



## Forum 4

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### Fog of War

by Joe Escobar - Sunday, May 24, 2015, 9:57 AM

This forum thread is for Fog of Warr posts and replies.

After studying the required materials, address the various questions. To make your POSTS, click the reply link in this, MY post. To reply to another student's post, be sure to click the reply link within in THEIR post.

IMPORTANT - SUBJECT LINES

BE SURE to use an informative subject line for your post. Do NOT simply leave it RE: Fog of War

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### "Don't make mistakes over and over. Learn from your mistakes."

by Jessica Seiler - Wednesday, May 27, 2015, 5:34 PM

His addition of his view of the war was very enlightening. He took it beyond the common experience of what was going on. Lesson #11: You can't change human nature. He states that he is very proud of his accomplishments but is very sorry for the errors he may have made. "We all make mistakes" the phrase, "the fog of war"- "war is so complex it's beyond the ability of the human mind to comprehend all the variables." He went to Vietnam to test his hypothesis of each country being successful in their objectives without the losses of people. Vietnamese prime minister told him that he was wrong, that they were fighting for their independence unlike the US who was fighting "to enslave" the Vietnamese. He states that they could have had anything they wanted without actually going to war and losing so many of their own people in the process. He says it was his responsibility to help the president of the United States to carry out his time in office and that he would have never authorized an illegal action in the war. (Talking about agent orange, a chemical to strip leaves from trees that later killed so many people.) "A lot of people misunderstand the war, a lot of people misunderstand the war, they don't understand me, a lot of people think I'm a son of a bitch." Everyone has there own interpretation of events. Like the saying goes, there are 3 sides to every story, my side, your side, and the "right" side. I believe that his points are valid considering he was such a huge contributor of the time in the war. Of course if LBJ and or Nixon had filmed a document similar to Fog of War it would have added to our understanding of the war. So much is always left out and or kept under private eye. It would have been interesting to see what they would have contributed to this subject.

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### McNamara: A Complicated Man

by Jeffrey Moat - Wednesday, May 27, 2015, 9:20 PM

Through out the different materials such as books, videos and articles; I have noticed that Defense Secretary Robert McNamara was a singularly interesting character. While his convictions of the war led him to one direction of belief, he was still bound by duty to serve at the pleasure of the president. And this becomes even more poignant in the story in the Appy book by Anne Morrison Welsh (page 150). When she details out her correspondence with the man, there is a real sense of empathy that he relates to her over the tragedy surrounding her husband's suicide.

I feel like this video clip further corroborates him as a deeply empathic and wise person trapped at the mercy of history. His responses seem genuine and his insight powerful. Leading me to believe he contains either a certain sense of nobility?

Or possesses a keen ability to manipulate his own image.

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**Human Nature**

by [Adam Mellott](#) - Wednesday, May 27, 2015, 9:58 PM

The Fog of War video clip was extremely enlightening and brought an "Appy" like interview realism of the Vietnam war and how it affected him and others. The way they McNamara describes the many mistakes that were made by human nature and the constant focus on how one should "learn from your mistakes" gives the feeling of repentance for what was done. McNamara talks briefly about the usage of Agent Orange and how its affects on humans was not known and how it caused many unnecessary deaths to those exposed. He backs up this statement with a comment about there not being a "law" in place that stated which chemicals could or could not be used in war. This to me sounds like an internal struggle to make right of a wrong.

My last comment about the clip is how McNamara talks about his time back in Vietnam with the former Foreign Minister and how they argued about the reasoning for each of their fighting stating how the Vietnamese thought of the Americans as pursuing to "enslave the Vietnamese" while the Vietnamese were just "fighting for their independence." The reasoning was so much bigger than that yet from one persons perspective it comes out like it could have just been discussed and resolved over tea. The U.S. knew nothing about the Vietnamese and the North Vietnamese were going to fight until there was no one left. This was apparent and the results of the war show that. There were a lot of mistakes and bad decisions made, but as was again said in the video clip by McNamara, we must all "learn from our mistakes" and hope to never make them again.

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**Re: Human Nature**

by [Samantha Westrope](#) - Thursday, May 28, 2015, 2:28 PM

I thought it was interesting look at McNamara as a person and not just the Secretary of Defense. I've never really thought about how it effected McNamara personally. I said in my original post that I would of been in the he's a "son of a bitch" camp previously. I still don't like him, but understand him I think, I say "I think" because I don't want to assume I really know someone from a short video clip, a little bit better.

I like the your point that if the reasoning for fighting had been that America was trying to further its colonial interests that it could of been settled over tea. Its far too simple.

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**Re: Human Nature**

by [Paul Turner](#) - Friday, May 29, 2015, 2:04 PM

Adam,

I really liked what you said here. I definitely feel like McNamara has an internal struggle. I think anyone who was in McNamara's position would struggle after the war. I feel like he has guilt about the war but has found ways to justify it to himself. Agent orange was borderline immoral and in the video you can tell McNamara knows this.

The misunderstanding by both sides is really a shame. Hearing McNamara talk about his conversations with the Foreign Minister really enlightens how the war was never going to end well. McNamara expresses that we must learn from our mistakes. He clearly uses that mentality to cope with the war.

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**Re: Human Nature**

by [Neil Pena](#) - Sunday, May 31, 2015, 11:52 PM

This was an interesting take on the video clip. I didn't think of it as having an "Apply" like take on it, but I definitely can see how it does by your explanation. McNamara did say that there was a whole misunderstanding from both sides and that the Vietnamese thought we were trying to replace the French as a colonial power and sought out to "subject north and south Vietnam to our colonial interests. He then tells that we were merely looking at it as an aspect of a cold war

while they saw it as a civil war. This definitely went hand in hand with some of the things talked about in the book saying that the north Vietnamese were nationalists and not influenced by communists.

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**McNamara weighs in...**  
by [Daniel Hovet](#) - Wednesday, May 27, 2015, 10:35 PM

Robert McNamara makes the case that right from the start, things were different from previous conflicts; while during the Cuban Missile Crisis, he believes that one reason that resolved so well was that the Americans could put themselves in the mind of the Soviets. In Vietnam, they never found themselves able to empathize with the Vietnamese properly. During his "detente" conversations with the North Vietnamese leaders years later, their leader claimed the U.S. interfered with their civil war; McNamara points out the U.S. always considered their conflict part of the Cold War. So the situation was poorly understood, and in the tense atmosphere with the Cold War, there were no room for errors; as McNamara puts it, "there's no learning curve with nuclear weapons". Understandable, to say the least.

I found McNamara's constant comparisons of himself to a military commander because they are both people who cannot claim they have never made mistakes to be an odd way of describing it. A lot of McNamara's video came off as odd to me; while his reasoning all made sense, his presentation of it felt strange to me. Perhaps that's simply because these sorts of "documentaries" (I guess you could call it) are rarely made by the person in question in defense of their actions. Again, that's something I can understand.

If LBJ was still alive, for instance, and he made a similar defense of his actions, I doubt it would change many people's opinions. They made their case then, what more could they say later?

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**Re: McNamara weighs in...**  
by [Adam Mellott](#) - Thursday, May 28, 2015, 9:32 PM

It basically all boils down to your last comment "what more could they say later?" The war ended up being an epic failure for the Americans and many lives were lost because of it. It was so political in nature that relevance was just thrown out the window. McNamara was trying to save face and pass blame and error as the norm, while no matter what he says makes a difference. In the end, you cannot take back what was done nor bring back the lives of the ones lost.

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**Re: McNamara weighs in...**  
by [Adam Mellott](#) - Saturday, May 30, 2015, 9:30 PM

I'm sure the pressure of McNamara's position was unbelievably stressful, tense and unbearable at times, but throughout the entire history of this war, there was not a single person who stood their ground with any of the Presidents and tried to make any other level-headed decision that did not surround a re-election of face saving scheme; and that definitely included McNamara. I get that hind-sight, post war decisions that were made would be hard to live with; especially when lives were lost. But the way that McNamara describes these "tough decisions" seems like someone who is searching for personal forgiveness in a "round about way." The damage was done, and I agree with you that no matter what is said from this point is going to make a bit of difference in people's opinions of the atrocities that were the result of bad decisions.

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**Re: McNamara weighs in...**  
by [Neil Pena](#) - Sunday, May 31, 2015, 10:31 PM

In the video clip McNamara shows a lot of remorse enough to actually come to say that he made a mistake. One thing that was mentioned in the video was about the use of agent orange in Vietnam. Like you said about some things coming off as odd, this instance was definitely odd for me. He talks about how reports came back to him that the chemical mixture of agent orange as a defoliants was actually toxic and kill people as well, he claims that if he knew that it was toxic he would have never had used it. He also says that he doesn't remember if he authorized the use making his

statements on his remembering the past a little foggy.

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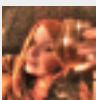
McNamera's excuse lame

by Thomas Brokaw - Wednesday, May 27, 2015, 11:21 PM

The fog of war refers to the making of critical decisions in battle when the complexity forces decisions with less than desirable information. The fog of war has been used more recently to explain the mistaken bombing of civilians as well as “friendly fire” accidents during battle. McNamera uses the fog of war to slip out from under the responsibility of his bad decisions based on errors in his judgment. He is confusing risky hurried actions with thoughtful battle decisions based largely on guesswork and overconfidence. McNamera’s application of the fog of war analogy is his best excuse for his poor decision making as Secretary of Defense. I thought his excuse was lame.

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A little insulted....

by Samantha Westrope - Thursday, May 28, 2015, 12:21 AM

The statements made by former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara helped me to understand about his decision making process and a little more about his mindset. I would have considered myself one of those people who considered him a “son of a bitch”. While I still can’t say I support his, or the administration’s, actions. The video clip helped me to see that he was doing what he considered to be the best course of action; he thought he was doing what was right for the country.

The way McNamara talked about people comprehending war did not set well with me at all though. It was almost insulting to say that we could not understand the complexities of war. Making these statements that war was just too complex made me wonder about his intentions. Was he saying he had no idea what he was doing? If so, whose puppet was he? Does he think the American people are stupid? These statements coupled with the segment at the end where McNamara primarily refuses to answer the questions of the reporter made me ask: what is he hiding?

The refusals also brought me to two possible conclusions. The first conclusion being that he was hiding something and the second that he had begun to forget the details of the war.

If LBJ or Nixon were to have been filmed in a similar manner they could shed a lot of light on the circumstances and our understanding of the war. Unfortunately they would probably be with holding and acted in a similar manner as McNamara, secretive and on the defensive.

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McNamera: Whiz Kid

by Thomas Brokaw - Friday, May 29, 2015, 3:14 PM

Before politics, McNamera made his reputation as a ‘Whiz Kid,’ one of several special recruits hired by Ford Motor Company to turn around their failing company, which he did. Soon after becoming President of Ford Motor company, McNamera was asked to become President Kennedy’s Secretary of Defense. When he entered the White House, he was already known as one of the “Whiz Kids.” McNamera must have seen himself as the smartest guy in the room. That's how others seen him. He would have considered his abilities second to none. Therefore, I believe he comforted himself in the belief that no one else could have done it better.

As for his refusing to answer some of the interviewer’s questions, I suspect he simply didn’t have a good answer. He certainly had been down all possible roads in his mind before and knew quickly which road not to take.

Source: http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/robert-mcnamara-becomes-president-of-ford-motor-company

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Re: A little insulted....

by Marcus Farset - Friday, May 29, 2015, 5:14 PM

I believe he made that statement not intending to insult anyone. I think it would be extremely hard for an average person to try to comprehend any war. The reason for this is that unless you have experienced war first-hand, then there is no way to understand all of the emotions and pressures of a war. Also commanders and officials have access to a lot more information than the public does. I do like your point though that it seems like one of the main men in the war should be able to comprehend the action he and the administration made.

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**Ugly Truth**

by [Daniel Hovet](#) - Saturday, May 30, 2015, 11:09 PM

I can't really be insulted by his statement because the Fog of War is a very real thing. Wars are always beyond the comprehension of any one individual. What one individual, even the most informed members on the councils of war, knows all that goes on? They are lucky to know a fraction.

In a war waged on the near opposite side of the world from us, rooted in murky and veiled conflicts spanning centuries and hemispheres, and involving players from all corners of the world, such as The United States, the secretive Soviet Union, the close-off Chinese, the Viet Cong, the South Vietnamese, the Hmong people, SEATO forces, and more, how can all the pieces be seen?

Sitting where we do now, decades safely removed from the chaos, with tools and technology at our disposal laughable to imagine to many back then, we can see a little clearer than most did then. McNamara has a case pleading the fog of war; perhaps not the strongest, but a case nonetheless.

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**Re: Ugly Truth**

by [Paul Turner](#) - Sunday, May 31, 2015, 10:11 PM

Daniel,

I agree with your perspective. Like you said, the fog of war is very real. I think that is because wars are always riddled with corruption and complexity. I understand how someone could get angry at McNamara for using the "fog of war" to cushion his decisions, but he does present a valid point nonetheless.

There's no possible way to ingest and understand all the aspects of war. And another point that was mentioned in the video is the factor of human nature. War makes people do some crazy things. The lines between moral and immoral get blurred. The bottom line is that there is such thing as the fog of war.

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**Re: A little insulted....**

by [Desiree Carter](#) - Sunday, May 31, 2015, 10:23 AM

I agree with you that the video helped to realize that while I still think hes horrible, he was trying to do things to what he felt was best. I have to disagree on the idea that he was insulting the american people by saying that we could not understand the complexities of war. I feel like even a man in his position all the way down to the people on the ground and at home will never have the full story. We only get the version that was passed down to us. someone somewhere is always going to be making decisions based on the information they have received and conversations they have had and there is no way of us knowing what they know, especially when secrets are involved. This makes me think of one of the stories in the Appy book ( I apologize that I can not find it at the moment to reference) He states how at first he thought he was on the right side it wasn't until he had been over there for a while and had seen the things that were happening did he realize that maybe it wasn't a totally noble war. Now during the time he was there I am sure he killed some people in fire fights etc. under the guise of it being the right thing to do. I feel that even in higher up cases your going to have the same issue. They are being fed information that adds to the agenda. while others may know closer to the truth. There is no way for us to ever know everything about it. I actually found his statements regarding this to be right on the money.

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**LBJ and Nixon Documentaries**  
by [Paul Turner](#) - Saturday, May 30, 2015, 1:53 PM

If LBJ or Nixon had filmed a documentary similar to McNamara's we would have learned a lot from them. Listening to the Presidents explain their reasoning and logic behind their toughest decisions would give us a better understanding of the war. Another reason why these documentaries would be interesting would be to see how much their view of the war has altered after several years. In my opinion, McNamara seems like he had a very different view of the war in his documentary. I would've liked to hear what they regret about the war, what they wish they had done differently, and what they were proud of.

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**LBJ or Nixon**  
by [Desiree Carter](#) - Sunday, May 31, 2015, 10:09 AM

I believe that if LBJ or Nixon had made a documentary similar to Fog of war it would not add to our understanding of the war. My reason for feeling this way is that honestly so much time has passed and the vietnam war hs has such negative responses from people, I believe that they would be more concerned in what they were saying as to paint themselves in the best light possible. I think after a certain amount of time things get "FOGGY" and even if they weren't trying to deceive people in the documentary everyone wants to think the best of themselves and I believe thats what they probably would project.

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**LBJ/Nixon Documentary**  
by [Marcus Farset](#) - Sunday, May 31, 2015, 2:06 PM

I think that if LBJ or Nixon were alive and had been filmed in a documentary similar to the fog of war we could have learned a few things and it would add to our understanding of the war, but a lot of information would have been withheld. It would have been informative to hear facts and important points of the war from their perspectives of commanders in chief. They would be able to share some pretty interesting decisions they made and the reasons behind making them. A lot of info would also be withheld though. Like McNamara said in the video, the Vietnam war is one of the most controversial wars in history and a few simple words could inflame all sorts of things. This would be the reason that some key facts that could help our understanding of the war would be held back because no one wants to stir the pot of the Vietnam war; especially higher ups like LBJ and Nixon who would want their reputations to be as high as possible, but they were the ones that made these decisions that created very heated debates. So why would they want to release anything that could spark such events again?

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