



HST 195: History of Vietnam War Sp17 (Escobar 42050)

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Fog of War

by Joe Escobar - Saturday, May 20, 2017, 4:03 PM

This thread is for discussions on the Fog of War topic.

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.

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Hind Sight Is 20/20

by William Barker - Tuesday, May 23, 2017, 9:37 AM

Hearing words from one of the top American decision makers about the Vietnam war, gives a truly different and important perspective about this tragic event. In Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's recount on the war, he says that we cannot change human nature. I think this is a great piece of wisdom that we all need to take into account when dealing with the history of any armed conflict. We were dealing with American boys in the field whom didn't want to be there (more towards the end of the war) and motivated communists who were determined to gain control of Vietnam with the help of nationalist civilians. The combination of these two differing mind sets, thrown into the mix with a very deadly war, create incredible amounts of confusion and out right horror.

McNamara had a “bird’s eye view” of the war and he himself still wasn’t able to wrap his head around all the moving parts and variables that went along with that conflict. He [McNamara] speaks about the fog of war, which basically talks about how no one truly has a clear vision of the whole scope of the war (now think about a soldier in the field who has bullets flying past his head and friends laying dead next to him in a mud puddle, his fog of war is even more confusing). This phenomena leads men to take unnecessary risks or get people killed when it all could have been avoided. McNamara, and everyone now, can look at the war in a clear way because hindsight is always 20/20. We can’t really make judgements against leaders and the actions they took in war time (unless it is an outright crime), because like McNamara said, he didn’t have the 20/20 vision to work with. His words really have gifted me with yet again, another way to view this war and all of its intricacies. Also, we should put ourselves in their shoes. What would we do in their position, fighting a war on the other side of the world?

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3

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Re: Hind Sight Is 20/20

by Stanley Cates - Wednesday, May 24, 2017, 2:37 PM

Please believe me when I say that in earnest I do not mean this facetiously or with malice, but I really despise the phrase “hindsight is 20/20”, because frankly, it isn’t. If it were would we really need to have conversations like this one? Would we really need to discuss and analyze intentions, and outcomes, and mistakes in a history class? If hindsight were 20/20 couldn’t we just check off learning objectives, commit some dates to memory, and call it a day? For instance, I might propose a hypothesis that if America hadn’t gone into Cambodia, the Rural Cambodians wouldn’t have fled to the cities and given the Khmer Rouge an upper hand against the Cambodian government and consequently the later genocide could have been avoided; or maybe the Khmer Rouge would have overthrown the Khmer Republic anyway; that’s definitely not 20/20. Again, I’m simply trying to offer another perspective on hindsight, not trying to demean anyone. That being said, I really like your comparison of the fog of war from the perspective of McNamara as opposed to the war fighter, I think it really forces a person to think not only about the differences between the two perspectives, but also how the actions of the people with those differing perspectives profoundly influence the other and just make the fog all the more dense. As for your question about being in their shoes; when nothing else makes sense, just fight for the person next to you, and hope they’re doing the same.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

3

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Re: Hind Sight Is 20/20

by William Barker - Thursday, May 25, 2017, 4:19 PM

Stanley,

I wouldn't say that hindsight gives you the ability to solely just hypothesize (which it can allow you to), I think it just gives you the ability to step back and see the whole scope of the situation. It allows us, students, to see why people made the decisions they did, because now, unlike the people during the war, we have the bird's eye view of all different perspectives/ angles. Really what it comes down to is understanding how and why the whole war unfolded the way it did.

Take a modern example, the unrest in the Middle East. I know that is a broad situation, but eventually (hopefully) things will become peaceful and we'll look back on it and understand the conflict more clear. Right now we have continuous events unfolding right in front of us. Even though I understand the conflict (to some degree) one day I'll better understand it when things settle down.

It really is the fog of war, even for myself, a civilian. Unlike McNamara and the soldier in the field, I'm completely removed from the conflict yet I still cannot comprehend the full picture and all the moving parts. Again, one day I'll have the privilege to review what has happened.

I do appreciate your perspective on it and I totally understand where you're coming from. It's useless to play the "what if" game!

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Re: Hind Sight Is 20/20

by John Anderson - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 3:46 PM

William,

I believe what Stan is pointing out here is that you cannot say that any situation is completely clear. It is one thing to say that we can understand something more clearly with time, ie. the intentions become more clear with the unfolding of events, but it is another thing to say that we can fully understand any event, even after the fact. What the phrase "hindsight is 20/20" belays is that you have a clear picture of an action or event. In this regard, no subject in History, or the study of History, is fully understood. It is only through this attempt at understanding that we can get closer to that stage, but I don't think anything could, or will, ever be fully clear.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Rose colored hindsight

by Stanley Cates - Tuesday, May 23, 2017, 3:46 PM

In the Fog of War video McNamara seems a little remorseful, though he doesn't admit it verbatim. I get the general sense from the video that he would have liked to have waged as little actual war as possible. I interpret this from his statement to the former foreign minister of Vietnam which suggests to me that McNamara believes that he was willing to negotiate from the beginning and that the war didn't have to happen: "You didn't get any more than we were willing to give you at the beginning of the war. You could have had the whole damn thing..." From the Herring book in regards to McNamara's, as well as Taylor's, suggestion to scale back troops early on in the war, in 1965 to be exact: "We need a way to get out of Vietnam," McNamara averred. "This is a way of doing it." (127)

McNamara makes statement regarding counterfactuals: "[from proverbial historian] Well how the hell do you know McNamara, what might have been? Well, I know certain things". Perhaps he's simply trying to add a little mystique, but I get a feeling that maybe he's trying to imply,

truthfully or not, that there was information still unavailable to the public that would better explain the actions of the U.S. in Vietnam; and that he's in a sense trying to save face. His reluctance to answer questions at the end of the video sort of solidifies that thinking. What do you guys think, is it hype? One way or the other this particular portion of his account seems to throw a wrench in the gears that are our understanding of the war.

Sum of ratings:2 (1) 2

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Re: Rose colored hindsight

by William Barker - Wednesday, May 24, 2017, 10:11 AM

Stanley,

I agree. I got the general feeling that McNamara was remorseful in a sense. Reflecting back on past actions makes us all a little remorseful, wouldn't you say? Though he is affected by his decisions, he still stands tall with all that he did as Secretary of State. McNamara says in the video, "I'm very proud of my accomplishments. And I'm very sorry that in the process of accomplishing things, I made errors." This is incredibly powerful, given the fact of who he was and what decisions he helped make. McNamara, then in his old age, had the humility to apologize for his errors, and was humble enough to admit he did wrong. Like he said, no military leader in the history of man, has not made bad decisions or gotten people killed unnecessarily.

I was surprised that he wouldn't answer any more questions towards the end, but upon further pondering it actually made complete sense. McNamara and anything he says, will muddy the waters and have to be battled over by historians to "re-figure" out what actually happened. It's best for him to keep his tongue, in order to not complicate things more than they already are.

I liked how you picked up on the fact that he was hinting towards he probably had more information that no one knows yet. I don't think it's hype, there is so much from that era that will probably never be declassified! Unfortunately all those secrets went away with the passing of McNamara in 2009.

Sum of ratings:2 (1) 2

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Re: Rose colored hindsight

by Stanley Cates - Wednesday, May 24, 2017, 2:56 PM

Certainly, there's something to be said for your muddy water hypothesis, but I wouldn't rule out that maybe some of the information he had was incriminating; either to himself or someone else. I just can't see someone humble enough to admit that their mistakes killed thousands unnecessarily but then being afraid to stir up a little dust about the history of the war. Perhaps he simply couldn't say because it was/ is still classified as you hinted; like McNamara said: "I'd rather be damned if I don't".

However, your emphasis on McNamara's humility I think leads to a segue to another portion of the forum questions. Regarding Nixon in particular, I don't think a similar documentary would have shed as much light. I say there is a segue here because I think

McNamara's humility is precisely what makes the documentary meaningful; and by all accounts I can find Nixon was a jerk and had no humility to speak of. "I don't have to tell you Nixon's record—I'm sure you know it." And he looked at me and said, using English for the first and last time, "I wouldn't buy a used car from that man." (Appy 464). And frankly, from the Herring book I can't even bring myself to pick an example; reading chapter 7 you would think Nixon kicked Herring's dog; repeatedly.

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Re: Rose colored hindsight

by William Barker - Thursday, May 25, 2017, 4:30 PM

Stanley,

Absolutely. Nixon was a very secretive individual who was paranoid in some respects. And yes, from the Herring book I sensed maybe some bias. Nixon, with all his flaws, was actually a good president. He brought an end to the war [Vietnam] with "honor," opened up relations with China, eased tensions with the Soviet Eastern bloc, and many other things. Whenever I hear someone bash a particular individual or organization (which I do all the time because I hate communism) I immediately throw up a red flag and do some further research.

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Re: Rose colored hindsight

by Stanley Cates - Thursday, May 25, 2017, 6:18 PM

Paranoid in some respects? The man had goons committing a string of crimes to ensure that he stayed in power, even if he wasn't aware beforehand he certain took steps to attempt to cover it up (History.com); and then he all but admitted his guilt by resigning. I didn't mean to imply that Herring was particularly vindictive against Nixon, as it seems that's how you interpreted it. I merely meant that there was a plethora of examples of insecurities and irrationalities in Nixon's administration. My word, even Kissinger was wary of the man: "Although still dependent on his chief diplomat to implement his goals, Nixon seethed with resentment that Kissinger was gaining public recognition rightfully his own...The president was planning to reshuffle his cabinet, and Kissinger's place was uncertain. The national security adviser may have pushed a harder line to reestablish his credibility with a distrustful and sometimes vengeful boss." (Herring 324) Furthermore, how can you say that Nixon ended the war with honor when he resigned (04/09/74) over a year before the war ended (04/30/75)? I'm fully willing to admit that Nixon had some legitimate successes, among my favorites being the creation of the EPA and, as you mentioned, opening trade relations with China. Though I must say that I'm a little surprised that you would consider the trade relations with China a positive if you "hate communism". What's that about? But what's more is that I'm curious about why you aren't as critical about his poor qualities as you are his good qualities?

History.com Staff. "Watergate Scandal." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, 2009. Web. 25 May 2017.

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Re: Rose colored hindsight

by William Barker - Friday, May 26, 2017, 10:53 AM

Stanley,

Nixon had placed policies into action that drew the war to a close. I understand he resigned before the war actually ended, but let's be real, he was an important instrument in the ending of the conflict. His Vietnamization efforts, though disregarded at times, were an important step in getting America out of the war, "...Nixon began to withdraw forces from Vietnam, meeting with South Vietnam's President Nguyen Van Thieu on Midway Island on June 8 to announce the first increment of redeployment. From that point on, the U.S. troop withdrawal never ceased." (history.state.gov)

Opening relations with communist China was a great success because it eased tensions with the communist nuclear threats. Just because I hate communism doesn't mean I'm closed minded or ignorant to the fact that we have to try and curb conflict peacefully. Take for instance North Korea. They need to be put in place and all of those millions of starving people liberated. Do I want to see our men and women in uniform put in harms way? No, I'd rather see a diplomatic resolution to this matter. However, we may have to use military force to ease tensions, only time will tell.

Also, I realize Nixon immediately tried to cover up Watergate (which he supposedly didn't know about) instead of condemning those who carried out the sabotage. So yes, he was very paranoid. So much so that it ultimately cost him the presidency.

<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1969-1976/ending-vietnam>

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Re: Rose colored hindsight

by John Anderson - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 3:52 PM

I fully agree that he was attempting to imply that there was information to which he was privy that had yet not been released to the public. That being said, I also got the idea that after he made some of the choices he felt he had to make, that his age had given him the perspective to see how wrong he could have been. He was, after all, a fairly young man, sending other young men off to die for old men's wars.

Much of what I gleaned from the FOW video was closer to him feeling bitter. He was bitter that he couldn't succeed in what he felt was correct. He was bitter that the N Vietnamese couldn't see things from his point of view. And, above all, I felt that he was bitter that

people kept asking him difficult questions about choices he made, or was complicit to, that destroyed lives.

Im sure that McNamara felt guilt, but part of me thinks that that is the least he deserved. He may have taken lives with the best of intentions, but he should live with the weight of the choices that he made. I hate when these people in power whine about how much political pressure they had to deal with. They wanted the power over life and death, they got it, now they have to live with that.

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2



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Two different pages

by Maile Sur - Wednesday, May 24, 2017, 11:52 AM

Watching this documentary of former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, I definitely feel like it allows us to put another piece of this complicated puzzle together. McNamara brings to light the fact that we, the United States, and the Vietnamese, were on two different pages. In a conversation with the former Vietnamese minister, the minister says, "You're totally wrong! We are fighting for our independence. You are fighting to enslave us" (2:41 into video). The minister goes on to say something along the lines of, "Haven't you ever read a history book? McNamara don't you know this? We are fighting for our independence!" This section of the video, to me, at least, shows that our objectives going into the war weren't aligned, which is, in my opinion, why there were so many casualties. Had there been better communication, or more knowledge of the situation, I definitely feel that there could have been a better outcome of the war.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2



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Re: Two different pages

by Riley Ahrenkiel - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 5:05 PM

Absolutely, had there been better communication, more favorable outcomes would have occurred, however, I'm not so sure if it would have really had a significant impact. The problem isn't so much in the communication, just the circumstances behind the two countries (South Vietnam and the US) involvement in the war. The real problem is that the US was fighting to stop communism and sought to look towards a body count for signs of victory, while the Vietnamese were fighting for their independence, their homes, and tradition. Had there been a more genuine common goal or greater common interest between the South Vietnamese and the US, maybe a more synergetic military relationship would have been seen between the two. But since there wasn't, they suffered a fundamental loss, it's difficult to unite and efficiently fight a war together if you don't have the same core goals driving you.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2



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Re: Two different pages

by Alexandria Villa - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 10:17 PM

I agree with you. If both sides had been on the same page, I think that there would have been a more favorable outcome. However, this war spans much more than independence vs Communism. I feel that, with all of the other aspects at play during this war, being on the same page would have only done so much. There were other motives here at play, but the only thing I can say would probably have benefited all sides was if the US had not chosen the body count method of figuring out the outcomes of battles, but instead tried other ways.

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Problems at Home

by Riley Ahrenkiel - Wednesday, May 24, 2017, 3:13 PM

McNamara's statements generally reinforce the ideologies behind the US government's choice to further engage and pursue greater war efforts in Vietnam. In one big mess of a war, there were many influences to escalate US involvement following the Tet Offensive, in the Fog of War video Robert McNamara says, "Do you mean to say it was not a tragedy for you, when you lost 3,400,000 Vietnamese killed, which on our population bases the equivalent of 27 million Americans, what did you accomplish? You didn't get anymore than we were willing to give you at beginning of the war, you could've had the whole damn thing, independence, unification." (2:47 into Fog of War) I get the feeling that McNamara's recollection is a bit foggy or at least a bit bias when it comes to addressing the outcome of the war and/or the repercussions of maintaining involvement in Vietnam at home. It appears as if McNamara is either in denial or is to blinded by the circumstances of the situation and does not want to come to terms with the problems that arose at home. A passage from Jonathan Schell in the Appy book does a good job pointing out this blindness saying, "It was as if World War III were being fought in Vietnam. In the nuclear age, the whole structure of credibility and deterrence seemed to depend on winning these wars out there on the periphery. This was the sort of theoretical trap that the policy makers found themselves in. They thought they were not only preventing the toppling of dominoes but total war itself. And if you believe the assumptions, then almost no cost was too high to pay in Vietnam." (p. 209, Appy book, Schell speaker)

It seems that for McNamara and many policy makers at the time, they did not want to come to terms with the problems that were arising at home due to actions in Southeast Asia. This is more evident after taking a look at a passage from the Herring textbook that reads, "The bloodshed that ran in the streets of 'nightstick city' was brought into the homes of Americans each night on television. The nation could 'no longer turn away from the fact that the war in Southeast Asia... was causing a kind of civil war in the United States.'" (p. 268, Herring) What was happening in Southeast Asia was certainly having an affect on the state of America at the time, bringing this back to a part of the original quote above from the Fog of War video, "What did you accomplish?" It can be argued that US policy makers accomplished civil unrest in the states.

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Re: Fog of War

by Skyler Tidwell - Wednesday, May 24, 2017, 3:26 PM

Throughout the war, the United States had put an excessive amount of time and money into it. Just to pack up and leave because things got difficult and the pressure was turned up, Nixon believed that it was not honorable in any way shape or form. From the late 1960's to early 1970's Nixon and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger worked together to end the war in Vietnam. However, the relationship between Kissinger and Nixon at first was like a game of chess, both looking for ways to gain from another. Later each had their suspicions of the other and it turned into paranoia, that paranoia turned into a rivalry. (pg 278 Herring) Regardless they both stayed on the path for a common good, the defeat of Communism in South-East Asia and the Vietnamization policy. This policy laid out a plan for the South Vietnamese to rely more on their own army than the US combat troops within their country's borders. What made the South Vietnam army depend on the US was the money and troops, well the plan was in a year or so that all American troops would no longer be in Vietnam. The money on the other hand was a different story, the money put into the country was to help the economics of the Vietnam nation, so that had its cuts but still was there. Nixon thought that this plan would help bring the North Vietnam (Hanoi) to the table for negotiating for peace. Although, election year was coming around and the North was willing to wait to damage Nixon's chances for re-elections. Eventually the North Vietnamese discussed negotiation terms, and like always it was not negotiating, it was "here are the terms, take it or leave it," and like many before it the negotiations had failed.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2



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Understanding of the War

by Kayla Elliott - Wednesday, May 24, 2017, 4:26 PM

The Appy book and the short McNamara video make me realize even more how complicated the Vietnam War was and how hard it is to understand even to this day. He made a point in the video that people don't know what he knew then, which is what he was basing his decisions off of at the time. That's what I think is the biggest problem of the Vietnam war, was that people were so poorly informed.

I think if LBJ or Nixon were still alive and did an interview about the war, it would add to my understanding of the war. If, and only if, they opened up and told the truth instead of just saying the type of rhetoric they said in their speeches.

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McNamara

by Kayla Elliott - Wednesday, May 24, 2017, 4:29 PM

The thing McNamara said that stood out the most to me was, "I'm not really sure I authorized Agent Orange. I don't remember it." That showed how his memory could be foggy.

I think he also downplayed how important Vietnam was for America. America spent billions of dollars in Vietnam and sent so many troops over there. But when McNamara mentioned how some Vietnamese thought that America was trying to take the place of France and colonize

Vietnam itself, he said that was "absurd." The PBS video makes it seem like it wasn't such an absurd idea though because America did try to push its policies on Vietnam, which was very dependent on America.

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Re: McNamara

by Maile Sur - Wednesday, May 24, 2017, 9:37 PM

I definitely agree with your first statement about Agent Orange. I noticed that when he was talking about that part that it definitely seemed as though he wasn't super clear on the details. With that being said, however, it might play into what some other people were saying about McNamara wanting to cover things up and also save face. There might be details in regards to the use of Agent Orange that he knows about, but he can't necessarily disclose to us. Though, the way I took it the first time was that he genuinely couldn't remember.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: McNamara

by Alexandria Villa - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 10:19 PM

There is definitely something to be said about saving face. I hadn't really thought of it before, but how much of the so-called 'fogginess' of his memory was really based on just saving his own behind from the aftermath of questionable (at best) decisions, such as the authorization of Agent Orange? I also think it would be interesting how much testing had been done before its use in the war...

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Fog of war

by Joshua Meeker - Wednesday, May 24, 2017, 4:55 PM

From what McNamara said it became evident that politicians had a completely different view from the war that normal people would have. This probably stems from the ability to call the shots and to be "responsible" for a great number of lives. The most interesting part was the way that McNamara viewed the conflict. He plays the subject off like its not a big deal at all, claiming that killing 100000 was sometimes inevitable as long as you didn't destroy nations. This, in addition to other actions politicians carried out during that time made convinced me that people like McNamara had a different sense of reality. Though I do not hold this against him for he also seemed fairly genuine about the war. It could be argued that McNamara was foggy when it came to the war. Though to me it is more likely that he had a completely different perspective of the experience, hence his recollection of the event will also vary drastically compared to the information we have come across so far. Its hard to tell what they (politicians he was involved with) were going through at the time and Im sure that they were dealing with events that we probably are not even aware of. I will however say that the way he spoke about the use of weapons was very irresponsible, especially when we was speaking about the use of Agent Orange; which is proven to be highly toxic to humans. He goes on to say he did nothing

wrong since it was not "illegal." Again showing that these people see the world from a very black and white point of view and have no problem killing if it pleases them. Because they will argue "war is in our nature". Which seems like a sorry excuse that can be ridden till the end of time.

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Failure to take responsibility

by Jay Autry - Wednesday, May 24, 2017, 5:08 PM

From the beginning of the Fog of War video, the former Secretary of Defense has what appears to me a very defensive tone. He begins by mentioning the death toll of the Vietnam War in a theoretical manner, claiming that any military commander has killed people unnecessarily (Fog of War, 00:26). McNamara then seconds later states the important part is to, "learn from your mistakes," when referencing the unnecessary killing (Fog of War, 00:41).

During McNamara's continued dialogue it became aware that he was talking about the Vietnam War like it was a learning experience. In reality it was, so I am not disagreeing with him there. It was a proving ground for state of the art military technology and new war fighting techniques. However, the way McNamara talks about the Vietnam War is that it was a misunderstanding between two sides. He argues that the United States saw the war as an element of the Cold War, while the Vietnamese saw it as a civil war (Fog of War, 1:46).

What made me think McNamara's memory is perhaps a bit foggy, would be his commentary about he use of Agent Orange. McNamara states that, "Now what kind of a law do we have that says these chemicals are acceptable for use in war, and these chemicals are not?" (Fog of War, 5:50). He then skates by any sort of explanation about approving the use of Agent Orange by claiming that he doesn't really remember authorizing it. It seems peculiar that a chemical agent could have been authorized by anyone other than the Secretary of Defense. Even if he did not directly order the use, as the Secretary of Defense he should take full responsibility for all actions of the armed forces, especially controversial actions like the use of Agent Orange. McNamara claiming, "he doesn't really remember it," concerning his actual role in authorizing Agent Orange is disconcerting (Fog of War, 5:58).

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Failure to take responsibility

by Stanley Cates - Thursday, May 25, 2017, 6:39 PM

"He then skates by any sort of explanation about approving the use of Agent Orange by claiming that he doesn't really remember authorizing it. It seems peculiar that a chemical agent could have been authorized by anyone other than the Secretary of Defense."

At the risk of being facetious; there is that one position above secretary of defense: "Kennedy authorized the use of defoliants to deny the guerrillas cover and secure major roads, as well as the limited use of herbicides to destroy enemy food supplies." (Herring 106). So, I wouldn't really read much into his recollection of whether he authorized the use of Agent Orange or not. As for whether the actual use of the chemical was ethical or not despite who authorized it is a whole other question. It's difficult to say, to the best of my knowledge the effects on humans were unknown at the time it was used; but who know's how true that actually is.

Sum of ratings:2 (1) 2

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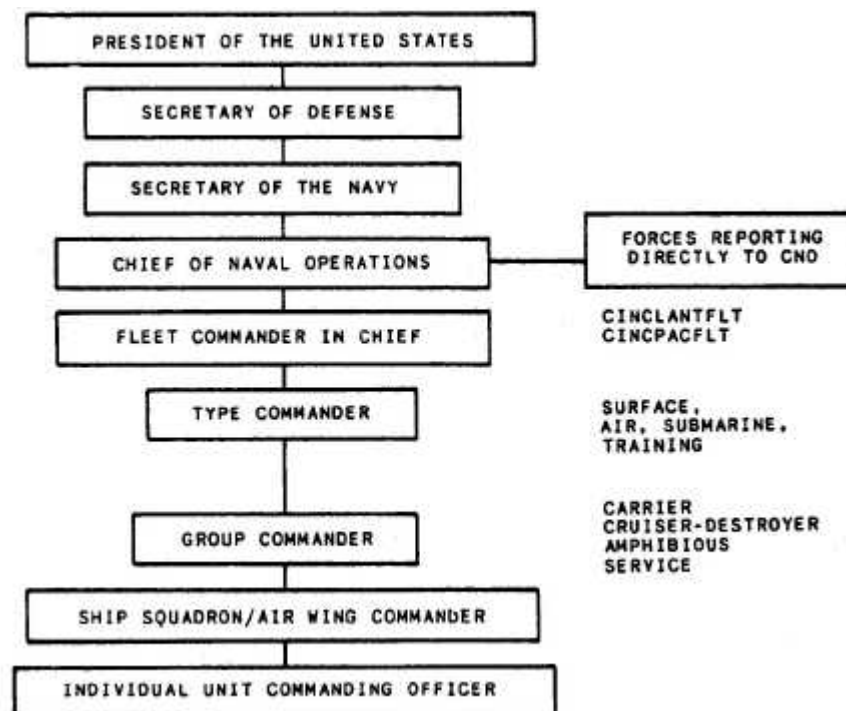
Re: Failure to take responsibility

by Jay Autry - Saturday, May 27, 2017, 3:05 PM

"At the risk of being facetious; there is that one position above secretary of defense."

Stanley,

Thankfully I have my six years of military experience to help me understand how the chain of command works. I know that you may not have the same experience to lean on so I have included a picture to help you understand. I would like to take this opportunity to assure you that I am fully aware of that one position above the secretary of defense. I appreciate your concern, however I would appreciate a different tone the next time you choose to reply to one of my forum posts.



Sum of ratings:1 (1) 1

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Re: Failure to take responsibility

by Joshua Meeker - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 1:32 PM

Hey Jay

I too got the impression that he was very defensive. At first I wondered why this was but during the rest of the video its clear to see that he got a lot of heat for what he did during the war. I remember him saying that some people saw him 'as a real SOB'. Which makes it questionable as to whether or not he felt bad for the decisions he made or if he just feels that way since he got grief for it. Though its not fair to speak on his behalf it seems to me it is the latter. Especially considering the role he played in Vietnam and taken to account that he betrayed a person he was enlisting his services to , Diem. (Granted Diem was causing trouble so I can let that one slide, but still this is not a man I would trust). The Agent Orange controversy also bothered me a bit, considering that it did cause a lot of harm to natives and US soldiers alike. I'm sure that they knew the dangers of using chemicals like this since they were already in use during WW2. To claim that the military and the producers of the chemicals didn't know this is pure garbage. We just didn't care. As for his clarity on the matter he seemed pretty old so I'm sure his memory wasn't what it used to be and that should be taken into account.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Failure to take responsibility

by Jay Autry - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 9:58 PM

Hey Joshua,

Thanks for your reply. I fully agree with your points and it is impossible for us to know what was going on in Mr. McNamara's head in the aftermath of the war. Did he feel guilty, did he feel attacked, or was he just oblivious? This is something we can only speculate on and perhaps will never know. As for the use of Agent Orange, I see both sides. Objectively speaking, Agent Orange did serve a purpose in denying tree cover to the Vietcong and NVA regulars. It was also used to deny food sources to the enemy.

These are just a few examples of why we used Agent Orange. We can argue all day about the ethics surrounding the use of Agent Orange, but the "why" is very clear. Claiming that U.S. commanders and producers did not understand the dangers is complete garbage as you put it. Whether it was pressure, frustration, or simply turning a blind eye, I agree to your point that we just didn't care.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Failure to take responsibility

by John Anderson - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 4:20 PM

In reference to McNamara and his assumption that this "learning experience," as you put it; the Geneva Conventions and special conventions on Bio Warfare do address several of the methods used in Vietnam. Namely, the use of napalm, non-selfexploding ordinance, phosphorus based weapons, and Agent Orange. The website for Bio Warfare protocols is here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biological_Weapons_Convention, and the protocol was ratified again in 1972.

On the subject of the use of Vietnam as a theater for testing of advanced warfare:

- Article 35 bans weapons that "cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering," as well as means of warfare that "cause widespread, long-term, and severe damage to the

natural environment."

There is no way to know the full extent of the damage we caused to the environment, and the people of SE Asia.

I would like to add, that I thank you for your service to our country, and I respect your commitment to upholding the code of honor that that implies. I do however, think that some of these responses, in context, shouldn't be taken as a judgment on you as an individual, or a soldier.

Sum of ratings:3 (1) 3

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Re: Failure to take responsibility

by Jay Autry - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 8:32 PM

John, thank you for your further research into the special conventions that address biological warfare. The point I was attempting to make in my initial post was that McNamara did not assume the level of responsibility expected for someone in his role.

Military commanders, all the way up to the POTUS are responsible for actions and weapons used by our armed forces. Even if Mr. McNamara did not personally himself order the use of Agent Orange, I would wager that he was in the room when the President did make that specific order in an advisory role, thus making him an active participant. At the time we did not know the long lasting effects of some of the weapons we used, or even the complete short term effects for that matter, the fact remains that we do now. That interview happened many years after the last Agent Orange was sprayed over the forests of Vietnam and the negative effects were public knowledge. I do not mind feedback and I welcome discussion on any of my posts that I write on this forum. My previous classmate's post simply came across as rather arrogant in the way he chose made his point.

Sum of ratings:1 (1) 1

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Hindsight is after the fact

by Brent Roessler - Wednesday, May 24, 2017, 5:29 PM

Where I believe the Abby book stories and McNamara are similar is the "cloud" of uncertainty that always distorts judgment in a war type environment. I can't imagine how hard it must be to stay calm yet make life and death decisions for thousands of people on a daily basis. The decisions McNamara did make might not have been correct in the long run but at the time they seemed correct (to him). "What I'm doing is taking you through with hindsight, but you don't have hindsight available at the time." (Fog of War-6:55, McNamara)

Dennis Deal says in the Abby book, "It was terrifying. I was terrified almost to the point of insanity. But what you have to do when you're a leader and everybody's looking at you is to figure out a way to pull out that extra millimeter of courage." (pg.131)

McNamara and Deal might have been in different leadership roles but both felt the extreme pressure while having to make extreme decisions. Neither of these men knew what the outcome of their decisions would be, hindsight is only available after the fact. I really enjoy the

courage and vulnerability displayed by both men in these stories. Both talk of fear, uncertainty and admit mistakes. "One of his sergeants told me later that he knew Henry had made a mistake the very moment he said "follow me." (Abby pg.131)

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Hindsight is after the fact

by Joshua Meeker - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 1:42 PM

Hey Brent,

I really appreciate your ability to empathize with McNamara, because I didn't really have the ability to do so. But after reading what you said it did put some things in perspective for me (I especially liked the quote you used to tie in this idea). It is pretty crazy to think about what the people in those positions of power have to deal with. Just look at how much a president ages in 4 years. If a president starts with no white hairs in the beginning of holding office there is bound to be some there after his term is up. Which says a lot.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Hindsight is after the fact

by Alexandria Villa - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 10:25 PM

I really found this post very insightful. It brought to mind Escobar's post early on in the term mentioning of trying not to judge the past based on what we know of the outcomes of certain events. It really is something to keep in mind, something that I had almost forgotten, even though he made that statement.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re:Robert McNamara, Strange is his middle name... no seriously

by John Anderson - Wednesday, May 24, 2017, 9:09 PM

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?

There is a lot to discuss on the subject of the Fog of War video. Firstly, the perspective of McNamara supports my pre-existing belief that many of the problems leading to the disaster that was the Vietnam conflict were based in fundamental misunderstandings on the part of both the US and to some extent the Vietnamese people. This point was largely supported in McNamara's interview. McNamara claimed that much of the opposition viewed the US as a new colonial power that had come to replace the French. The US believed that the N Vietnamese were pawns of communist China. Both groups took the stance of diametrically opposed forces that could not exist with each other. I believe that this is one of the errors that McNamara made.

In the fog of war video, McNamara claimed that "any military commander who is honest with himself ... will admit that he has made mistakes in the application of military power." (McNamara, FoW 00:19) In the context of Vietnam, McNamara admits that his fundamental views on the subject of why they were at war in Vietnam were, in hindsight, flawed. He had

made a mistake with his judgment, even if he later refused to entertain questions on the subject, this much was true. McNamara had led US forces on a witch-hunt in Southeast Asia under the guise of preventing further loss of life.

He continues on to say that “there will be no learning period with nuclear weapons.” (McNamara, FoW 00:50) I guess it goes to show that some lessons, even for McNamara himself, will never be learned. Napalm, Agent Orange, and even the economic warfare waged on the Vietnamese people by the US were all horrifying. In many cases the loss of life would have been less if a nuclear device had been implemented. There may be no recovery from nuclear war, but only a fool would believe that they did a good job when millions were slaughtered and thousands more have died to mines and unexploded ordinance in the last 50 years.

McNamara damns himself with his own inaction and his own guilt. A man who tries to repair his past mistakes cannot erase them. My beliefs on the subject of Vietnam are only supported by his cowardice, and his inability to accept the blame that he is burdened with.



-Portrait of R S McNamara, Strange is his middle name

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

3

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Re:Robert McNamara, Strange is his middle name... no seriously

by Stanley Cates - Thursday, May 25, 2017, 6:29 PM

Are you telling me that you don't think detonating a nuclear device would have pushed either China or the Soviets over the fence? In the case of China, Vietnam is sitting right in their proverbial backyard. Think about it in contrast with the Cuban missile crisis. The American government was totally losing its mind at the very idea of the Soviets putting missiles in Cuba. Surely you must at least some semblance of consideration to the notion that a nuclear attack would have provoked larger communist powers unleashing untold levels of life lost.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2

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Re:Robert McNamara, Strange is his middle name... no seriously

by Joshua Meeker - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 2:04 PM

I think he meant more along the lines that one nuke to Vietnam would have resulted in fewer deaths than all the bombs and chemicals we dropped there. I dont think he was speaking about the events that could unfold afterward, which you are doing.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

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Re:Robert McNamara, Strange is his middle name... no seriously

by John Anderson - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 3:54 PM

Josh hit the nail on the head here Stan, sorry fam.

Sum of ratings:0 (1)

0

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Re:Robert McNamara, Strange is his middle name... no seriously

by Joshua Meeker - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 2:00 PM

My first impression to reading this was "Damn dude, no mercy." But I find myself thinking the same thing. Though there were parts where he seemed genuine for the most part he downplayed his mistakes by saying that everyone does. Buts its important to remember that had a normal person done anything so heinous , he would be put down faster than you can say lethal injection. I also didn't appreciate the way he spoke of human life, saying that is was okay to kill 100,000 people as long as you didn't destroy a nation. To me people like him just throw away their humanity and only cling to power and fully desire to wipe out their enemy no matter what it takes. Which plays back to the notion that the reason why to war took so long was because the President was always a coward to admit that this was a lost cause. He didn't want to be the guy who lost the war. Which goes to show that even though they were all different ,they were all stubborn and arrogant. It always sad to see

people in high power who abuse it and swing their d*** around without any consideration for the whole, they're merely interested in themselves and their image. And thus that is where the trouble begins.

"only a fool would believe that they did a good job when millions were slaughtered and thousand more have died to mines and unexploded ordinance in the last 50 years."

love that line, so true.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2

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Re:Robert McNamara, Strange is his middle name... no seriously

by John Anderson - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 4:02 PM

Thanks for your insight Josh,

I fully agree that this guy, and many of his kind, were more concerned with trying to show face then the cost of such an endeavor. I'll be perfectly honest with you, I normally love to put snarky lines in my subject headers, but after watching the FOW video I almost titled this "the asshole who tried to defend killing millions because it made him feel a little bad." The actions of McNamara and LBJ resulted in more loss of life then almost any modern engagement. I say almost because the full extent of his actions may never be known. Kill a man and you're a murderer, kill 1 million, a conquer, Kill them all, a god.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

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Right from the beginning...

by Alexandria Villa - Wednesday, May 24, 2017, 11:08 PM

Right from the beginning of the video, there were certain aspects of what he said that really left me wondering what he was talking about. I found it interesting that he was willing to note the major impact the miscommunication between Vietnam and The United States, but I felt he may have been wrong about the reasoning we had for the war. Yes, according to both the PBS documentary and the Herring book, the US was there because of the Domino Theory and for the possibility there was for deterring the strengthening the grip of Communism on that part of Asia. However, both the documentaries and the book mention ties to more economic reasons. There were minerals and other goods that came out of Vietnam, making the war about more than just the march of Communism. Also, I have to note I had a slight moment of misunderstanding when McNamara went from speaking about the over-arching messages he wanted to convey to his audience to his mild ranting about an argument he had on day one, at around noon.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2

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Re: Fog of War

by Kelsey Gilseth - Wednesday, May 24, 2017, 11:11 PM

The impression I got from Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara was that he really just couldn't make up his mind about the war until the very end of his time office. In preparing for this forum I went back through the Herring textbook and skimmed for mentions of his name. He was constantly switching positions from aggressively adding more troops to trying to downsize the American effort in the war. One quote I found particularly interesting was the following: "McNamara and his military advisers did not knowingly lie about the alleged attacks, but they were obviously in a mood to retaliate. They seemed to have selected from the conflicting evidence those parts that confirmed what they wanted to believe." (pg. 149). McNamara didn't fully examine the evidence presented during the Gold of Tonkin, and informed the president that the United States had been fired upon. President Johnson believed McNamara without checking any of the facts, and as a result decided to initiate air strikes against North Vietnamese torpedo boat bases and nearby oil storage dumps. Consequently, the North Vietnamese also retaliated in response to the war escalation by United States. McNamara's decision here helped shape a turning point in the war where the United States basically declared war without an official declaration of war. In the Fog of War video we watched this week, McNamara says "Any military commander who is honest with himself or with those he is speaking to will admit that he has made mistakes in the application of military power. He's killed people unnecessarily, his own troops or other troops through mistakes or errors of judgement." (McNamara in Fog of War beginning). Although the Golf of Tonkin wasn't explicitly mentioned as a "mistake" that McNamara felt he made, I can imagine that his decision has led to several questions. What do you all think? Do you think he was in the wrong when he chose not to consider all the evidence? Do you think his regretted his decision, especially considering that he ultimately sided against American involvement in the Vietnam War?

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

3



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Re: Fog of War

by Kayla Elliott - Saturday, May 27, 2017, 7:36 AM

From what I have read in the Herring book and watched in the videos, I think that every President and a lot of the other people making decisions in the Vietnam War, changed their minds a lot when it came to the Vietnam War. Not only did they change their minds a lot, but I feel like they said one thing to the public and did another thing behind closed doors. For example, there is a lot of things that Nixon was secretive about. But one thing that stood out to me in the Herring book was that Nixon promoted that the Vietnam War was a war of peace and all he wanted was to have a peaceful Vietnam so he could remove the troops. However, behind closed doors he would send threats of nuclear weapons to Ho Chi Minh. The Herring book described it as such, "He [Kissinger] and Nixon were prepared to use maximum force, threatening the very survival of North Vietnam, to get what they wanted." I think they were more worried about not losing the war that they made a lot of mistakes, like sending troops into Cambodia.

To your point, I think the people that were involved in the war nearing its end, were sometimes blindly making decisions without thinking about all the possible outcomes. McNamara didn't look at all the evidence, and neither did the President before making a decision to bomb North Vietnam. In the video, McNamara also said, "I just felt that I was serving at the request of the President, who'd been elected by the American people, and it was my responsibility to try and help him carry out the office as he believed was in the interest of the American people." To me, this shows that no matter what he personally felt,

he also just followed the lead of the President. I don't think any President was prepared for the stamina that North Vietnam had, and so no one had a solid plan that they stuck to. Therefore, everyone looked like they jumped back and forth on their ideals. Which is yet another reason I find that it's hard to figure out exactly what happened in the Vietnam War and why.

Sum of ratings:3 (1) 3

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Doing the President's work?

by Brent Roessler - Friday, May 26, 2017, 5:25 PM

There is a part in the Herring book I really enjoy, it say's" The secretary was encouraged by senior civilians in the Pentagon, men such as Paul Nitz and Paul Warnke, who had long been disenchanted with the war and had helped convert McNamara."(Herring, pg244) I think some of the confusion or "fogginess" is credited to McNamara's in ability to think for himself. I know that sounds harsh, but it seems he was either influenced or manipulated easily or he was doing the work on someone else's behalf. For example; "I just felt that I was serving at the request of the president who'd been elected by the American people, and it was my responsibility to try and help him carry out the office as he believed was in the interest of our people." (Fog of War, 3:51) So yes, I guess his recollection was a little foggy, do to filtered information and outside influence and doing what he thought was right via the president.

Sum of ratings:2 (1) 2

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Re: Doing the President's work?

by Kayla Elliott - Saturday, May 27, 2017, 7:05 AM

I believe that some of the foggy about the Vietnam War in general is due to the fact that people were just following the orders that were given to them. Many people didn't understand the reasoning behind the orders, but they just acted on them. This makes figuring out what exactly happened in the Vietnam War difficult, because everyone has different information and remembers things differently from their perspective.

Another reason McNamara's recollection is foggy, is because some parts of it, he just doesn't remember anymore. It's hard to remember every single detail about the war. For instance, in the video he said, "I'm not really sure I authorized Agent Orange. I don't remember it."

Due to the foggy of memories and just following orders without know the reasoning behind them, it is hard to piece together the events and the reasons behind them of the Vietnam War.

Sum of ratings:1 (1) 1

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Re: Doing the President's work?

by Joshua Meeker - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 2:18 PM

That's a good point you made there. "Due to the fact that people were just following the orders that were given to them." I can relate to that really well. I was in the Navy and we did a deployment out to Japan to spy on Chinese submarines. Around the same time it was announced that the US was taking huge loans from China. One day while I was working I considered why were we actually there, and if we were there to hunt Chinese subs it just seemed stupid. To stay mission ready for flights I'm sure that we spent at least a couple million a day, if not more. And this is to spy on the Chinese who gave us money? That would be like me giving you money to spy on me. Which brings me to the point you made, that a lot of people didn't really take the time to understand the situation. I will say though that in the defense of the soldier who is in a war, the crimes for disobedience is harsh. Not listening to orders can result in a Court Martial. Just for falling asleep on watch during war time can be punishable by death. Not to mention in boot camp they grind you down to the point where you feel like the military has absolute control over you. This makes it hard for a soldier to really think with his gut and to go with what he thinks is right.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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LBJ wouldn't be better

by Brent Roessler - Saturday, May 27, 2017, 2:45 PM

If LBJ were alive today and gave an interview, like the "Fog of War", I believe it would be much similar to that of McNamara's. I think there would be a lot of remorse along with pride.

Johnson was a very arrogant person. I think this quote speaks volumes about the type of person he was... "By persisting in the face of declining popularity Johnson displayed courage as well as stubbornness. It was primarily a matter of pride. The president had not wanted the war in Vietnam, but once committed to it he had invested his personal prestige to a degree that made it impossible to back off." (Herring, pg.231)

I can't imagine we would get "the whole picture" with a Fog of War type of interview with LBJ. I just feel like his ego would get in the way too much to not distort the facts.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: LBJ wouldn't be better

by Riley Ahrenkiel - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 3:03 PM

I agree that LBJ would have a foggy recollection of the war, much like LBJ, I believe Nixon would have been fairly similar as well. Like Johnson, his ego would have gotten in the way of a clear big picture of war. Given the illegal activities carried out by Nixon, I don't think he would have given a full-length interview where he would admit to all the abuses of power and the costs of his decisions. Herring gives a description of his Nixon's foreign policy saying it was dedicated to the goal of peace, "but frequently ruthless and cynical in its use of military power and callous in its obliviousness to the enormous human costs inflicted at home and especially abroad. The result also was a systematic abuse of power that ultimately forced Nixon's humiliating resignation from the office he had pursued relentlessly throughout his political career." (Herring, p. 279)

I find it hard to believe that there would have been anything like the Fog of War documentary with Nixon, without him leaving out some of the rationales behind the decisions made. I feel like there would be many questions about things he would be somewhat reluctant to answer, questions possibly regarding a victory or defeat in Vietnam, about a war of peace leading to hundreds of thousands of lives lost, or anything about the Pentagon Papers.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2



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Re: Fog of War

by Skyler Tidwell - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 2:51 PM

Throughout the Vietnam War the settlement for peace was almost not existing. Ho Chi Minh time and time again would not go to a peace conference to end the war in Vietnam unless it was agreed upon beforehand that South Vietnam would surrender to the north. The south just wanted to end the war and be their own nation with democracy, which is the direct opposite of the North's opinion. Ultimately, President Nixon gave Ho Chi Minh and the North Vietnam an Ultimatum. He said that if they did not attempt to settle the conflict by the first of November that the USA would have no choice but to create a consequence in return. Upon not selecting to settle Nixon had a group assembled called Duck Hook which consists of National Security Council study members. They were tasked with finding a way to bring the north to a settlement regardless of what it took, they considered massive bombing of major cities, blockade of all port, and possibility of nuclear weapons.(pg.287 herring) However, the situations has laid themselves out and failed to bring North Vietnam to the table to talk. Not only did that raise the stakes for the fight in the Middle East, but put a lot of heat on the president's chair. Sitting in the spotlight of something major and the American people already do not agree with then this happens, tension rises to a new level. In attempts of finding a new way to end the war, Nixon is faced with two options: (1) Being completely humiliated by abandoning Vietnam and suffering Americas firs lose, (2) or stepping up the game to a whole new level regardless of civilian live at stake. Ho Chi Minh waits to see the reaction of the USA because he knows that with the pressure aimed at the president, he would soon have to make a pressing decision and the Ho would be able to react accordingly.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1



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cambodia

by Skyler Tidwell - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 3:33 PM

Sometime after Nixon have given Ho Chi Min an ultimatum of raising the stakes of war or settle for peace, Nixon backed up from that theory and determined that it would get the situation nowhere on either side. Although like war new situations arise and develop. Cambodia has now been dragged into the massive bloodshed. Prime Minister Lon Nol and a small group of independent Americans overthrew the Cambodian prince Sihanouk and opened a new gate way that was like an off limits zone. Lon Nol thought with the removal of the Cambodia's prince that the United States would give their support to the people of Cambodia. Before all that Cambodia was neutral and free from the conflict of Vietnam. With the change North Vietnam secured Sanctuaries and set up military bases along the borders. Knowing that president Nixon approved groups of Vietnam military and a small portion of American combat

troops to go over the border and remove the north. This allowed for a shift in battle strategy. Nixon knew he would get public pressure from this and instead of fighting it he accepted it and allowed for them to hop on the wagon, because it was going to go for a ride.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Nixon in modern time?

by Skyler Tidwell - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 3:46 PM

If Nixon were alive in our present time and was able to look back at the past, he would be fueled in anger of the thought of veterans being treated in some un-respectful way. If he got to be put into a documentary, he would say something like it is unacceptable to accept defeat and would see the world as he would, a failure. Why, because the communist countries stand on the same plat form that we do today. Also that we as a nation do not let others tell us what to do and how we do. His time and his beliefs would not fit into modern times because of the sensitivity of the individual within the United States.

Sum of ratings:0 (1)

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Re: Nixon in modern time?

by John Anderson - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 4:09 PM

I fully disagree. Look at the modern equivalent, the current POTUS. He advocates for more defense spending and cuts Vet benefits. Much like Nixon, the POTUS is fueled by nationalism and isolationism.

I would love, however, to address one of your statements: Also that we as a nation do not let others tell us what to do and how we do. Firstly, any just and free nation is subject to the basic laws and will of the people. The vast majority of Americans don't want to go and murder a bunch of people in another part of the world, we generally want to go and help them. Unfortunately, history has taught us that leaders like Trump don't listen to the will of all their constituents, they listen to the will of the ones that agree with them.

Nixon was a traitor. Nixon was a liar. Nixon was a coward. If these are things you think would be welcome in the current times to replace the "sensitivity of the individual" then maybe we are truly in a bad place as a country.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Why Didn't He Do More?

by Kelsey Gilseth - Sunday, May 28, 2017, 11:28 PM

Upon viewing Fog of War, I couldn't help but recall a story that was in the Patriots textbook earlier in the term. This particular story, which was Anne Morrison Welsh, hit me harder than most. For those of you that don't quite remember, Anne was the wife of Norman Morrison, the man who burned himself to death outside the Pentagon in 1965 to protest the Vietnam War. There is some controversy, but it is believed that McNamara witnessed the whole thing from him office window. In her story, she says that she read McNamara's book "In Retrospect" where he says that "the war was wrong and that it was a tragic mistake," (Appy pg. 152). Anne

says “After all, if he knew the war was a mistake, why didn’t he do more to stop it? Why did he help to escalate the war after he began to have that awareness? Think of all the American soldiers and Vietnamese who died between the time of his awareness and his resignation. If he’d had the courage to protest, it might have ended the war sooner and lives would have been saved on both sides,” (Appy pg. 153). Obviously there are many people to blame for how long and tragic the Vietnam War was. McNamara was not the only government official with the power to protest the war and he is not entirely to blame. “We all make mistakes, we know we make mistakes...there’s a wonderful phrase: the fog of war. What the fog of war means is that war is so complex, it’s beyond the ability of the human to comprehend all the variables. Our judgement, our understanding are not adequate and we kill people unnecessarily (McNamara in Fog of War 8:25). This quote here is the best explanation that can be given to answer Anne Morrison Welsh’s questions. No answer will ever be “good enough” though. Looking at things from McNamara’s perspective, I’m sure he asked himself everyday why he didn’t do more to end the war earlier on. However, I believe that he hid behind the concept of “fog of war” so that he could make it through another day. Like he said, everyone makes mistakes, and somehow they need to find a way to live with them.

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