

A main message of war and peace

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



War and Peace

With the world more peaceful than ever, it is hard to look at times of war and think that they were handled properly and diligently. Looking at situations of war and peace, it is clear that humans tend to conflict with one another often, which can sometimes sizzle down to faded grudges or boil up to full on wars. The cause of wars is usually complicated and dense, but few major factors usually point to the direction of war. Things like greed, jealousy and power all tend to steer nations into conflicts, but the reality is that wars are complicated and unpredictable. The unpredictability of war is something that should be well known, as no one can simply assume an outcome or predict a victor. Moreover, the mistakes people made in the past teach lessons in the future, like those discussed by Robert McNamara in Errol Morris' film, *The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert S. McNamara*. Within the dense storyline and compelling arguments, McNamara offers eleven lessons on war and how to strategize properly. Within McNamara's copious advice lies perhaps the most compelling statement in the whole film, which is lesson number nine.

Within Lesson 9 lies the ultimate truth which is that in order to do good, you may have to engage in evil (Morris 01: 20). This ever so important truth is one that makes sense outside of all aspects of war and peace. The reality is that this applies to life in general and thus easily conforms towards the three documentary films, *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, directed by Rory Kennedy, *The Look of Silence*, directed by Joshua Oppenheimer, and *The Act of Killing* which was also directed by Joshua Oppenheimer. Within all films, the concept

of evil for good arises and the plotlines and individual histories tell the same stories of balance and overall morality. Beginning with *The Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, it is easy to see the connections to morality in the decisions of the prison guards and US government. The best scene to examine for this would have to be where the truth leaks out, and it is discovered that torture was actually being conducted in the prison (Kennedy 1: 10). In the scene, some viewed the whistleblower as a hero and others as an enemy, as the morality behind torture is foggy and conflicted at best. The reality of this is that in the opinion of those men and women, sometimes torture is needed to gather crucial information or stop certain behaviors. While an argument can be made both supporting and prohibiting torture, the moral understanding depends on the person asked. It is clear though, that as an action, the morally ambiguous methods used may fall under an evil pretense. While the entire Iraq war may have been considered evil in and of itself, the truth is that torturous activities within the war could have very well led to proper information or some sort of success. While it seems immoral, lesson nine makes sense, as evil is sometimes needed to influence the ultimate good. Now looking at Oppenheimer's films, *The Look of Silence*, and *the Act of Killing*, one might be less likely to agree with the methods. As a companion piece, Oppenheimer's two films educate and entertain the viewer about the Indonesian genocide of 1965-1996. Within the documentaries, the sad reality of internal genocide comes to the center stage, presenting to the audience the horrible events that occurred during the fight against communism. Within *The Look of Silence*, the viewers follow a traveling optometrist whose brother was killed in the genocide. This man, who remains anonymous seeks

answers as to how men were and still are so accepting of these mass killings and travesties. The true gory nature of the film comes alive most in the scene where two men walked the path they took during the genocide, laughing and feeling nostalgic over the killings they executed (00: 30). The sick and twisted reality of the situation is that the men felt they did no wrong. Within the film, the people who tortured, killed, and abused ‘communists’ were proud of their achievements and truly believed they were doing the country a service. Looking at their point of view, what they did was a public service needed to rid the county of those who want to harm it. As the war on communism advanced, more and more were killed either from genuine fear of the ideology or just for sport. Looking at Oppenheimer’s other film, *The Act of Killing*, the men in focus are so proud of their services that they attempt to recreate them for amusement and nostalgia. While the actions they performed were heinous and unforgivable, the men observed all found justification within themselves to do evil for the greater good of their country. The scene that best captures this is in the beginning of the film, where they recruit women and children to act as civilians begging for mercy (00: 05). The fact that the entire village is numb to the deaths of thousands and is willing to reenact the terrible parts of history speaks toward the main point, which is that they think they did good. Since the entire situation for both Oppenheimer films occurs in Indonesia, it is only fair that the view be from said location. The unfortunate reality is that to truly defeat communist, Indonesia had to do as it did, and practice evil. In the end, evil actions and techniques were used to come to the common good and peace

that Indonesia expected, but the truth is that no one knew any good would come out ultimately, as wars are completely unpredictable.

As Errol Morris' lessons from Robert McNamara end at eleven, looking at the films watched could lead one to a new lesson not discussed. Examining the films *The Fog of War*, directed by Errol Morris, *No End in Sight*, directed by Charles Ferguson, and *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, directed by Rory Kennedy, one can see that they share many themes and situations. Most of all, they all share unpredictability. The truth behind war and peace is that outcomes can never be predicted. In the three films stated, as well as many times in life, situations that are predicted to go one way shift, throwing everything out of place. In *The Fog of War*, McNamara discusses his life and the Cold War, where unpredictability reigned supreme. In a time of pure tension and anticipation, two superpowers were prepared to battle. As the United States and Russia flexed their powerful muscles, the world thought that war was inevitable. The reality was of course that tensions never rose to violent conflicts. As stated in the film, Americans at the time expected that at any moment the USSR could attack, and that was just normal (Morris 00: 25). The fortunately misguided opinions of the nation were disproven as the two superpowers settled down to avoid conflict while everyone was left surprised. The true unpredictability of the cold war was one of the main reasons that so much tension built up in the country, and no one knew exactly how to speculate the future. Looking at a separate conflict, in *No End in Sight*, Ferguson discusses the Iraq war and how the United States assumed they could just fix it all. The truth of course is that Iraq was much harder to handle than the U. S. had speculated. While in the Cold War

America looked for the worst and received safety, the Iraq War was the polar opposite. As shown by Ferguson, the Americans had no experience in Iraq, and sent people to run the nation who did not speak the language or care for the culture (Ferguson 00: 50). This unforgivable mistake led to the eventual fall of American power in the country, as minorities all over Iraq searched for real leadership and people who cared. The clear mistreatment of Iraqis in the country was again to blame, as the American forces abused their power and disregarded all consequences. Looking at *The Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, directed by Rory Kennedy one can see the mistreatment continue. As discussed, the mistreatment and torture of men in the Abu Ghraib prison was something that Americans engaged in to gather information and expand their power. In the end though, the Americans left with little accomplished. At the end of the film, when one of the guards asks himself if his immorality was worth it, the true nature of the film seeps out (Kennedy 01: 20). While engaged in all the immoral activities of war, it is hard to remember the consequences and realities of actions, which makes it hard to see the end. Not seeing the end of war is a dangerous and destructive tendency, as one may forget the reasons the war came into existence and how to end it. In Iraq, precisely this happened, and while Americans got carried away, the country slipped out of U. S. fingers. While few could predict an overall failure in Iraq, those who did could teach the lesson that war is unpredictable.

In conclusion, one must always search for lessons when contemplating the past, as history teaches and shapes the world that humans inhabit. By looking for lessons in war and peace, one can understand how to process different situations and events. Whether the lesson is that in order to be

good, one must engage in evil, or that outcomes can never be predicted, learning is a priority. With all the conflicts and wars that have happened, many lessons have emerged and coincide with other situations, but those that do remain eternal. Looking ahead, the chaos in the world today will undoubtedly be recorded in history, and lessons will be taught from the mistakes that humanity makes. With the world constantly in conflict, it seems that more and more people need to look at history to realize that at this point, war is just getting repetitive.