



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 War 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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Does he say anything that would make you think his is “a little foggy” in his recollection of the war?

by Joseph Foley - Wednesday, May 27, 2015, 12:27 AM

Does he say anything that would make you think his is “a little foggy” in his recollection of the war?

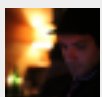
Time has a huge impact on how well someone is able to recall and describe past experiences. As I have mentioned in other forums this term, I have personally witnessed veterans gradually alter their recollection of war. Outside factors including mental health, politics, region and battle wounds tend to influence a change in how someone remembers a particular event. This process of change does not render current eyewitness interviews useless, but understanding the filter is essential.

McNamara’s recollection of the war sounded vague, and he seemed to be deeply troubled and insecure about his personal involvement. He was unable to recall his knowledge or participation of using Agent Orange, but admitted to its catastrophic effects. He was very aware of the fact that he had caused unneeded death, although he believes that any leader of war suffers from the same mistakes. He admits that he had a part, while also not pointing out specific examples. Overall, his memory of the conflict seemed to be a bit foggy.

Despite McNamara’s obvious change in perspective, we are extremely fortunate to have a key witnesses account. Much like any one perspective, it is always best to compare to as many other sources as possible. What McNamara didn’t say or want to say, offers great insight into his evolution of thinking.

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Re: Does he say anything that would make you think his is “a little foggy” in his recollection of the war?

by Matthew Maffioli - Friday, May 29, 2015, 4:07 PM

I think that is McNamaras thing, He still believes he is right but hes had 40 years or so, at the time, to think about what he did and what he could have done differently. I agree with his evolution of thinking, as I previously stated. He definitely has different opinions now then he did at the time.



Re: Does he say anything that would make you think his is “a little foggy” in his recollection of the war?

by [Joseph Foley](#) - Saturday, May 30, 2015, 1:33 AM

There are quite a few interviews with McNamara, which can be easily accessed online. I found this short clip of a '95 interview with C-SPAN to be particularly relevant in regard to our forum; McNamara briefly discusses the medias involvement in the war, and other factors, which he believed rendered Vietnam a lost cause (not the press/media). The interview was conducted while McNamara was promoting his book "In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam," a book met with a wide mix of reviews.

I would recommend reading it, but the “fog of war” and selective memory suffered by McNamara leaves you wanting at times. Many of his post-Vietnam accounts offer unique insight, but he seems to tread carefully on the hot-button issues. During this interview, book sales had to have played a part in his pitch.

Interview/ you tube (less than two minutes and worth a watch):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=20&v=ZJOcrJP8yM4>



Re: Does he say anything that would make you think his is “a little foggy” in his recollection of the war?

by [Joseph Foley](#) - Sunday, May 31, 2015, 5:49 PM

While researching some of McNamara and President Johnson's final interviews, I came across quite a few post-presidency Nixon interviews. I have included an interview from 1977 with Sir David Frost and Nixon. The Frost/Nixon series of interviews are all available on you tube. (Found here/ less than 7 minutes/ copy and paste to view: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mQyKq5fvQg>)

I was surprised how candid Nixon came across, and apparently there was little preparation required for the interview. Nixon is of course defensive at times, but he seems genuinely apologetic and saddened by his own poor decision making (Watergate etc.). He conveyed real emotion and severe embarrassment from the Watergate scandal.

Having already resigned from his presidency, and having already suffered a meteoric political downfall, it sounds like Nixon was in a unique position to be forthright regarding the scandal (and of course the self-imposed pressure to salvage some respect). Unfortunately, I have yet to find a similar Nixon interview covering the Vietnam War so honestly. The almost universal disapproval of American involvement in Vietnam has made candid/accurate interviews on the conflict with former leadership extremely difficult to find.



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Re: Does he say anything that would make you think his is “a little foggy” in his recollection of the war?

by [Dylan Kohn](#) - Sunday, May 31, 2015, 8:09 PM

One of the points that you make is in regards to Nixon being capable of honesty and being upfront and forthright in his interviews. I can't help but feel that both he and McNamara are trying to make peace with their decisions not necessarily with U.S. citizens, but with themselves and possibly something on a spiritual level. Often as people approach the tail end of their years, their willingness to talk and access blame and ask for forgiveness is much higher (at least this is from personal experience of being around bad people trying to become good at the end). So I wonder how much this has to play into his candid responses. However, I also think that developing a rapport with the interviewer as Nixon did helped get many of the responses we never expected a shamed president to address.

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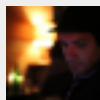


Re: Does he say anything that would make you think his is “a little foggy” in his recollection of the war?

by [Joseph Foley](#) - Sunday, May 31, 2015, 10:14 PM

Dylan, thanks for the response. You bring up very good points in Nixon's rapport with the interviewer and the personal need or desire for forgiveness or acceptance. Despite Nixon's understandable disdain and weariness towards the press, he developed a couple of strong bonds with reporters. Mike Wallace was another of those reporters. Wallace has an insightful final interview before retirement in 2008 where he touches on his budding friendship with Nixon while he was the Vice President (access on you tube).

As we have witnessed with many important American figures in Vietnam, time tends to alter ones perspective of the conflict. A variety of factors strongly influence this alteration in memory, ranging from mental health, politics, newly released information, economics or even the pursuit of reconciliation. Although neither McNamara nor Nixon touched on many of the hot-button issues I would have liked to have heard about, their regret and doubt was apparent to me.



He didn't seem foggy at all.
by [Matthew Maffioli](#) - Wednesday, May 27, 2015, 7:52 PM

Question 1

Immediately the first thing that pops into my head is his “not remembering authorizing the use of Agent Orange.” He was the Secretary of Defence. The entirety of the military, all four divisions, answered to him. He’s was trying to back pedal due to what came out after the war.

Clearly he is still bitter about the war. When he is talking about talking to the Vietnamese Prime Minister. He clearly seems that he is still in the right, that if the Vietnamese had listened to the US. They could have had what they wanted in the beginning.

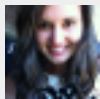
I do like that he admits that “military commanders make mistakes.” Even though he is referring to Nuclear Weapons. I would like to think that he means that on a grander scale of what he did, or helped do in the Vietnam war. It seems he’s conflicted. On one hand he clearly feels that what they were doing was right, on the other it seems maybe there’s some sadness in there. Maybe the years have clouded what he originally thought about the whole conflict.

Interestingly, when Nixons plumbers went on Trial E. Howard Hunt had the same defence they both basically said “I was doing what was asked of me by the president.” It seems they were both in the same line of thinking that if an order comes down from the highest office in the land you do it, no questions asked.

Question 2

I don’t think Nixon would have brought anything to the table as far as understanding. Starting out, he’s never been the most credible source on information pertaining to what he did in office. He did say he had a plan to end the war, though he ended up in it as long as Johnson was. I think he gets more credit though because the ending was doing his term.

Though I think LBJ might have some interesting viewpoints. He was forced into a war that was already going. Though he never wanted to lose the war. I would imagine like McNamara maybe the years would have softened him and maybe he could have shed an interesting viewpoint on the war.



Re: He didn't seem foggy at all.
by [Laura Stewart](#) - Friday, May 29, 2015, 5:37 PM

It seems quite obvious that Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara was either forgetting the details of the war or purposefully left out certain pieces of evidence. I would lean towards believing the latter. He continued to restate that he had military secrets, but he shared none of them. He would prefer to stay out of the discussion, yet he was very opinionated about the war. Perhaps this is due to, as you said, the “sadness in there” and how he felt “what they were doing was right”. However, he felt some remorse for his actions. “I’m very sorry that in the process of accomplishing things I made errors.” A slight error by him would result in many lives lost. Carrying this weight on his shoulders would not be an easy feat. I don’t blame him for not wanting to continue rehashing the past. There is no changing what happened. He would “rather be damned” if he didn’t speak about the war. Still, how are we supposed to learn from our past if we don’t examine our mistakes and successes?

I think that LBJ and Nixon would have been able to shed some light on their goals in the war. Although both might argue about the reason behind the war, they would be able to reflect on its result. They would be able to offer their perspective and the reason behind their decisions.



Re: He didn't seem foggy at all.
by [Veronica Sandow](#) - Sunday, May 31, 2015, 6:19 PM

McNamara's accounts appeared clear and unquestioning until he got to the topic opf Agent Orange. He started to downplay the effects by introducing the chemical as simply something that strips the leaves off of trees, then says "after the war, some claim that it was a toxic chemical that killed many individuals." This is immediately followed by justification of use by saying there is no list of legal or illegal chemicals and then he says he would never do anything illegal. At 6:44 he says "Well, I know certain things." It is difficult to believe that one of those things is not knowing about the use of Agent Orange.

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McNamara and the Vietnam War
by [Dylan Kohn](#) - Wednesday, May 27, 2015, 9:42 PM

The theme of "fog" is quite apparent in the short excerpt of video, primarily because they mention the usage and after-effects of the chemical agent known as "Agent Orange". What was then an acceptable military action, the results of which have been greatly destructive to the land and even more so to the people. It appears that McNamara is still in the fog himself, recanting that he doesn't recall whether or not he okay-ed the use of Agent Orange as a military maneuver.

This stands out in the excerpt as someone that wants to be forgiven for his mistakes during the Vietnam War, yet still unwilling to admit what exactly those mistakes are and to what extent. When pressed he avoids questions that might cause "clarifications", instead wanting to make a blanket apology in hopes that the viewer accepts it.

What this video shows about the war is that there is so much of it that we don't, won't, and cannot know about the actual aspects of the war, and that there is no absolute truth in the matter. Even someone who was known to object the war and his involvement still tows the line of giving only minor details and minuscule tidbits of information.

If Nixon or LBJ were still alive today, they'd both love the advancement in spy technology over the years. *ahem* But they'd also have no comment and would never admit to mistakes or misdoings in their presidency. Both would probably do a good job of passing the buck to the previous administration as to the real President at fault.

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Fog sets in over Vietnam war
by [Timothy Conway](#) - Wednesday, May 27, 2015, 10:15 PM

Dylan, I agree with your assessment about the video and the fog of war."***What this video shows about the war is that there is so much of it that we don't, won't, and cannot know about the actual aspects of the war, and that there is no absolute truth in the matter.***"

McNamara's definition of Fog of War: is so complex its beyond the ability of the human mind to comprehend all the variables. This is true because, does the fog ever rise from war's and our understanding of wars? World War I is a good example, there are many people that don't even know why we fought in "Europe's War." Vietnam is a good example as well because the "fog" does not help clarify why we were fighting in Southeast Asia. That fog is full of variables that we as students need to find our way through and seek clarity through careful academic research and analysis.

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Re: McNamara and the Vietnam War
by [Matthew Maffioli](#) - Saturday, May 30, 2015, 4:11 PM

"This stands out in the excerpt as someone that wants to be forgiven for his mistakes during the Vietnam War, yet still unwilling to admit what exactly those mistakes are and to what extent. When pressed he avoids questions that might

cause "clarifications", instead wanting to make a blanket apology in hopes that the viewer accepts it."

This is exactly what is happening and I completely agree, he is refusing to expand on anything he did, while trying to say "maybe we didn't do the right thing, but who can say?" It's really kind of ridiculous the more I think about it. If he would just admit to what they did, and actually say the things that happened in the back ground, I am sure there are a million missing pieces he would have known how to fill in. Instead he avoids every question that he can't frame in his own way.

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McNamara's Fog
by [Timothy Conway](#) - Wednesday, May 27, 2015, 9:55 PM

Question 1

Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara’s words in the 2003 documentary film Fog of War does not have a significant effect on my understanding of the war because his words to me are very typical of a member of government and one of the top cabinet members of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. McNamara’s recollection of Agent Orange would be a good example of a “little foggy” memory of the war. He stated: “I’m really not sure... I don’t remember authorizing the use of Agent Orange.” How can someone in that position of power not “remember” authorizing such a devastating chemical that in the documentary said around 1 million people died from? The government of Vietnam says that 4 million of its citizens were exposed to Agent Orange, and as many as 3 million have suffered illnesses because of it; these figures include the children of people who were exposed. (*Ben Stocking for AP, published in the Seattle Times May 22, 2010*) McNamara also seems to justify the use by stating a question “what is morally appropriate in a time of war?” and defends the use of Agent Orange by saying that the Law is vague in what type of chemical you can use in war. This typical of a member of government and a person of power to avoid the question with another question or conundrum to side step the issue at hand.

The fogginess of recollecting war is always an issue for people involved. There person filters do not allow the raw data from war to always present itself. I think this is a defense mechanism we all have. So the fog affects individuals differently. I do agree with McNamara definition of “the fog of war” is “so complex it’s beyond the ability of the human mind to comprehend all the variables.” (2003 Fog of War) The complexity of the Vietnam War was tremendous. And the “fog” has set over McNamara because even he could not process all the variables that made up the war.

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Re: McNamara's Fog
by [Dylan Kohn](#) - Sunday, May 31, 2015, 8:16 PM

One of the things that I find fascinating about government standards in the U.S. is that the person changes, but the words stay the same. McNamara uses the phrasing of what is morally appropriate, and I could swear that I've heard the same lines from our leaders when Guatanamo Bay was discovered, when the NSA wire tapping scandals came about, as well as when bombs in Iraq missed their mark of military structures. Sadly it just feels like we're constantly getting the same answers to the questions we wanted answered 40 years ago, without really knowing if we're asking the right questions anymore.

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LBJ and Nixon Fog of War
by [Timothy Conway](#) - Wednesday, May 27, 2015, 10:45 PM

Question 2

If LBJ and Nixon were still alive I think our understanding of the war would be the same but have a different angle to view from. Even though we are here to research, read and analyze stories of people who experienced the war in many different aspects of life, the effects would be the same as McNamara’s statements in The Fog of War, “*The Fog of War is so complex its beyond the ability of the human mind...*” meaning that we as humans don’t have the capability to understand. I think that as politicians especially “cold warrior” ones tend to back their policies and very rarely admit fault or defeat. They don't have the capability to play the devils advocate and analyze themselves because the power of their position has a "fog" of its own that hinders clarity of the issue. They can look hindsight and change their views but these men seem to be very stern and stubborn in their ways and decision making practices. Using President Bush as an example, if you asked him to recount

the war in Iraq and Afghanistan he would stand firm and protect his and his administrations policies and admit no fault into the many failures and byproducts that have resulted from such wars such as American and civilian deaths, ISIS etc...

About the only thing that LBJ and Nixon could add is a first hand account of the decision making process of conducting the war in Vietnam. This may not be a complete true account but at least they could add a different angle of understanding the war and hopefully with enough analysis and academic research we can lift the fog of the Vietnam War.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2

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Re: LBJ and Nixon Fog of War
by [Joseph Foley](#) - Thursday, May 28, 2015, 9:35 PM

Thanks for the post Timothy, I was coming to a similar conclusion. If President Nixon and Johnson were alive today, I don't think that we would know anything more about Vietnam, beyond the complex group of philosophies/theories/accounts that are currently debated. They would both offer unique and valuable perspectives, but as we have experienced in our current study of the conflict, one person's account must be compared with thousands in order to formulate historical truths.

As we observed with McNamara, time and of course the "fog of war" don't always lend to vivid and accurate memories. The further time removes us from a situation, the harder it is to conjure up specifically accurate memories. A change in politics, socio-economics, mental health or even education, can have drastic effects on how we recall the past.

I have always been intrigued by President Johnson, and have often wondered how he would remember the Vietnam War. Having reluctantly inherited the Vietnam conflict, he seemed initially apprehensive to proceed. His positive progression with Civil Rights issues and poverty were at times impressive. Yet, he played a large part in a questionable war, as did many other leaders. As Johnson's presidency came to a close, his distrust of the press and doubt about the war peaked.

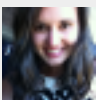
Wondering about what could have been, led me to President Johnson's final interviews. PBS has some excellent data covering Johnson's last phone conversation with President Nixon (actual audio included), and his final interview (10 days before death), which happened to be conducted by Walter Cronkite. (Found @<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/lbjs-last-interview/>) President Johnson seemed to be aware of his own imminent death (family tradition), and extremely concerned with his legacy. His insecurities regarding the war were apparent. This being just a handful of years removed from being President. I can imagine that his perspective would only have continued to become more "foggy."

Post-war interviews with eyewitnesses are not useless, but they must be put into perspective and compared to other accounts. I have been impressed with the amount of documentation covering Vietnam, and hopefully we can continue to collect as many accounts as possible before we lose the last of the direct survivors.

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Too Complex to Learn
by [Laura Stewart](#) - Wednesday, May 27, 2015, 11:19 PM

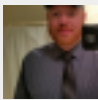
Robert McNamara says very little about his involvement and the secrets from behind the scenes during the Vietnam War. He doesn't even remember whether he approved the use of Agent Orange. It would be difficult to forget about the devastation of this "forgotten" war technique on the people in Vietnam. Instead of explaining his perspective on the war and the reason behind his decisions, he qualifies war as being "so complex". "What the fog of war means is war is so complex. It's beyond the ability of the human mind." It would prove to be difficult to even study history if it is too complicated to learn from.

He brings me to doubt the reliability of the decisions made by United States officials during the war. His forgetfulness as well as the desire to forget the war reinforces the enormous impact his decisions made on the lives of the American people and abroad. "I don't want to add anything to Vietnam. It is so complex that anything I say will require additions and qualifications." He would rather forget about the whole ordeal than to reflect on the consequences of the terrible decision made by American officials.

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2

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Vietnam is so complex
by [Timothy Conway](#) - Thursday, May 28, 2015, 10:54 PM

McNamara's "Fog" sounds very selective to me for some one that is regarded as the architect of the Vietnam. *"McNamara, who stayed on as Pentagon chief into the Johnson administration, oversaw the massive build up of U.S. Forces in Vietnam from 1964 to 1968, earning him the sobriquet as the war's architect."*(L.A. Times: 2009) I agree with you that it would not be so difficult to remember making such decisions for the war and the authorization of using Agent Orange. That was his job to assist Kennedy and Johnson on war making decisions as Secretary of Defense. He was the architect, its not likely that the "fog" took over his memory but more maybe a selective memory "loss."

I was reading an article from the L.A. Times from 2009 that was written on McNamara after his death. It seems that he was very regretful about the Vietnam War. He was asked what he thought about the Bush Administration and the war in Iraq, he stated: *"We're misusing our influence. It's just wrong what we're doing. It's morally wrong, it's politically wrong, it's economically wrong."* (Canada's Globe and Mail: 2004) He was a strong opponent of the war in Iraq. Maybe his "Fog of War" was not so complex as he stated in the film. That statement shows a man who learned from his mistakes ,lesson's and complexities of the pas and thet war in Vietnam.

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Re: Too Complex to Learn
by [Matthew Maffioli](#) - Friday, May 29, 2015, 4:05 PM

He brings a lot of doubt on everything he did. I do not believe he doesn't remember he approved the use of Agent Orange, though in his defense he was probably approving a lot of stuff that was never used or had nothing to do with the war. In hindisght he definitely realizes it was one of the worst things they did and wants to distnace himself from it. But with that said, I don't think he is foggy out all. He was sharp he remembered everything. But I felt liek it was clear he was trying really hard, or atleast the past 40 years to forget what he rememebred.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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To know the place for the first time
by [Christina Bergman](#) - Sunday, May 31, 2015, 11:54 AM

Does he say anything that would make you think his is “a little foggy” in his recollection of the war?

When McNamara says, “There’s a quote from TS Elliot that I just love. We shall not cease from exploring. And at the end of our exploration we will return to where we started and know the place for the first time. Now that’s, in a sense, where I’m beginning to be.”(Fog of War) it’s obvious that his perspective on the war is changing. And I think that’s why there’s some fogginess in his recollection. For example, he says he doesn’t remember authorizing the use of Agent Orange. He makes it plain that at the time, there was no reason for him not to authorize it, but now I think he might regret that decision, now knowing the consequences that ensued. I think maybe he is now looking back at the war, but he’s looking back at it as if through a fog, or maybe he’s realizing that he was always in the “fog of war” from the beginning. But, either way, I think now he’s beginning to interpret things differently and that’s possibly changing his memory, or at least maybe the way he presents what he remembers.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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I wouldn't expect much
by [Christina Bergman](#) - Sunday, May 31, 2015, 11:56 AM

What if LBJ or Nixon were still alive and had been filmed in a documentary similar to Fog of War? Would they be able to add to our understanding of the war?

Yes, if LBJ or Nixon were still alive, I’m sure they would have oodles to contribute. They could tell us about their goals and objectives, their reasoning, and how they felt about certain things. They could tell us about ideas that came up, but were never executed, etc. But, whether they would actually tell us is another issue. They were presidents. So, I’m sure there would be a lot that they unfortunately had to keep quiet about and probably a lot of other stuff that they would choose to stay quiet about, as well. Or even lie about. Just like McNamara says at the end of the clip, “And I’d rather be damned if I don’t.” I

think they would probably share his perspective. So, really, I wouldn't expect much.

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