Preview Questions

1. What are the eleven lessons elucidated from the life of Robert S. McNamara?
2. What are the key takeaways from the movie?

Summary

References

* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Fog_of_War>
* <http://www.errolmorris.com/film/fow_transcript.html>

Prologue

* Every military commander has killed people unnecessarily (i.e., made mistakes)
* Normally, military commanders learn from their mistakes during the course of conventional war.
* There is no learning in nuclear war because the scale and pace of destruction doesn’t allow it.

Empathize with your enemy.

* Allows us to understand the motivations of the opposition’s actions.
* Understanding the motivations of the opposition allows you to create options that are more likely to be received favorably by the opposition.

Rationality will NOT save us.

* Rational decision making focused exclusively on self-interest can produce decisions that are irrational or detrimental to the public interest.

There’s something beyond one’s self.

* A responsibility to society.

Maximize efficiency.

* Enables the greatest benefit per unit of resource.
* Creates capabilities and options that one otherwise would not have.

Proportionality should be a guideline in war.

* There are rules of war.
* Why is an action moral if you win but immoral if you lose?

Get the data.

* Decision making needs to be guided by facts and information, rather than based on emotion and unsupported opinions.
* Better information enables better decision making.

Belief and seeing are both often wrong.

* Information obtained through the senses must be interpreted and it’s possible for the interpretation of the information not to correctly reflect the reality of the situation.
* Information obtained through the senses is interpreted based on pre-existing beliefs.

Be prepared to re-examine your reasoning.

* If allies don’t support your stance on an issue then it’s a sign that you should re-examine the reasoning that let you to that stance.

In order to do good, you may have to engage in evil.

* In such situations you can only hope to minimize.
* In the fight for survival, no action is off the table.
* Doing evil can be interpreted as acting against your stated values.

Never say never.

* Never answer the question that is asked of you; answer the question that you wished had been asked of you.
* Speaking in absolutes reduces your options and may cause you to make irrational decisions.

You can’t change human nature.

* Conflict is a core element of human nature.
* Reason has limits.

Epilogue

* Sometimes in decision making you’re damned if you do and damned if you don’t.