though? We'd start--

CHUCK SPINNEY: Well--

BRANCACCIO: --a war to use--

CHUCK SPINNEY: No, no. I--

BRANCACCIO: --stuff?

CHUCK SPINNEY: It doesn't work that simply. It doesn't work that simply. I think it makes us more likely to use 'em. But, it- I think it's sort of almost like a subliminal thing. First of all, in the end you sort of have to justify it. So, there's sort of this pressure in there that you gotta use it.

I think we saw a dramatic example of it in the early '90s when there was a lot of pressure to go into Yugoslavia, there was a lot of pressure not to go into Yugoslavia and Secretary of State Madeline Albright got set-- got very frustrated and said publicly at one point, "What's the point of having this magnificent military if you're not gonna use it?" I think that's illustrative of what you're doing here.

BRANCACCIO: You describe a system that seems immutable. It is built out of bedrock. You tried to reform it all those years. Is there any chance that this country moves on from military industrial Congressional complex as it is now?

CHUCK SPINNEY: Boy, that's a hard question. I-- you know, I don't know-- I don't know-- how it's gonna evolve. Right now, I don't see a whole lot of hope.

T I wouldn't say it's cynicism as much as it is-- it's just inertia has taken over. Certainly, there are cynical people there. But, it's just inertia. We've gotta keep the spending going and we'll say anything to get through the day.

BRANCACCIO: It's like the care and feeding of the military industrial complex rather than worried about security.

CHUCK SPINNEY: Precisely. Welcome to America

BRANCACCIO: Well, Franklin Spinney, Chuck thank you very much.

CHUCK SPINNEY: It's been my pleasure.

BRANCACCIO: For more on that "military industrial complex," check out our Web site at pbs.org.

WHY WE FIGHT is now playing in theaters In New York and Los Angeles, with more cities soon to follow.

And next week on NOW.

In the lead-up to the war the president now says the intelligence was wrong- an honest mistake. But a former administration insider is making a startling claim:

WILKERSON: I participated in a hoax on the American people, the international community and the United Nations Security Council. How do you think that makes me feel?

BRANCACCIO: And that's it for NOW, From New York, I'm David Brancaccio. We'll see you again next week.

Folks: The study guide to the film, which you must also access and digest, is available [here](#).