

Paul: [00:00](#) Ladies and gentlemen, angry Americans around the country and around the world, welcome to a very special conversation for a very special time. We are very humbled and grateful to be joined from Baghdad, Iraq by the great and powerful Colonel Miles B. Caggins the Third. How are you my friend?

Myles: [01:07](#) Well, it's great to be on the air with angry Americans. It's an interesting time to be in Baghdad, Iraq and beyond Corona virus, I don't recommend travel here. Follow the state department guidelines. Things are certainly heating up in our attentions. But we're focused on ensuring that our soldiers are safe out here, helping our Iraqi security force partners. And I'm happy to talk to you and your listeners and update you on what's happening in the middle East.

Paul: [01:39](#) So we're old friends, man. We go way back. Did we meet the first time at the council on foreign relations or where did we meet the very first time? Do you know? I'm trying to remember.

Myles: [01:50](#) We could have met in person for the first time at the council on foreign relations, but I think prior to that you had already started the IAVA organization there and being an Iraq war veteran, this ... your organization that you founded, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America appealed to me as a veteran of these modern conflicts that we've had in Afghanistan and Iraq for the past, what, 18 years now. And then later on met you at the CFR and glad to have maintained contact with you. And here we come full circle to where I'm back, where you served in 2003 in Iraq. Still out here. Still going forward in the United States army.

Paul: [02:30](#) And tons of overlap to dig into. But first before we get into that, let's set the picture. I'm in New York city. We are pretty much on lock down. Families are locked down. We're all watching the news as this situation develops. I'm in my wife's closet with shoes behind me. It's a closet of about four square feet. Very small New York city closet and you are in Baghdad. Can you tell people where you are and set the stage? You were kind of giving me a little tour where you are right now. Tell me ... tell folks where you are right now as well.

Myles: [03:05](#) Certainly I'm in my office in Iraq at a base called union three. It's in the international zone, the green zone. It's directly across the street from the United States embassy here in Baghdad on the base that where I'm sitting now, it's an Iraqi base. There's an Iraqi headquarters right across the street. You could roll a bowling ball and hit the door with an Iraqi three-star who

commands their joint operations command Iraq. I'm here at the coalition's military headquarters.

Myles: [03:35](#) The headquarters I serve in is responsible for coordinating the efforts to defeat ISIS remnants with our Iraqi partners as well as Syrian democratic forces. And I monitor to serve as the spokesman for this 82 member organization, including 77 nations and five international organizations. My office is in a building that was once an Iraqi army headquarters and had an opportunity to decorate my office a bit behind me, I have my Hampton university banner that motivates and inspires me every day.

Myles: [04:08](#) A couple of little cousins on my mom's side of the family. The McCray family drew a little picture of me and they said, you're our hero. And I think it looks a bit like me. And I have a friend named [Lann 00:04:20] Meyer from Montana who runs a support group for soldiers and we've been pen pals ever since 2003 when you and I served in Iraq the first time around.

Paul: [04:31](#) So I'm excited to talk to you for a number of reasons, but because before coronavirus hits, you are one of the most important spokespeople for the entire department of defense, for the coalition, you are a master of essentially crisis communications and leadership in times of chaos. Last episode I talked to Chris Fussell, Navy seal commander, McChrystal Group president about how to lead in chaos.

Paul: [04:57](#) But you're a guy who has been leading in chaos for most of your career, but especially in this role right now. So I want to expand on many elements of what you do and your leadership and what folks can learn from your experiences. But just on a very human level for you, my ... I'm going to ... I'm not going to call you a Colonel even though you are well deserving of that title now.

Paul: [05:19](#) You are a full bird Colonel. Now you've been in the military for a couple of decades or more. What's it like over there for you as a person, as an American right now watching Corona virus hit the country and around the world?

Myles: [05:35](#) Yep. Paul, this is great and timely question. Those of us in the military and our operations here in Iraq and Syria are also affected by the Corona virus. Let me paint a bit of the picture for you. We have soldiers that maybe around 10 basis here in Iraq and several others in Syria, particularly on the Iraq side, we have a two part mission with our partners. One is the catch bad

guys, catch ISIS outside the wire. We advise and assist and enable our partners. So we bring technology that's [inaudible 00:06:09]-

Paul: [06:10](#) Hold on, we're going to pause here for a second Miles. We're going to pause for a second Miles. If you can hear me, we may get some hiccups sometimes so I may I say-

Myles: [06:22](#) Did you say pause?

Paul: [06:23](#) Yeah. If I do this-

Myles: [06:24](#) I can hear you.

Paul: [06:25](#) ... we'll pick up ... we may get some blips in the recording that we can go back up and redo and clean up later. So I think we got through most of that. But you were saying, let me pick up from, we advise, where you basically got to the point where you said we go get bad guys, so maybe you could pick it up from there.

Myles: [06:43](#) Sure. I'll say it again. Our military coalition has really a two prong mission. One is to help the Iraqis catch bad guys outside of our basis. So the Iraqis hear that there is ISIS hiding out in the mountains or in the desert, they'll come to us, we'll share some intelligence and information and on rare occasion we'll accompany them to go on a raid to catch ISIS remnants and we're talking financiers, outlaws, people who are smuggling lethal aid. We want to bust up their networks and ensure that they never resurge.

Myles: [07:16](#) More importantly though, we train the Iraqis on several bases across the country. Well that training is currently paused just this week as a result of the Coronavirus. We have paused our training operations for several weeks and the Iraqis are paused too. So it looks like we may not get back to the training until sometime after Ramadan.

Myles: [07:38](#) That has an impact on our troops here. So we're looking at moving some troops around, getting them out of harm's way instead of having them sit around on camps that occasionally get rocketed by rogue militia groups. There's another part of this though, beyond the mission that's impacted. It's the people. We have people here who were expected to go back to their home countries. We have more than 30 military countries represented. We have folks who are scheduled to go on leave and those leave and vacations back home were timed during

spring break so they could spend time with family, go on vacation.

Myles: [08:14](#) None of that is happening as a result of the Covid-19 response. These are some of the tough pills to swallow and the hard decisions our commanders have to make to keep everyone safe and no military is effective if everyone's sick. So we take health as clearly one of our number one priorities before people even come into most of our Western militaries and certainly throughout our terms of service.

Paul: [08:39](#) So to paint the picture, there's a guy or gal who's been there maybe six months or a year, has been planning for a year to come home. Maybe was going to go to spring break and Disney world with their kids or maybe somebody was going to get married. They're looking forward to reconnecting with their families and those folks are just frozen, right? They're frozen in place. They don't know when they're going to move, they don't know when ... it's the ultimate stop loss, right?

Paul: [09:03](#) And at the same time, you all don't know how your families are doing back home. I remember being in Iraq when the hurricane hit and folks, couldn't go home and check on their houses, couldn't go home and check on their property or their people. And that's really incredibly stressful. But I think it important for folks to not be navel gazing and understand that our frontline fighters right now are essentially on lock down too. How do you ... the military is a group of people that get together, right?

Paul: [09:33](#) We've ... and a couple months ago, back in January, the number one news in the world was rocket attacks and you all were hunkered in place in groups, avoiding rocket attacks. Without, obviously, this is going to be the theme throughout this interview, without disclosing anything that is top secret or confidential or would in any way endanger our folks, how do you do that? How do you go to dining halls? How do you do training? How do you do any ... I ... the mission of the military is always to adapt, improvise, and overcome. But can you paint that picture for us right now on a military base in Iraq?

Myles: [10:07](#) Sure. A couple of anecdotes, today I went to cross the street to talk to Major General Tahseen Ibrahim. General Tahseen is the spokesman for the joint operations command. He's an Iraqi general and I consider him a friend. I walked down into his basement office and he had a surgical mask on and two blue latex gloves. And he was surprised. I caught him off guard. He took the gloves off immediately and we shook hands.

- Myles: [10:31](#) But people are taking some individual protection measures. For those of us in the coalition side, we've done something new and novel today, protect ... practicing social distancing during video teleconferences. So we have this new system where you can have several hundred video teleconferences up and where we used to have gatherings of 30 people, 40 people in a room to have a meeting, now we have people doing the meetings from their own office or in smaller groups. On a wider scale though there still is the military and we do assemble and we do eat and we do have to travel together. We're taking precautions that everybody else is taking. People are being reminded to have good hygiene, wash their hands, keep their rooms clean, practice social distancing as well as getting rest and exercising, staying healthy, keeping your immune system up, being resilient so your body's ready to take on any illness. Fortunately, we are in the band of people who are less susceptible to severe Coronavirus.
- Myles: [11:37](#) But we're thinking about everyone back home and as you said, there are some people who were planning on going on vacations and getting back with their loved ones. And what's really hit home is our group of Italians, the Italians have the third largest contingent of troops here in Iraq and we have several hundred Italians who are frozen in place. They couldn't get back to Italy and some who couldn't come out here as a result of what Coronavirus is doing in Italy and their focus is totally on their families, particularly the older members of their families.
- Myles: [12:12](#) And as soon as they can get out and get back to their home country, they're free to go. That's one of the decisions that was made by the commander here as we've paused training. On a case by case basis, we're getting people out of here, but there are a lot of different rules from airlines and customs and immigration at various countries. We'll get through this together, but our focus is on protecting our force now.
- Paul: [12:35](#) Myles, you've been a spokesperson, and you've been in front of the cameras on a global stage, you've been the guy when the rocket attacks were happening back in January and over the last couple of months and tensions with Iran were at their apex, you were one of the guys briefing essentially the world media on what was happening and what we were doing. First off, can you explain for the average American civilian, the capacity of the US military right now to help?

- Paul: [13:09](#) Folks are hearing about national guard deployments to places like New Rochelle. You're hearing about medical units that may be deployed to places like New York or San Francisco, but you're an expert on the capacity of our military and on communicating that. So for the average American, how can the military help right now?
- Myles: [13:29](#) The ... I'll keep my comments tailored to what we have seen here in this region and what the military is doing. Our Iraqi partners right now in certain locations are enforcing curfews, in other locations they're running checks where their medical professionals with them doing roadside checks of people who are passing by, just spot checks on the health and coronavirus symptoms, flu like symptoms. Back in the States, one of the great things that our military has is the ability for logistics.
- Myles: [14:06](#) I think as it ... as we think of this Coronavirus in our response and any sort of military response that might be related to it, it's our ability to mobilize a healthy ready group of workers who have committed to serving the United States to assist civilian authorities in whatever way that civilian authorities need to be aided. One of the things that we have is a significant logistics infrastructure and equipment. We can fly personnel around, we can move around medical professionals, we can move around personal protective equipment, supplies, medicines, and deliver them in a way that is very organized.
- Myles: [14:52](#) But any time we do this, we work with the civilian authorities, I know the leadership here in deployed environments as well as in the United States to the most senior levels of the defense department are focused on this and you can tell that they're focused on it with the number of communications down and in to our formations, their youngest private and airman knows what's going on as it pertains to the coronavirus protocols. And we're also doing a lot of communication up and out.
- Myles: [15:22](#) So I anticipate that you'll continue to see updates from the Pentagon. And I defer to my Pentagon colleagues to explain the department's overall role, but America should feel confident that our service members, the young men and women who are wearing the uniform wearing the jersey of our nation, will respond as they are asked to respond and can be trusted and dependable in delivering any mission that we require.
- Paul: [15:47](#) Miles, is there any example from the deployed environment recently that you can share that speaks specifically to the medical capacity, whether it was mass casualties or treating

refugees? There are a lot of examples I can think of where we ... where the military has a capacity to stand up a hospital, to do immunizations. I mean the capacity to deliver babies and do things that are necessary for a healthy society. But are there any examples from the deployed environment either now or throughout your career that you can reference to kind of put color around what that capacity could look like in action?

Myles: [16:23](#) Our military medical professionals are exceptional. I wish I didn't have these examples to share with you, but in recent weeks, yes, we've had a number of rocket attacks by some vile militia groups that have wounded and killed some of our soldiers and airman. Others have been saved by our commitment to preserving the force through battlefield healthcare, battlefield medicine. We had rockets land and from the time of rockets landing, between then and the next 60 minutes we had people flown on black Hawk helicopters through the night to a hospital at the Baghdad airport, a military hospital where life saving surgery was conducted.

Myles: [17:13](#) This is done under times of duress when there's rocket attacks, you never know when the next one comes, but the pilots are mobilized. They get in their black hawks, they land people on the ground, do everything they can to render aid, fly through the night in an atmosphere that could sometimes be dangerous. You land and strangers receive the patients and they're waiting and most of the time they're waiting with nothing to do.

Myles: [17:40](#) But sometimes the alarms ring out and they have to answer the call and save a life. It's really incredible the investment that we put into saving our personnel here. Sadly, we had a couple of Marine raiders who were killed a couple of weeks ago in combat operations against ISIS and it was really tough terrain, mountainous terrain in Makhmur mountains in North central Iraq. And these guys were killed and in a place where they're pretty hard to recover their remains, but we leave nobody behind on the battlefield.

Myles: [18:18](#) So our special operators responded, trudged through the night, fought ISIS in close combat and close combat, I mean terrorists who had suicide vest strapped to them, explosive suicide vests, direct close fire engagements where they're firing AK 47s from hidden positions inside caves and behind boulders. And our guys fought through that to get our Marines back so they could be sent back with honor to the United States.

Myles: [18:50](#) And this just ... I forever am impressed with the toughness and resolve of individual soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines who will come together as a group. And here at the coalition, you see this from multiple soldiers. We've had a time where five Italian commandos were wounded in an operation against ISIS and our American medics saved them. The Italian general is forever thankful to the American soldiers. And so are those Italian soldiers and their families.

Myles: [19:27](#) And that's just what we do. It's who we are. And I know there's probably some young people listening and if they want to be part of the best team in America, I say consider the military. It's a chance to serve our nation in ways that can go beyond any of our dreams. I never imagined when I was graduating from Hampton university in 1996 that a couple of decades later I'd be spokesman for a global coalition in Iraq. But here I am and I'm happy to talk to the angry Americans, and I believe in what I do. And on the days where my morale might be a bit lower, I just have to look ...

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Myles: [20:03](#) I do, and on the days where my morale might be a little bit lower, I just have to look around me and I can be inspired by the most junior member of my team.

Paul: [20:08](#) I'm really, really glad you shared all of that, but especially you do a lot of work inspiring young people. Every conversation I have on this show, every guest is an important, inspiring, and/or iconic American. You're a guy that has probably been below the radar for most Americans, but someone that that I know has advised senior level military leaders, senior politicians. You're the kind of person that whoever wins the presidency in November should be calling to work at the White House. You've been in those high level environments. But you also do talk to kids and give back.

Paul: [20:43](#) On a very basic level, Myles, you've been under tremendous adversity most of your life and definitely in your professional life. I asked this question of Chris Fussell last week, but for folks who are scared, for folks who are experiencing a kind of fear or anxiety that maybe they never felt before in their life, what is your message to them and what can you share with them as a tested leader to help get them through it?

Myles: [21:11](#) Fear. Fear is a mind killer. Whenever I might start to have any sort of fear, I try to focus on what's next, and put things into

perspective. But I think there's a way that... There certainly is the unknown, but there are things that are known and anticipated. I think that there are certainly path to overcome fear. A lot of that is related to preparation.

Myles: [21:42](#) I've got this little leadership philosophy that I call the Straight As for Success that I talk to young people about. Then also even I've spoken to some different corporations. I'll run through it, these five As that I have. I think it's useful. I've tested it in my own life and I retest it daily a number of different ways. I think for success, these five As, these straight As for success, it starts out with having aspirations, dreams. A, aspire. Aspiring and I'm old enough where I've seen people go through transitions in life and eventually, I'll be going through one here as I leave the military in a few years and go into private life. But having aspirations, setting goals is important because you can tack something on the wall and work toward it.

Myles: [22:32](#) As you have these dreams, as you're in New York, Christopher Wallace, a famous poet from New York, known as Notorious B.I. G., his first song, Juicy, it was all a dream. I used to read Word Up! Magazine, right? He even started with a dream.

Myles: [22:49](#) Starting with a dream, next you have to acquire two things that I say. So aspire then acquire knowledge and a network. Paul, I consider you part of my network of people. Having a network is important for achieving your dreams, but you also have to have knowledge too. This means simple things like stay in school, but get smart in what you're trying to do. So there may be different types of learning, experiential learning that you have to have. There may be learning from going through arduous time, rigors, trials, all of those things.

Myles: [23:29](#) The knowledge and the network are necessary to the third A, which is achieve. Get out there and do it. Just do it. Achieve your dream. Once you've achieved your dream, you're not done yet. You have to acknowledge the people who helped you out. Your parents, your mentor, your clergy leaders, whoever influenced you in life, you should acknowledge them. Send them a thank you note. Pick up a phone, call them, text them. Let them know you're doing well.

Myles: [23:56](#) The last A of the five As is assist. Help somebody else out. What good is it if I'm here as a colonel, if I'm not helping out cadets, lieutenants, captains, majors, and lieutenant colonels become colonels? I tell the majors who are on my team, I say, "My job is to train you to be a colonel." Sometimes they looked at me

quizzically, but I say, "Just trust me. So when we're staying up late, when we're revising things, when I'm preparing you to sit in front of the general and brief, this is all me preparing you to go beyond anything that I'll ever do in the military."

Myles: [24:31](#) That's what I owe people. I owe people that because people invested in me. I've got great parents and a ton of mentors, family and friends who have invested in me from birth all the way through this day. I think there are perhaps people in my life who could see me in this role before I could see myself in this role. So my job is to prepare others to be in this role or whatever their dream is, in or out of the military.

Paul: [24:55](#) I love it. I love it. You also sent me a graphic that has this broken down into a video game controller that I'll post on my social media and folks can check out, because I think it really effectively communicates the five As that you're talking about.

Paul: [25:08](#) But I also am recognizing the environment we're in now. As folks who've been in the military, we've been in difficult situations before. I imagine folks saying to themselves, "Yeah, but you know what? Coronavirus is coming and I don't know what to do. I don't know what's going to happen." You're in Iraq and you don't know when the next rocket's going to come. So what about people who are listening right now and said, "Yeah, man, that playbook sounds great, but this is crisis. This is different. All that shit about my dreams and aspirations. This is different now because coronavirus is coming."? How do you respond to that new dynamic?

Myles: [25:47](#) Hey, look for the opportunities related to coronavirus. I spend a lot of my day monitoring social media because I live in the information environment. I'm a words warrior out here and we're in a constant information war against terrorist groups and other regional actors in cyberspace.

Myles: [26:08](#) One of the things that I've seen are a lot of the fun stuff that people are doing with family at home. People are making some of their favorite recipes. I've seen folks doing these wicked home workouts, some are practicing dance routines. Making the best of these times.

Myles: [26:25](#) 24 hours ago, I was sitting in my office probably working on a communications plan related to shifting around some troops here, and then all of a sudden we get an alert that there's been a rocket attack on Camp Taji again. So I'm like, "What the heck is going on? Three times in one week?" Turned out to be a false

alarm. While we're sorting out this false alarm, a couple of explosions happen in a neighborhood not too far from where I'm sitting. So that was a very real thing, but you roll with the punches, you control what you can control, and stay focused on living in the moment and don't worry too much about tomorrow or worry too much about what happened in the past.

Myles: [27:07](#) I think that's a challenge that all of us have. Sometimes in my own life I have the challenge of just focusing on the moment and not letting yesterday be the thief of today or tomorrow be the thief of today. That's all I would suggest for who's listening.

Paul: [27:24](#) I think that's really, really helpful. I think America is adjusting to a new normal. What I want to do on this pod, for as long as necessary, is try to help people hear from leaders who are maybe a little bit farther down the road and have adjusted to a different kind of new normal.

Paul: [27:39](#) You all were operating in kind of a different coronavirus environment before coronavirus hit America, right? Every day you didn't know if a rocket was going to land on your head, a bunch of your friends were going to die, and how you would have to respond to that. You didn't know if one rocket was coming or 50 rockets were coming, right? Some days the entire world was focused on it and other days you guys were on the back page.

Paul: [27:59](#) So I think that that actually does translate well to this new environment where the president is saying, "Fighting corona has got to be like a war." Many of us are mobilizing in a way we've never seen before. We're going to, I think, become aware of and connected to our military probably more than any other time in modern history. The National Guard is going to be involved, the Defense Department's going to be involved, the VA now is going to be involved, and that's going to be a new normal for folks.

Paul: [28:25](#) But I really appreciate your candor and your perspective, Myles, because folks are going to have to recognize that the snow day is going to be over soon, right? This is after you get to Iraq and after the first month goes by and you realize you're not going home and this is a different kind of environment, you start to adjust. Your playbook, your five A's are applicable a month ago if you thought you were going back to college for the semester. They're especially important now if you have to mobilize your building, or your neighborhood, or your family to deal with this

threat. So I really appreciate the durability of your message, but also the durability of your leadership.

Paul: [29:03](#) I want to ask you to maybe drill down on one point that's important. The forever war, as I've called it, our continuing combat operations, don't stop for coronavirus. Our troops are still fighting and dying in many countries around the world, and including many of our allies. Can you talk to maybe the unity that you see in your coalition among countries of different backgrounds, different languages? I think that that can provide a model for what we may see from nations in fighting the coronavirus now, right? A couple weeks ago, we were all aligned. Many of us were aligned around ISIS. We can take those same coalitions and now fight ISIS.

Paul: [29:48](#) What did you see in that unlikely coalition at times, and what made it effective? What made that fighting for us tight and unified in the face of such a tough challenge?

Myles: [30:01](#) Yeah, sure. I want to go back and address one thing. First, when rockets come in, I do get scared. When that alert comes off, "Incoming, incoming," with the sirens, my heart starts to beat. When I hear the explosions, I get scared, adrenaline shoots up and there's nothing you can do about it. But one thing over the time of these deployments is I know what my mission is next. That's to inform. Find out the facts, coordinate with the coalition, coordinate with my Iraqi or Syrian democratic forces partners, and get the facts out. So I'm never paralyzed by the fear. But certainly, I do get scared in the moment without a doubt.

Myles: [30:39](#) You talk about this coronavirus as a war. In 2014, the world responded to ISIS sweeping across Syria and Iraq. Today, nearly one-third of the world's nations are part of this coalition against ISIS, a global coalition. The core of it is here, Iraq, Syria, but they're also focused in West Africa, Asia, and other regions where ISIS is a threat.

Myles: [31:07](#) The thing I've learned from this coalition is that when everybody has the same goal, in this case, the same enemy... I've seen the hashtag, "kill the virus." When people are oriented on the same goal, they'll work together, share information more effectively, because we realize that we're all threatened by this. It's March, it's Women's History Month. A few days ago we had International Women's Day. I invite your listeners to go to the Combined Joint Task Force — Operation Inherent Resolve Facebook page. On our Facebook page, we've been profiling

women warriors from throughout the coalition. You'll see them from the United Kingdom, from Poland, from the United States. Nations where people may not have a lot of interaction until they get out here. We're bringing their stories forward, because we're not robots as soldiers, and we have hearts and we do miss our family and friends and favorite foods and drinks.

Myles: [32:12](#) But it's incredible how the world will come together and rally around this enemy of ISIS and terrorism. It's looking like the same type of response is happening as it pertains to COVID-19.

Myles: [32:29](#) One thing though I would say is we have to be cautious that we don't become xenophobic. That in this time of threat, that we don't draw into ourselves and point a lot of fingers. Instead, this should be an opportunity for us to rally internationally and work together.

Myles: [32:51](#) I'm certain that the global health community is responding and collaborating, and governmental leaders are certainly talking. The example of what our service members do here in a place like the coalition against ISIS probably sets an example of the way governments can interact across the world to fight the coronavirus threat. We'll get past this just like we are coming up on one year anniversary of the physical defeat of ISIS territory, we'll lick corona too.

Paul: [33:23](#) Excellent. I appreciate that, man.

Paul: [33:25](#) I've been talking to folks about how this show can adapt, improvise, and overcome. We may move to a more regular show to try to provide information, especially because of our unique connection to the defense, military, and policy community. So I want to provide people with information that is useful.

Paul: [33:42](#) I think the last episode with Chris did that. This episode with you is going to do that as well. I heard a beep. I don't know if that was on your end or mine.

Myles: [33:52](#) It was mine.

Paul: [33:52](#) Yeah, I hope it's not a rocket attack.

Myles: [33:54](#) No, no, no. You'd know that one.

Paul: [33:58](#) All right. Well, let me ask you, what is it like when a rocket attack happens? What do you hear? How do you know a rocket

attack is coming? Let's use that as an opportunity to help people understand.

Myles: [34:13](#) Yeah, sure. Since October, coalition troops in Iraq have been rocketed more than 20 times at our bases. Sometimes it might be one small rocket. When I say a small rocket, it's the 107 millimeter Katyusha rocket fired and it lands a kilometer or so outside the base, and you hear a little poof in the distance. Other times, we've had barrages where 30 rockets have landed inside our camps and killed or wounded not only coalition troops, but also Iraqis. These terrorists are indiscriminate, kind of like the coronavirus. They'll go after anything that's in their target range.

Myles: [34:55](#) We have a sense and warn system. We have these radars that detect things that fly through the air abnormally. They'll go off if they identify that a rocket is coming this way. And there is an alert, a siren that goes off, a recorded voice that shouts, "Incoming, incoming, incoming, incoming." You really only get moments to try to find yourself a bunker to hide in. For the most part, if you're in your room or in your office, you'll reach and grab your body armor and helmet, say a quick prayer, and hope for the best.

Myles: [35:26](#) Now, let's back up to January. January 8th, we had a tactical ballistic missile strike from Iran. There was some warning that the Iranians were going to launch missiles our way, so commanders made decisions to have everyone get the body armor, move into some bunkers where they could. Then these missiles were launched.

Myles: [35:51](#) This was kind of a night that I'll always remember. Sitting here, I knew something might happen. But you never really believe a ballistic missile might come your way. I'm at my desk and a sergeant major from the 82nd Airborne comes around, bangs on my door, "Colonel, colonel, get to the basement." I'm like, "What?" So grab my stuff, run down to the basement, and wait it out.

Myles: [36:16](#) We find out that more than 15 missiles landed near our troops in Al-Asad base in the Anbar province of Iraq and then up in Irbil in the Northern Kurdistan region of Iraq. The first thing you do is have this great sense of empathy and concern like, "Holy cow, who do I know at this base? Are they okay?" Well, of course it's hard to communicate in the moment. People are hiding in bunkers. You can't WhatsApp them, you can't Facebook

message them. They're looking to gain accountability. Then the dust settles and most people are okay.

Myles: [36:55](#) But it gets you focused, Paul. You know those times when you are on the ground invasion into Iraq, you've written about it. When things explode, when small arms rounds snap off near you, when rocket propelled grenades blow up next to your convoys, or when you know people who have been wounded or killed, it makes it very real out here. It makes it very real out here.

Myles: [37:25](#) I can't pretend like this is just a game and that I'm only in an information war. But even with that, I know that sometimes these attacks are for the purposes of information. Sometimes what we see Russians do in Northeast Syria, driving around and meddling with our patrols, that's part of their information. We are in what I consider to be a great powers war. Not just a competition, a great powers war right now. It's happening in the information domain. A lot of times, people are moving around or even firing rockets that has a kinetic effect because it has a bigger information impact.

Myles: [38:08](#) What I try to do is ensure that the public has the facts and the truth as fast as I can get them out. We're doing some different things here. You've mentioned at the top that I do some crisis communication. Yeah, a lot more than I ever expected. What I've learned is that audiences here in Iraq and Syria, that's really my primary audience, because they want to know what the heck is happening in their neighborhood. Why is the coalition here? How is the coalition working with our local security forces to keep us safe?

Myles: [38:40](#) But there's also a big audience in the United States. The mom of the aircraft crewman from the Minnesota National Guard, the father of the soldier from Fort Hood, Texas. Those family members as well as our senior defense leaders and elected officials are always yearning for information from what's happening here on the ground. I'm very fortunate to have a team of combat camera soldiers, public affairs soldiers, as well as rank and file Joes and Janes with cell phones that snap pictures, share them up, and we can present to the world what's really going on. It's quite an honor, a privilege, and a joy.

Myles: [39:25](#) Sometimes we do fun things. We can celebrate Women's History Month. We can tag on to other trending themes and topics. Other times, it's a very real business of letting you know

what the heck is going on with combat operations and our continued operations against ISIS.

Paul: [39:43](#) I think you've been masterful. I think I'm excited to see what you do when you come home, whether you stay in the military and are a spokesperson at the Pentagon lectern, or if you're tapped on the shoulder by the president to serve as a White House press secretary or something like that, you really are masterful in the way you communicate-

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Paul: [40:03](#) And you really are masterful in the way you communicate effectively and clearly and with confidence and thoughtfulness, but also in many different environments. You're tweeting content in Arabic, you know, you're doing press conferences with the entire region. You're doing a podcast with me in my closet. I mean, you're able to go uptown and downtown and weave in a Biggie Smalls reference along the way.

Paul: [40:25](#) And I think that's what we are so yearning for in this country right now, especially in this moment, is clear communication. And I will say it, because I know, you know, you can't get into that world, but the President, in my view, has been very ineffective. And in the last couple of days, I think he's finally recognizing there are other folks that are more effective. We now see the Secretary of Defense. We now see the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. We will see other people communicate. But on a very basic level, I want to ask you something about the coronavirus. We're hearing about testing. Do you guys know, you know, have you gotten tests? Do you know if you're going to get tests? Is that something you can even talk about?

Myles: [41:02](#) Yeah, the coronavirus, back of the subject of the day.

Paul: [41:06](#) Yeah.

Myles: [41:08](#) Here's what we're doing to protect our soldiers from the coronavirus. We're following the CDC protocols. If anyone has symptoms, we set them aside for 14 days. They go live in a tent, we wait, we do tests, we send those tests to Germany. It comes back, they're screened yes or no, and then they can move on with their military duties. Certainly while they're in their tents, they have wifi access and they're fed, but the main thing is to isolate folks and protect the Force.

- Myles: [41:42](#) To date, we've not had any of our soldiers in this theater, Iraq, Syria, Kuwait, test positive for corona, although corona does have a little bit of a presence in Northeast Syria and in Iraq. We live mostly on our bases, and again, our commander made a decision as well as the Iraqi commanders to pause training. So this reduces the amount of interaction between the coalition troops, over 10,000 of us, 5,200 Americans, over 10,000 including all the other countries, and the Iraqi security forces, more than 240,000, and on the Syrian side, more than 60,000 members of Syrian democratic forces. So we're limiting some of our interaction during this time that the training is paused.
- Myles: [42:27](#) As it's required though, we do have to do our duties. So we still have people who are on the gates, who are letting people in the post. I just told you I was meeting with the Iraqi spokesman today. We shared some great local food and sipped on some chai tea, but we're looking out for each other too. So if anyone has symptoms, it's better off that they just go to their room, go seek medical aid if they can, and as soon as they're ready to get back to duty, they get back to duty.
- Paul: [42:55](#) I know that we want to be mindful of your time because you've got, you know, very important work to do. I also was going to talk about this before we got what I thought you know was an alert, and if you need to wrap, just let me know and I can wrap right now. Okay, no? You're good for a couple more minutes?
- Myles: [43:11](#) I'm good. I'm good. Hey, I'm with the angry Americans. I'd rather be with angry Americans than angry militia mofos.
- Paul: [43:19](#) Well, we are also inspired Americans, right? We want to turn that anger into positive impact, but I also want to maintain a degree of normalcy, right? I think that any of us in the military know, like in my house, right now, we are doing morning breakfast together. The entire family gets together and my son Ryder picks a letter of the day, a number of the day, a dinosaur of the day, a vehicle of the day and a word of the day. And as a family, we go through this process and we are exercising together. It kind of feels like being back in the military on some levels, but we're maintaining a level of normalcy.
- Paul: [43:55](#) And I want to do that in this show too, but with an adjustment for the new environment. So I usually ask every guest four questions and I want to rapid fire ask them for you, of you, so we can keep that consistency in this show. So let's quickly go through these, right? Number one, Myles, what is your adult

beverage of choice? When you finally get home from Iraq, what are you looking forward to drinking?

- Myles: [44:19](#) I'm a straight lace buddy duddy. I like Shirley Temples.
- Paul: [44:23](#) Ah, that's the best answer ever. I love that. We've never had anybody say Shirley Temple. I love it.
- Myles: [44:31](#) Bring out the grenadine, buddy. I can't get it over here and I'd be happy to kick back while anybody else has their spirit of choice.
- Paul: [44:37](#) Oh man. I'm remembering when we were at a party together and you and I have had kind of Forrest Gump lives, and I don't know if it was an inauguration party or what it was-
- Myles: [44:48](#) It was after the White House Correspondents Dinner.
- Paul: [44:51](#) Yeah. It was-
- Myles: [44:53](#) 2016.
- Paul: [44:54](#) White House Correspondents Dinner. You and I were trying to hook up, but I think it was an MSNBC party-
- Myles: [44:59](#) Yes.
- Paul: [44:59](#) And it was DJ-ed, but who was the DJ? It was somebody big. I'll think of it later.
- Myles: [45:12](#) I think it might've been Biz Markie. I just can't recall.
- Paul: [45:16](#) Oh, it was Biz Markie. It was just Biz Markie.
- Myles: [45:18](#) Biz Markie, yeah. Biz Markie.
- Paul: [45:19](#) Yeah, Biz Markie was the DJ. And I remember saying like, "Hey, I got to get my friend, he's a Colonel." And they're like, "Ah, it's a VIP list," you know? And then I went to the president of the network and said, "Yo, my buddy is in uniform. There's a bunch of liberals at MSNBC. You need to support the military better. Can you get him in?" And I think they got you in, right?
- Myles: [45:40](#) They got me in. It was an epic night of socialization there in D.C. A long way from where I am now, but I'll get back there at some point.

Paul: [45:47](#) Well we'll have one more that when we get back.

Myles: [45:48](#) Yeah.

Paul: [45:49](#) And when you were growing up, the next question, what was your first car, Myles?

Myles: [45:54](#) My first car? Mazda 626. I drove that bad boy for 13 years. 180,000 miles on it. Drove it until the transmission just fried and the cost of getting the transmission fixed was more than a car, so I bought my next car. I drive a Hyundai now.

Paul: [46:13](#) What color was that and where was that when you were growing up?

Myles: [46:17](#) Well this was after I was commissioned. It was a gray V6 leather interior Mazda 626, and the air conditioners things, they would oscillate. Oh yeah, I used to ride through Germany on the Autobahn hitting about 110, 120 miles per hour. You couldn't tell me nothing when I was in, but you know what? I still recall scraping the damn bees off of my car because when drive through towards Kaiserslautern from where I was up in Henau. in the winery, there's a lot of bees and you smack the bees at 100 miles per hour. Those things get burrowed into your pavement.

Paul: [46:53](#) I love it. I love it. I love it, this vision of you as a young officer on the Autobahn with a Mazda 626 encased in bees, you know, drinking a Shirley Temple is going to be like, you know, when they play you in a movie, there's going to be a scene of that.

Myles: [47:08](#) I had the portable CD player plugged into the ashtray lighter-

Paul: [47:16](#) Oh yeah.

Myles: [47:16](#) With Puff Daddy's Bad Boys Greatest Hits.

Paul: [47:21](#) I love it. I love it. All right.

Myles: [47:23](#) It was a victory album.

Paul: [47:24](#) A couple of the last questions we ask of everybody and we'll do an abbreviated version. Colonel Myles Caggins, Myles B. Caggins III, which is just an amazing name to write. Every time I write it or I see it, it's an amazing name, I have to tell you that, but what makes you angry and what makes you happy?

Myles: [47:45](#) Yeah. What makes me angry is not totally related to the military. But in general, you know, there's a lot of inequality in the world, and beyond that, you know, not wanting to see people stepped on or put down, but thinking of the least of these, when people are overlooked, and in the military it could be leaders, senior sergeants and officers who never want to listen to what the young private or the young marine has to say, that lance corporal, where they don't bring in the views of the youth, where people look past people who may be beneath them financially.

Myles: [48:37](#) Anytime people are overlooked, oppressed, put down, this bothers me. And I see it in our country. I see it over here. I see it inside great organizations like the military, and that greatly annoys me. Unnecessary bureaucracy, you know, anybody who works in a large organization. I like flat organizations. I understand rules are rules, but we got to try to cut through and have efficiencies and decide things at the table together and not have so many meetings before the meetings, before the meetings, before the meetings.

Myles: [49:11](#) So that's it. That's what makes me angry mostly. But I certainly am a hopeful optimistic person, and I think if we look at some of the examples that we have from our great religions, the example of Jesus Christ or other members of our own family. Some of us are blessed to have those great wise uncles and aunts who dispense wisdom and also dispense a wrinkled \$20 bill that you know they got from their social security check, but they give it to you when you're a young person. You go home and visit on the holidays and they're just proud of you and give you encouragement. That's the kind of upbringing that I had, and so I owe it back to my parents' parents and their parents whose dreams I'm living out.

Paul: [49:56](#) And what makes you happy, man?

Myles: [50:00](#) I get happy, I get totally geeked when I see people who I know doing well. Me and my boys from college, we are always big up in each other. One is a medical professor down in Emory, another is a big shot lawyer in Charlotte, another is a great teacher, and so, seeing my boys do well, seeing people who I mentor get selected for promotion or special fellowships or schooling, seeing the soldiers have the privilege of serving with and leading, have those light bulb moments where they know that the picture that they're taking is not just a frame from a camera, it has strategic geopolitical influence and they get inspired to do the best and they start bringing forth ideas to the

sergeants and the officers in the section and we adopt those ideas and they feel like they're part of the team and have a sense of corporate ownership, that makes me happy.

Myles: [50:55](#) Also, talking to friends and family and the people who I know are interested in me for me and the people who I'm interested in for the genuine miss, for the love, people who have been riding with me from early on, starting with my parents down in Columbus, Georgia and my sister and her family and some other longterm friends.

Paul: [51:17](#) Would you ever run for office? I hope you say yes, but well, you know, we're going to be watching you. And when you get out of the military, have you ever thought about running for office?

Myles: [51:26](#) Paul, you know, I'm a military man, so I can't answer this question. No, seriously, when I was at the Kennedy School, I took a class with Professor Steve Jarding, and it was really an advanced communication class. The title of it was Making a Politician, but it prepared me for this job in the way of knowing how to do on-camera interviews, draft speeches and other things. And he said at the beginning of the class, "Hey look folks, you are here and we need people like you in service and in government." Well, I'm already in government, but I certainly get a lot of personal satisfaction and value of representing others and serving.

Myles: [52:03](#) So if I'm called to serving government after being in the military, I probably would answer that call if it was what's best for me at the time and met my priorities. But certainly, the pursuit of any office of any appointment or even a promotion in the military is not worth losing one's soul. It's not worth compromising one's principles and values. And so, maybe that's one of the things that makes being a military spokesman unique. I just put forth the truth and state the policy and try to make it inspiring. I try to persuade, but I do it with the truth.

Paul: [52:44](#) And you succeed, man, in everything you do. And that's why I've been so honored to know you and I'm so thankful you're joining us. I can't give you whiskey like I normally do in an interview, so we're going to have to adjust fire on that. I will get you some kind of a special beverage. I'll try to get it to you over there if we can do mailing soon. I'll try to get you some Peeps too because Easter is coming. We do that. If you've listened to the show, if I were going to give you Peeps and I asked you to choose between pink, blue, or yellow, which color would you choose, Myles? Pink, blue or yellow?

- Myles: [53:19](#) I'm classic. I like yellow Peeps.
- Paul: [53:21](#) Excellent. All right. Now I know what to put in your gift package, which by the way, are you guys still getting gift packages? I mean, that's one thing I saw somebody post. Interesting to know. You guys are over there. Are they going to allow gift packages during the coronavirus outbreak?
- Myles: [53:39](#) Well, it looks like our mail might be paused, but stuff is still coming in. I'm just grabbed, I've got a gift package next to me. People send them to me. They're like, "Hey, you're the spokesman, you know people." So when I do get a chance to travel around to some of these small camps and bring media, I've got a gift package. Here, in my hand, I have like 50 little packages of floss. So I'll bring these to some remote camps somewhere, the troops will have floss. Everybody loves to have this gourmet coffee. Black Rifle coffee is a popular one around here. So yes, we do get gift packages. We also have the ability to buy things from the PX and Amazon delivers out here when they can. Things are well. Do I get a chance to answer the dinosaur question though?
- Paul: [54:22](#) Oh, you want to pick a dinosaur of the day?
- Myles: [54:25](#) I want a dinosaur of the day.
- Paul: [54:26](#) Yeah, man. You're the spokesperson. You have the floor. By all means. What's your dinosaur choice?
- Myles: [54:32](#) I've always been a fan of triceratops.
- Paul: [54:35](#) Amazing dinosaur, right?
- Myles: [54:37](#) Amazing dinosaur. Beast, offensive, defensive, triceratops.
- Paul: [54:43](#) And just such a cool helmet. And I mean, it just looks cool. It's a cool looking dinosaur, right?
- Myles: [54:49](#) Yeah.
- Paul: [54:49](#) Yeah, we might-
- Myles: [54:50](#) It's the like Marshawn Lynch of dinosaurs.
- Paul: [54:52](#) Oh. By the way, I don't know if you've seen it, Westworld. Have you seen the new episode of Westworld?

- Myles: [54:57](#) I have seen no new episodes.
- Paul: [55:00](#) All right. Well, I took a break and I watched the new episode of Westworld, and here's why. Number one, Jeffrey Wright who plays Bernard has promised to join me at the show in the future and I'm looking forward to that, but also Marshawn Lynch is in it. Marshawn Lynch has-
- Myles: [55:15](#) Is that right?
- Paul: [55:16](#) Yeah. He has a feature role. I was totally surprised, was not expecting it. I said, all right, my wife and I are going to take a break, we're going to watch Westworld to kind of disconnect, which is important in times like this. Like we learned in the army, you got to take time. You can't live in the fight all the time. You got to take a break and find that break, and maybe this podcast is a break for folks, but dude, Marshawn Lynch is in Westworld, and that's some mind-bending shit. And it's coming. You're going to see it and you're going to love it.
- Myles: [55:45](#) I'll be sure to check it out. I finished the final episode of Power a couple of weeks ago, and out here, in the midst of all this chaos and military war tension, I've got to watch This Is Us in and get in touch with my sensitive side again.
- Paul: [56:01](#) Ah.
- Myles: [56:01](#) Behind the scenes.
- Paul: [56:01](#) I love it. You're touching on it, but I'm hoping Milo Ventimiglia, who's been a longtime friend and supporter of IVA and of the military, he's done some USO tours, he is, you know, the star of that show and a guy we had on the show.
- Myles: [56:14](#) Yeah.
- Paul: [56:14](#) James Laporta, who is an incredible investigative reporter, is a technical advisor on that show. So there's a lot of connections, and if you and I keep talking, we're going to cross over into every episode we've had. But-
- Myles: [56:29](#) I've answered questions out here about Syria from James Laporta. I used to work for Ambassador Susan Rice, and all my life, I've had a crush on Rosie Perez. So certainly, I feel right at home on the Angry Americans Podcast.

- Paul: [56:42](#) That is the perfect ending, man. That is a great way to end it. Well look, listen, Myles, I am so grateful for your friendship. I am so inspired by your leadership. You are a leader who's risen to the moment for this country for so long, and you're doing that especially now. You know, I was on CNN during those rocket attacks. You were on one side, I was on the other side, and I felt, you know, really comforted and confident knowing that you and other leaders were on the ground to guide our men and women through that. And, you know, I know you're going to be tapped to do other things for this country in the years to come, and you do it the right way.
- Paul: [57:21](#) You're an incredible role model, more than almost anybody I've had on this show. Young people or anybody who needs a role model, read up on your background, follow you. You are a leader that this entire country is proud of. I know Hampton is proud of, I know your family is proud of, but you represent the best of what this country is all about, especially in times like this. So I'm so grateful for all your leadership and for you making the time for this discussion in the midst of everything else going on, man.
- Myles: [57:47](#) Well thanks for having me, Paul. If people want to continue to get updates about what's happening here, you can follow me on Twitter @ O-I-R-S-P-O-X, Oirspox, and then my personal Twitter is @MylesCaggins, and I'll be happy to stay in touch with you and do any follow up questions. And if any of your listeners want me to Skype into their classrooms, I'm happy to make time to do that.
- Paul: [58:10](#) That's actually amazing. I don't want to overwhelm you, but there's a lot of teachers who are going to be listening and trying to figure out over the next couple of months how to creatively connect their students with great educators and leaders, and you're that, man. Everything you do is kind of a masterclass in leadership and humility and communication. So I hope some teachers take you up on that. That would be a great honor for the kids and an inspiration, man.
- Paul: [58:32](#) But you're awesome. I look forward to having you back in the States at some point soon. We'll rent a Mazda 626 and we'll get some Shirley Temples. We'll play some Biggie and Biz Markie and Puff Daddy, and we will celebrate your return when we get through all this, man.
- Myles: [58:49](#) All right, we're going to get through this coronavirus and New York streets will be full of travelers and revelers soon enough.

This transcript was exported on Mar 19, 2020 - view latest version [here](#).

Paul: [58:55](#) All right, brother. We love you, man. Thank you for all your leadership and thank you to all the men and women that you lead over there.

Myles: [59:00](#) Yeah, that's it here from Baghdad. Have a good one.

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