Medal of Honor: Operation Anaconda: **Playing the War in Afghanistan**

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This article examines the confluence of the U.S. military and digital capitalism in Medal of Honor: Operation Anaconda (MOHOA)*, a U.S. war-on-Afghanistan game released for play to the world in 2010.* MOHOA*'s convergent support for the DOD and digital capitalism's interests are analyzed in two contexts: industry (ownership, development and marketing) and interactive narrative/play (the game's war simulation, story and interactive play experience). Following a brief discussion of the military-industrial-communications-entertainment complex and video games, I analyze* MOHOA *as digital militainment that supports digital capitalism's profit-interests and DOD promotional goals. The first section claims* MOHOA *is a digital militainment commodity forged by the DOD-digital games complex and shows how the game's ownership, development and advertisements support a symbiotic cross-promotional relationship between Electronic Arts (EA) and the DOD. The second section analyzes how* MOHOA*'s single player mode simulates the "reality" of Operation Anaconda and immerses "virtual-citizen-soldiers" in an interactive story about warfare.*

Introduction: From the Battlefields of Afghanistan to the Battle-Space of *Medal of Honor: Operation Anaconda*

In March 2002, a little less than half a year following U.S. President George W. Bush's declaration of a global war on terrorism (GWOT), the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) launched "Operation Anaconda."[1] As part of the U.S.-led and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-supported "Operation Enduring Freedom," Operation Anaconda was a two-week long and multi-national war-fighting effort to kill Taliban and Al-Qaeda fighters in the Shah-i-Kot Valley and Arma Mountains.[2] Operation Anaconda brought together U.S. Army Rangers, Air Force Combat Controllers and the Navy SEALs with the United States Special Operations Command (USSOC), Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) and the CIA's paramilitary and black-operatives. It involved conventional and non-conventional forces jointly participating in direct combat activities. Operation Anaconda was also supported by British, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, Danish, German, Turkish and Norwegian forces, as well as the

Afghan National Army.[3] Eight U.S. soldiers and numerous allied Afghan soldiers and Afghan civilian women and children residing in mountain villages were killed,[4] but former U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander General Tommy Franks described Operation Anaconda as an "absolute and unqualified success"[5] because it killed hundreds of Taliban fighters.

The military "success" of Operation Anaconda created a business opportunity for U.S. media companies, which have long profited by mining the historical, present and imagined futures of war for story content, transforming this content into military-themed media products and selling them in the marketplace. Indeed, stories of the "success" of Operation Anaconda were covered in 2002 by leading U.S. TV news networks and websites.[6] U.S. war correspondent Sean Naylor turned the operation into a Penguin book called *Not a Good Day to Die: The Untold Story of Operation Anaconda* in 2005; Malcolm MacPherson's 2005 competing title, *Roberts Ridge: A Story of Courage and Sacrifice on Takur Ghar Mountain, Afghanistan*, was released soon after. Pacific Coast Video, a U.S. production company specializing in war films, manufactured a made-for-TV "documentary" called *Operation Anaconda: The Battle of Roberts' Ridge*, which was acquired by Discovery Channel and broadcast to U.S. and transnational TV viewers in 2004.

By 2008, the Redwood, California-based Electronic Arts (EA) was chasing the commercial success of these Operation Anaconda militainment products when it announced a partnership with L.A.-based Danger Close Studios and Sweden-based Digital Illusions CE (DICE) to digitally develop *Medal of Honor: Operation Anaconda* (*MOHOA*), a video game. EA's *Medal of Honor* World War II franchise is a significant source of its revenue and played by gamers in the U.S. and in many other countries. But *MOHOA* was the first to immerse players in the post-9/11 war on terror's virtual front in Afghanistan. Though many war games "collapse the temporal space between real-world events and the ability to recreate and 'play' them in real-time," *MOHOA* represented a temporal lag between an actual battle and its simulation. In October 2010, eight years following Operation Anaconda, EA's simulation of this seminal battle was being sold by retailers across the U.S. and much of the networked world.

In the early 21st century, digital war games like *MOHOA* are integral to the global market expansion of U.S. video game corporations like EA and a global means of representing the U.S. as a nation at permanent war. Digital war games generate huge profits for their corporate owners and are part and product of digital capitalism and information-age warfare. As Roger Stahl argues, war games visually merge "the home front and the battlefield through multiple channels," contributing in numerous ways to the ongoing "militarization of cultural space."[9] *MOHOA*'s commercial success in the global games market and simulation of the U.S.'s post-9/11 occupation of Afghanistan thus make it a fruitful site for analyzing the links between the DOD and U.S. video game corporations and how digital games serve profit imperatives and military PR. Did the DOD personnel work with EA to shape the content of *MOHOA*? How does *MOHOA*'s narrative and interactive war-play experience simulate war and extol a war society? What might be the consequences of the game's blurring of actual and simulated war? And what does the conflation of war and gaming suggest about

the DOD-digital capital relationship?

To answer these questions, this article analyzes *MOHOA*'s support for the DOD and digital capitalism's convergent interests in two contexts: industry (ownership, development and advertising) and interactive narrative/play (how the game tells a story about war, as well as the interactive play-war experience it enables). Following a brief discussion of the military-industrial-media-entertainment complex and digital war games, I critically analyze *MOHOA* as a form of digital militainment that is designed to support digital capitalism's profit-interests and the DOD's promotional goals. The first section claims that *MOHOA* is a digital militainment commodity forged by the DOD-digital games complex and shows how the game's ownership, its development and the TV and online advertisements for it support a symbiotic cross-promotional relationship between the DOD and Electronic Arts (EA). The second section analyzes how *MOHOA*'s single player mode simulates the "reality" of Operation Anaconda and immerses "virtual-citizen-soldiers" in an interactive narrative about war. This case study furthers our understanding of the complex interrelationships between the US military and digital capitalism, and more generally, how interactive militainment supports the war society.

The Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment-Complex and Interactive Militainment: War Games

Since WWII, the U.S. has existed in a near permanent state of war, facilitated by news and entertainment products that glorify war while ignoring its consequences. From World War I to the present War on Terror, military violence has been habitually idealized and packaged as entertainment by media corporations with the assistance of Department of Defense (DOD).[10] The U.S. Empire's "militainment" products represent war as normal, acceptable and even enjoyable to people and supports a cultural milieu aligned with the U.S.'s strategic war policy and security objectives. The source of these products is the U.S. military-industrial-media-entertainment complex.[11] An increasingly important sub-sector of this complex is the DOD-Digital-Games complex, which encompasses structural alliances and symbiotic relationships between the DOD and digital game companies that integrate the DOD's war machine with commercial game machines, war-fighting and war-play.[12] The market power of the U.S. game industry has long been entangled with DOD subvention. In fact, the DOD has supported seminal innovations in the history of digital war games with products such as the first video game (*SpaceWar!*) (1962);[13] the first head-mounted virtual reality display system;[14] the first first-person shooter video game (*Maze Wars*);[15] the first tank simulator arcade game (*Panzer PLATO* to Atari's *Battlezone*); the first prototype of an online multi-player game (*Empire* for the PLATO computer network) and then, SIMnet, or "simulation network";[16] and the first full-fledged military recruitment game (*America's Army*).

At present, the DOD underwrites the research and development (R&D) of many war

games through the Modeling and Simulation Coordination Office (M&S CO). The M&S CO contracts digital game firms to make war games and "procures" the finished war simulations sold by them. Beneath the M&S CO are DOD agencies, each immersed in the business of war gaming. These include the U.S. Army's Project Executive Office-Simulation, Training and Instrumentation (PEO-STRI); the Institute for Creative Technologies (ICT); the U.S. Army Simulation, Training, and Instrumentation Command; (STRICOM) and the Modeling, Virtual Environments and Simulation Institute (MOVES). Established in 1974 and headquartered in Central Florida's Research Park, PEO STRI annually supports modelling and simulation projects valued at more than $2.7 billion.[17] Located at the University of Southern California (USC), the ICT (established in 1999) receives approximately $100 million a year from the DOD and liaisons with the entertainment industry. Founded by the Naval Postgraduate School at Monterey, California in 2000, MOVEs bring together U.S. military personnel, digital game firms and academics. These linkages between the DOD and digital game industry annually channel millions of public dollars into digital war game R&D. From allocating public dollars to R&D on simulation technologies for war purposes, to consuming war-ready software and hardware from private firms, to cultivating consumer demand for and cross-promoting war games by waging wars, the DOD's violence is thoroughly intertwined with digital capitalism's profit-goals; the business of war feeds a marketplace of violent war games and this marketplace of violent war games feeds back into the virtual veneration of war.

A convergence of interests between the DOD and the digital games industry is further evident in the DOD's uses of digital war games to: 1) recruit players to the military (and attract young people to its ranks); 2) train soldiers and save on both the costs associated with live training exercises and the threat these exercises pose to the lives of soldiers and to the value of its property; 3) model future war scenarios and pre-emptively prepare to fight in any and every possible scenario or country; 4) make training for and fighting war fun by turning weapons systems into a network of bodies consoles, screens and joysticks that distance and desensitize soldiers to the trauma of killing; 5) conduct PR campaigns take the risk out of democracy by engineering public consent to U.S. exceptionalism; 6) maintain public support for five hundred billion dollar + annual defense budgets; and 7) rehabilitate war veterans in hopes of preventing the 100,000 + soldiers that suffer from post-traumatic disorder (PTSD) as result of their actual experience of war from killing themselves or others in uncivil society. Numerous scholars have documented the uses of digital war games by the DOD,[18] which are extensive and routinized.

As the DOD-digital games complex grows more powerful, the civic experience of war is undergoing important changes.[19] In the early 20th century, wartime propaganda agencies such as the Creel Committee of public information (WWI) and the Office of War Information (WWII) aimed to engineer public consent to war through print, radio and motion picture propaganda. They made a case for why the nation fights and whom the nation must fight. Whereas early war propaganda was designed to manipulate public opinion by persuading citizens of war's virtue through rational appeals and forms of moral justification, war propaganda in the post-WWII age of commercial TV and tele-visual spectacle and dis-

information more frequently aimed to control public opinion by neutralizing the citizen's capacity for rational deliberation about war policy.[20] Governments still make moral cases for war and spectacular rhetorics still circulate, but Stahl notes how since the end of the Cold War, a new and more interactive militainment form has emerged, one that invites citizens to participate in war as opposed to passively watch it depicted.[21] This new interactive war-play mode invites citizens to derive pleasure from first-person performance and immersion into theaters of war-fighting. Instead of de-activating citizens by compelling them to lean back and watch war, interactive militainment demands that citizens lean forward and play war: it brings the "citizen into proximity to a vision of the soldier and battlefield" toward the point of this violence's execution, all the while moving them "further away" from the point of public deliberation about state violence.[22] The new militainment heralds a shift to an interactive war consumption paradigm that "presents myriad ways for the citizen to plug in to the military publicity machine, not only through new media technologies but also through rhetorics that portray war as a 'battlefield playground.'"[23] In contrast to the spectacular war's passive citizen-spectator, militainment represents war as playable by "virtual citizen-soldiers."[24]

Forged in the nexus of the DOD and global entertainment industries, digital war games are ideal-type militainment products, "increasingly both the medium and the metaphor by which we understand war."[25] In the next section, I analyze *Medal of Honor: Operation Anaconda* (*MOHOA*), an important interactive militainment product forged by digital capital with support from DOD personnel.

Owning, Developing and Advertising the "Reality" of War in *MOHOA*

Military-industrial-media entertainment- complex "synergies" are partnerships formed between the DOD and media corporations with the goal of achieving a mutually beneficial economic or political outcome. Not all commercial digital war games result from DOD-corporate synergies. Indeed, the DOD and digital game companies are different kinds of organizations, motivated by different institutional imperatives, the former being "security" and the latter, profit. Nonetheless, there are many instances in which "the business of play works closely with the military to replicate the tools of state violence" and the "business of war and state violence in turn capitalize on playtime for institutional ends."[26] Is *MOHOA* the result of a DOD-digital capital synergy? This section examines how DOD personnel supported EA's development and marketing of *MOHOA* and how this synergistic partnership bolsters EA's profit goals and the DOD's need for PR.

EA, *MOHOA*'s owner, is one of the world's most powerful and profitable video game studios. This company's global market power is attributed in major part to the history of war upon which *Medal of Honor* (*MOH*) is based and which made it one of the most commercially successful and popular war franchises of all time. *MOH* games have long cashed in their claim to offer players authentic and realistic experiences of WWII and to educate civilian players about this war by immersing them in a simulation of it. Since 1999, EA has mined World War II's history, its protagonists and antagonists and its battles for content and

transformed partial and selective facets of this war into a game that has been played by millions. Apart from *MOHOA* and *MOH: Warfighter*, all *MOH* games enlist players in a gamified version of World War II: *Medal of Honor* (1999), *Medal of Honor: Underground* (2001), *Medal of Honor: Frontline* (2002), *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* (2003), *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* (2003), *Medal of Honor: Infiltrator* (2003), *Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault* (2004), *Medal of Honor: European Assault* (2005), *Medal of Honor: Heroes* (2006), *Medal of Honor: Vanguard* (2007), *Medal of Honor: Airborne* (2007) and *Medal of Honor: Heroes 2* (2007). As digital properties, these *MOH* war games support EA's business interests. At the same time, *MOH* games support the DOD's promotional goals by making U.S. military personnel look good by representing WWII as an inherently "Good War." Embedded in the game are patriotic messages that commemorate the history of U.S. war policy and venerate the sacrifices made by troops in the service of protecting America's "freedom."[27] War has been very good for EA's bottom line, and the growth of commercial markets for militainment products can account for the company's virtual veneration of the DOD. Recently, EA has responded to curiosities and anxieties stemming from the state's post-9/11 wars "over there" by designing a supply of commercialized simulations of war made for consumers "over here." Its digital transcoding process has transformed the imperial determinations and human consequences of real war into interactive entertainment geared toward immersive pleasures.

To make its *MOH* games, EA has recruited DOD personnel and mobilized their labor as game consultants. Gamers tend to place a high premium upon "realistic" and "authentic" war games. And in competitions to divide and conquer global digital war-game markets, EA has tried to differentiate its war commodities from those sold by competitors by marketing to gamers the most "realistic" or "authentic" war-play experience. The process of marketing war games as "realistic" or "authentic" is basically an industry standard, as much promotional material for digital war games promise consumers an interactive experience that simulates war's reality.[28] In efforts to brand its digital war games as "realistic" or "authentic" and gain a position of dominance in the war-game market, EA has enlisted DOD personnel as design consultants. Active duty and retired soldiers have been happy to comply with EA requests, seeing games as a means to convey a positive image of what they do to the public.

Prior to 2010, all games in the *MOH* franchise were designed by EA with the help from Captain Dale Dye, a former U.S. Marine and Vietnam War vet.[29] After retiring from the DOD, Dye founded Warriors Inc., a company that sells "technical advisory services to the entertainment industry worldwide" including "performer training, research, planning, staging and on-set advisory for directors and other key production personnel."[30] Though Warriors, Inc. is motivated by profit, by selling advice to Hollywood it also seeks to use the power of Hollywood to influence public perceptions of the U.S. military. The Warriors, Inc. website explains the political motives of this company:

> Captain Dale A. Dye, USMC (Ret) came to Hollywood with a vision. He had a single mission in mind…to change how American civilians view the common grunt. Having been around infantrymen all his life and having

been one himself, he knew that the majority are intelligent, creative, and full of heart…and the image of the dumb cannon-fodder blindly following orders not only was not true…but was a grave disservice to those brave servicemen who had risked and often gave their lives so that our nation could survive and prosper. So he looked for the best medium available to reach the hearts and minds of the public, and chose the film and television industry to spread his message. Welcome to Warriors, Inc.[31]

Warriors, Inc. has worked with Hollywood on the development of blockbuster WWII films like Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) and popular WWII TV shows such as HBO's *Band of Brothers* (2001) and *The Pacific* (2010). Dale has also acted in numerous war films and TV shows.

Warriors, Inc. entered the video game industry when Steven Spielberg's Dreamworks Interactive (now Electronic Arts L.A.) recruited Dye to be military consultant on the first *MOH* game in 1999. Dye explains, "thus began a long, rewarding and entertaining relationship with the best-selling videogame franchise [. . .] When Spielberg sold his game division to Electronic Arts, Warriors, Inc. went with the deal. We had an exclusive contract with them for research, training production crews, planning, design and publicity. It's been a rewarding relationship and a great training ground for our Cadre. It's also an opportunity for us to introduce a new generation of young men and women to their military heritage and celebrate the heroes of World War II."[32] Dye has described the *MOH* series as a "long-overdue salute to the men and women who freed the world from tyranny and oppression. Media consumers are intensely aware of that and the popularity of both films and games are a reflection of their awareness."[33] An Extra! TV segment about *MOH* says that "Captain Dye worked to make the game true to life" and that these games "help us all remember the sacrifices our fighting women and men have made for our freedom."[34] To make money, Dye responded to the digital industry's demand for his expertise and by doing so, shaped the content of *MOH*.

This EA and Dye synergy underpinned the *MOH* franchise for ten years, but EA did not re-hire Dye when it re-launched this franchise in 2010. EA's development of *MOHOA*'s simulation of the war in Afghanistan was instead assisted by Tier 1 operatives who fought in the actual war in Afghanistan. As consultants, they advised EA designers on the war that EA simulated as play. The EA-Tier 1 partnership which shaped *MOHOA* was explicitly emphasized in EA's promotion of the game. EA's website states that "the new *Medal of Honor* is inspired by and has been developed with Tier 1 Operators from this elite community" and allows players to "step into the boots of these warriors and apply their unique skill sets to a new enemy in the most unforgiving and hostile battlefield conditions of present day Afghanistan."[35] It continues: "from story to dialogue to weaponry and technique, these elite Operators guided the action on the screen to help best represent the action on today's battlefield."[36] In an "EA Showcase" interview, *MOHOA*'s executive producer Greg Goodrich (dressed up as "Dusty," a Tier 1 protagonist in the game) describes the support EA received from the DOD. Goodrich explains to his interviewer that EA was "introduced to these Tier 1

operators" who "happened to be operating in Afghanistan" and that soon after, "these guys [. . .] came into the studio and started interacting with the team" and that this helped it "find the backbone of our narrative."[37] Goodrich says that Tier 1 operatives "helped quite a bit, not only in the story telling, but also in terms of weapons systems, gear and just helping us keep it authentic."[38]

The synergistic relationship between EA and the DOD and the presumably "authentic" or "realistic" war play experience it led to is routinely highlighted by *MOHOA*'s TV advertising campaign. One TV ad for the game is a video of in-game play and cinematic cut scenes overlaying text from reviews such as "over the top with realism" (Gamezone) and "this seems almost too real" (MTV News). After declaring the game will let people play "A new breed of warrior for a new breed of warfare," another TV ad declares: "*Medal of Honor*, developed in collaboration with U.S. Special Operations soldiers." To further emphasize its collaboration with Tier 1, EA launched a "Medal of Honor: Tier 1 Interview Series," which consisted of eight two-minute online videos packaged as interviews with Tier 1 soldiers (Afghanistan war vets). Each video opens with a warning "ERSB Rating Mature 17+ for Blood, Strong Language and Violence," and then the text: "The elite operators of the U.S. Special Operations community are tasked with only the most difficult and dangerous missions. The subject featured in the following interview operated within this community and acted as a consultant on the development of *Medal of Honor*. Their identity has been concealed for security purposes."[39]

Each "interview" splices three videos. In one, we see Tier 1 soldiers with faces blurred out seated in dimly lit rooms talking about why they joined the military, what jobs they do, what it takes both physically and psychologically to do them, how they do them, what it feels like and why they enjoy them. In a second, we are exposed to in-game war-play sequences and cinematic cut-scene sequences. And in the third, we watch footage that seems to represent actual Tier 1 soldiers in Afghanistan. In fact, the soldiers resemble the characters in the game and are depicted walking on roads holding machine guns, taking off in, landing and flying Apache helicopters and driving/riding in a jeep mounted with a big machine gun. There is seamless cutting between each of these videos, which transport the viewer's gaze from the soldier on the homefront to the battle-space of the game to Afghanistan and back again. The videos encourage their viewers to adopt different military gazes. In the first video, viewers are asked to identify as a patriotic U.S. citizen that is reverent and deferential to the authority and expertise of the soldier who fought in Afghanistan. In the second, viewers dawn a first-person player's eye view of manipulating a virtual soldier in a virtual Afghanistan. In the third, the viewer is hailed as a media consumer who acquires knowledge of the war in Afghanistan by watching TV. The "interview" ends with "this is Tier 1", followed by the *MOHOA* game box cover, its October 12, 2010 release date, an invitation to "learn more" on Facebook and Twitter, and EA's brand logo. While promoting a virtual war in Afghanistan these promotional shorts also validate and glamorize the actual war. They serve to sell the real military violence of the U.S. state since 9/11, its playable simulation, citizenship, soldiering and gaming, all at once.

Two videos in the series focus on the work these Tier 1 soldiers did for EA. In

"Consulting" and "Authenticity," soldiers talk about why they chose to work with EA's designers, what work they did and how their work helped to create a "realistic" or "authentic" game. One soldier suggests that he worked with EA to create an authentic representation of what he did so as to counter an apparently inauthentic Hollywood image of the soldier: "Some people have got this Hollywood image of what an Operator is" he says. "It's more than just: I'm a soldier. I knew some of the folks at EA were interested in working with a specific group of people. They wanted an authentic feel to what was going on in the game and how they were going to build the game."[40] Another soldier implies that by working with EA on *MOHOA*, he was able to shape how he and others soldiers are publicly perceived: "I thought it was important to get involved because this game was going to come out, one way or another. By me being a part of it I at least have some say in the way the community gets represented. I look at is as an opportunity to [. . .] let them see the operator for what he is." He continues: "By them taking on board things that we're saying, we are able to influence, and be sure things are shown in the proper light, and not be misrepresented."[41] Another solder similarly explains his motivation in terms of a militarized identity politics of representation, claiming that because he fought and had an embodied experience of the war in Afghanistan, he is most capable and deserving of speaking about this war's truth to consumers: "We have sacrificed so much of our lives to become what we are and [by helping EA make a game] we can help them understand what it is all about, what is going on over there."[42]

The soldiers also describe *how* they helped EA make the game. One says he gave EA advice on the weapons and tactics he used to kill: "They asked me to watch some of the footage and comment on the weapons, comment on some of the tactics."[43] Another says EA's designers asked questions about the personalities of soldiers when scripting the game's protagonists: "What would guys say? What would they be like? How would they act?" He goes on to say he helped EA with character development: "There are personality aspects which we injected into the game to give it a little more flavor, realistic flavor."[44] Another implies that his personal stories about the war supported EA's scripting of *MOHOA*'s narrative: "If I told a story or talked about something, half an hour later, I could see the results of what I said taken place on the screen." In another clip, he says: "We've made some recommendations based upon things they had in the original storyline. They [EA] were extremely receptive to everything we've asked of them. They've come through."[45] In addition to explaining how they helped EA make *MOHOA*, the soldiers contribute to EA's sales pitch by promoting *MOHOA*'s realism as different or unique when compared to competing war game titles in the marketplace. One says: "The games that are currently out there, at least the ones that I've seen, nothing simulates being on a real Op, and *Medal of Honor* is going to be different. It's the human side that they are bringing to the soldier and bringing back respect."[46] Another says: "I think they've done their homework and it is going to be a whole new experience. People will get a distinct realistic feel. [. . .] I think they've gone the extra mile trying to figure it out."[47]

The support given to EA by these soldiers is recognized in *MOHOA*'s end-game credits: Tier 1 operatives are thanked, not just for helping EA design the game, but for sacrificing themselves for "America":

> To our brothers, past and present - This is a dedication to America's ser-
> vicemen. A dedication to the debt we owe to Warriors lost and to all our
> military forces who continue to defend freedom around the world. Men and
> women who have honorably served throughout our nation's history – who
> stood and continue to stand fast in the face of a determined enemy and de-
> feat them with unwavering discipline. Most Americans do not know what
> our Special Operations Forces community experience. They do not know
> what these Warriors endure in combat, nor do they understand the selfless-
> ness and love of the brothers beside them. Men within this community bring
> the fight to the enemy, engage aggressively and stand their ground. Born
> unto a different cloth, these men could have chosen a different life of pros-
> perity and chased every opportunity afforded by our great nation. Giving
> life as they live it, they chose to leave these pursuits behind and devote
> themselves instead to a higher calling, living with indomitable purpose, by
> simple truths – Brotherhood. Honor. Sacrifice. Words molded into their
> character, exemplified by their actions. It is their final hour we celebrate –
> our fallen brothers who shine a light on the greatest attributes of dedicated
> men. With their sacrifice, legends are born and will live as examples to in-
> spire the heroes that will lead our nation to victory in the years ahead; mak-
> ing our Founding Fathers proud and acting as a promise to America's next
> generation. This to our fallen brothers. You will be honored in our commu-
> nity's history as the greatest heroes. As men who shouldered our nation's
> burden, you will remain as beacons for our heroic ideals. Taught to be
> proud and unbending in failure and humble in success, there are no greater
> examples for which this nation stands for and of which this nation is built
> from – the ideal of service to country and to others. To our community and
> all who wear the uniform - Thank you for your service to the nation. And,
> to those in this hour who are in the fight and keep our enemies awake at
> night.

Referencing the history of actual U.S. wars for their story concept and commercial appeal,
produced in collaboration with retired and active duty U.S. military personnel, and promot-
ed with support from actual soldiers, *MOHOA* is a clear example of digital militainment
product.

MOHOA's Modalities of Simulated Realism

Game studios design digital war games to be "realistic" and do so by manufacturing
"modalities" of realism.[48] Digital war games often claim a real historical and geographical
war referent (the game is based on an actual military conflict somewhere, past or present);
claim subjective realism (the game offers players subject positions that are modeled on

those constituted by military doctrines); claim functional realism (game-play is modeled on the procedural rhetoric of existing military strategies and tactics); and claim audio-visual realism (the game's images and sounds are proximate to real world equivalents). Overall, studios aim to design war games that support "experiential realism," an immersive and interactive experience that gives players a feeling of being in a war, which the medium-specific properties of the video game heighten and intensify. Distinct from war TV and film spectators, game players actively move, as opposed to being moved by, the protagonists engaged in combat before their eyes. The joystick mobilizes touch, shaking, rattling, and vibrating in tandem with the on-screen action the player conducts.

   Despite being manufactured with different modalities of realism that aim to create experiential realism, digital war games do not offer players a "realistic" experience of war, but a "hyper-realistic" one that "can never be anything but a second-level experience, a substitute for a reality that is lost to us."[49] Like other digital war games, *MOHOA* offers players what James Der Derian describes as "virtuous wars," simulation models of war abstracted from embodied, psychological and geographical consequences.[50] These models aim to "create a fidelity between the representation and reality of war," but ultimately fail to do so.[51] "When compared to the real trauma of war" says Der Derian, "the pseudo-trauma of simulation pales."[52] Stahl says digital games are "absent the horrors a high-tech military machine can effect," as they fail to address or leave out "certain realities of war" to enable "conscience-free playing.[53] From this, the act of "introducing un-consumable realities of war" into the analysis of digital war games has "become a major weapon of critique."[54] In this section, I critique *MOHOA*'s single-player mode's attempt to simulation of war.

   MOHOA's historical referent is the post-9/11 U.S.-led global war on terror (GWOT) and the war in Afghanistan, which began on October 7, 2001, and is still happening; its geographical referent is a world system of states in which the U.S. is at war in the contested territory of Afghanistan. The game's opening sequence gives the player a satellite eye-view of earth from outer space; players hear transmissions of people talking in English and Arabic and see data being transferred. Scrambled signals of news reports referring to the 9/11 attack and voices claiming that "no doubt it [the attack] was Al-Qaeda" introduce players to the post-9/11 period of the GWOT and Afghanistan as its key geographical front. The camera then delivers the player's gaze from outer space to earth, from a third-person satellite-eye view of the world to a drone's eye view of Afghanistan, and then to a first-person view of a soldier. On the player's visual trip down from the intergalactic ether to a road in Afghanistan, they are told by a commanding voice that "Preliminary air strikes have been successful, but we need to get dirty," and then, by another, that "This is what we came here for; let's go hunting." *MOHOA*'s cinematic introduction basically reproduces the post-9/11 state's rationale for war: that the 9/11 terrorist attack was an act of war and the best response to it is war, not diplomacy or crime-fighting. The game frames the U.S. as waging reactive wars to secure itself, never wars of aggression to serve ulterior ends. By explaining to presumably U.S. players "why we fight" (to avenge Al-Qaeda's attack on the U.S), "who we must fight" (the Taliban) and "where we fight" (Afghanistan), the game gives belated ideological legitimization for the U.S.'s post-9/11 GWOT policy. The game, then, affirms the

U.S. executive branch's broad GWOT foreign policy frame (since 9/11, U.S. overt and covert wars have aimed to rid the world of terrorism as opposed to further expand the U.S.'s sphere of economic, military and cultural influence) and NATO's position on Operation Freedom (the U.S. and its allies are in Afghanistan to oust the Taliban from power and establish democracy as opposed to building yet another proxy state to contain would-be rivals).

   MOHOA's cinematic introduction sets the stage for interactive war-play based on *Operation Anaconda*, or the March 2002 seizing of Bagram Airfield, the Battle of Shah-i-Kot and Battle of Takur Ghar. The game simulates for play partial and selective realities of the war in Afghanistan. When playing *MOHOA*, gamers don't see the following parts of the Afghan war. *Torture and murder*: some U.S. soldiers tortured and murdered Diliwar and Habibullah, Bagram Prison detainees;[55] massacred between 250 and 3,000 Taliban fighters who had surrendered at the Dasht-i-Leili pits,[56] killed five Afghan civilians and then removed bullets from their bodies to cover up their guilt,[57] and deliberately targeted and killed Afghan civilians, collected their victims' mangled body parts as trophies, and on Web 2.0 platforms, described themselves as a video game "kill-team" and shared murder footage with friends.[58] *Resistance*: since the war began resistance by Afghani, U.S. and international citizens has been persistent.[59] *Corruption*: the U.S.-backed Karzai regime is corrupt and autocratic.[60] *Under-development and cronyism*: the failure of the U.S.'s allocation of $100 billion to spurn economic development, democratic state-formation and improvements to the lives of average Afghani citizens.[61] *Death*: 3,427 actual U.S. soldiers have been killed and 20,000 seriously injured since 2001; more than 15,000 Afghan civilians have been killed since 2007.[62] *Post-traumatic stress disorder* (PTSD): one in five Afghanistan war veterans are diagnosed with PTSD and many of these veterans have suffered depression and committed suicide.[63] *MOHOA*'s simulation of the Afghanistan war fails to simulate these actualities of war. Released about nine years following the U.S.-led invasion, *MOHOA* thus tells a fantasized war story without controversy that aims to foster a sense of national pride and deference to military authority. Though EA had the benefit of hindsight when developing *MOHOA* and could have addressed some of the Afghan war's unsavory realities, it instead idealized the war. *MOHOA* covers up the realities of war and, in its place, offers a glorifying and sanitizing substitute.

   Though *MOHOA*'s interactive war narrative is affirmative of post-9/11 U.S. foreign policy and war, it shows us the "changing face" of U.S. Empire,[64] that is, joint operations: a policy which brings together the White House, the DOD, the CIA and the State Department to achieve U.S. strategic objectives.[65] While the post-9/11 invasion of Afghanistan was a large-scale assault and ground war, this battle strategy was accompanied by covert or "dirty" warfare tactics undertaken by the little known Joint Operations Special Operations Command (JSOC).[66] Established in 1980 and utilized by the Bush and Obama Administrations,[67] JSOC has since 9/11 played a "prominent role in national security" and counter-terrorism campaigns in fields "traditionally covered by the CIA."[68] JSOC is made up of DEVGRU (the Army's Delta Force, Army Rangers and the Night Stalkers) and is accountable to the President's National Security Council (NSC), not Congress. Colonel W. Patrick Lang de-

scribed JSOC as "sort of like Murder, Incorporated" whose "business is killing Al Qaeda personnel." As a first-person shooter which puts its players in the first person gaze of soldiers, *MOHOA* aims to simulate *subjective realism* by offering players JSOC subject-positions to identify and interactively play-kill with. *MOHOA*'s lead characters are a U.S. Naval Special Warfare Development Group (DEVGRU) agent (code-named "Rabbit"), an Army Delta Force sniper (code-named "Deuce"), an Army Ranger (Dante Adams) and a U.S. Army Night-stalker helicopter gunner (Brad Hawkins). A TV ad for *MOHOA* represents these as "the most elite operators in the world" and "a new breed of warrior for a new breed of warfare."

JSOC faces heightened U.S. and global public scrutiny, but *MOHOA* casts its players as dirty war heroes and by doing so, encourages them to identify with these "elite operators" and their controversial conduct. While U.S. citizens are frequently kept in the dark about JSOC's exceptional conduct, *MOHOA* brings to light the recent past of JSOC's activities in Afghanistan in the form of a game, thereby making them seem ordinary. As a "Special Forces shooter" genre game, *MOHOA*'s subjective realism "seeks to naturalize and legitimize covert force solutions as acceptable instruments of statecraft" by "allowing individuals to connect to wars in a way that was previously not possible."[69] Though *MOHOA* claims to put players in the boots of the U.S. Empire's vanguard, its virtuous simulation model entreats civilian players to the experience of war as a leisurely luxury, enjoyed from the comforts of their homes, at a safe physical distance from the real battle. Unlike actual soldiers, *MOHOA*'s players do not risk physical injury or death while fighting; they do not actually kill people. While *MOHOA*'s players can pause, save and replay war, actual U.S. soldiers cannot. Although *MOHOA* claims to give players a Tier 1 operations experience, the ritual of gaming it enables does not come close to the activities of the protagonists it models. JSOC forces do not wage war "over there" from "over here" with joysticks, PS3 and Xbox consoles and TV sets, but occupy and traverse other countries, gathering intel, extracting and killing along the way. They are trained to do extremely strenuous activities that require physical strength and mental discipline. No amount of mastering joystick button combos and virtual headshots could prepare *MOHOA*'s civilian gamer for JSOC. *MOHOA* doesn't train players to fight dirty wars, but does encourage players to identify with JSOC and accept how it fights.

MOHOA's *functional realism* immerses players in how JSOC fights via a procedural rhetoric;[70] the game invites people to play war using the very same strategies and tactics the DOD employs in battle. The DOD described the actual Operation Anaconda mission as an example of a "new type of war" that mixed conventional territorial combat between soldiers with de-territorialized and information age battle-strategies and tactics, as it combined soldiers and special ops, satellites, global positioning system (GPS), lasers, and Predator unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to designate ground targets for air strikes, which were provided by cruise missiles and strike aircraft such as AC-130 gunships, bombers and tactical fighters.[71] *MOHOA*'s in-game play simulates this "new type of war." Quite a lot of in-game action entails first-person combat in Afghanistan's mountains (running, crouching, jumping and shooting one's way through huts, caves and pastures) and urban environments (killing

one's way through houses and stores). There are war-play sequences in which players highlight Taliban encampments, vehicles and troops with a laser pointer and then direct missile strikes and drone attacks on these "ground targets." Furthermore, *MOHOA* represents war in the information age as something that U.S. military commanders coordinate in real-time yet at a safe distance through information and communication technologies (ICTs). Cinematic cut sequences depict General Flagg ordering (from the safety of his Pentagon office in Langley, Virginia) Army Colonel Drucker (at a U.S. base in Afghanistan) to wage war. In the battlefield, small, nimble and flexible groups of U.S. soldiers take tele-orders from Drucker via ICTs, which enable them to be in constant communication on the battlefield as they kill. Network Centric Warfare (NCW), then, is a tacit referent for *MOHOA*.

MOHOA's functional realism immerses players into a rule-bound and linear narrative of how JSOC fights new and dirty wars. The algorithmic introduction to each of *MOHOA*'s levels explains to players their mission and goals, instructs them as to tasks they need to complete to achieve them, the weapons they will be equipped with and the threats they will encounter and eliminate along the way. In level one, **"**First In," "you must infiltrate the Taliban-held town of Gardez and locate Tariq, a local elder who has valuable intel on High-Value targets and enemy positions in the surrounding area." In level two, "Breaking Bagram," "you must penetrate the Taliban's defenses and seize the control tower" by "eliminating Taliban insurgents that have Bagram airfield under their control." In level three, "Running with Wolves," you must "infiltrate the rugged mountains surrounding the Shahikot Valley on stealthed-out ATVs" and after encountering "enemy outposts and villages along the way," will "rain down tactical airstrikes on enemy positions." In level four**, "**Dorothy's a Bitch," you must "push into the snow-capped peaks of the Shahikot on foot, take out Taliban and Al-Qaeda fighters in close-quarters battle and eliminate AAA positions with the support of AC-130 gunship Reaper 3-1 all the way to Dorothy, your final Observation Point." In level five, "Belly of the Beast," you are "inserted into the Shahikot in heavy lift helicopters" and "you and your platoon must fight your way to the high ground and eliminate the enemy's firing positions." In level six, "Gunfighters," "you're in the front seater of an AH-64D Apache on mission with your companion aircraft, Gunfighter 11. Together you will go 'switches hot' on Taliban mortar teams, Al-Qaeda RPG gunners and AAA positions with the Apache's deadly arsenal of high-tech weaponry." In level seven**, "**Friends from Afar," "you and Dusty move higher to hunt dug-in Al-Qaeda fighters" on the top of a mountain; there, you must "conceal your movement and watch your noise discipline, or the hunter will become the hunted." In level eight, "Compromised," you fall back for extraction as "Al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters take the bait and walk into your irons as you draw them closer with tactical fall back maneuvers." In level nine, **"**Neptune's Net," "you ignore the order to return to base and reinsert at night on top of Takur Ghar to get your men back," rescuing two soldiers left behind on the mountain. In the final and tenth level, **"**Rescue the Rescuers," you "once again step into the boots of Ranger SPC (Specialist) Dante Adams and are inserted on top of Takur Ghar to find Neptune."

In order to complete *MOHOA*'s levels (and win the game), players must learn and internalize the game's rules of warfare and therefore learn how to win wars according to the

game's design. This "procedural logic"[72] ensures that *MOHOA*'s interactive experience does not facilitate free-flowing experiments in identity. Just as actual U.S. soldiers must obey the DOD's command and control structure, *MOHOA*'s virtual citizen soldiers must conform to the game's rules. *MOHOA* commands its virtual-citizen soldiers to obey orders and kill to complete each mission. Deference to the code's power lets them play another round, get high scores, proceed to the next level and win the game. Virtual-citizen soldiers that refuse to submit to this structure die, lose and cannot move forward. The power relationship between the DOD's command and control structure and the U.S. soldier is mimicked by the relationship between *MOHOA*'s interactive narrative and its players. Soldiers are subject to a command and control structure that has little to do with their independent will and free choice (they must take orders and have no control over the war itself and why it is fought); player agency is subordinate to and largely an effect of the game's algorithmic plan. *MOHOA*'s command and control structure, then, integrates and functionalizes its players "into the mechanical pleasures of 'how we fight'"[73] and by doing so, risks diminishing their democratic responsibility to contemplate, let alone deliberate about, why and if they should fight.

MOHOA's subjective realism is enhanced by *audio-visual realism*. The game's sounds and sights are modeled on their real world equivalents. Indeed, *MOHOA* claims to give "Unparalleled Authenticity." It simulates sounds of battle (recorded from live training exercises in a mock Afghan village at Fort Irwin California), the look of the rugged landscapes of Afghanistan, the appearances of actual Tier 1 soldiers (their bodies, clothing, weapons and equipment) and actual weapons used in combat. The weapons players use to kill are modeled on those used by soldiers to kill: side-arms (M9, SIG Sauer P226 and Glock), shotguns (TOZ-194, 870 MCS and M1014), carbines (M4A1 and AKS-74u), assault rifles (M16A4, Ak-47, FN2000 and G3A3), light machine guns (PKM, M249, M60, M240 and RPK), heavy machine guns (DsHK), sniper rifles (Mk M110, SVD, SV-98, M24 and G3A4), anti-tank guns (RPG-7 and AT4), grenades (M67 and M83), grenade launchers (M203, GP-25 and GL1), helicopter mounted mini-guns and SOFLAM, a laser that marks targets (buildings, bunkers, vehicles, people) for destruction. First-person shooter war games merge the player's gaze with the mediated sights of new weapons technology, resulting in what Stahl calls a "weaponized gaze," "a broad aesthetic connection between the citizen and the military apparatus."[74] For Stahl, the "weaponized gaze" fully identifies the subject's gaze with the imperial war machine in motion by allowing civilians to see through the crosshairs of a gun, the head of a bomb as it falls on a city before exploding, the sights of a drone or a 3-D animated satellite image.[75] *MOHOA* "weaponizes" the civic gaze by allowing players to virtually enact strategies and tactics of killing from the point of view of the weapons technology they select and use to do so. Players see targets to be killed and the effects of their customized killing (headshot bursts, exploding torsos, blood splattering from limbs) through the crosshairs of sniper rifles (Dragunov SVD, M82, M110 and MP7A1); the cockpit of an assault helicopter; the crosshairs of a helicopter mounted machine gun; the binocular eyes of the SOFLAM laser GBU-24 guided bombs, Hellfire missiles and GAU-8 anti-tank guns; and the gritty black and white camera filter of a Predator Drone as it attacks and

strafes bodies. Like the U.S. drone pilots in military bases at a safe distance from the actual place of death and whose war vision is mediated by a screen and battle-action, a joystick, *MOHOA*'s player flies drones from the virtual home-front, launching missiles at pixilated outlines of others elsewhere.

In addition to simulating the above modalities of realism, *MOHOA* digitally imagines an American imperial self that is distinct from external and internal Others. Indeed, *MOHOA* participates significantly in a post-9/11 and neo-Orientalist nation-making process that constructs a positive American self by distinguishing it from a negative Muslim Other.[76] In *MOHOA*, Afghanis are represented as both "good" (i.e. supportive of the U.S. occupation and helpful to U.S. special forces: allies) and "bad" (i.e. unsupportive of the U.S. occupation and resistant to U.S. special forces: enemies). In the game's first mission, player-soldiers must rescue Tariq, an Afghani informant to the U.S. who has gathered intelligence on the Taliban's whereabouts. In a cinematic cut-scene following the mission's completion, Tariq explains to Rabbit that the Taliban has "spies everywhere" and that "they took everything and left only hurt." Tariq begs Rabbit to "find them and kill them all." Rabbit hesitates and questions Tariq's trustworthiness. But Tariq continues to plead: "Please, I have a daughter. I want her to go to school. I want her to be a person, have a life. Do you not understand?" To that, Rabbit responds, "Okay, okay, I understand." The sequence represents this good Afghani in a passive and dependent role; Tariq is capable of collaborating with the U.S. but ultimately in need of its help. Moreover, the sequence tacitly forwards the liberal imperialist argument that the U.S. war in Afghanistan is a benign or humanitarian mission whose primary goal is to save poor, helpless and terrorized Afghani men, women and children from the Taliban. By depicting Tariq begging for Rabbit's help and Rabbit acquiescing, the sequence not only represents war as something decided by individual soldiers, but also, affirms the U.S.'s exceptionalist credo of having a unique obligation to use its military power to liberate peoples elsewhere from some kind of domestic evil or oppression. Moreover, Tariq's reference to his daughter attending school justifies the U.S.'s war as a way to export and defend women's liberation, and in a larger sense, the universal human right of women to education. In addition to representing Afghanis as people needing to be saved by the U.S., *MOHOA* represents Afghanis as NATO-trained and allied soldiers, passive instruments of the U.S.-NATO mission. In a cinematic cut-sequence, for example, General Flagg and Colonel Drucker refer to Afghans as "Task Force Rebel" and "insert them into the fight" with the Taliban. But U.S. forces misrecognize Task Force Rebel as a terrorist group and attack; some flee and others suffer "friendly fire," adding to the hundreds of already rendered Afghan dead bodies.

MOHOA represents a handful of "good" Afghanis, but more than five hours of gameplay and cinematic cut scenes depict hundreds upon hundreds of Afghanis as "bad" Taliban that must be killed. Afghani civilians who first appear to be neutral turn out to be Taliban combatants. Almost all are dehumanized as "targets," "bad guys," "armed individuals," "animals" (connoted by regular use of phrase "happy hunting"), and "food" (to be eaten by U.S. soldiers after they have "hunted" and killed them). Afghanistan is a multicultural society full of diverse ethnic groups (the Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Aimaq, Turkmen,

Baloch and more) whose members speak many languages (Pashto, Dari, Uzbek, Arabic), but *MOHOA* depicts Afghanis one-dimensionally: as enemies. Not all Afghanis are members of the Taliban, but *MOHOA* represents most Afghanis as Taliban fighters who live and die to kill Americans. Furthermore, a little under half of all Afghanis live on less than $1-2 a day, more than 80,000 Afghanis are disabled due to landmines from previous wars, and one in ten Afghan children dies before the age of five, but *MOHOA* obscures the daily human toils and socio-economic hardships faced by ordinary Afghanis by representing the Afghan people as a collective threat to U.S. and world security. And though millions of women and children live, work and play in Afghanistan, *MOHOA* represents an Afghanistan that is womanless and childless, a vast landscape occupied by Taliban men. By constructing the majority of Afghan characters as male Taliban terrorists who threaten U.S. security and women, *MOHOA* enables its players to feel good, even heroic, when virtually killing these bad Others.

MOHOA's domestic "Other" is not foreign Taliban men, but American women on the homefront. *MOHOA* reinforces the confluence of patriarchy and militarism and the dominance of "militarized masculinity"[77] by casting players into male soldier roles while excluding women soldiers. Hundreds of women actually fought in Afghanistan but women soldiers simply don't exist in *MOHOA*'s virtual battle-space. In the game, one absent, passive, domesticated and tele-mediated woman's voice is a foil for ever-present, active and war-fighting men. An online video trailer for *MOHOA* called "Leave a Message" enforces this gendered distinction.[78] A phone rings and the answering machine picks up. A woman says: "Hi, you've reached the Paterson residence. Jim, Michelle and Chloe. We are not in right now. Leave a message and we'll get back to you." The voice on the other end of the line is Jim, who from Afghanistan, says:

> Hi honey, it's me. Sorry I missed you. I don't even know what time it is here. Anyway, I just want to let you know everything is fine. Hey, tell Chloe good luck at the Soccer game. Get Terry's kid to clean out those gutters. I don't want you up on that old ladder. Look, I know you've been watching the news, but most of the action is up in the North, hundreds of miles away. Our gear's collecting dust. It's just mud and bugs down here. We are finding things to do and trying to stay out of trouble. If trouble does find us, we are tough as nails and we are ready to get into the fight. But don't worry, we are Army Rangers, this is what we do. I love you and Chloe very much. I'll be home soon.[79]

Jim's phone message to his wife on the "homefront" seems to intentionally conceal the antagonistic reality of the war he is fighting on the "battlefront." The sound of Jim's spoken message is accompanied by video sequences of helicopters descending upon Afghan mountains backlit by sunsets, male soldiers in full gear preparing to deploy, and, then, explosions and all-out war. The ad, then, represents Jim as telling a "noble lie" that intends to protect his wife and child from the "truth" of war so as to deter them from worrying about him be-

ing injured or killed in battle. "Leave a Message" not only perpetuates the patriarchal notion that women's proper place is the homefront (where they reproduce life with unpaid domestic work) and men's the battlefront (where they kill via paid soldiering), but also assumes a male spectator and invites him to become complicit in a "noble lie" to women, who need not partake in deliberation about war. In *MOHOA*, men's proper place is a foreign warzone and their job is to do the dirty work of killing foreign others, while women's appropriate place is the home and their duty, child rearing. This gendered war play confirms a militarized vision of patriarchy by depicting war as a way for macho men to liberate Afghan women and give them the freedom presumably enjoyed by American women.

Overall, *MOHOA*'s single-player campaign simulates many modalities of realism. By doing so, it immerses players in the rhetorics and logics of why and how the U.S. fights the post-9/11 GWOT in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

This article has analyzed *MOHOA*'s geopolitical-economic underpinnings and modalities of militarized realism. *MOHOA*'s production and interactive play narrative show how digital capitalism's accumulation logics intersect with the U.S. state's geopolitical imperatives, the DOD in particular. Although digital games corporations and the DOD are not "fused" and game studios and the DOD are different kinds of organizations, these differences do not mean there are never any symbiotic interactions between the two. *MOHOA* illustrates the ways in which economic and geopolitical interests and ideologies interact in support of the U.S. Empire and a digital militainment culture.

That being said, *MOHOA* does offer some views of the tactical challenges faced by soldiers in Operation Anaconda. Nearing the end of the game, players must retreat from a treacherous battle with the Taliban. A U.S. helicopter is hit by a Taliban rocket and crashes into a mountain. Rabbit, one of the lead characters, dies. In this respect, *MOHOA*'s simulated realism points to some consequences of war. But it does not criticize the war itself or represent troop withdrawal as an option. *MOHOA* concludes with the soldiers saying "this is not the end."

True, the war did not end, actually or digitally. *MOHOA*'s end was the beginning of its sequel, *Medal of Honor: Warfighter* (2012). While *MOHOA*'s release was met with commercial success, its sequel, supported again by DOD personnel and initially designed to link players to U.S. arms manufacture websites,[80] was poorly received by critics and players alike. Though *MOH: Warfighter*'s market disappointments have been attributed to poor game design and a confusing story, its status as a flop may have had more to do with the public's growing recognition of the war's futility and an emergent distaste for entertainment that claimed to simulate war's "realism." *MOH: Warfighter* was released in October 2012 to a public whose support for the war in Afghanistan had dropped.[81] In that same month, EA posted a $381 million loss, citing *MOH: Warfighter*'s low sales.[82] In January 2013, EA cancelled the *MOH* franchise, closed down Danger Close Games and laid off many of its em-

ployees.[83] A few months later, the Obama Administration sped up the U.S.'s withdrawal from Afghanistan, perhaps confirming to the public that the end of the war, like EA's sequel to its beginning, would also be remembered as a loss.

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