

How To Spot Propaganda In The Fog Of War

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SUMMARY

The discussion centers on the Gulf of Tonkin incident, which was a pivotal moment leading to the Vietnam War, revealing how faulty intelligence and political agendas can manipulate public perception and drive nations into conflict. The conversation highlights historical patterns where leaders exploit fabricated or exaggerated threats to justify war, emphasizing the recurring theme of deception in wartime narratives.

- The Gulf of Tonkin incident involved the USS Maddox, which was claimed to have been attacked by North Vietnamese ships, leading to a war resolution by President LBJ.*
- The second attack that prompted the resolution never actually occurred; it was based on faulty radar interpretations.*
- LBJ's administration sought conflict despite public assurances of avoiding war, showcasing a pattern of political manipulation.*
- Similar tactics were employed during the Gulf War with the testimony of Nayirah, who falsely claimed Iraqi soldiers were killing infants, which influenced Congress to support military action.*
- The conversation draws parallels to modern conflicts, suggesting that misinformation continues to shape public opinion and political decisions.*
- Historical examples illustrate that political leaders often exploit crises to justify military action, regardless of the truth.*
- The discussion warns of the "fog of war," where narratives can quickly shift and be manipulated, affecting perceptions of ongoing conflicts.*

(car zooming) - Gulf of Tonkin, what

is the true conspiracy? - So Gulf of Tonkin is

the reason we ended up in the Vietnam War. And what happened was the USS Maddox was in the Gulf of Tonkin,

and had been attacked by some Vietnamese ships, North Vietnam. And it was a little skirmish. It was like, you know, pew-pew, pew-pew, and then they ran away, right? It wasn't a big conflict. Well, the following day, they came back, and they started attacking the USS Maddox again.

The USS Maddox, you

know, sent a communique to headquarters, which worked its way up to Defense Secretary,

Department of Defense, Robert McNamara, which made

its way to the president. And they said, "We're being

attacked a second time. This is intentional. This is a act of provocation, intentional act of provocation,

not a little skirmish." And so, the president

immediately acts on it. He immediately calls Congress to sign a resolution of war to go against Vietnam after telling people, you know, "I'm gonna keep your boys outta the war."

"We're not gonna go send, you know, all these boys to war," and- - This is LBJ. - LBJ. And his polling numbers are sagging. And so, like any president in that position, you want a conflict- - Among the biggest scumbag presidents. - Well, I'll say- - A man who would pull his private parts out (Connor laughs) and put them on the table, in the Oval, that's the thing he did. - [Connor] Oh, I didn't know that.

Okay.

- Oh, yeah, terrible person. Okay. - And so he had claimed to the public, "We're not gonna go to war," but secretly, he desired that. He wanted to find a way to get involved. And so when McNamara came and said, "Hey, we got this intelligence," he immediately jumps on it, even when they started to realize that the intelligence was totally faulty. As it turns out that, second attack never happened. - [John] It never happened? - Never actually happened, it was radar echoes, and it was things that they thought they were being attacked, but there was no actual attack, and so even when that- - What about the, like, I don't hear any bullets hitting the hull of the ship.

- You would think (John laughs) that that would be a good way to determine, you know, but they're looking at their radar, and there's all these sounds, and there was a storm. - [John] Okay. - And so this is more a conspiracy where they exploited faulty intelligence, even when they quickly realized it all fell apart, to construct a narrative to get them into war. There's a lot of recurring themes and different conspiracies in this book when intelligence is either flawed, and it's realized to be flawed, or it's manufactured in order to deceive the public to go support a war, and then push this agenda forward.

And so Gulf of Tonkin is just one of those examples where there's a desire in the administration, in the political class to achieve an outcome. The public was not there with them. In fact, they had been told, "We're not gonna go there." - [John] Right. - And then they exploit this circumstance of faulty intelligence to produce the outcome that they wanted. - Was Woodrow Wilson also

like, "I'm not gonna take us to war, and then was like, "Oh, now, now!"

- Correct, yep. So, yep. - Good. - Well, George W. Bush said the same thing. - Yeah. - You know, like this is a recurring theme that the people don't want war until they are deceived into thinking that it's necessary. Again and again, there are all these examples. I'll share a brief one really quick. The first one we opened the book with is the story of Nayirah. This is the Gulf War in Iraq, the first war, American War, at least in Iraq.

- This is George Herbert Walker Bush. - Correct, correct, this is Dad, and former CIA dude, and director. And so this 15-year-old girl is testifying before like the Congressional Human Rights subcommittee on something or another. And she's testifying saying she had just come from her home of Kuwait, that she had personally witnessed in a Kuwaiti hospital, Iraqi soldiers removing premature babies, infants from their incubators, their life-saving incubators, and casting them aside to die, and taking the incubators.

This horrific, unspeakable act of barbarity, and everyone is incensed. Seven US senators cited her testimony as among the influences, the reasons why they decided to vote for the resolution to go to war. I'm sure there were more senators that were influenced, but we know that seven actually cited her testimony as influence. The resolution passed by a margin of five votes, fewer than the number of people who said that they were persuaded by Nayirah. As it turns out, Nayirah was the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador.

She was coached by a PR firm that exists still today, Hill and Knowlton. This PR firm had a million dollar contract from Citizens for a Free Kuwait. - I didn't know this story, wow. - Which was an organization that existed solely to push for Americans getting involved in war. It was funded by the Kuwaiti government. So she's the daughter of the ambassador. The whole thing is made up. It was complete fabrication. This did not happen at all.

And yet, it was the single act that, just like Gulf of Tonkin, that incensed Americans. All these congressmen are like, "We can't stand for this. This is horrible." And I'll just say, I mean, at the time that we're recording this, right? I think that truth is one of the first casualties in war. You look at Ukraine, right? The Ghost of Kyiv, right? This fighter pilot going around shooting, like totally made up, or these people on the island

giving the middle finger to the submarine, you know,
telling all the Russians to go pound sand, totally made up.

And then, so in the early
days of the conflict, all these stories emerge where people were sharing on social media, and getting outraged,
and shaping their views on the particular situation
influenced by these stories that turned out to be false. And I would just suggest
that as we're recording this, and Israel and Hamas is going on, we had this story of 40
babies being beheaded, and then, you know, it was true. And then, oh wait, it's not true.

And it can't be corroborated. And like there's such a
fog of war when it comes to what is actually happening. And yet people are
immediately taking sides. They're jumping to conclusions. I'm not saying that, for example, that Hamas
didn't attack Israel. It wasn't horrible or anything like that. I just know having literally
just published this book in the very week when
those attacks happened, that there are many historical examples of when political actors will
exploit legitimate attacks and circumstances to spin
an outcome that they want, and to foment more war
by deceiving and lying.

Maybe it's not happening at all in the Israel-Hamas conflict, but that would be an anomaly
when you look at world history. (dramatic drum music)