

DEBORRA LEFF: Good afternoon. I'm Deborah Leff. I'm Director of the John F. Kennedy Library and Museum, and on behalf of the Library and of John Shattuck, who is here today, the CEO of the Kennedy Library Foundation, I want to welcome you to what I know will be an extraordinary afternoon.

I'd like to recognize the sponsors of our Kennedy Library Forum Series: Fleet Boston, WBUR, the Lowell Institute, Boston Capital, *The Boston Globe*, and Boston.com.

Vietnam was a wrenching experience for America. As historian David McCullough has written, “The Vietnam war was the longest and most unpopular war in which Americans ever fought, and there is no reckoning the cost. The toll in suffering, sorrow and rancorous national turmoil can never be tabulated. No one ever wants to see America so divided again.”

And as we will see momentarily, Vietnam was a wrenching experience for one man who is kind enough to join us today, Robert S. McNamara, the Secretary of Defense in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. In a film that critic Roger Ebert describes as “splendid, a masterpiece,” filmmaker Errol Morris enables us to experience a cinematic dialogue with the conscience of Robert McNamara. I would like to thank Sony Pictures Classics for allowing us to screen the film here at the Kennedy Library and Museum prior to its opening in New York and Los Angeles next week. The co-president of Sony Picture Classics, Tom Bernard, is here with us today, and it is a real pleasure to welcome him.

I would like to ask Errol Morris to join us in a moment to give us an introduction to the film. And after the film, Robert McNamara will join us for a discussion with Errol Morris and, Delta Shuttle willing, Frank Rich, who is apparently just taking off from LaGuardia after de-icing, of *The New York Times*, will be moderating that discussion. So Errol, let me turn it over to you.

[applause]

ERROL MORRIS: I also wanted to read this one quotation that I stumbled across last week that seems to be particularly appropriate for the present time and for this screening. It's a quotation from John F. Kennedy. I was just talking to several people who are aware of the quotation. I guess it's not so surprising; they run the Kennedy Library. But let me read just a small piece of this quotation. It's from the commencement address at Yale University in 1962.

“As every past generation has had to disentrall itself from an inheritance of truism and stereotypes, so in our own time we must move on from the reassuring repetition of stale phrases to a new, difficult but essential confrontation with reality. For the great enemy of truth is very often not the lie -- deliberate, contrived and dishonest -- but the myth -- persistent, persuasive and unrealistic. Too often we hold fast to the clichés of our forbearers, we subject all facts to a prefabricated set of interpretations,” -- and this is perhaps the best line of all -- “we enjoy the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought.”

And in that spirit, the spirit of the discomfort of thought, I offer this particular movie to you this afternoon. So thank you very, very much for being here.

[applause]

[Screening of Fog of War]

DEBORAH LEFF: Errol Morris, let me say, should be this year’s Academy Award winner for Best Documentary, if not Best Picture. [applause] This is not the first remarkable documentary that Mr. Morris has produced. His film, “The Thin Blue Line,” about a man wrongly sentenced to death for killing a police officer, was directly responsible for saving the life and gaining the release of that man. He has also produced “Vernon, Florida,” “Gates of Heaven,” and “Fast, Cheap and Out of Control”. His work has won the top awards from the National Society of Film Critics, the National Board of Review, the New York Film Critics Circle, and the Boston Society of Film Critics, among many others.

And today is Sunday, the day that’s considerably improved because we can read Frank Rich’s pieces in *The New York Times*. Frank Rich is senior writer for *The New York Times Magazine* and a columnist on the op-ed page. Prior to writing his columns he was the *Times*’ chief drama critic. As one of this country’s most gifted writers, who knows about the intersection between politics and theater, I can think of no better moderator for today’s discussion. So Frank, I turn it over to you.

FRANK RICH: Thank you very much. Thanks for having the three of us at this terrific screening. I join, I think, probably almost everyone, if not everyone in this room, in congratulating Mr. Morris on this terrific movie and in thanking Mr. McNamara for doing it, for being the star of it.

And I wanted to start, Mr. McNamara, with you, by acknowledging what may be for someone in my position the most daunting rule of your rules, although a relatively minor one, which is that you want to answer the questions you'd like to be asked rather than the questions you are asked. [laughter]

ROBERT MCNAMARA: Let me respond to that. That was said rather facetiously. But probably in this past year, I may have done 150 TV interviews. I never do a TV interview, and in a sense I didn't do this movie without having in my mind a storyline. I have certain things I want to say. And if you ask me a question, whatever the hell the question is, if I have in my mind something I want to say, I turn it around, I answer your question. But the point I want to make is when I come to an interview, with you or TV or whatever, I have certain messages, I want to take the opportunity to say them.

My message today is for God's sake, don't duplicate in this century what we did in the last century. We human beings killed 160 million other human beings through conflict, conflict within nations, across borders. That's my main message. I've got

a lot of subordinate points. [laughter] And anything you ask me, I'll come out with that message. That's what I meant. It was a facetious response.

FR: I understand. I was being half-facetious too. Why did you decide to cooperate with this film?

RM: Now there's a long story. How much time do we have on this? I'm serious. Let me answer that. I never heard of Errol Morris. I don't go to movies. I've only seen one movie in the last ten years, for example. I don't know anything about them.

FR: What was that movie?

RM: It was a ...

FR: That's all right.

RM: That's right, I can't even remember the name.

FR: Doesn't matter. Go on.

RM: In any event, I never heard of him, because I don't go to the movies. He called and said -- and correct me if I misstate this, Errol -- he said he wanted to do a TV documentary. I think he had had a contract with somebody to produce five

TV documentaries, half-hour documentaries, and package them and so forth, and would I be willing to do it. And I said, "Well, what's the message? Do you have a storyline?" "No storyline. In a sense, you can say what you want to say." And I did want to say certain things. So I said, "Well, I never do these things except live equivalent." "What's that mean?" "Well, if it were a live 25 minutes, it's 25 minutes. And I want to do the equivalent on your thing." "Well, what's that mean?" I said, "I know you have to edit, but if it's 25 minutes on the air, then I want 25 minutes plus a quarter, say 35 minutes." I said, "How much time do you want?" He said, "Hell, eight hours." I said, "You're out of your mind. I'm going to do eight hours of tape and you're going to, on your judgment -- I respect your judgment -- you're going to use 25 minutes. No way."

So we argued and argued. And I think we ended at two hours. So I came up here -- his studio is in Cambridge -- we did eight hours the first interview. [laughter] And one of the reasons is -- you can judge his talent as a filmmaker from the applause, I judged, you applauded it -- I consider him, his IQ is very high and this is ...

EM: Maybe.

RM: Well, it is. I know something about IQs; yours is very high. [laughter] And second point, he's very, very well-read. And thirdly, he works like hell. I mean not behind the movie camera, but in trying to understand the subject. He empathizes. And based on that, he produces what you've seen. And he's an

extraordinarily interesting conversationalist. And most of that film just -- he didn't have any storyline, I didn't have any storyline, except I had in my mind I wanted to get this basic point across, for God's sake change the ... the subtitle of my last book is *Reducing the Risk of Conflict Killing and Catastrophe*, meaning nuclear war. And so this was an opportunity to do that. And what you saw is a result of informal conversation.

FR: Do you like the results? Are you happy?

RM: That's a good question. The answer is no. Now, when I say that, let me say why. [laughter] Apart from the, I'll call it the credits at the end, the World Bank isn't mentioned. I ended up doing 23 hours of taping. He's got the 23 hours. Out of that, he took whatever the film was, an hour and three-quarters, ten percent. He made the decision what ten percent; I didn't have any authority to say what portion he would use. That was a terrible mistake, first time ever I made it in my life. [laughter]

But the point I make is there's nothing on the World Bank in there. I spent 13 years at the World Bank, 25 percent of my adult life. Extremely important. It's important today. The world needs to understand something about development and about the relationships, the development of conflict and so on. There's a section on the World Bank in that 23 hours that is I think superb. Didn't use it at all.

FR: That's what DVDs are for, isn't it?

RM: Well, I hope so. But we aren't at a DVD yet. Let me mention one other point. In the 23 hours, there's another point, I am extremely interested in this country, in the way in which we use our resources. And my strong belief is that our quality of life today is far less than it ought to be at our level of income.

Let me give you an example. Forty million of Americans are inadequately caring for their health. You will not believe this, but I guarantee it's true. In the capital of the richest country of the world, Washington DC, the infant mortality rate, which is one of the best measures of the effectiveness of the health system, is much higher than that of Castro's Cuba. That is a damn disgrace, and everybody in the room ought to feel disgraced by it. I do. [applause] And that's on the film that he didn't use. Now one other thing. [laughter] He put in some things that I don't like. But I come back to the point: he deserves an Academy Award and I hope to God he gets it. [applause]

EM: Thank you.

FR: When were you editing the picture? When did you finish the picture forever?

EM: It's not quite finished.

RM: Well, Errol, am I not right, the first taping was about three years ago?

EM: The first interview was before 9/11.

RM: Oh, a long time before 9/11.

EM: It was in May of 2001. And then the subsequent interviews ... I was given a homework assignment, as you can probably tell. When we did the first interview, Mr. McNamara told me a condition for coming back again would be editing this material, showing it to him. If he liked it, he would come back.

RM: That's right.

EM: We completed the homework assignment, we sent it off. In fact, he did like it. There are substantial sections of it in this film, in fact. And then he came back again and again. And I'm pleased to say we're still talking.

RM: Oh absolutely.

EM: This is inexhaustible material.

RM: He's a terrific guy, I'll tell you that. I don't agree with everything he does. Oh, there was another ...

EM: One thing, he started arguing just in the back of the room ...

RM: Yeah, absolutely. We'll continue it later.

EM: ... about the epilogue.

RM: It's not worth a damn. I never intended that. [laughter] It's not worth a damn. I did not know it was going to be in the film. But let me say one other thing. There were two homework assignments; the other one you didn't mention, which was read my books. There are three books ...

EM: Oh, I've read them.

RM: Well he has, but there are three books that underlie this film. The first is *In Retrospect* on Vietnam. The second is *Argument Without End*, which is a book out discussing the meetings with the North Vietnamese, extremely important. And the third book, which is in paperback, which just came out a few months ago, which in a sense is a foundation of the thread that runs through his ... God, I'm losing my mind.

FR: *Wilson's Ghost*.

RM: *Wilson's Ghost*. Which really sums up my views about the world security and the U.S. role in it and what we can do and the lessons that we should apply today and for the future.

FR: Well, let's talk about that a second. There are 11 lessons, obviously, in the movie ...

RM: They aren't my lessons. That's ...

FR: I know. But they're all ... I know that. But there are also 11 lessons in *In Retrospect*, which somewhat overlap but don't completely overlap. One thing that I think everyone in this audience must feel watching this movie is how applicable most of these lessons are to what's going on in Iraq.

RM: Exactly.

FR: And the same thing is true for your book, written obviously well before we knew about this war. So apply them to Iraq.

RM: Well, I'm not going to apply them; you all can apply them. You've seen the film. You won't believe this, but I've been asked by 74 members of the press or TV to come out on Iraq.

FR: 75 now?

RM: 75.

FR: I guess that's the diamond year.

RM: I haven't responded to any of them, except in this way. I think it would be irresponsible for an ex-Secretary of Defense, when Americans are being killed in a war and when the president is involved in very, very delicate negotiations with the UN and other international agencies and with allies, irresponsible for an ex-Secretary of Defense to comment, particularly if it were critical.

FR: But Richard Haas, for instance, who was in the Bush State Department and who left to become the Head of the Council of Foreign Relations, wrote a piece in *The Washington Post* just in the past two weeks, an op-ed piece essentially talking and criticizing implicitly a lot about what's going ...

RM: He wasn't the Secretary of Defense.

FR: So that's the distinction? You can do it ...

RM: Absolutely. I don't think many in the room really understand the difference between a parliamentary government and the US presidential government. The parliamentary government -- the ministers, the members of the cabinet -- have independent power bases and they can exercise those. They can vote the prime minister out of power. The American people didn't give me an independent power base; they voted for the president. I served at his discretion. I never believe what most Secretaries of Defense do, that they're there to defend the Army, Navy and

Air Force. Not a damn bit. I was there to serve the president. And I did it contrary to the recommendations and views on occasion of the departments. I always told him that they were contrary. But my job was to serve him. I was not elected then; I'm not elected today. I do to some degree have an independent power base, I know that. I'm not going to use it against the president.

FR: Well, then, implicitly you're answering my question. You could before the president. In other words, you haven't applied these ...

RM: That's right, I could, but I wouldn't use it then. I'm a Democrat with a small 'd' and a large 'D', but I haven't come out in security affairs for a Democratic president. I just think it's wrong for an ex-Secretary to use, particularly if he has what I call an independent power base. The American people didn't give it to me, the president gave me the opportunity to get it.

FR: Let's go to that epilogue that you like so much for a second. In it, you say that ... you're asked by Mr. Morris about why you didn't speak out about the war, and you say, "I'm not going to say any more than I have. These are the kinds of questions that get me in trouble." In trouble with whom?

RM: With all of you. [laughs]

FR: I think people would be ...

RM: No, I know it. Look, I don't want to be facetious about this, but I do want to in a sense enlarge on that answer. Vietnam is an extraordinarily complex subject. I was Secretary for seven years. I've been out of the department for, whatever, 34 years. That makes 41 altogether. I've thought about Vietnam for 41 years. I'm still learning. I've written three books on it. It's not an easy subject, and you can't answer it as the epilogue tried to. So if you want to know more about what I think of Vietnam, please, please buy the books. I don't get anything out of it to speak of; some of them I don't get anything out of. But anyhow, buy the books. They do relate to today, they do lead to conclusions about today. Derive them from the books. Today and tomorrow. The last book particularly, *Wilson's Ghost*, relates to it.

FR: But still, to get back to Mr. Morris's question. I still don't see how that's applicable to why you didn't speak out after leaving office about the war.

RM: Well, you're speaking now about Vietnam.

FR: Right.

RM: When I left office, there were still Americans in Vietnam, fighting and being killed. The war went on for, what was it ...

FR: Seven years. Seven years after ... (inaudible)

RM: Right. And an American elected by the American people, Nixon, was dealing with that. I wasn't elected by the American people. I thought it would be wrong, and I still think it would be wrong.

FR: What would you say to the argument that you might have saved some of those lives if you had spoken out?

RM: I don't think that. You present the evidence, I'll present the contrary. What I could have done, what I feared I would do, is cause more to be killed. Part of the evidence ...

FR: How so? I'm just curious.

RM: Because it would lead to more dissent and it would give aid and comfort to the enemy. If the Secretary of Defense, ex-Secretary, one week out of office said to the North Vietnamese, “We're losing the war, you can win if you keep at it,” my God. Or if we said, “Well, we're going to get out.” First place, how would you get them out? You just think this through. The Secretary of Defense, or the ex-Secretary, one week after says, “We're losing, we're going to get out.” The president hasn't a plan to get out. The North Vietnamese are killing Americans every day. You've got to think this problem through. And most people haven't thought it through when they ask the question. And it is so complex. As I suggest, read the book.

Another point. In which book is it? You probably know. *In Retrospect* there were a group of wise men. These were the wisest security experts, international experts in the country: the former Secretary of State Dean Acheson, Omar Bradley, the former Commanding General in the Army, and so on, about 12 or 15 of them. The film mentions my November 1, '67 memo. That was the most important thing I ever wrote. It went to Johnson. The wise men met, the 12 or 15, met the night of the day I gave it to Johnson. Not one of them was ever shown the memo. They gave Johnson a memo that said, "You're right on the right course, stay it. Don't listen to these people that say get out." Johnson gave the memo, unbeknownst to me, to Clark Clifford, who was my successor, and to Abe Fortis, the former Supreme Court Justice. I didn't know what they said until Johnson's book came out and he reports this. They basically said, "This guy is a quitter. He wants to get out, that's what the memo says. Don't do it."

And a point I want to make is I was in this -- you know this Errol -- I was a small minority within the government. The only top-ranking guy in the government who agreed with me was the Deputy Secretary of State Nick Katzenbach. Everybody else was for it. Was I right and they wrong? I think pretty well of myself but I don't think I'm that good. You have responsibilities as an officer of the government, and you've got to think of those and carry them out. So put yourself in my place, empathize with me, read the books and then decide what you think.

FR: One piece of evidence that you brought out in your own writing from getting access to tapes and so on, discussed I believe here this fall, was more and more the belief that Kennedy did not want to expand the war and wanted to bring ...

RM: Very important.

FR: ... bring back the advisors.

RM: Now, why do I believe that? Because I think Kennedy believed that a responsibility—re-phrase that. Kennedy believed the responsibility, first responsibility as president, was to keep the nation out of war if he could. That’s why he allowed the Bay of Pigs to fail. At the time of the failure, when the rebel Cubans were on the beach trying to penetrate Cuba, being thrown back, the Chiefs of Staff and the CIA said, “Mr. President, we’ve got a carrier with aircraft there, we can go in and save it.” He refused to do it. And he was right. He said, “I’m not going to take this nation to war with Cuba.”

Most of you never heard of this case, but in the fall -- that was in March of '61. In the fall of '61, about September, the Soviets decided they would take West Berlin, which was in the middle of East Germany, away from NATO. NATO had been granted it at the end of World War II. And I won't go through the whole episode, but it extended over a period of time. We were supplying West Berlin by air. They essentially stopped the air lift. Then we went through with ground corps, ground convoys, through East Germany. And then they sent word to East

Germany to stop the ground convoys in the middle. So then we sent a military escort in and escorted these convoys, and they stopped a militarily-escorted convoy in the middle of East Germany.

So I called Larry Nored (?) ... (inaudible) how is this going to end? They did A, we did B, they did C, and we did D. What's going to happen?" He said, "Well they'll do F, and we'll do J, and they'll do H." I said, "What happens then?" Now, this is the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe commanding all NATO forces. He said, "I guess we'll have to use nuclear weapons." This was a terrible problem with the Soviets, for, as I said, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, for seven years we had to live with it and deal with it. And that shaped our mindset and our actions. We were totally wrong on Vietnam.

I didn't tell you, and just to illustrate the point I'll use some vulgar language, but this is exactly what occurred. It's printed in the book *Argument Without End*. When I was trying to tell the North Vietnamese they were crazy as hell, that we weren't there as colonials taking the place of the French, they said, "You just don't understand." I said we were there because they were trying to take South Vietnam. Eisenhower had said if the communists take Laos and South Vietnam, the dominos will fall. And I said, "We believe that you would use South Vietnam -- the Soviet communists, Chinese communists -- as a base from which to stage your hegemony across East Asia and possibly South Asia." He said, "McNamara, you're entirely wrong. Don't you understand?" This is what one of them said to me, apart from the fact that they'd been at war with China for hundreds of years, "Didn't you read

that Ho Chi Minh was criticized severely by his associates at one point because he appeared to be giving in to the French? And Ho Chi Minh said to his associates, “I would rather smell ...” -- and I apologize for the vulgarity, but this is what he said -- “I would rather smell French shit for five years than Chinese shit for 500 years.” He said, “McNamara, didn’t you read that?” The fact is I hadn’t read it. I never heard about it. But what I’m trying to say to you is we did not understand.

I’ll give you another illustration. I have a very close friend who was an OSS officer behind the lines in China during the war and then he became part of the CIA, and he was sent in 1954 along with the Secretary of State to Geneva to meet with Ho Chi Minh and the others, meet with the North Vietnamese and the others. At that time the CIA asked him to determine if Ho Chi Minh was still alive. We just didn’t know.

FR: Let me ask you, in the film, while you’re obviously extremely respectful and sympathetic to Johnson, you make it clear that he bears the responsibility for a lot of the expansion of the war ...

RM: That was poorly chosen, I agree. That’s what I said, the president was responsible. That’s simply a boilerplate. Everybody knows it. Who else was responsible? Not the president.

FR: Let me read you something. This is Robert Dallek, who wrote *Unfinished Life*, a Kennedy and Johnson biographer. This is what he wrote in his Kennedy

biography this year. "If Kennedy was opposed to a substantially larger US role in the war, why did LBJ believe that he was simply following Kennedy's lead by escalating US involvement? He believed it because Kennedy had significantly increased US commitments during his presidency, and because three of Kennedy's principal foreign policy advisors -- Rusk, McNamara, and Bundy -- told Johnson that expanded involvement would have been Kennedy's choice.

RM: I don't think we ever said that. By the way, I think the world of Dallek. From my point of view, he's written the best biography of Kennedy. But I don't think ... I'm sure I never said it, and I don't think the others did either.

FR: Do you feel that ...

RM: And if I may say something, I don't believe it. Go back to the October 2, 1962 meeting, which we see a recording of in the film. Very, very controversial meeting. I presented the recommendation that we get out by the end of 1965. It took hours to get through it -- it's on tape -- and many, many were opposed. Kennedy finally went along with it. And I think he went along with it, as I suggest, in part because he believed his responsibility was to keep the nation out of war. That was certainly what affected his decision on the Bay of Pigs, it affected his decision with respect to Berlin that I mentioned, it affected his decisions in the Cuban Missile Crisis. And I think it would have affected his decision, had he lived, with respect to Vietnam. It certainly did that day. He said to this divided Security Council, "All right, go ahead. We'll plan to get out by the end of '65."

I knew enough about government at that time to know that those who opposed the position would live to fight another day, so I thought how to put this in concrete. The way to put it in concrete was have it announced. So I said, “All right, Mr. President, let’s announce it today.” Then there was a hell of another fight, because those who opposed knew what I was doing. But he finally did agree to announce. It was announced that day.

EM: You know, there’s a lot of disagreement on this issue of the withdrawal of the thousand advisors ...

RM: Yes.

EM: ... to remove all of them by 1965, was it announced, wasn’t it announced. In fact, it was announced several times. It was printed in many different places, including *The New York Times*. We have a series of newsreels actually that date December 9, 1963 where they are announcing the removal of the thousand advisors. You see them lining up for planes on their way, as the narrator tells us, on their way home in time for Christmas. It was something that was announced, it was something that was public knowledge.

Part of that debate concerns was Johnson trying to remain consistent with Kennedy’s policies. But, of course, Johnson was aware of this troop withdrawal. One of the strengths -- I like to think one of the strengths -- of this movie is it

juxtaposes two very powerful conversations, one of which I know from in retrospect, although I believe we're the first people to get our hands, thanks to the Kennedy Library, on the actual recording itself. Robert S. McNamara and President Kennedy discussing in this Security Council on October 2, 1963, the plan to pull the advisors out, very powerful quote from this man, “We need a way to get out of Vietnam and this is a way of doing it.” Very, very powerful quote.

And then we hear Johnson chastising Robert McNamara in a phone conversation. Why is this phone conversation important to me? Because Johnson is making explicit reference to that October 2nd meeting. “I sat silent while you and the president decide ...

RM: Did the wrong thing.

EM: Essentially did the wrong thing. “I did not agree.” Very powerful for me, because I feel listening to that conversation I am hearing the President of the United States say to his Secretary of Defense, “These policies were wrong, I don't agree with them, we're changing them.”

RM: Now may I argue against myself for a moment and add to what you're saying? [laughter] I have said that, and I've said this in print, I've said it publicly, I repeat it today. If Kennedy had lived, I do not believe we would have had 400,000 or 500,000 US military personnel in Vietnam. However, I have to recognize that had he lived, within a few weeks of his death, that is to say before

the end of the year, there was a coup. And Diem and his brother Nhu were killed. This is referred to in the film. But what isn't referred to in the film -- it wasn't appropriate to refer to it in the film -- is that was a revolving door for government changes in Vietnam. It was total political instability after that. You probably know, I forgot. We had about five governments in the next five or ten months.

Now, what Kennedy would have done under those circumstances, I don't know. I say in the book *In Retrospect* Kennedy believed in the domino theory. We all did. I think it was wrong. One of the lessons is, which we're not doing today, didn't do then, aren't doing today, may not do in the future, is for God's sake surface critical issues that will divide your advisors, accept the fact that you're going to cause war among your advisors, because you have respected people on both sides of the issue.

One of the issues we never debated was, were we correct in believing in the domino theory. We were wrong, I think. And I think had it been surfaced, it would have split the government wide open, but we might have come to a better decision. And Kennedy believed in that.

FR: Do you think we're having a better discussion now about the whole issue of weapons of mass destruction and whether they ...

RM: No. One of the reasons I agreed to do the film was I'm obsessed today with the failure of this country and the world to deal properly with the problem of

proliferation of nuclear weapons, more generally weapons of mass destruction. We are not dealing. The film gives me an opportunity, and even more the DVD will, with the rest of the tape.

FM: You're getting very film savvy. I want to see you at the Oscars. The discussion about nuclear weapons pertaining to Iraq has been marked by obviously a lot of controversy and dispute over the facts. Is this helpful to your goal of eradicating ...

RM: Well, that's a good question. I think yes, because, for example, it's given me an opportunity to say, and I'll say it again, hopefully you'll pick it up -- and you may not have seen it because when Chirac, Schroeder and Blair were talking to each other a little more than they are today, the three of them wrote an op-ed. I didn't know this until my research assistant brought it to my attention. And it was published, I don't know when, say two years ago. In the op-ed, Schroeder, Chirac, and Blair state the greatest security problem that will face the world in the 21st century is the proliferation of nuclear weapons. And I strongly agree with that. We do not have a policy today to deal with that.

The US policy is preemptive action and regime change. That's absurd. Forget Iraq, I'm not talking about Iraq. [laughter] Well, I will tell you what I am talking about. It's not dealing with North Korea. And I tell you it won't. There's no way we can use preemptive action against North Korea and survive without losing -- I don't know what -- 100,000 Americans and a million South Koreans. I don't think

it's a policy that will deal with Iran. I know it isn't a policy that will deal with other potential proliferators.

So this is a very, very serious problem. The movie gives me an opportunity and the DVD hopefully will give me more to present this as a problem. The world doesn't have it, the Security Council doesn't have it. Hell, they couldn't come to agreement on how we should deal with Iraq when many people, most people I guess, believed Iraq either had or intended to have nuclear weapons. Security Council wouldn't say what to do.

EM: One thing about the movie, a theme that I believe runs through the entire movie, is this theme of preventive war, because after all ...

RM: Preemptive war. Preemptive war. Different than preventive.

EM: Well, preventive war in the sense that your first memory, the memory of World War I, is a preventive war in the sense what is Wilson telling the American public? He's saying, "This is a war to end all wars." It will be the ultimate preventive war in the sense that it will prevent all wars to follow. And, of course, the strong irony in all of that is that it was no such thing; it was a war that ushered in the worst century of carnage in human history.

It makes you think about ... I sometimes think of preventive war as being one of those ultimate oxymorons, but you see it resurfacing again and again and again and

again. In a very important form, it surfaced in the Cuban Missile Crisis. Let's attack them now.

RM: LeMay's view.

EM: LeMay's view and others. And we know, of course, from recent research that that would have been totally disastrous.

FR: Mr. McNamara, does it make you feel, you're 87 years old, you've seen a lot of history, indeed, going back to your earliest 2-year-old memory of armistice. When you see history repeat itself over and over again, when you see the 11 rules you have in this book broken as they have been in the past year or so, long before we knew this war in Iraq would happen, does it fill you with despair?

RM: No. Well, I should maybe ... I should speak more sense of limitations. What it does is stimulate me to talk more or to write more. I understand my limitations in influencing action and public opinion. But that's the only thing one can do. Those words of T.S. Elliot are very important to me. You come through life and you reach a stage where you look back and you see opportunities to have done more to achieve human goals than you did, and you think, well they aren't lost because there are opportunities today to talk about those, and maybe they'll influence some people in the future. So I'm not pessimistic, and neither am I about to stay quiet when I have something to say.

FR: I want to get a few questions from the audience. My last question is I want to read back something that you say in the film. You're talking about receiving the Medal of Freedom and being too choked up to talk about the president, Johnson. And you said, "Had I responded, I would have said, 'I know what many of you are thinking. You're thinking this man is duplicitous, you're thinking that he has held things close to his chest, you're thinking that he did not respond fully to the desires and wishes of the American people, and I want to tell you, you're wrong.'" Could that also be a description of yourself and how other people view you?

RM: No, I don't think so. The situation is different. The reason I said that about Johnson is that I doubt that there are many in this room that understand two things. Number one, the majority of the American people of all characters -- members of Congress, academia, the press, the public -- believed that the US was right in Vietnam up until early '68. There was a very interesting study by a University of Illinois political scientist that documents that. And Johnson knew that, so he thought he had the people with him.

Number two, he worried far more -- although resistance was building up before '68, whatever, Kent College and Stanford and Harvard and so on, long before that. But number two, he feared the right more than he feared the left. He was very, very much concerned about the pressure on him to do more. And it hasn't been discussed much, but there was a feeling on the part of many Americans, in the military and outside the military, that he should do far more against North Vietnam: he should invade Hanoi, he should consider using nuclear weapons, he

should consider dynamiting the dikes and flooding the countryside, cutting off the food. You heard a little bit of it from Goldwater. And these were very, very powerful forces he was concerned about. Frankly, he was more concerned about them than I was, but he was a heck of a lot better politician than I was.

FR: Just in terms of his character, do you feel -- I noticed in interviews or little pieces about you during the 1980s, through the Westmoreland trial, which you were involved with, the Westmoreland libel trial with CBS, you were adamant about not giving interviews, not wanting to say your piece. And obviously you've changed your mind, culminating in this wonderful movie, but also beginning obviously with this book and the books you've written subsequent. Why did you decide to make yourself more fully known?

RM: Well, I think that ... for two reasons. Number one, you won't believe this. I mention it, I think, in the preface to that book. It took me about ten years -- say I left the government in '67, it took until ... more than ten years, but it certainly took at least ten years for me to begin to see Vietnam in perspective. I believed in the domino theory. Kennedy did. Now, why did I think Kennedy would have not put 400,000, 500,000 men in there if he believed in the domino theory? The domino theory was if you lose South Vietnam, you lose East and South Asia and you weaken American security across the world. He believed that, I know that. I think because if he believed that and we were losing in South Vietnam, then he would have to ask the question. It was never debated. You cannot find on a piece of paper any high level debate of this question. Assuming the dominos would fall

if we lost, could we prevent the loss by introducing large numbers of Americans? There was no full and proper debate of that. And I say that, in retrospect, that I believe Kennedy believed the domino theory, but I think when he was faced with the necessity of putting in large numbers of US troops he would have forced a debate on that issue. And we didn't. And that was a terrible, terrible error.

It goes back to my basic point. I don't care whether you're talking about a church-- we've recently seen a large church go through just what I want to talk about-- or a large corporation -- we've seen evidence of that -- or the government. Leaders hesitate to surface issues that will split their organization wide open. That's why we didn't discuss either of those things, domino theory or could we win the war by introducing Americans. Because at the highest level, the government would split apart. And I can draw analogies. You can draw analogies. I'm not going to mention any.

FR: Okay, let's have a couple of questions.

EM: I know that one of the exchanges that I did not put in the film, I asked Mr. McNamara at one point if one of the lessons of Vietnam was that we shouldn't interfere with the affairs of foreign countries, and he said no. He said, one of the lessons of Vietnam is some conflicts have no military solution.

RM: That's right.

EM: And I think it too is a very, very powerful lesson.

RM: And for me, I want to tell you, it took a lot of thinking to get to that point. I have spent my life solving problems, and I believed until that point every problem had a solution. I'm prepared to say today some problems don't have a solution, not an immediate solution, and many problems don't have military solutions.

FR: Let's have a question or two. And we really would prefer questions, not statements. Yes?

AUDIENCE: I have a question sir. You mentioned the wise old men who were advising President Johnson at the time of the Vietnam conflict. I wonder if you know if there are any wise old men today who might be advising our current president. Can you speak on that?

RM: Well, that's a good point, and the answer is number one, I don't know enough about who is advising the current president to answer your question. Number two, today in this society we don't have the equivalent of those wise men. I don't mean there aren't wise people in our society, but those men had gone through experience. They had gone through World War II, they had been leaders in establishing a post-war Europe, the Marshall Plan, in establishing NATO, in developing the containment theory or expanding on the containment theory of George Kennan, which was our basic foreign policy in dealing with the Soviets for 35 years. I don't think we have their equivalents today.

FR: Yes?

AUDIENCE: (inaudible)

RM: I'm losing my hearing. Translate.

FR: Should there be a twelfth rule to warn presidents to be wary of the arrogance of power?

RM: Oh yes, yes. I don't know that I'd use arrogance, but be wary of believing that using whatever power they think they have they can change the world by themselves or by our country alone. We cannot do that. We can't do it. We've got to work with others. We have to learn that lesson.

AUDIENCE: When I first bought *Argument Without End*, I opened it up, and on the first page I was astonished to find the statement that despite the history of the war, both sides achieved their objective, that you were openly saying -- implicit in that you were openly saying that the United States' objective had nothing to do with the country of Vietnam itself but was a larger geopolitical issue.

RM: That is essentially correct. Except I don't want to say it had nothing to do with Vietnam itself. It had to do with Vietnam in the sense that we believed -- Democrats, Republicans, etc.-- believed that if Vietnam were lost to control by the

Russian and Chinese communists it would seriously impact on the security of the Western world.

AUDIENCE: To my knowledge, when I read that line, you were by far the only and by far the highest government official who actually, overtly said that. In view of the fact today, even now say in Iraq and the Middle East, you've still got tremendous conservative policymakers talking about going back to Vietnam and the analysis and saying things like, "This is their right to self determination and right to have their own government." Have you done anything to sort of speak out?

RM: No, I haven't, to tell you the truth. That's in a sense a subject of political structure within a country or countries, and I haven't spoken on that. I have some views on it. My view is, I'm a Democrat with a small 'd' and a large 'D' and I'm prepared to support democratic policies, small or large. But I do not believe that we can -- I'll call it impose democracy -- on every nation in the world. And I think we have to be damn careful how we try to do it, where we try to do it and by what means we try to do it.

FR: One last question. Who has their hand up?

AUDIENCE: How did 9/11 change your movie or your line of thinking?

RM: It hasn't.

AUDIENCE: Not at all?

RM: No, not at all.

AUDIENCE: Why not?

RM: Well, I feel like I did when Errol was asking me the one in that epilogue, that what I say will raise more questions. How can I put it without raising the questions? Well, I think one has to put 9/11 in perspective. It doesn't compare with Vietnam or World War II or many of the other threats to our security in today's world or the world of the future. I'm not opposed to recognizing we have a terrorist threat, but it's a different level of threat than we have faced in the past, and I think we need to put it in perspective.

FR: Thank you very much. Thank you.

RM: Thank you, Mr. Rich. Errol, thank you.

[applause]

FR: Thank you very much for doing this.

EM: Thank you.

RM: May I ask you to stay two minutes more? As we came in, I ran into a lady that had interviewed me. I think she's with the Kennedy School, Samantha Power. And it reminded me that one of the lessons that I believe very strongly in was not fully discussed in the movie. We have essentially two deterrents to prevent war today that we bring up when war becomes likely. One is economic sanctions. Very, very ineffective. I don't mean to say that we shouldn't use it at times; it has some effect in South Africa, for example, but they're very ineffective as a deterrent to military action. And the other is military action itself. That is a crude instrument, and we ought to avoid it in every degree we can. We should have a third deterrent, and that's what I call the judicial deterrent. We should have an accepted code of conduct in war for military leaders and political leaders. We don't. We should have means of penalizing leaders that violate that accepted code of conduct. The International Court for Crimes Against Humanity and the Hague as established were opposed to it. That is totally wrong.

[applause]

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