EPILOGUE

Wilson's Ghost

My earliest memory as a child is of a city exploding with joy. It was November 11, 1918. I was two years old. You may not believe that I have the memory, but I do. I remember the tops of the streetcars being crowded with human beings cheering and kissing and screaming. End of World War I—we'd won. But also celebrating the belief of many Americans-particularly Woodrow Wilson—[that] we'd fought a war to end all wars. His dream was that the world could avoid great wars in the future. Disputes among great nations would be resolved. How wrong he was.

. . .

I think the human race needs to think more about killing, about conflict. Is that what we want in this 21st century?

ROBERT S. McNAMARA, in "The Fog of War"[1]

Our aim in this Epilogue is to provide a context for Robert McNamara's message in "The Fog of War." It is our attempt to address various versions of the most frequently asked question at screenings of the film in which we have participated: "Why did McNamara do this?" Why did he subject himself to this kind of scrutiny? Why did he, once again, turn himself into a lightning rod for critics from across the political spectrum? What kind of person is he? In short, *who is Robert S. McNamara?* The answer is that he is Woodrow Wilson's ghost. Explaining what we mean by this is our principal objective in this Epilogue.

Questions like "who is McNamara?" or "why did he do it?" reflect, more than anything else, Errol Morris' great success in conveying McNamara on screen as a complex, driven, immensely interesting and—as many have said, in one way or another—a scary guy. Especially on the big screen, it is a unique experience to find oneself almost ducking for cover, as this eighty-five-year-old man comes veritably leaping out of his chair at the audience, finger pointing, sometimes almost growling, other times fighting back tears, but always burning with an intensity that is, in fact, reasonably described as "scary."

Many want to know why, in his old age, he has opened himself up once again to charges of having committed war crimes—in the Pacific War in the 1940s, and in Vietnam in the 1960s? Why has he, yet again, revisited the nuclear horror of the near miss of the Cuban missile crisis—which he says in the movie we escaped by luck, rather than by the steely-eyed crisis management of McNamara and his colleagues in the Kennedy administration? What drives him to do this? Not only has he exposed himself yet again as a "sitting duck" to his critics, but he has even mustered the courage—or gall, depending on one's perspective—to put forward lessons he believes should be derived from his mistakes in these epochal events—lessons he presents as perhaps our best hope for avoiding another century of conflict, killing and catastrophe. In so doing, he has not only exposed himself to the possibility of criticism and condemnation, he almost seems to invite it. Again, it has been asked of us countless times by people who know we advised Robert McNamara and Errol Morris in the making of "The Fog of War": who is this guy?

McNamara himself has gone a considerable distance toward providing an answer—one kind of answer—to these probing questions, stimulated in many viewers of the movie by the virtual—but nonetheless intense—experience of going one-on-one with Robert McNamara. He has done so in *Wilson's Ghost: Reducing the Risk of Conflict, Killing and Catastrophe in the 21st Century* (written with James Blight, and published in 2001).[2] *Wilson's Ghost* does not contain the kind of deeply personal revelations some look for, when seeking explanations of McNamara's relentless activity as both a prophet of doom, and as an avowedly idealistic advocate of institutional reforms—in the United Nations, the U.S. government, regional security arrangements and much more—that he believes would, if enacted, lower the odds of the kind of doomsday disasters and near disasters in which he participated, and with which he remains concerned. He is uncomfortable with public confessions, of the type one can find daily on countless radio and television programs, on the Internet, and in a seemingly infinite array of popular magazines. In "The Fog of War," for example, he refuses to discuss in any detail the impact of the war in Vietnam on his immediate family. He is an anomaly in our tell-all era: a very public person who is also, paradoxically, a very private person as well.[3]

Wilson's Ghost, however, provides considerable insight into what makes Bob McNamara tick. It displays McNamara at his most expansive. It reveals the depths of his passionate concern for the human future, as well as his belief that it is actually possible to affect that future in ways that promote human survival and more: an enhanced quality of life for all human beings. These are ambitious, lofty, somewhat fuzzy objectives, especially for a man who is famous (or infamous) for his insistence on precision. Yet in an exercise of compression and conciseness, McNamara has been able to convey a good deal of the essence of what he is about in less than two pages: the "Manifesto" that leads off *Wilson's Ghost*.[4] We include it here, immediately below, as a kind of quasi-"document"—something to refer to, while proceeding through this concluding chapter, especially when questions arise along the lines of: "why did McNamara agree to be interviewed for 'The Fog of War'?" To put it another way, one that is a favorite personal locution of McNamara's: what is McNamara's "bottom line?" Here it is, what he is all about, in as concise a rendering from McNamara himself as we are ever likely to get.

A 21st-Century Manifesto: Choose Life over Death

The 20th century was, in important respects, a century of tremendous advancement for the human race. In developed countries, life expectancy increased dramatically; literacy became virtually universal; productivity—both industrial and agricultural—reached levels undreamed of previously; and income per capita grew to similarly stunning and unprecedented levels. Even in underdeveloped countries, people's lives began to improve, as potable drinking water, improved sanitation, better housing and other infrastructure improvements were introduced in many relatively poor areas. Although much remains to be done to advance the poorest of the poor, in these and other ways, the human race advanced dramatically during the 20th century in its capacity for dealing with many of the causes that brought untold suffering, impairment and early death to human beings throughout all of recorded history.

Yet the 20th century also produced a bloodbath of war and destruction that dwarfed earlier periods, as approximately 160 million human beings were killed in violent conflict. We enter the 21st century, moreover, with the capability of destroying all the gains of the 20th. We are demonstrating radically increased efficiency in killing our fellow human beings in cross-border wars, and in civil and communal conflicts. And there continues to hang over us the risk that whole nations will be destroyed in wars in which weapons of mass destruction are used.

This paradox of the 20th century—our success at saving, lengthening and improving lives, coexisting with our incapacity to prevent massive killing—is epitomized in the life of one of the century's most admired figures, Albert Schweitzer, winner of the 1952 Nobel Peace Prize, physician in rural Africa, musician, scholar and crusader for saving and improving the lives of his fellow human beings. His philosophy of "reverence for life," which he practiced in Africa, stood in stark contrast to the catastrophic events in Schweitzer's native Alsace, on the French-German border. Twice in his lifetime, in the world wars, it became a killing field in which human beings slaughtered one another by the tens of thousands with weapons whose development derived from the same scientific method as the medicine which allowed Schweitzer to save and improve lives in west Africa.

Woodrow Wilson, whose presidency encompassed the whole of the First World War and its immediate aftermath, was one of the first leaders of the 20th century to sense that without radical political changes, the human race might destroy itself in ever greater numbers in what he called metaphorically the "typhoon"—catastrophic wars of ever greater destructiveness. The key requirements to avoid the catastrophe, he believed, were to make a moral priority of reducing the killing, and to take a thoroughly multilateral approach to issues of international security. He failed utterly, however, to implement these objectives. Thereafter, Wilson's ghost haunted the 20th century: in the Second World War, in which fifty million people were killed; in the Cold War, with its nuclear fear and destructive "proxy" wars; and in the seemingly countless post–Cold War conflicts that threaten anarchy, death and destruction in many parts of the world today.

Why this anomaly? Why has the killing of human beings by other human beings been immune from the overall trend toward achieving longer, more fulfilling lives that characterized so much of the 20th century? We argue that fundamentally, the human race—in particular foreign and defense policymakers of the Great Powers—has not made the prevention of human carnage a central priority. In *Wilson's Ghost*, we describe the basis and implications of making a reduction in carnage a central priority—not the only priority, and at times perhaps not even the most important one—but a central priority nonetheless.

In the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy we are told, "I set before you life or death, a blessing or a curse. Choose life then." It has never been more important to reduce the curse of human killing, so that the blessings of life can be enjoyed now, and in succeeding generations.[5]

"McNamara Is a Very Scary Man"

Just as the ghost of Jacob Marley haunted Ebenezer Scrooge in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, the ghost of Woodrow Wilson (the U.S. president from 1912 to 1921) has haunted world leaders from his day to ours. The message of Wilson's ghost is this: Beware of the kind of blindness and folly that led Europe's leaders into the First World War, a disaster theretofore without compare in world history; and beware of the temptation to believe that sustainable peace will be maintained simply by plotting to achieve an alleged "balance of power," without a strong international organization to enforce it.

That message has gone unheeded. The 20th century became the bloodiest century by far in all of human history. Now, half way through the first decade of the 21st century, conflicts have broken out anew around the globe, within states—in many countries of sub-Saharan Africa, the former Soviet Union, and of course the Islamic world; and between sovereign states—such as the U.S.-Afghanistan war, the U.S.-Iraq war and the seemingly never-ending struggle between Israel and the would-be state of Palestine. In addition, the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington raised the specter, for the first time, that highly organized and well-financed nonstate actors, such as the al-Qaeda organization of Osama bin Laden, can threaten the basic

security of the major industrial states. And hovering like a foreboding dark cloud over all these conflicts is the realization that we have, alas, retained the capacity utterly to destroy ourselves in a nuclear holocaust. This is the international context in which "The Fog of War" appeared, in 2003.

The North American premiere of "The Fog of War" occurred on August 30, 2003, at the Telluride (Colorado) Film Festival. In a discussion following the screening, a member of the audience got Robert McNamara's point just about right, in our view, regarding the relevance of Wilson's failure for us, nearly a century later. Here is what she said:

> That old man McNamara just kind of dumps Woodrow Wilson's failure—his tragedy—right in our faces. Do you remember that old folk song, "MTA," about that guy "Charlie" who has to ride the subway forever in Boston because he doesn't have the fare to get off? It starts off with the line: "Citizens hear me out. This could happen to you." I think that's what the old man is saying. Except this time it will be the total end, finis, because of nuclear weapons. This movie—McNamara's message—is one of the scariest things I have ever experienced. McNamara is a very scary man, even at his age.[6]

For McNamara, Wilson is a kind of historical "mirror" with which to illuminate our own security risks, and a stimulus to finding ways to lower those risks. Wilson's ghost hounds us, according to McNamara, just as the ghost of Jacob Marley clanked in his shackles after Ebenezer Scrooge, admonishing his former colleague not to continue making the mistakes he made, or else he too would join him in perdition! The post–Cold War era, which began with optimism and hope, has already, in the space of a decade and a half, given way to apocalyptic predictions of "a clash of civilizations."[7]

McNamara's message, rooted in his remarkably varied experience and buttressed by his recent study of Wilson, is indeed frightening. Once before, he notes, the people of the U.S. and much of the world thought—though he emphasizes that it was more wishful thinking than carefully reasoning—that they were home free, that serious international conflict was a thing of the past. The Great War of 1914–1918 was supposed to be "the war to end all war." Instead, it was the merely the opening disaster in a century of increasingly brutal and lethal wars. This may not only happen again, in the 21st century; it may already be happening now, as in the U.S. "war on terror," and the declaration of President George W. Bush in his January 2002 State of the Union Address that the U.S. intends to seek "regime change" in the states he characterized as the "axis of evil"—Iraq, where the regime has already been removed, Iran, and North Korea.

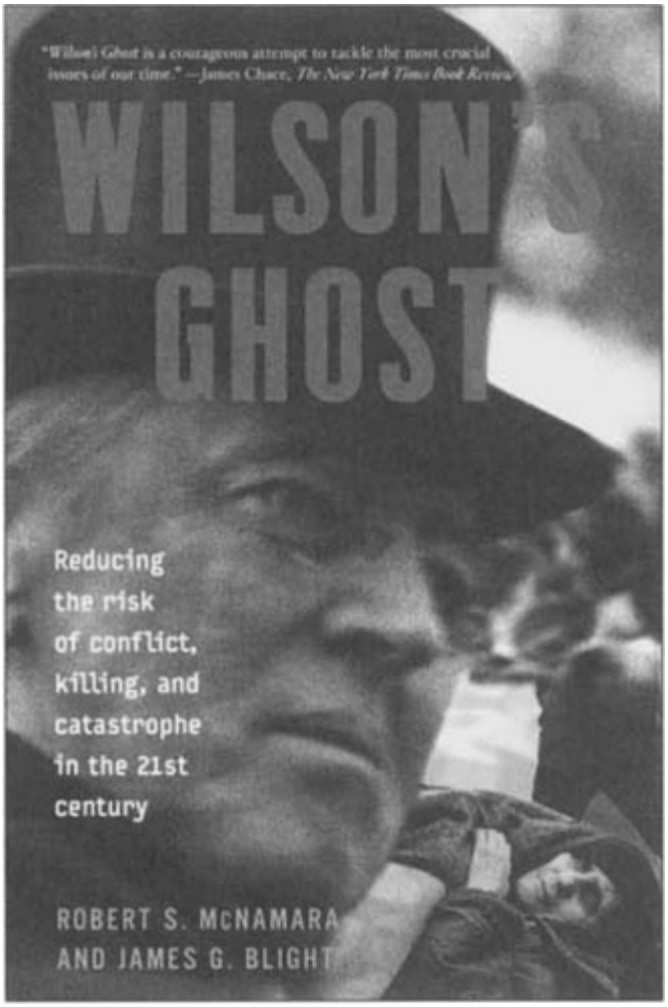
Like Wilson of old, McNamara burns with intensity. He veritably leaps off the screen at us in "The Fog of War," as he exhorts us to get our collective act together, lest we yet live to experience a manmade, global tragedy of unprecedented proportions. We could, and we might, he warns in "The Fog of War," literally destroy whole nations, even large and powerful nations like the United States. We could, and we might, destroy human civilization.

This is not a feel-good message, to say the least. It is deeply unsettling, especially when delivered with the dilated passion of McNamara. Harvard scholar Samantha Power has noted that this seemingly omnipresent octogenarian, McNamara, "refuses to go away"—refuses, in other words, to let up, to take it easy, to relent, to stop issuing warnings, and to stop providing solutions which, in his view, might prevent the worst from happening. Power is far from alone, however, in noticing that his darkly prophetic, relentlessly propagated message can also be annoying to those who either hope he is wrong, or who worry that he may be right, but in any case conclude that they have heard enough of McNamara.[8] McNamara is unmoved by such criticism. In fact, he may well be the oldest really scary, really annoying person now living. Certainly, he must be the oldest, scariest, most annoying person ever to have "starred" in an Academy Award®–winning movie.

Woodrow Wilson and Robert McNamara's "Earliest Memory"

Robert McNamara returns repeatedly, as he does in "The Fog of War," to his earliest memory—to San Francisco, to "a city exploding with joy" on November 11, 1918.[9] As symbolized by this memory of McNamara's (and illustrated in the movie with dramatic archival footage), the post–First World War era began for Americans with a feeling of triumph, supreme optimism, moral conviction and idealism. It was also an occasion when a precocious, impressionable Robert McNamara experienced some portion of the emotion of the moment. The two-and-a-half-year old boy, standing on the streets of San Francisco, recalls adults on the tops of streetcars, acting oddly and wonderfully like the children he played with, for such was the ecstasy of the moment. On November 11, 1918—Armistice Day—the combatants in the First World War agreed to lay down their arms and go to Paris to work out a peace treaty. As McNamara emphasizes in "The Fog of War," many were celebrating simply because loved ones could now return home at war's end.

But not all were merely relieved by the prospect of a return to "normalcy," as the postwar was soon to be called by Wilson's successor as president, Warren G. Harding. McNamara is right to assert that at least some of the celebrations across America were about more than the prospect of family reunions and the return to normal life. President Woodrow Wilson had convinced himself, and a good many of his constituents, that Armistice Day represented not merely the end of the most devastating war in world history, but also, in the phrase Wilson made famous, "the war to end all war." One can only try to imagine how this memory resonates now with McNamara, a man whose life, in common with everyone of his generation, was marked by the suffering, anxiety, and trauma of the Second World War, in which fifty million people died. In fact, at age eighty-five when "The Fog of War" was filmed, McNamara had borne witness to nearly an entire century virtually soaked in human blood.



"His dream was that the world could avoid great wars in the future."

What gives McNamara's earliest memory of Armistice Day its poignancy in the film is the fact that the memory is more than eighty years old, and in those intervening decades, *absolutely nothing* that seemed possible in that celebratory moment long ago actually occurred. Wilson's "war to end all war" was, instead, the war that begot a much bloodier, even more catastrophic war, a global society fractured seemingly beyond repair, and a civilization that may be doomed to self-destruction, if not diverted from its present nihilistic course.

How did this happen? Here is the rough chronology. In the peace conference in Paris following the Armistice, Wilson sought to lay the institutional groundwork for accomplishing what he believed were the two principal prerequisites for enduring peace in the 20th century: first, "peace without victory," a nonpunitive peace treaty devoted to reconciliation between Germany and its principal European adversaries in the war just concluded—England, France and Italy; and second, a League of Nations which would have the power to enforce the peace thereafter. Leadership of the League of Nations, he believed, would fall naturally to the Americans because they were relatively disinterested and lacked the cynicism the war engendered in many Europeans. "America," said Wilson during a speech praising the League, "is the only idealistic nation in the world."[10]

Wilson was right, alas. The greed, vindictiveness, bitterness and pettiness of the victorious Europeans toward Germany proved more than a match for Wilson's eloquent idealism. The British, French and Italian Allies considered Wilson to be intellectually brilliant, but almost childishly idealistic—and supremely arrogant and annoying. Here, for example, is how Wilson was viewed in Paris by David Lloyd George, the

British Prime Minister and head of the British delegation to the Paris conference: "I really think that at first the idealistic president regarded himself as a missionary whose function was to rescue the poor European heathen from their age-long worship of false and fiery gods. He was apt to address us in that vein."[11] As Lloyd George and other Europeans saw it, Wilson came to Paris to preach, to inspire, obsessed as he was by the ludicrous objective of creating institutions which would thereafter forbid and prevent war. Lloyd George and the other European Allies, on the other hand, came to Paris unapologetically to claim the spoils due the victors of a war from the dreaded and hated Germans—to bleed the Germans dry, if they could get away with it.

Despite an almost superhuman effort that ultimately destroyed his health, Wilson failed to accomplish any of his major objectives. In the end, Germany was humiliated and embittered by the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, which required not only the ceding of vast tracts of land, but also the payment of exorbitant reparations to Germany's European enemies. Wilson's League of Nations, moreover, was rendered nearly irrelevant by America's absence from it, due to Wilson's failure to persuade the U.S. Senate to ratify the treaty creating it. During a cross-country speaking tour in the summer of 1919 on behalf of the treaty, Wilson suffered a stroke, from which he never fully recovered. The Senate voted down the League shortly thereafter. Much of Adolf Hitler's appeal to the Germans, during his rise to prominence in the 1920s, derived from his demagogic skill in characterizing the Germans as the victims of the Paris Peace conference and the Treaty of Versailles.

Thus did Wilson's personal tragedy reflect that of his country and the world. Almost before the ink was dry on the Treaty of Versailles, the nations of Europe began to sleepwalk ever more closely toward the abyss of human destructiveness known to history as the Second World War. Wilson died a broken and largely forgotten man in 1924, still unable to resolve the paradoxical premises of his presidency, and indeed of his vision for America and the world. He was a devout Presbyterian, and therefore a Calvinist with unbounded respect for the power of "original sin"—human frailty—to render human life an unmitigated horror from beginning to end, on the one hand; and yet, on the other hand, he seemed to many—not only to cynical Europeans like David Lloyd George—to be a starry-eyed idealist who felt with utter sincerity that he, and perhaps just he alone, had discovered, in the tragedy of the Great War (as the First World War was called, prior to the Second World War), the way "to end all wars."[12]

There is an unusually strong affinity between Wilson and McNamara. This is why our understanding of McNamara and his mission is enhanced by a consideration of some of Wilson's central concerns, along with Wilson's all-too-accurate prediction of the horror of the Second World War. The "voice" of McNamara in "The Fog of War" is very similar to Wilson's, on his rail tour of America in 1919, aimed at persuading Americans to embrace the Treaty of Versailles. He warned during that last-ditch effort to save the League of Nations that solutions to problems of war and peace must be "*radical*, if civilization is to avoid the typhoon" of total destruction.[13] We now know that "typhoon" as the Second World War, and it very nearly did destroy civilization as Wilson conceived it. Wilson was, especially during his barnstorming tour in 1919, also "a very scary man." Historian Frank Ninkovich has captured the essence of this scary side of Wilson:

> Wilsonianism's . . . image of the world was utterly terrifying . . . Wilson was . . . the first statesman to understand the self-destructive side of modern international relations and to formulate a comprehensive new approach that promised to salvage society's progressive machinery. According to his grim diagnosis, only a radical experimental treatment promised any hope at all for a cure.[14]

And Wilson was right. The "experimental treatment"—a League of Nations with the power to prevent war and punish wrongdoers—was not invoked, unleashing a war so catastrophic that even Wilson, as grim as he

could be, could scarcely have imagined its scale and ferocity. The Robert McNamara who recounts his earliest memory in "The Fog of War" knows all this, of course, knows it from experience, and knows it from study. It is the "earliest memory," therefore, of one whose hopes and dreams have been shattered. It is the memory of an old man who believes he may have one last shot at getting his fellow human beings to try the "experimental treatment" before the promise of his "earliest memory" is shattered once again, possibly for the last time.

A Street Saint or Wilson's Ghost?

McNamara says at the outset of "The Fog of War," that "my rule has been try to learn, try to understand what happened. Develop the lessons and pass them on." On the face of it this objective seems laudable, but hardly exceptional. Yet, as was true for Wilson, when the lessons are propounded with the insistence and intensity that McNamara brings to the task, he seems scary; he makes people uneasy. Why is this?

In reviewing "The Fog of War," Roger Angell, the longtime fiction editor of *The New Yorker*, used an image that may help explain McNamara's (and Wilson's) scariness, and the reactions to it. Angell is almost (but not quite) as old as McNamara and, like McNamara, is a veteran of the Pacific Theater in the Second World War. He writes that he was deeply moved by the segment in "The Fog of War" on World War II, the war in which he and McNamara participated as young men. He was moved, but he was also made uneasy. His personal unease calls to mind, he says, an image of "old Robert McNamara . . . stand[ing] in our path with the bony finger and crazy agenda of a street saint."[15] Anyone who has ever been accosted on the street by a person full of doomsday predictions, and with "the solution" to whatever problem is his or her obsession, knows how this feels. McNamara accosts us on screen, bony finger pointing directly at everyone in the audience, full of admonitions to change or the end may well be at hand. One has the impression that, if he were physically present, he would not let you proceed out of the theater until you come to grips with both the problem he has identified, and his radical solution to it. This makes almost everyone uncomfortable, to one degree or another.

One need not believe simplistically that history is bound to repeat itself more or less exactly—in this case post–World War I history, which led to World War II, being repeated in a leadup to a hypothetical World War III—to give some credence, as does Angell, to both McNamara and his message. For while the "bony finger" is certainly in our faces, the agenda of this "street saint" is anything but "crazy." He participated firsthand in much of the history he recounts: the brutality in the Pacific in the Second World War; the close call to global doomsday during the Cuban missile crisis; and the uninformed and flawed decisionmaking that resulted in the Vietnam tragedy. This is what makes him *really* scary: he appears to know what he is talking about. In fact: *he may well be right, just as Wilson was right!*

For all these reasons, as was noted by the member of the audience in Telluride, "McNamara is a very scary man, even at his age." Given the length and trajectory of his life, we would say *especially* at his age. For Robert McNamara, Angell's "street saint," was *there* when Wilson proclaimed that the human race had a choice: to usher in a peaceful and harmonious world, by permitting his League of Nations to become the equivalent of a world government; or to let the sovereign nations lead the world into progressively more catastrophic wars. He was *there*, participating in many of the very events that, alas, proved Wilson to be prophetic. And now, he is still *here* in "The Fog of War," right in front of us, figuratively blocking our path, asking audiences of "The Fog of War" to act to prevent a repetition, or worse, of the tragedy he and his generation endured. He may give us the willies, as "street saints" often do. But if McNamara is right, if his agenda is not "crazy," then he is Wilson's ghost, a man clanking in his metaphorical chains, having returned

from the hell on earth that was much of the 20th century, offering the human race one last chance to save itself.

The Tragic Reality of "McNamara's Century"

So what does "Wilson's ghost," this "very scary man" think we should be afraid of? What fuels McNamara's intensity and concerns? First, he would have us appreciate what happened in the 20th century—"McNamara's century," we may call it.[16] What was it, McNamara asks, that made the 20th century the bloodiest in all of human history?[17] How did war change during McNamara's life in ways that made it more deadly?

The rates at which civilians were victimized illustrate the changing nature of war in the 20th century. One source breaks down an estimated 105 million killed in 20th-century wars into 43 million military dead and 62 million civilian dead.[18] Another estimates that whereas at the end of the 19th century, approximately 10% of war deaths were civilians, 50% were civilians in the Second World War, and 75% were civilians in the wars fought in the 1990s.[19] From these estimates, it is clear that in the 20th century, war was a common occurrence, it was increasingly lethal, and its toll fell primarily on civilians—noncombatants, the elderly, women and children.

The 20th century was not just history's bloodiest century, therefore, but it was also the century in which noncombatant immunity—long held in the West to be a requirement of a "just" war—virtually ceased to operate. German journalist and scholar Josef Joffe recently gave this epitaph to the 20th century:

> How will we remember the 20th century? First and foremost, it was the century of the Three T's: total war, totalitarianism and terror . . . In the 18th and 19th centuries, enemies were defeated; in the 20th, they were exterminated in [places like] Auschwitz or in the killing fields of Cambodia."[20]

This applies equally to the roughly 80–100,000 people killed in the firebombing of Tokyo, the 140,000 people who died instantly at Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, and to the victims of the systematic terror inflicted over decades by Stalin and Mao on their own people.[21] No one knows how many died in the Stalinist purges and forced removals of the 1920s and 1930s, or how many died due to famines associated with Mao's "Great Leap Forward" initiatives and from the chaos of the Cultural Revolution. (The number usually cited is 20 million in each case.) Suffice it to say that millions died due to Stalinist and Maoist cruelty and mistakes.

It is obvious that whatever one fixes as the number killed in war and domestic conflict in the 20th century, the number must be understood as indicating only the approximate level of magnitude of the tragedy. No matter how the total is broken down, there can be nothing approaching numerical precision regarding any of the constituent numbers.

But if approximately 110 million died in war from 1900 through 1995; and if 20 million each died due to the brutal policies of Stalin and Mao; and if approximately 10 million died in war, or for reasons related to war, between 1995 and 2000 (a figure commonly used), we arrive at the figure of 160 million killed in conflict—including interstate and intrastate conflict. This figure is a useful approximation that illustrates the level of violence in the century just ended.

Most of these 160 million or so would have been civilians. How many? If we add the 60 million civilians we calculate were killed in war, to the estimated 40 million who died due to Stalin's and Mao's ideologically driven internal violence, something like 100 million of the 160 million killed due to violence and war in the 20th century were innocent civilians—an appalling statistic. Whatever the actual numbers may have been,

there can be no dissent from the assessment of the 1997 report of the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict: those numbers we can derive, however imperfectly, tell a tale of "mass violence on a scale that dwarfs all previous centuries."[22]

New Dangers in the 21st Century

Robert McNamara believes that the Carnegie Commission report is realistic. Consider, for example, the following calculations which, while speculative, are probably fairly conservative:

- What appears to be the most reliable estimate of the number of wars fought in the 20th century gives the number as 218.[23]
- Assume no increase in the number of wars in this century versus the last and no increase in their intensity.
- But recognize that the average population of the globe will nearly double.[24]

Under these circumstances fatalities from war would likely be substantially higher, at least 300 million. Further, let us assume that the rate of civilian casualties remains constant at approximately 75% (which is judged to be the approximate post–Cold War rate in the 1990s). In this case, 75% of 300 million yields a projected 225 million civilian war deaths.

We reiterate—as is done in *Wilson's Ghost*, where this argument is presented in greater detail—that these numbers are speculative. The estimation of *past* war deaths is just that—estimation, based on "data" of often unknown reliability. To the uncertainty attached to estimates of the pattern and number of war deaths in the 20th century we must, in dealing with projections into the 21st century, add additional uncertainties: the rate of technological advance and dissemination; political leadership or its lack; and a host of other essentially unknowable factors. So neither we, nor the Carnegie Commission, nor anyone else can say with any degree of precision how many people will have died in war by December 31, 2100. But our projections—300 million war deaths, 225 million of them civilians—may well be *underestimates*!

Is it any wonder, therefore, that McNamara believes the urgency of the Carnegie Commission's call to war-prevention in the 21st century is entirely warranted? It is, in fact, difficult to believe that our increasingly interdependent global village—civilization as we know it—can, in this century, withstand the killing of anything like 225 million innocent civilians without leading to political, economic and social instability that would severely penalize most, if not all, nations and all peoples.

And what if—as seems entirely possible—nuclear weapons were to be used in one or more of these conflicts? In that case, the estimates for war deaths would have to be revised significantly upward. For example, just a few nuclear detonations in a border war between India and Pakistan would likely kill millions—perhaps tens of millions—in densely populated South Asia. The same applies to a nuclear conflict in the Middle East between Israel and one or more Arab adversaries. And it is highly probable that the U.S. would be drawn inexorably into any conflict of this magnitude. Then what of the Russians and Chinese? What form would their probable involvement take? Alas, this worst-case scenario may not be as unlikely as we all hope it is.

Or is this possibility, disastrous though it would be, even the worst-case scenario, as it applies to the security of the U.S. and other Western states? In the wake of the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington, along with documented efforts by al-Qaeda-linked groups to obtain and use nuclear weapons in their attacks, vulnerability to a direct nuclear attack on a major U.S. city can no longer be ruled out as wildly improbable.

In an important new book, *Nuclear Terrorism*, Harvard's Graham Allison describes what he calls the problem of "the second shoe" in the U.S. intelligence community following 9/11: the anticipated followup terrorist attack from al-Qaeda operatives. What would they do to up the ante—to create as big an impression as had been created by the 9/11 attacks? The answer was and remains obvious: attack with a stolen or clandestinely constructed nuclear weapon.[25] The technical difficulties involved in either stealing or making a nuclear weapon are far from unsurmountable. Is al-Qaeda interested in this possibility? Lest there be any doubt, here is bin Laden's deputy Suleiman Abu Gheith in 2002: "We have the right to kill 4 million Americans—2 million of them children—and to exile twice as many and wound and cripple hundreds of thousands."[26] There is only one way to achieve this grisly objective: by detonating one or more nuclear weapons in a densely populated city.

Most of the filming of Errol Morris' interviews with Robert McNamara occurred well before the attacks of 9/11.[27] If a "second edition" of "The Fog of War" should ever be contemplated, we believe its message, and the bearer of the message, might be even scarier then they were, to many, in the "first edition." Such is the world we now face, halfway through the first decade of the 21st century.

Three Imperatives for the 21st Century

What can we do? McNamara's response—and our response—is that solutions to the current predicament must be *radically* different from what is currently being proposed and implemented. McNamara formalized the core of his position by June 2001 in two imperatives, each of which runs radically counter to the received political wisdom of our own day, just as it did in Woodrow Wilson's era. The imperatives are:

- *The Moral Imperative*. Establish as a major goal of U.S. foreign policy, and indeed of foreign policies across the globe, the avoidance in the 21st century of the carnage—160 million dead—caused by war in the 20th century.
- *The Multilateral Imperative*. Recognize that the United States must provide leadership to the world to achieve the objective of reduced carnage but, in doing so, it will not apply its superior economic, political or military power unilaterally, other than in the unlikely circumstances of a defense of the continental United States, Hawaii and Alaska.[28]

The multilateral imperative was characterized as "zero-tolerance multilateralism" for the United States, indicating that the world's only remaining superpower should *never* intervene unilaterally, except "in the unlikely circumstances" of an attack on the United States Itself.[29]

"In the unlikely circumstances"—the phrase now seems bizarrely anachronistic. For whatever the likelihood or unlikelihood of an attack on the U.S. homeland in June 2001, when *Wilson's Ghost* was published—and it certainly *seemed* unlikely at the time to almost all specialists on international peace and security—the likelihood or probability no longer matters. The terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001, constitute a tragic demonstration of the point made by Harvard political scientists Richard Neustadt and Graham Allison in their analysis of the Cuban missile crisis. "No event demonstrates," they wrote more than thirty years ago, "more clearly than the missile crisis that with respect to nuclear war there is an awesome crack between *unlikelihood* and *impossibility*."[30]

Robert McNamara has known since October 1962 that the supposed unlikelihood of escalation to nuclear war in October 1962 provided no comfort whatever to those charged with the responsibility for finding an

escape from the crisis short of war. The key feature of this fear of a nuclear holocaust was the unspeakable totality of its *possible* destruction, not reassurance that such a catastrophe was *improbable*, simply because it was thought to be plainly irrational to initiate a nuclear war. In the same way, the 9/11 attacks, unlikely or not, occurred. Of that fact we can be 100 percent certain.

The second edition of *Wilson's Ghost* was published in the summer of 2003. In light of the 9/11 attacks, the deployment of realistic empathy was elevated in that edition to the status of a third imperative of equal stature to the moral imperative and the multilateral imperative.[31]

THE EMPATHY IMPERATIVE

The West, led by the United States, must seek by all possible means to increase its understanding of the history, culture, religion, motives and attitudes of those who have declared themselves to be its adversaries. This effort should begin by developing empathy toward the Islamic fundamentalists, specifically those groups allied with, or sympathetic to, the international terrorist network known as al-Qaeda. Empathy does *not* imply sympathy or agreement; it *does* imply curiosity, leading to deeper understanding of an adversary's mindset, as a prerequisite to resolving differences and eliminating threats to peace and security.

Why empathy? And why now? Because the 9/11 attacks were unanticipated, even unimaginable, to Americans before they occurred. They seemed to most Americans, in fact, to be unprovoked acts of "evil"—in other words, *they made no sense*. Many assumed they must therefore have been carried out by irrational zealots, or by brainwashed youth, or by people from desperate backgrounds—in any case, a group of certifiably crazy people willing to kill themselves in the act of killing others—and who therefore were *evil* people. And it is true that there can be absolutely no moral justification for the targeting of innocent civilians, as was done by those responsible for the 9/11 attacks. One can with justification therefore call the deeds "evil." The problem with labeling the perpetrators "evil," however, is that such a designation is usually taken to be an explanation for the actions—which it *is not*—warranting overwhelming military retaliation—which it *may, or it may not*. Labeling actions and actors "evil" tells us nothing about why the actions were committed.

Why did they do it? Not because they were crazy. The plan for the attacks may have taken as long as five years to implement.[32] The attackers were led by mature, well-educated men from middle-class and upper-middle-class backgrounds. Far from being odd or crazy, the attackers blended into American culture almost perfectly—some for several years—and are recalled by those who knew them in the United States, where they took their flight training, as quiet, unassuming and "normal." So the mystery deepens, along with the urgency of the need for empathy. That they hated us is clear. That the attacks were only a final step in a very detailed, daring and clever plan, and that more attacks should be anticipated—regrettably, that is also clear. But why?

The overarching lessons of the attacks of 9/11 are all related to empathy and its lack. They are identical to those derived in "The Fog of War" by McNamara from the Cuban missile crisis and Vietnam War: size is not necessarily an advantage; a small nation or group can threaten the basic security of even the world's greatest superpower; arrogance—the implicit belief that we as Americans needn't make an effort to understand an adversary, due to our asymmetrical advantage in quantifiable military capabilities—is the greatest impediment to empathy. For these reasons, "empathize with your enemy" is lesson number one in "The Fog of War." Robert McNamara, Errol Morris, and we agree: if you take away only one lesson from "The Fog of War," it should be the first lesson. "Empathize with your enemy"—without qualification. What you don't know, don't understand, or misperceive can hurt you *fundamentally*, no matter who you are, or who your

enemy may be. Acceptance of this principle is the beginning—the bare beginning but a beginning all the same—of the reduction of the risk of conflict, killing and catastrophe in the 21st century.

Wilson's Ghost

The failure of empathy in the West and among its opponents has been a core reason why the 20th century was the bloodiest in all of human history and—to use Wilson's own image—a heart-breaking century.[33] He was eloquent and prophetic in conveying the sense of betrayal that would follow the incalculable sacrifices made in the war just concluded, if it were *not* "the war to end all war." Here is Wilson, sounding for all the world like a McNamaraesque "street saint," promoting what some believed was a "crazy agenda," speaking in St. Louis in September 1919, shortly before his paralyzing stroke:

> You are betrayed. You fought for something you did not get. And the glory of the armies and the navies of the United States is gone like a dream in the night, and there ensures upon it, in the suitable darkness of the night, the nightmare of dread which lay upon the nations before this war came; and there will come some time, in the vengeful Providence of God, another war, in which not a few hundred thousand . . . will have to die, but . . . many millions.[34]

Yet by now, early in the 21st century, the deaths in war of tens of millions more of our fellow human beings have been betrayed, in the same sense: their sacrifices led not to the end of violent international conflict, but only to more (and more lethal) conflict. Neither Wilson, nor McNamara, can fairly be characterized as "crazy." Wilson turned out to be right. Can we risk betting that McNamara—Wilson's ghost—is wrong?

Before answering the question with finality, it is well to keep in mind that the stakes have risen enormously since Wilson's time. In spite of the deaths of some 160 million human beings by violent conflict in the 20th century, in spite of all that unending heartbreak, the world was not destroyed. But that was then, and this is now. We have known for at least fifty years that we, the human race, possess the physical ability to destroy ourselves and the world as we know it in a nuclear war. We have known for more than forty years, since the Cuban missile crisis, that a lack of empathy between nations can lead us to the brink of a nuclear war and, but for luck, even over the brink into total catastrophe. Now, after 9/11, we can be absolutely certain that people we do not understand, but who feel intense hatred toward us, wish to destroy us, and have proved they are well-organized, resourceful and ruthless. Such people are seeking the most efficient available means of carrying out our destruction with nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction.

The Harvard scholar Michael Ignatieff has written, regarding the possibilities of empathizing with an enemy: "When it comes to political understanding, difference is always minor, comprehension is always possible."[35] Of course it is possible. But will we make the effort? And even if we do, will we do so in time? After the events of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent U.S. responses to that tragedy, two conclusions seem warranted: the deployment of empathy is the only sure path away from a monumental disaster for the United States and the world; and, in the face of further proliferation of nuclear weapons, we may have less time to work with than we once thought we had.

In other words, we return to where we (and Robert McNamara) began, but with an addendum: "choose life over death," by empathizing with adversaries, allies, constituents—everyone, in fact. In the 21st century, this commitment must no longer be mistaken for a strategy suitable only for "Goody-Two-Shoes" idealists. Instead, it may be our best strategy for survival—as a nation, and as the human race.

"I've asked Robert McNamara to assume the responsibilities of Secretary of Defense. And I'm glad and happy to say that he has accepted this responsibility."