

## War Game: A Panoptical Narrative of Terror

By Ana Ashraf

When reality is too panoptical, too suffocating, too authoritative, when the naked, crude power overshadows the mind resulting in greater ambiguity and an unconscious fear of the unknown, then there arises a need of some medium that may act as anesthesia; illusive (but only illusive) of power, of knowledge, of comprehension. The medium of Modern interactive video games, based on the modern armed conflicts, is one such illusion of reality. Today, it is a sheer challenge for the intellectuals to comprehend the totality of their effect and to critique how this effect helps in furthering the political-cause.

This research paper attempts to comprehend the effectiveness of war games and their use in the propagation of the rhetoric of modern war. The War in Afghanistan is an appropriate example in this regard for two reasons. Firstly, it can expound the shift in the conduct and perception of modern warfare. Secondly, the conflict in Afghanistan is used in many of the latest war games which studied intensively can reveal how the reality of war shapes the game world and how in return the game world makes war perceptible or 'real' for its audiences. For this purpose, three of the most famous and latest war games; *Delta Force*, *Call of Duty*, *Medal of Honor* are analysed in pithy detail. Where most of the criticism on video games is based on their form or structure, this article attempts at exposing the significance and complex inter-relatedness of content and form. It is strongly implied here that the medium of video games cannot be thoroughly understood unless their criticism involves an objective analysis of the content and form.

"Games are popular art, collective, social reactions to the main drive or action of any culture. Games, like institutions, are extensions of animal organism" says Marshall McLuhan, one of the pivotal critics of modern medium.<sup>i</sup> Hence it might be said that understanding war games will ultimately open up ways of comprehending the 'collective, social reactions' towards the phenomenon of modern war. Initially, critics embraced this novel medium by celebrating the idea that such war games

---

ii. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man* (London: Routledge, 2001) 235.

can actually 'divert' and 'modify' the 'bulging hatred' and warring masculine energy, and it can strengthen the vulnerable bond of human brain and technology. McLuhan emphasizes that it is the form of these games that is of prime import as the fundamental impetus to 'play' is created through the form. However, it will be argued in this analysis that the modern war and the games based on those wars are ambiguous for the reason that today form cannot be separated from the content. Form and content are not just intermingled rather one cannot be differentiated from the other. Similarly, another enthusiast critic of these games, Stewart Brand says:

Spacewar serves Earthpeace. Space, and by logical extension the new medium of video games, was remarkable, because it was intensely interactive in real time with the computer, because it bonded human and machine, because it served human interest, not machine and, perhaps best of all, it was merely delightful.<sup>ii</sup>

This idea is further encouraged by Geoff Keighley

Video games, in this view, are about problem solving and game play, the captivating, kinetic interaction between the movements a player makes on a controller and the simultaneous action on-screen whether this is set on Afghanistan or set on the moon, it doesn't really matter.<sup>iii</sup>

Indeed, it is considered that the medium of modern war games is a virtual space\_\_ a safe road to deliberate and controlled violence, a space that will save the actual world from being consumed by unnecessary, useless, and futile wars. Hence the main concern of this analysis is to see how an apparently harmless medium can propagate the hyper-real version of a particular war and change the general dominant political rhetoric into accepted sensibility. However, the objective is not to evaluate the technological particularities rather to find out similarities in their linguistic, formal, and contextual structures that give them a unified motif, namely, the perpetration of hyper real rhetoric about a certain war.

Here, it is significant to mention that like film media, United States dominates this medium hence making it a tool of economic, cultural and political hegemony. One example of this political hegemony manifests itself in the background information of these games. Primarily, the game info gives basic directions for the gamer's movements i.e. provides him with his 'plan of action' for which it can be termed as the 'plot' of the

---

iii. Chris Suellentrop, "War Games." *New York Times*. (Sep 8.2010: Web, Dec 2010)

iv. Suellentrop, "War Games."

game, but this game info also serves as a sharp political maneuver based on the most trite political rhetoric.

This political rhetoric mingled with the game info serves dual purposes. Firstly, it creates a positive image of US in front of the world. Secondly, it creates a moral justification for the otherwise criminal interferences. This deception and politically charged initial info is formed by presenting one dimensional view of current U.S. military operations in other parts of the world. The popular FPS game *Delta Force*, developed by US Company Novalogic since 1999 reveals the same pattern. In almost all of the series, the player is provided with varied missions; to destroy the terrorist groups, to hunt terrorists, to save some hostages etc. However, the player is always a US Special Forces soldier. The terrorists are shown as the drug traffickers, hostage takers, and rebelliously wild people. But no logical reason or explanation is given for their hatred of US and its citizens. Rather in one of the game versions, the game info is as follow:

In October of 1977, the 1<sup>st</sup> Special Forces Operational Detachment\_ Delta was secretly formed to deal with the growing threat of world terrorism. At Fort Bragg, elite Delta Force operatives, recruited mainly from the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne, Special Forces Green Berets and US Army Rangers, rigorously train in hostage rescues, specialized reconnaissance and other counter terrorism techniques. Highly skilled in CQB (Close Quarters Battle), armed with the best equipment, and able to infiltrate as civilians, Delta Force is ready to deal with the most dangerous world threats. Due to the extremely sensitive nature of these low-visibility missions, the US Department of Defense still does not officially acknowledge the existence of Delta Force. You are the hunter. This is what you're trained for...what you live for... YOU are Delta Force.<sup>iv</sup>

In reality these secret missions are a reminiscence of War on Terrorism operation officially launched in 1985 during Reagan Administration against International Terrorism. The former Secretary of State George Shultz described it as a plague spread by “depraved opponents of civilization itself,” as “a return to barbarism in the modern age.”<sup>v</sup> It

---

v. Steve Thorne, *The Language of War*. (London: Routledge, 2006) 82-83.

vi. Noam Chomsky, “The Journalist from Mars”, New York, January 23, 2002.

Thirdworldtraveler. Web. 2010.

appears that the game conforms to the jingoism of that age and does not revolt from it in any way. The only word used to elaborate Terrorism is 'threat' and 'most dangerous world threats'. It has not been illustrated as to how and why this so-called 'threat' has generated over the years. On the contrary, all the emphasis is to describe the vital role Delta Force plays in saving world peace and security. The unquestionable tone in the information invokes an instinctive response from the gamer in such a way that not only the gamer would accept the reality of game but it would re-shape this sense of the recent history.

Moreover, immediately after the appraisal of US Special Forces, there is a rapid shift, from the passive descriptive mode of telling or rather narrating the facts to an emotional imperative mode which involves second person address to the audience; the passive listener is now an active participant 'YOU', "YOU are Delta Force". Regardless of the political consciousness of the player, he will evidently assume the privileged role of Delta Force without ever knowing in actuality what this Delta is and how they function in secret operations in the far off lands.

Another example in this regard is the fourth edition of *Delta Force* called *Delta Force: Task Force Dagger* released in 2002. In *Delta Force* series it is the first version that was set in Afghanistan and is based on the US Special Force Operation: OEF (Operation Enduring Freedom), the player is one of the Special Force members. In the game information provided the soldier is told briefly about the missions that he has to accomplish during the gameplay.

As the US army's elite special operations soldiers you are the most potent 'smart weapon' known to man. You are the 'tip of the spear' for covert operations around the world\_ you are the first line of attack. Nothing stands in your way... As the US military's preemptive strike force you must work with your team to get the job done.<sup>vi</sup>

The player is involved into the 'reality' of the game by recurrent direct address, "you are 'smart weapon', you are 'tip of the spear', and 'you are first line of attack'. The reader feels that he is part of the righteous side because of this over-whelming language. However, the sensationalism of the game does not allow the player to think it over, he instinctively relies

---

vii. 29Soft. Webhost4life. 2010. Jan 2011.

<

on the narrative voice of the game and his mind imbibes the game structure to a point that this instinctive dependence on game rhetoric formulates the general and accepted sensibility. In this way, the player is fighting, killing, and attacking the terrorists throughout the gameplay but he does not know who these terrorists are. The player 'feels' that he knows his enemy whereas the reality is that the structure of the game does not allow a comprehension of 'the other'. Those called 'terrorists' in the modern war games were once termed the great 'freedom fighters', 'mujahideen', and real heroes during Reagan Administration as they were fighting the greatest US enemy of that time; Russia. Not only they were admired at that time but the US government supplied them with the latest weaponry and other material aid for the noble cause of defeating Soviet Union.

The extremely rhetorical propaganda of US government has been registered in *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* where the author mentions: "General Zia was always ready to make an exception for a higher cause. And if the cause was a fund-raiser for Afghan Jihad, then no principle was sacred enough".<sup>vii</sup> Similarly, in the same novel, a very pro-active US journalist has published special invitation card for the same fund raising, on these numerous cards, different kinds of Afghan *mujahids* are shown, "others showed a nameless Afghan mujahid in an old shawl with a rocket launcher on his shoulder (Caption: Your ten dollars can help him bring down a Russian Hind helicopter)".<sup>viii</sup> However, no such reference is present in war games based on the War in Afghanistan. The game, effortlessly, imbibes the traditional political message that places US at the righteous side. The smudged truth of the past is cleaned up again with the use of typical, rhetorical language and by avoiding certain parts of the historical facts. Simple game information is twisted into a political tool as the addressed 'you' unconsciously considers himself the privileged member of Delta Force.

Similarly, 2007 edition of *Call of Duty* is placed in an unknown Middle Eastern Country which is invaded by American Special Forces Soldiers differentiating the two fighting forces as good guys (US Soldiers) and bad guys (the terrorists). "It sold nearly five million copies in North America and Britain, racking up \$310 million in sales in 24 hours. By January of

---

viii. Muhammad Hanif, *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*. (New Delhi: Random House India, 2008) 94.

ix. Hanif, *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*.95.

this year, the game's worldwide sales added up to \$ 1 billion".<sup>ix</sup> 2009 edition of *Call of Duty* is set in Afghanistan with somehow exact simulation of the topography of that country using the exact names of the cities and towns. This game info does not provide historical background to the possible reasons and causes behind the rebellious attitude of some specific people in the modern world. Indeed this exclusion of certain historical facts from a specific narrative can be termed as the ahistorical discursive practice. In the game narratives discussed here, this ahistoricity is used to make the US motives and actions a self-righteous way in war. Similarly, these war games are turning bits and pieces of history into some generalized truism. Wars as complex as Iraq War or War in Afghanistan are 'defined' and made 'imaginable' through this naïve simplification and extreme generalization.

Here it might be argued that it is not the main function of video games to ensure political objectivity through microscopic analysis as video games are just a medium of entertainment for the general public. Why should the game producers be concerned about the political implication and the level of reality or irreality introduced in the game? And why should a gamer who bought the game for the sole purpose of being entertained worry about the level of truth and objectivity in it during the game play? And most importantly does the representation of war in game affect the actual war and its consequences in any way at all? The sheer size of the success of war games since last decade will open up ways of answering these questions. The unquestionable acceptability of this medium at a vast level prompts the intellectuals to understand their impact, content and greater motives. War games are the most popular medium these days.

In the Australian Entertainment and Media Outlook Report (2003), PricewaterhouseCoopers estimated the 2002 global market for interactive video game software to be worth \$40.9 billion, surpassing the total global film box office takings of \$39.6 billion."<sup>x</sup>

The tremendous popularity of these war games reveals that both their form and content is 'acceptable' to a vast number of people. Not just their popularity but the group of people most affected by these war games also raises doubts to their apparent harmlessness. Chris Suellentrop mentions in one of his articles about how these games are actually affecting the perception of the male adults of a society.

---

x. Suellentrop, "War Games".

xi. Thorne, *The Language of War*. 79

The player \_\_ adults mostly between ages 18 and 29 (though some were in their 50s), largely Americans and almost all men\_\_ said playing the World War II versions of *Medal of Honor* or *Call of Duty* made them feel empathy for their countrymen. One wrote that, after playing games, his “feelings have deepened in respect for those who have died.”<sup>xi</sup>

Jacob Hodes and Emma Ruby-Sachs write in their article “America’s Army Targets Youth” that the US army recruitment figures were at the lowest in 1999 in over the last three decades and it is from then onwards that these sensational war games came to the fore. As they say:

In response, Congress called for ‘aggressive, innovative experiments’ to find new soldiers, and the Defense Department jacked up recruitment budgets to \$ 2.2 billion a year... But the goal of the revamped recruiting campaign is not just to raise short-term recruiting numbers, it also aims to ensure a steady stream of recruits in the long term. The goal, as spelled out in testimony before the Senate Army Services Committee, is to penetrate youth culture and get the Army into a young person’s ‘Consideration set’.<sup>xii</sup>

One need not be surprised of the US ‘all-volunteer army’ anymore as the free-thinking and decision-making process is controlled by the profusion of these mediums in everyday life. This medium, like any other medium of communication, controls and forms the ‘set of consideration’ of the most potent group of a society i.e. adults. Hence the way these games have become most popular, most influential to the adults of a society, and finally the way it helps in shaping one’s perception about the ‘important role’ army has in peace and security of the whole world indicates that war games are indeed a tool for manipulating the very thought-process through which important choices are made by the ordinary yet most potent people of a society.

Carefully measured portions of reality and irreality blended together strengthen the political bias. On one hand, there is great emphasis to create exact similitude of past or current wars, to simulate the exact locations of countries such as Iraq or Afghanistan, to use minor details, to make the ammunition used in the game as much ‘real’ as is humanly possible and yet at the same time there is an equally strong emphasis at never depicting what ‘happens’ in the actual wars. The Operational structure of US forces

---

xii. Suellentrop, “War Games”.

<sup>xii</sup> Thorne, *The Language of War*. 85-86

has been described in minute detail but not how this Operation is actually performed. The soldiers use ammunition against the enemy in reality but how his ammunition hits and destroys ordinary people's life have not been registered in the game world. Even the characterization of US soldiers is no exception to this strange blend of real and unreal. The US soldier will always be a professional, tough and silent soldier, but the way many of those are just bewildered for the difficulty they face in this unknown land has been clearly omitted. Therefore, it can be said that the objective to make video game one dimensional way of looking at a problem is achieved by singularly focusing on a certain part of reality and completely ignoring the other.

Nonetheless, the so-called 'authenticity' created in war games is their biggest selling point. Nicholson Baker recently wrote in *The New Yorker* that *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* might be "truer, realer than almost all war movies." Waylon Brinck, the computer-graphics supervisor for the game claims, "We want the player to feel, not like they're in a movie, but like they're in Afghanistan".<sup>xiii</sup> In almost all of these war games the sound recording of the weapons used is their real sound. To make the details of the military operation all the more real, the soldiers who participated in recent wars are consulted. All these magnanimous efforts are done to make everything in the game appear authentic and thus reliable for its users. Undeniably, the actual events that happened or are expected to happen, the precise geographical description, all makes this innocent game another means of experiencing wars. Hence, the game-text becomes the most authentic and influential medium of experiencing war in this age. Indeed, war games have left behind novels, poetry and even films in the sheer impact they leave on gamer's mind. It has been observed that most of the movies based on current war operations neither receive a very welcoming response from its viewers nor capture the attention of majority of general public. Even the Oscar winning film based on the current military operation in Iraq, "The Hurt Locker" could not gain much attention of the people at very large scale. Whereas games like *Delta Force*, *Call of Duty*, *Medal of Honor*, have been far more successful in being received as authentic depiction of current wars.

One of the many reasons of this popularity and acceptability at global level is the propagation of grand narratives about war. The majority finds it easier to relate with and believe in a grand narrative based on naïve simple and meaningless generalization. Reality that is otherwise multi-

---

<sup>xiii</sup> Suellentrop, "War Games".



dimensional, complex and mind-boggling can be generalized through these grand narratives. War games also follow the same structures of grand narration: wherein negating the historical causation of events, the player views the game world in clean binary division. Every US soldier is a good guy because he is a US soldier and every 'other' is the terrorist/evil because he is not US soldier. Therefore, at one level, these games strike the mind for the level of reality it brings and at another level it silently cancels out its own reality. At one level, the game is situated in Afghanistan and at another it is not at all Afghanistan but a pure hyper real invention. At one level, there is the 'other' sharply defined for the gamer and at another level, the diversity and sheer variance associated with the 'other' has been completely and ruthlessly excluded. It can be said that the 'portion' of reality presented is carefully 'crafted', 'directed', 'channelized', and thus manipulated and controlled. In one of the versions of *Delta Force*, the game info says; "From the war torn streets of Somalia you have been re-deployed to take out targets in Colombia and Iran".<sup>xiv</sup> Now in this game direction, the player is addressed and acknowledged whereas the 'other', the 'enemy' is de-humanized by calling it 'targets'. The enemy is significant for the completion of the mission, but is made extremely insignificant on linguistic plane. Moreover, the omniscient voice that gives the game info compels the player to believe and obey this omniscient invisible character as an actual soldier unquestioningly obeys his senior's orders. The player as he depends on the guidance of this voice is also trained to believe in the righteousness of the given information.

As the US army's elite special operations soldiers you are the most potent 'smart weapon' known to man. You are the 'tip of the spear' for covert operations around the world- you are the first line of attack. Nothing stands in your way.<sup>xv</sup>

Apart from the narrator's omniscient and central position in the whole gameplay, another important factor is the use of adjectives in description. In the above quote from DFTED: *Delta Force-Task Force Dagger*, it is evident how all the positive and over-whelming adjectives are attached with 'us'. The positive adjectives 'elite', 'most potent', 'smart weapon' are used for the one who is among 'us'. The objective here is clearly to place an ordinary civilian into the boots of a special force soldier and force him to behave in a certain way at least in the reality of the game so that when the player himself kills the terrorist, orders the air strikes in some

---

xv. [29Soft](#). Webhost4life. 2010. Jan 2011.

xvi. [29Soft](#). Webhost4life. 2010. Jan 2011.

village of Afghanistan, accidentally kills some local Afghans, then he will be mentally paralysed from criticizing his government's policies as the government is making the same decisions as he did during the gameplay. One of the game producers claims in an article, "That's where the fun comes in, at least for me," Farrelly said. "I've now created this soldier fiction for the player and put him in those boots. And now I'm making him think like a soldier".<sup>xvi</sup>

FPS games, unexceptionally, have a monotonous camera projection. Camera in visual medium is one particular angle from where the scene is shown in the gameplay. However, in the gameplay, camera angle is also the angle from where the gamer looks at the game world. This camera angle serves three different but important purposes in the gameplay. Firstly, it increases the level of reality and the sense of individual observation for the player. As in reality one looks ahead of oneself while looking at the world around similarly the player cannot see himself in the game only the front part of the body, the hands and the weapons of the player are shown on screen. All this is done to make the player an essential and natural part of the hyper-real world rather than a passive, excluded viewer as is the case in watching movies or reading books. It makes the game world all the more real for the player. Secondly, this 'camera' angle creates a feeling of freedom. The player 'feels' that he is free to look around, move about and explore the area the way he wants to. The camera angle of movies is fixed and similar for everyone, whereas in gameplay if ten people are playing a similar game they can choose to move in different directions and therefore explore different parts of the game world.

If anything, this is the greatest illusion created by game producers like rest of the illusionary constructs. The perspective or the view of the gamer is already 'controlled', 'limitized', and 'manipulated'. The game producers have already thought of the world which can be explored by the gamer while he is in Afghanistan or Iraq or Siberia or any other conflictive place shown in the game. Hence there is no choice for observation in these video games; 'you' watch what is selected for 'you'. The 'unexpected', the 'mysterious', the 'unknown' which is the essential part of actual war is removed carefully from the game world as it is removed from the political rhetoric, from the literary world or from the linguistic constructs used to describe the current wars.

---

<sup>xvi</sup> Suellentrop, "War Games".

Thirdly, and most importantly, camera angle helps in looking at the world around the gamer as a mere target. The player always has a variety of weapons at his disposal, holding one of them in his hands. In general, FPS games start in a strange dangerous land where the player is one of the Special Force soldiers who is sent there to destroy the most dangerous people of the world. E.g. in one of the versions of *Delta Force* the US military aircraft has to leave the player in the mid of land surrounded by dangerous caves where terrorists are hiding. Now these situations impulsively make the player extremely cautious in his movements. He is forced to view the scene and the strange land ahead of him as 'target', as a place that should be immediately 'operated'. To heighten this angle of looking at the outer world as enemy mostly the land that is observed through this camera is shown to be barren, dry and infertile. It is inhabited by the evil terrorists and mostly there is no innocent civilian found in this dry land. The instinctive danger and the extremely cautious sensibility provoke a feeling that perhaps one is fighting a sub-human being. In actual conflict, the drone attacks and precise air strikes hinder the actual confrontation with the enemy and create a safe distance and at lingual plane this depiction of the enemy furthers the same imaginative distance. Such cold indifference in presentation evokes empathy for US political strategies and an unconscious acceptance and conformity of any US militaristic confrontation in foreign lands which can be termed as a formalistic device that intensifies the impact of the contextual message. Hence the camera angle plays multiple roles for the desired objectives. Like language, political rhetoric, camera angle also controls the way a player will think about his role and his mission.

As described before, the genre of these games is First-person-shoot-them-up, FPS also known as First Person Shooter. It is this mode of presentation that creates verbal and visual harmony in the game. Visual images correspond with the theme and the language signals and intensify the effect of other techniques used in the game. Indeed these visual images 'real-ize' the game world and give irreality to the actual war. Also visually, the gamer is convinced that he is the invisible player in the game. Visually he is the 'I' of the game. Now with this visual sensation that he is the 'first person' of the game the following instruction in *Delta Force: Task Force Dagger* will reveal how the player is controlled verbally:

- Take over the Kandahar Airport, raid rebel headquarters in Mazar-e-Sharif, ambush a convoy near the Pakistani border and demolish bunkers in the foothills of Kabul.
- Gear up with a huge arsenal of machine guns.

- Plan your attack with the element of surprise using visual intelligence.
- Call in devastating air strikes to take out key SAM and SCUD missile sites.
- Create your own multiplayer games and maps with the mission editor. 10 new multiplayer maps included!<sup>xvii</sup>

The player is involved in the gameplay by the use of imperative action verbs; 'take over', 'raid', 'ambush', 'plan', 'call in', 'create'. The presumed addressee of these action verbs is 'you'. The addressed 'you' is the playing 'I'. Hence, the visual images and verbal constructs strengthen each other. The player follows directions of the omniscient instructor like an obedient soldier. Indeed this imperative language creates an 'inclusive sensibility'. The player feels himself to be a part of a selected group. This exclusivity of the player's group is further enhanced by the defamiliarization of language. Not everyone would be able to understand so many of the acronyms therefore the player feels himself to be a specific and selected person for this task e.g. in *Delta Force: Task Force Dagger* some of the initials and acronyms are SFOD, SEAL, SF, SAS, SASR, SAM, SCUD. Apparently, these are used to simplify the otherwise difficult military terminology, but it also creates a sense of exclusivity of the player. Moreover, it also emphasizes the already established distance from 'us' and 'them'. The 'other' will not be able to understand 'our' code words. These acronyms further overwhelm the player and he is entrenched into the reality of the game. "The best games do not give you a sense that you are controlling someone else \_\_ they give you a sense that you *are* someone else"<sup>xviii</sup>.

The game world is dominated by the stereotypical masculine values such as bravery, courage, righteousness, self-defence etc. Through the form as well as the content of these games it appears that these are exclusively for the male audience. The extreme violence, the well-trained soldiers, and the upright objective of fighting the evil conform to the stereotypical idealism of manhood and heroism. It also helps in eliminating even a little speck of compassion and sympathy for the 'other' in real life as well. Traditionally, weaponry is considered the symbol of manhood. The tremendous use of all kinds of latest weapons and ammunition in war games also elevates the over-whelmed spirit of the gamer. In fact, being the greatest weapon manufacturing country, US has a special focus on habituating common

---

xviii. 29Soft. Webhost4life. 2010. Jan 2011.

<sup>xviii</sup> Suellentrop, "War Games"

sensibility towards the use of ammunition and weaponry. The soldiers in the war games use all kind of weapons from simple knife to latest aerial bombing attacks. As the player assumes the character of a soldier, he depends on these weapons for winning the game and believing in the reality of the game world. During this involvement of the player, it is inevitable that the gamer would feel a sensational fascination for the militaristic equipment at his disposal. This process inculcates a positive, willful acceptance and craving for using these horrible weapons in reality. It also infuses a sensibility that whatever waste the weapons are doing around the globe is compulsory for maintaining peace in it which in fact means a continuation of militaristic intrusions. The following review by a gamer posted on internet shows the keen and irresistible interest of the gamers in the military hardware during the gameplay:

In some missions you'll want to find a nice place to hide and kill. For these types of outings, you'll have two choices. First there's the M40A1 Sniper Rifle which boasts on 800m effective range and an 8x scope (you can see up the enemy's nose with this eyepiece). If you're fairly sure that you're going to be a really long way away, you may want to consider the Barret Light .50 which has an effective range of 1500m and also has an 8x scope.<sup>xix</sup>

As the vast number of players is adults who yet have to choose a career for their life therefore it might be considered a typical jingoist strategy from the US government to influence and attract these young people so that they voluntarily join army. As Timothy Maude, the Army deputy chief of personnel mentioned about the production of video games that it will open a way to bring military profession in the "set of consideration" of the youth.<sup>xx</sup>

A very delicate but significant point in all war games is the end result of a mission. In past, wars were fought with a clear hatred and objective of killing the enemy. Rather even the propagandist literature showed that the winning of war is conditional to the final defeat and destruction of the enemy. However, in modern day video games the main objective is not killing the enemy and thus bringing victory for the homeland; in fact, the main objective may be based on achieving many important goals during the game play such as eliminate all hostile forces, rescue the hostages, intercept an enemy convoy, capture (or kill) an enemy leader, destroy (or recover) certain objects, and ensure the safety of a friendly leader. Indeed

---

xx. Thorne, *The Language of War* 83.

xxi. Thorne, *The Language of War* 86

if a player wastes too much of his time in solely killing the enemy he might as well fail to complete the actual tasks during the game play and loose the game. Now this element in the game apparently seems quite insignificant but in reality it is based on the actual structure of modern war. Primarily it uncovers the fact that the terrorist groups are so infinitely dispersed in the world that it is not significant and fruitful to keep on killing them as they will always increase in number. More significant is to annihilate the temporary hurdles and difficulties created by these bad people. As today in Afghanistan it is said that the more important task for the NATO forces is to create a self-dependant Afghan army and Afghan police to establish a democratic environment in the region. Underneath this structure is the ancient rhetoric of the continuity of fight between good and bad. As the fight between good and evil will never come to an end, so this fight between the US forces and Terrorist groups never ends. Meanwhile the only important thing is to continue saving the innocent, trapped people and fighting the eternal war. Therefore, it might be said that modern war is the eternal war fought in the name of eternal peace.

Initially, war game was not taken as a very serious mode of communicating war experience; however, today, the unique structure of these games is gradually turning it into new art form of war narration. In novels, poetry, and movies the reader or the viewer is passively involved in the narrative process. The reality of a movie and a book cannot be changed by the passive involvement of the viewer or the reader. During the gameplay player can make on-spot-decisions and implement his decisions immediately. In fact, he can change a situation to better or worse by his decisions and thus while being immersed into the reality of the game, the player is creating and changing its reality simultaneously. Virtually the player has all the liberty of being part of a great event. Where other medium makes 'you' a passive receptor, these war games make 'you', 'I', of that event. Thus unconsciously without any political bias, the player may end up making clear political choices in a current war and on the basis of those choices, 'I' have also conformed to the political notion that it is the only possible way of handling the situation as such. This immediate participation of the player has played a vital role in making video games a new form of narration. Unlike, movies or fiction where the viewer or the reader is a passive receptor of whatever is given to him, the game-player is made an active participant as at every moment he chooses to do something and changes the problematic situation. This potential of the video game to enunciate innumerable interpretations of a single

military conflict is not only controlled but also deformed by a society paralysed by the rhetoric of political grand narratives.

A very interesting example of which is presented in the latest edition of *Medal of Honor* (2010), where for the first time in the history of these games, the player can play whichever side he chooses to. Previously the player had to assume the role of either a US Special Force or a member of terrorist group. Immediately after the release of this edition, there was strong uproar and protest against this game. Karen Meredith, the mother of Ken Ballard, an Army lieutenant killed in Najaf, Iraq, in 2004, protested against this game by saying that any game based on a continuing conflict was “disrespectful” to those whose family members have died in the war. Not just the ordinary people but the government officials came to the fore and tried to ban the game. As has been mentioned in an article:

Not long after Meredith’s interview with Fox News, Britain’s defense secretary Liam Fox, called the game “un-British” because, in its multiplayer incarnation, it will allow players to fight as the Taliban against coalition forces. “I would urge retailers to show their support for our armed forces and ban this tasteless product.”<sup>xxi</sup>

The strong response from the general public as well as from the authorities shows the intellectual paralysis and dependence of ordinary people on the accepted grand narratives. The binary division of the all-good US soldiers and the all-bad terrorists has been carved so strongly in the ordinary minds that they cannot accept any other construct. Hence it can be concluded that the very freedom and infinite possibilities that can actually bring positive change in the form and content of these games is deliberately distorted. The world is so much engrossed in virtuality that ultimately they cannot accept any other reality as that reality may go against their social, moral, ethical values based on the great grand narratives.

Are these war games just another extension of man’s unending urge to find respite in frivolous activities or is it more than that? The answer lies in observing the viewer-ship of these games. Recent surveys show that mostly it attracts people from eighteen to twenty-five years of age. When asked why many of them are interested in these games it was discovered that by playing these war games they have the opportunity of ‘feeling’ how their soldiers must be fighting in the foreign lands into a war that takes so much space in their newspaper, news channels and elite conversation, but is kept away from them physically. Moreover, the players appreciated war games based on contemporary wars rather than

---

xxii. Suellentrop, “War Games”

the games about WWII or any other war in past. It shows that most of the people who buy these games do not play it primarily as entertainment source rather they want to 'feel' or 'know' the war experience that some of their citizens are going through right now in some mysterious unknown land. Hence intensifying the impact of actual war at global level:

Nearly 80,000 Americans are deployed in Afghanistan, Exum said, while 2.2 million played Modern Warfare 2 on Xbox Live during a single day last fall. There's something annoying that most of America experiences the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which are actually taking place, through a video game.<sup>xxii</sup>

In the end, it can be concluded that an extremely shocking similitude between the video game and the actual warfare distances the 'real' from the common eyes. In reality, there is a war fought in distant lands such as Afghanistan or Iraq. The citizens get to 'know' about this war through media, or fictional records and they assume that what they know is the reality of this war. A vast majority of people are addicted to war games and they take the information given as reliable and authentic information about the otherwise alienated wars. However, the point here is that the war that is just as easy as game is not the actual war rather it is a virtual war. It is a manufactured version of that war created by the covert and distorted use of language, political rhetoric, historical facts and other virtual constructs.

In the main, this game structure is based on the same value system of which Twin Towers is just one minute symbol. As the Twin Towers is a superb example in architecture to understand how the virtual reality is dominating the human mind similarly technologically modern war and the video games based on these wars are Twin structure. They can easily alternate their roles: Game is war and War is game. As one cannot discriminate the Twin Towers, one cannot discriminate the difference between war game and game war. The Twin Towers represent the market supremacy of a country on the rest of the world. No one can be a competitor of US as it is its own competitor.<sup>xxiii</sup> Similarly, in case of war and video game the basic reality on which both are formulated is an image of mediatized event\_\_ a hyper real version of the actual war whereas the actual war is never 'signified' in the main discourse. The discussed portion of war is hyper-real and the games imbibe that hyper-reality and make that

---

xxiii. Suellentrop, "War Games"

xxiv. Paul Hegarty, *Jean Baudrillard: Live Theory*. (London: Continuum, 2004) 106-109.



Ana Ashraf

war even more sensational and over-powering. This shows that the control created through hyper-reality is complete and absolute.