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< Previous (Vietnamization of the War)

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Fog of War

by Joe Escobar - Sunday, May 26, 2013, 3:35 PM

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

After studying the required materials, address the individual questions in SEPARATE posts.

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.

BE SURE to use an informative subject line for your post.

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Trying to see through the fog of war

by Rebekah Rundstrom - Tuesday, May 28, 2013, 10:46 PM

Former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara has a very tainted view of the war. The thing that stood out to me was when he was in Vietnam talking to another former officer in Vietnam. He said that each of the sides could have reached their objective without loss of life. The former prime minister said that he was wrong, and that they were trying to fight off enslavement. They had been fighting against China for years and no amount of US support, or fighting would compromise their hope of being free people one day. They were willing to keep sending their fellow countrymen to fight the war for them to someday have freedom.

If LBJ and Nixon were still alive to make a video of their opinion would be very different. LBJ was more focused on helping the South Vietnamese get ready for combat: ie, training camps, sending US training commands to help get them trained. Nixon was trying to show the United States that he was on their side. He tried to show how he was opposed to the idea of the war too. But then still had it keep going for a bit longer. I think they would add to our understanding of the war. Each authority represented here has their input to the war that makes it more complex and

easier to see all the points of the war.

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Re: Trying to see through the fog of war

by Michelle Coming - Sunday, June 2, 2013, 11:24 AM

I think maybe the objective could have been reached without loss of life on our side if we would have kept our fear of communism out of it. We were so afraid of communism that we sacrificed hundreds of thousands of men to fight it. We ignored Ho Chi Minh's plea for help in gaining independence but as soon as we thought a communist nation was helping them or rather they were turning into a communist nation we jumped right in. The Vietnamese were fighting for something that they truly yearned for, for many years, and we were fighting because we were afraid.

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Fog of War - Understanding of the War

by Patrick Haider - Wednesday, May 29, 2013, 4:40 PM

Would LBJ or Nixon be able to provide a better understanding of the war if we had a similar documentary featuring them? No, I don't think we would. One thing that has become clear to me is that there is no really clear understand of the Vietnam War because it is a reactionary war. We entered into the war as a reaction to a the percieved threat of communism, and each president inherited the war and had to deal with trying to manage the war for more political and patriotic reasons than for moral reasons.

Watching this clip I found that McNamara himself didn't have a clear understanding of the war, and this could be felt in his reluctance to answer some of the more pressing questions. He didn't even try to give a politically correct answer, he simply denied an answer. It felt to me like he was in this possition of carrying out his job during a very complex war, and he was focused on doing his job.

I think that if we had a similar documentary featuring LBJ or Nixion we would get a better understanding of decisions that they made in dealing with the war, but I'm not sure they would be able to give a better understanding of why the war was happening in the first place. Like McNamara they would probably focus on details rather than the bigger picture of why we were there. They would be presured by political agendas to stick to the talking points that were already in place, even now many years in the future.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Fog of War - Understanding of the War

by Melissa Booth - Sunday, June 2, 2013, 8:47 PM

I think that not only did McNamara no fully understand the war, but maybe he was ashamed of some of the incidents that occurred during the war. Maybe it was those incidents, like My Lai and reaction at Gulf of Tonkin that he was ashamed of because they could have been prevented. The soldiers at My Lai had the choice to choose whether or not to shoot all the innocent civilians. We could have looked into the incident at the Gulf of Tonkin instead of just jumping to conclusions. I think that it would be hard to understand the war fully from LBJ or Nixon if the video featured them. Although I do think that they may have some different perspectives on different incidents that occurred that could be interesting or helpful. Getting their point of view could be interesting. There were so many things going on that it is hard to place exactly why the war happened. I think that whatever they say, it would be to make sure that they look good.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Fog of War

by Jungmin Um - Wednesday, May 29, 2013, 10:56 PM

After watching the video, it helped me understanding the war in a way that everyone makes mistake whenever they do something or decide something. Those mistakes can be fixed throughout the time and finally the person or maybe the next person can have the work done successfully without making a mistake. It was same with Vietnam War. So many people were dead, both Vietnamese and American, and neither won the war; however, through that mistake, U.S. decided to make a policy about helping the other country, but not fighting for them. Hence, they will not make the same mistake next time when they get to help another country.

If LBJ or Nixon were still alive and had been filmed in a documentary similar to Fog of War, I feel like they would argue that they did a great job of having what they decided to have done. If they do so, I think I would have persuaded by what they were saying and praised their decision and leadership. What I can assure is that I would not have been able to look at the War in objective view if they talked about the War.

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Re: Fog of War

by Travis Jones - Sunday, June 2, 2013, 8:02 PM

The US certainly didn't change its policy about not fight for other countries because look at our current foreign affairs and how often since the Vietnam war we have been the primary force in multiple wars. We did it for Kuwait in the first gulf war, again in Afghanistan and once more in Iraq alone. The US may claim to have a different foreign policy but we still do the same things.

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Re: Fog of War

by Patrick Haider - Sunday, June 2, 2013, 8:47 PM

That is a very good point. The Iraq war in particular shares a lot of similarities with the Vietnam war. Both wars were fought over fear of what each country might do in the future rather than what they are currently doing. Both wars have generated a certain amount distrust with the leaders that brought us into those wars, and both wars are protested against by the general public as well as soldiers. We didn't really enter each war for the same exact reason, but it was a similar kind of reason. We entered Vietnam over the fear of a spreading communism, and we entered Iraq over a spreading fear of WMD's. Both cases have also found that the reasoning was rather unjust.

I think that one of the differences though, is that today we have far more free media due to the widespread nature of the internet, and that kind of free information was not as common in the 60's and 70's. We still get the mainstream media covering for the leaders of the Iraq war, and they are certainly the loudest media, but we have a number of sources from which another side of the war can be seen. It makes me wonder what would have happened during the Vietnam war if the internet had been as available then as it is now. Would we have seen even more protesting? Would the war have even happened, as the public would have likely known much more about the worldwide news?

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Re: Fog of War

by Skyla Brocksmith - Wednesday, May 29, 2013, 11:24 PM

The statements made by former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara led to a better understanding that mistakes are inevitable during war. It is human nature to make mistakes. McNamara says that "war is so complex, it's beyond the ability of the human mind to comprehend all the variables". When he states that he could not remember if he authorized the use of the chemical Agent Orange during his time in office during made his recollection of the war, "a little foggy". This made me think that

the use of that chemical was not important to him.

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Re: Fog of War

by Rebekah Rundstrom - Thursday, May 30, 2013, 11:11 AM

That's a bit ironic...having a little fog, towards the memories related to such hazardous and somewhat "foggy" substances such as Agent Orange.

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Re: Fog of War

by Skyla Brocksmith - Wednesday, May 29, 2013, 11:25 PM

Had LBJ or Nixon been alive to do a documentary, there would be more insight to the war and why certain actions were or weren't authorized. They could have explained the reasons behind the decisions they made during each of their terms of presidency.

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Re: Fog of War

by Rebekah Rundstrom - Thursday, May 30, 2013, 11:10 AM

I agree with having more insight on the war. I said that they would have given us more insight too. I wonder what they'd choose to share and what information they'd rather keep secret.

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Re: Fog of War

by Skyla Brocksmith - Friday, May 31, 2013, 10:27 AM

I wonder the same thing. How much they would share and what kind of reactions the information would bring. They could have opened up the public's understanding by so much.

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Re: Fog of War  



by Rebekah Rundstrom - Saturday, June 1, 2013, 12:41 AM

Would they own up to their mistakes? I wonder if the public would treat them as we treated some soldiers, spitting on them and really in a way disowning them. Oh all these questions that will never be answered or discovered. 😊

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Re: Fog of War

by Patrick Haider - Sunday, June 2, 2013, 3:46 PM

How much they would choose to reveal is the question that comes to mind for me as well. There is no doubt that they could tell us more about the choices that were made, but I don't think we would have gotten too much from them beyond what we already know about the choices they made.

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Re: Fog of War

by Jungmin Um - Sunday, June 2, 2013, 3:23 PM

I think your argument also makes sense because I originally thought that the history of the War at that time might be exaggerated more if they were alive because there is a high possibility that they will try to boast what they did and tell people how they did such great works.

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Re: Fog of War question 1

by Melissa Booth - Thursday, May 30, 2013, 9:56 PM

Similar to the accounts you've read in the Appy book, what effect do the statements made by former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara (from the 2003 documentary film Fog of War) have on your understanding of the war? Does he say anything that would make you think his is “a little foggy” in his recollection of the war?

When listening to someone talk about a memory, it is always questionable to how correct they may be. You have to take into account that they may have a motive, may have forgotten something, or exaggerating a bit. Although, most of the time it is not too questionable. But when listening to McNamara talk, in the beginning he starts to seem frustrated and a little mad when talking. When he talked about when he

went to Vietnam and spoke to former prime minister of South Vietnam, he said that the Americans were trying to come in and enslave them, that they just wanted independence, and that the Americans were wrong. He seemed to become very angry about this assumption and you could tell in his voice. He also mentions that he carried out the office as the president wanted him to do for the interest of the people. But from what I remember, there have been different accounts where the president did not choose

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Re: Fog of War question 1

by Rebekah Rundstrom - Saturday, June 1, 2013, 12:35 AM

Very good point, it is good for us as students to take a step back, and see what the speaker is trying to say. Almost to separate their emotion from their words, and see past the possible exaggerations. You have come up with another great point, with the president not choosing certain "strategical plans."

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Re: Fog of War

by Melissa Booth - Thursday, May 30, 2013, 10:03 PM

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?

I think that it would be interesting to get their viewpoint on how things were going. There are many different viewpoints to take into consideration when learning about the war. For example, the presidents would have interesting information on the political side of the war in which the soldiers may not be able to add to. Although, the soldiers would have had real life battle experiences that the presidents would not have had. The thing that makes me wonder if they would be fit for this documentary is whether they would want to look good and make everything seem like it was fine, or if they would not be afraid to be blunt and admit any mistakes that happened. Part of learning and moving on is admitting to ones mistakes. Overall though, I think that they would be able to dd to the understanding of the war a little bit.

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Re: Fog of War

by Rebekah Rundstrom - Saturday, June 1, 2013, 12:39 AM

Would they be able to remember those accounts? Or would it be like Robert's

recollection of the accounts during the war? I only just thought of this, would our way of life after the war, the possible hatred that soldiers have talked about, would that have influenced what the presidents told us - the public? sorry for all the questions, but I saw your post and it just made me think. I enjoyed reading your post and wish there was a way we could see what they thought about the outcome of the war, or even if they would own up to mistakes they made on their "watch."

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Fog of War

by Brendan MacDonald - Friday, May 31, 2013, 1:57 PM

I found several things that Senator McNamara said interesting during the interview; one of them being that part where he discusses the after feeling of thinking that the objective could have been accomplished without the loss of lives, and then goes onto explain his meeting with the former foreign minister of Vietnam. It's something that crosses everyone's mind following a tragic event of some kind, is what could have been done differently that would have led to better outcomes? And I paid particular attention to the argument that ensued between Senator McNamara and the Foreign Minister. At the part where he said that he told the Foreign Minister that they did not receive anything that the United States was not willing to give at the beginning of the war, and the Foreign Minister replied that they did not want to become pawns like they had previously been with China and Russia and that they were fighting for their independence. So that really debunked his theory that any agreement with the United States could have been made that would have changed anything.

Yes, certain parts of what he said at times sounded like he either could not remember a particular event, or just didn't want to bring up a particular topic. For example when he is discussing the use of the plant killer "Agent Orange" in the war and whether or not he authorized the use of it. He says he cannot recall if he did or not but he would absolutely not have permitted an illegal substance. It was understandably obvious that he did not feel like going into a lot of depth with certain things because with the Vietnam War already being as controversial as it is did not want to say anything that would make it more so, however I don't think he was not being honest.

As high up in command as he was during the war, a lot of the blame for the loss of lives and the war itself is placed on him by many people, and he states in the interview that everybody makes mistakes in the course of trying to choose what they think is the right thing to do sometimes. I don't think the blame can be placed on one soul person no matter how high in command they were. There were many situations in the Vietnam War that could have been handled differently on both sides.

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Re: Fog of War

by Melissa Booth - Saturday, June 1, 2013, 10:14 PM

I think that there are many events that could have been prevented during the War. One that comes to mind is the story in the Appy book on Larry Colburn. His story is on his experience while flying in one of the helicopters scouting out the area My Lai. This experience just makes me think that this could have been prevented if the soldiers did not do what they did. (Appy p 346-349) I would have to agree with the fact that he might not have wanted to go into detail about the event on Agent Orange. There are some instances that are somewhat embarrassing to admit. I could see he was probably ashamed with the fact that the pesticide was used and caused some damage. There are many other events that occurred that some people might not have wanted to bring up again. For example, like I mentioned earlier, the My Lai massacre. Yeah, the blame cannot be put on one person. There are many people that could have said no or come up with an alternate option.

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Re: Fog of War

by Patrick Haider - Sunday, June 2, 2013, 7:26 PM

The way that McNamara responded to the question about Agent Orange rubbed me the wrong way. Even without going into much detail he could have admitted fault for authorizing it, regardless of if he remembered doing it or not. Instead he tried to put himself in the best light possible with regard to the situation. He chose to go down the path of claiming not to even remember authorizing it, and that had he known what it would do, he wouldn't have authorized it. In my opinion he should have admitted to the authorization, and to not having tested the agent enough before deployment in a war time setting. For the secretary of defense to take the "we didn't know any better" route is very disturbing to me, as it is their job to know better.

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Re: Fog of War

by Ian MacDonald - Saturday, June 1, 2013, 10:58 AM

As with the stories in the Appy book, I think it's always interesting to hear somebody's side of the story who actually went through the actual experience. We've already heard countless experiences from veterans of the war in the Appy book, so

to hear an account from someone who was more on the political side was interesting. I did feel that McNamara was a little vague on certain things in the interview. I don't think it was necessarily because he couldn't recall those events however. Some things are bound to leave your memory over an extended period of time, although I think in McNamara's position, most of what he didn't say or didn't want to say is because of the position he was in during the war. Being Secretary of Defense during a war, I think a lot of what ends up happening as a result of the war is going to be blamed on that person just because of that position that they hold. So to a big degree, it's understandable as to why McNamara would want to refrain from saying certain things. As he said in the end of the video clip, "some questions get him into trouble" and that "a lot of people misunderstand him and the war."

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Re: Fog of War

by Brendan MacDonald - Saturday, June 1, 2013, 4:04 PM

Good point about him refusing to bring up certain topics and go into detail on them because of the controversy surrounding it. I can see why a man in his position would be cautious about explaining certain things especially when a lot has already been blamed on him because of how high in command he was during the war. Although it does give him kind of a shady aspect in a sense that it makes people wonder if he is hiding something that adversely affected the war somehow (i.e.: a decision he made or authorized that cost the loss of more innocent lives) He says he does not want to say anything that will lead to more controversy, however sometimes not wanting to say anything can create more controversy in and of itself.

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Re: Fog of War

by Patrick Haider - Sunday, June 2, 2013, 6:21 PM

I agree that a lot of it is less about what he can say, and more about what he can talk about, or is willing to talk about. Vietnam is still a touchy political subject, as the wrong information could shine a bad light on this country and the choices made by the people that run it. Saying that "some questions get him into trouble" is telling in this regard as it enforces the idea that there are still a number of subjects that he simply can not publicly discuss, even now.

I also find him saying "a lot of people misunderstand him and the war" is an interesting subject. Is it that people truly misunderstand him, or that the choices made might not be agreeable with the public.

It is going to take a lot of time for history to really understand the Vietnam war, and the choices made by those who were running the country at the time. Even now we are still coming to terms with many of the events of the Revolutionary War, our reasoning for it, and the events leading up to it. The Vietnam war will take just as much time to understand, if not longer due to the effects the truth may or may not have on the public.

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LBJ and Nixon

by Michelle Coming - Saturday, June 1, 2013, 12:12 PM

If LBJ and Nixon were still alive and were filmed in a documentary about the Vietnam War they would definitely be able to provide an insight into their policy making. Even if they're view of the war is a little foggy their body language and recollection of the war would give plenty of insight. How they remember things can tell a lot about how they perceived things then and even now.

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Re: LBJ and Nixon

by Travis Jones - Sunday, June 2, 2013, 8:08 PM

I agree that the body language they would exhibit could greatly lead to where they actually stood in regards tp anythign they would have said. Very good point about the body language idea, I wouldn't have thought of that one.

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Re: Fog of War

by Brendan MacDonald - Saturday, June 1, 2013, 4:28 PM

I think both Presidents LBJ and Nixon would definitely be able to add to our understanding of the war. Like the interviews with soldiers from Appy's ***Patriots***,one can always learn the best from a person who has actually experienced the events firsthand in my opinion. However it is difficult to say whether or not they would want to. Senator McNamara was vague with certain things he discussed while being interviewed because of not wanting to add even more controversy to an already controversial subject. It's hard to say if LBJ or Nixon would be more open then McNamara was on certain topics or not because of the same reasons that the Senator had.

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Re: Fog of War

by Ian MacDonald - Sunday, June 2, 2013, 9:35 PM

I also believe that if Presidents LBJ and Nixon were still alive they would be able to shed more light on the war. And what I mean by that is they would be able to tell us more about what happened from their point of view. Whether or not it would help us understand the war any better is questionable. With a war that is as controversial as Vietnam, you're always going to have people who don't believe what others say about it, even if they were actually there and experienced it first hand. For instance, there are some people that think Robert McNamara was not being very truthfull in what he said about the war. And he may not have been entirely truthfull, but that's my point. I think in the process of trying to explain something like the Vietnam war, people are going to explain it from how they interpreted it.

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Re: Fog of War

by Andrew Lavengood - Sunday, June 2, 2013, 2:10 PM

I'll start by saying that I found McNamara's statements very humbling. He certainly expressed a sense of apology or empathy towards all those involved.

I'm going to tackle the second set of questions, however. While I think that there might be some illumination that could be gained from LBJ and Nixon, I'm not sure that we could expect much from them. Where McNamara had no outstanding reasons to be misleading or secretive, LBJ and Nixon's personalities lead me to think that they would have been of little help in shedding some light on the war. LBJ was always insecure and worried about "losing the war," and I think if he was asked anything that would hurt his ego, he would shut down. Nixon, on the other hand, was highly secretive and paranoid, and I think with him we would see only a defensive and bitter man.

Maybe I'm pessimistic about the whole thing, but I think there are far better primary sources to be evaluated than the presidents of the time.

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Re: Fog of War

by Travis Jones - Sunday, June 2, 2013, 5:03 PM

After listening to McNamara speak I have to think the man is fully in the fog of war when he speaks of some of his recollection of the war. His statements about Agent Orange and its implementing in the war really caused me to question a lot of what he said. He said that he wasn't sure who authorized its use in Vietnam and that he

heard it killed some of those whom came into contact with it. McNamara also said if it was he who authorized it couldn't recall. The thing I find amazing about that is if he did sign off on its use, I'm rather certain that's something an individual would remember based upon its consequences. I think he has become very delusional and chose to forget things or deny them in his own ideals of what he did as some sense of self-righteousness.

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Re: Fog of War

by Melissa Booth - Sunday, June 2, 2013, 8:55 PM

I think that the first step to learning something is being able to admit when you have made mistakes. It seems like McNamara was not one of those people who were willing to admit to those mistakes. Since you mentioned Agent Orange, it made me think how he was unwilling to answer the question and admit to the mistake. Being able to admit to a mistake is a huge step to bettering yourself and learning. If he would have admitted that it was wrong, and owned up to the mistake, I think that I would have been a little more willing to agree with what he had to say. There were other instances where he seemed a little sketchy on the information. It was as if he was not willing to answer some of the questions, and making it seem like it was not that important or he forgot. Maybe he did forget some of the information that occurred. That happens when you get older. Since I am not him though, I cannot fully say what he was think and what he thought about different incidents.

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Re: Fog of War

by Skyla Brocksmith - Sunday, June 2, 2013, 11:28 PM

I also noticed McNamara's Agent Orange recollection. I definitely agree that the person who authorized something that ended with major consequences would have remembered doing it. Him saying he wasn't sure if it was him who authorized it or not, really made him look as if he was trying to hide his guilt.

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Re: Fog of War

by Travis Jones - Sunday, June 2, 2013, 8:06 PM

If Nixon and LBJ were both alive today I think their interviews would have been also taken big questions marks as to where they were at. I mean they were both presidents during that war and therefore would have been probably prideful about

their actions during the war and defending them, especially Nixon.

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