

The Fog of War Reaction Paper

In Errol Morris' film *The Fog of War*, I was fascinated when Robert McNamara introduced his ninth lesson of war. This lesson stated that "In order to do good, you may have to engage in evil" (Morris 1:25:11). McNamara said this to clarify that there are no parties in a war that are always the good guys. In the goal of winning, all sides eventually commit acts that can be considered immoral or evil. Every war in human history has been characterized by such actions. However, McNamara emphasizes that the amount of immoral and evil committed must be minimized as much as possible. To show this, McNamara mentions a conversation during the American Civil War between the mayor of Atlanta and Union General William Tecumseh Sherman. When the mayor of Atlanta pleaded with Sherman not to destroy the city, Sherman responded that war was cruel. Sherman was determined to show the cruelty of war to those who had promoted and begun it. His army leveled Atlanta.

To showcase engagement in evil during war, McNamara then talks about the use of Agent Orange by the U.S. military in the Vietnam War. Agent Orange was an herbicide mixture that was used to eliminate forest cover from North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops and destroy their crops. McNamara stated that after the war, Agent Orange was "a toxic chemical, and it killed many individuals, soldiers and civilians exposed to it" (McNamara 1:24:16-1:24:24). The U.S. military knew Agent Orange was harmful, but they took no precautions to limit its exposure to personnel and civilians. Thus, Agent Orange was known to be harmful to people, but the U.S. military continued to use it for the purpose of winning the war in Vietnam. McNamara obviously appreciated the evil in the use of Agent Orange and regretted that the US had used it. But at the time he thought that the good result was worth it. That's the ninth lesson of war. Unfortunately when people like McNamara use evil in the pursuit of good, the evil result remain even if the good is never attained.