

[Title]Military Videogames[/Title]

[Subtitle]More than a Game[/Subtitle]

[Author name]Nick Robinson[/Author name]

[abstract]

This article demonstrates the significance of military videogames, exploring the changes in representations (how war is depicted) and production processes (the links between the military and videogames industries) that have occurred from the 1990s to the present. It argues that representations have moved from a focus on the 9/11 wars to one based on depicting conflicts set in the past and/or future, so depoliticising popular culture. In terms of production, there have been corresponding changes, with a loosening of the historic links between the military and videogames industry.

[/abstract]

At first glance, videogames may appear to be trivial playthings – just for teenagers or children.¹ Yet as this article shows, they have significant – and increasing – political, cultural and military implications. Their impact and importance operate at two key levels: first, in terms of direct use for and by the military; and second, as part of a wider popular culture that shapes perceptions of conflict and increases understanding of and support for military engagements.

Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, the relationship between the between the popular cultural industries and the military has been central, whether supporting military action or strongly critiquing it as witnessed, perhaps most clearly, in the contrasting depictions in film of the Second World War and the Vietnam War. Since the 9/11 attacks, military videogames have become a dominant way in which the public 'experiences' warfare.

Crucially, however, this article identifies a key shift in the focus of videogame representations over that period from centring on the 9/11-infused wars to a focus on the depiction of conflicts set in the past and/or future. The article argues that the rising perception that the West has become embroiled in a number of intractable and unwinnable conflicts has resulted in a growing sense that it is increasingly difficult to produce entertainment centred on contemporary war. Real-world events are therefore integral to these temporal shifts in military

videogame representations from contemporary 9/11-based scenarios to either a fantasy future where victory is possible, or to the First and Second World Wars in which victory is assured. This article offers a comprehensive discussion of the existing literature demonstrating its failure to account for these shifts. In doing so, the article examines the wider significance of military videogames in terms of production, the changing nature of the representations they offer, and the consequences of those changing representations for both the military and public as captured through the consumption of military videogames. They are much 'more than a game', as this article demonstrates.

The primary focus is on military shooter games such as the *Call of Duty* (2003–present) series and *Battlefield* (2002–present) series. These are the dominant genre in the war videogame field, their releases frequently supported by significant marketing budgets and crucial to their publishers' commercial sustainability. The combined sales of such titles approximate 40–50 million copies per annum. The games include first-person shooter games which situate the player as a serving member of the US (or an allied) military (for example, the *Call of Duty* series), and what Roger Stahl terms 'insurgent hunting games' which locate the player as a member of a secret national security team charged with neutralising terrorist threats and which tend to be played from a third-person perspective (for example, the *Rainbow Six* series).²

[H1] A History of Military Videogames

Videogames have been directly used by the military for decades for simulation and training.³ Since the 1991 Gulf War, militaries worldwide have increasingly recognised the effectiveness of game-based simulations to replicate the interfaces used in modern war systems, to offer realistic approximations of conflict and to enhance combat readiness.⁴ To this end, the global

market for military simulations and computer-based training was projected to reach \$10.8 billion in 2018, totalling \$128.5 billion in the period 2018–28.⁵ While not on the same scale, all modern militaries make extensive use of videogame-based simulations, with, for example, the UK, Australian and US militaries among over 50 defence organisations using the game *Virtual Battle Space* as part of a portfolio of training tools.⁶

Videogames have also been used by the military for recruitment. Most famously, the US Army developed the game *America's Army* – first released in 2002 – which has since been played by 15 million players.⁷ The game has had a significant impact: 'According to military research as of May 2003, the game ranked fourth among things creating "favorable awareness" of the Army, behind the war in Iraq, homeland security, and tensions with North Korea. Some 40 percent of enlistees in 2005 had previously played the game'⁸ and 30% of Americans aged between 16 and 24 said 'some of what they know about the Army comes from the game'.⁹

Beyond these formal military roles, videogames can be seen as part of the wider popular culture (which also includes film and music) that has been used during times of conflict to mobilise public support for the troops.¹⁰ Consider, for example, the role of popular entertainers such as Dame Vera Lynn and Bob Hope during the Second World War, or the importance of films such as *The Green Berets* (1968) which was co-produced with the US military to promote the Vietnam War effort.¹¹ In the contemporary period, the potential contribution of popular culture to mobilise public support is ever greater, as fewer members of the public have direct experience of war and/or soldiering. Media reports, popular culture and social media thus become primary mechanisms through which the public 'understands' and 'experiences' military conflict.¹² And following the onset of the war on terror, military videogames have replaced film as the primary means through which popular culture represents war and conflict, marking a significant shift.¹³ This follows from a series of previous transitions:

from the Second World War to the 9/11 attacks, film and music were key;¹⁴ prior to this, for example in relation to the First World War, poetry and novels were central.¹⁵

The shift is also one of huge commercial scale: the best-selling *Call of Duty* series has combined sales of 300 million copies with total revenues of over \$17 billion as of May 2019.¹⁶ As Roger Stahl identifies, this is not an isolated case: 'September 11, 2001 and the ensuing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq ushered in a boom in sales of war-themed videogames for the commercial market'.¹⁷

[H2] Production and the Military–Entertainment Complex

Historically the links between the videogames industry and the military have been extensive. Indeed, the term the 'military–entertainment complex' is frequently used to describe the symbiotic link between the military and entertainment industries in which war and popular culture are fused to make entertainment media across a wide-spectrum including videogames, Hollywood films, and rock and pop videos.¹⁸ Tanner Mirrlees, for example, explains how the military were involved in the production of the *Transformers* film franchise (2007–) by allowing access to military bases and installations, supplying military expertise, personnel and training, and allowing use of military weaponry and equipment. He argues that the military's motivation for so doing centres on ensuring that it is shown with positive, heroic qualities, thus helping to build public support for the military and boosting recruitment.¹⁹ Collaboration between the military and videogames industry are similarly motivated, with this author, for example, showing how the developers of the games *Medal of Honor* (2010) and *Medal of Honor Warfighter* (2012) made extensive use of former and active US Special Forces and collaborated with military weapons and equipment manufacturers in order to deliver a 'positive' and 'authentic' experience to the player.²⁰

These ties are deep-rooted. In the videogame sector, the links with the military date back to the 1980s. While military technology (for example in terms of computer hardware and graphics chips) initially underpinned the development of the videogame industry,²¹ the military had a negligible role in a title's concept and development. However, by the mid-1990s, the situation had changed; the military was commissioning adaptations of commercial videogames such as helicopter simulators (such as *Apache*) and military combat games (such as *Doom*) for military use.²²

The military has also explicitly produced military videogames for recruitment. Most prominently, as highlighted above, the US Department of Defense developed and launched the game *America's Army* in 2002. Now in its fourth version, its first 10 years (2000–09) cost \$32.8 million in nominal terms in development and running costs,²³ and as of July 2017 the game has been played by 15 million people for over 278 million total hours.²⁴ While other countries' militaries, such as that of the UK, have not made similar investments, the use of 'gamification' in recruitment has also been used – as shown, for example, in the 2009 'Start Thinking Soldier' campaign in which viewers were asked 'what would you do?' with links provided to an associated website which contained interactive, decision-making based videogames.²⁵

Videogame-based recruitment and branding are, however, not limited to state-based militaries; they have also been used by violent non-state actors and terrorists. For example, the private military and security company Blackwater (now Academi) acted as consultant in the production of the commercial game *Blackwater* in 2011, and Hizbullah's media wing released the games *Special Force* (2003) and *Special Force 2* (2007) in order to aid recruitment and convey Hizbullah's 'values, concepts and ideas'.²⁶ These are not isolated cases, with Al-Qa'ida and Daesh (also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, ISIS), while not formally developing videogames, also making extensive use of videogame-based imagery in their

appeals to would-be terrorist recruits, for example through development of social media memes which reference the *Call of Duty* and the *Grand Theft Auto* series.²⁷

[H1] Post 9/11 Representation

Following the 9/11 attacks, there was a growing desire from players in the West to play games set in scenarios influenced by the War on Terror – research conducted by a leading videogames developer in April 2003 (in the midst of the US-led invasion of Iraq) demonstrated that a 9/11-based wargame would be ‘very popular’.²⁸ The booming sales of war-themed videogames from this point on demonstrated that this was not an isolated or unjustified finding.

Yet to see these as consistent trends worldwide would be a mistake. The political economy of production, distribution, circulation and consumption of military videogames reveals that overwhelmingly these are Western-made games, distributed by Western companies and played by Western players. While PC gaming is more ubiquitous (for example, *World of Tanks*, made by the Belarusian developer Wargaming, has 140 million registered accounts and was initially released in Russia and China), console military videogaming – for example, on Xbox and PlayStation platforms – is heavily Western-centric. The *Call of Duty* series, for example, has been developed primarily by three development studios (Treyarch, Infinity Ward and Sledgehammer Games) and published by Activision, all of which are based in the US. Nearly 97% of total sales of this series are on consoles with sales of 138.84 million sales in North America, 90.92 million in Europe, 32.54 million in the rest of the world and 4.5 million in Japan.²⁹ Thus more than 86% of total sales are in Europe and North America: ‘Western voices’ are producing games about war which are overwhelmingly speaking to

Western players. Exposure to the representations outlined below is thus highly contingent, given this uneven engagement with military videogames worldwide.

The proliferation of military videogames in the West has resulted in a corresponding growth in scholarship, with much of the literature emphasising the ways in which these games were profoundly shaped by 9/11.³⁰ Initially this was indeed the case. However, as this article shows below, more recent releases have increasingly vacated contemporary conflict, and instead focused on past or future wars – this is a change which much of the recent literature fails to account for or acknowledge.

Much of the literature argues that Western-made military videogames are seen as providing players with a clear demarcation between the virtuous West and despotic irrational enemies, who are generally drawn from either George W Bush's 'axis of evil' – for example, *Homefront* (North Korea) and *Battlefield 3* (Iran and Iraq) – or from within the ongoing legacy of Cold War imaginaries – for example, the *Call of Duty Modern Warfare* series (Russian ultranationalists and unnamed Middle Eastern state)³¹, *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Future Soldier* (Russia) and *Battlefield 4* (China). Conflict is repeatedly framed as taking place between a virtuous West (portrayed as the victim of an unprovoked attack) and enemies who are beyond the boundaries of reason or diplomacy, thus forcing the West to use overwhelming yet always 'legitimate' military force – the message reflecting wider political discourses that war is ever present and that the War on Terror can only be won militarily.³² Military videogames thus offer what Vit Šisler terms an 'orientalist' framing in which the player is cast in the role of an American or Western soldier.³³ Invariably these soldiers are 'humanized and individualized by their nicknames or specific visual characteristics' - in contrast to an enemy who is 'collectivized and linguistically functionalized as "various terrorist groups", "militants" and "insurgents"'. This demarcation is reinforced through the depiction of the West as moral, professional and courageous, while the non-Western enemy is depicted as immoral, unprofessional, and

cowardly through its attacks on civilians, indiscriminate violence and failure to respect the rules of engagement. The representations thus match the Manichean simplicity offered within Bush's War on Terror, clearly distinguishing a virtuous West from the barbaric non-Western other.³⁴

Underpinning these clear distinctions, and integral to the development of many post-9/11 games, is the developers' aim of offering representations that look, sound and feel authentic and that give players an experience of either 'real conflicts' or plausible scenarios set in the present day.³⁵ Reflective of the military–entertainment complex, collaboration with military experts is extensive to render realistic-looking environments and weapons, with physics systems that reflect real-world ballistics and environmental destruction, and sound that authentically captures battlefield chatter and recreates real weapon systems. Furthermore, military videogames lay claim to authenticity through links to serving military personnel and advisers (such as members of special forces) who help frame their stories and narratives, as the then executive producer of the game *Medal of Honor Warfighter* (2012) makes clear:

This story in this game is actually written by the Tier 1 operators while they were deployed overseas. We had about a dozen on the last game [*Medal of Honor*] helping us craft that narrative, in this game we have got twice that many . . . everything from the dialogue to the chatter to the environments to the character – the best traits of all the guys are all infused into this product.³⁶

There is, however, a striking difference between a military videogame's 'ability to render photorealistic graphics and surround sound with broader notions of experiential realism'.³⁷ Scholars have strongly critiqued the failure of both commercial military videogames and recruitment-based games such as *America's Army* to accurately represent the demands of real war-fighting alongside a failure to reflect the 'unpleasant aspects of warfare such as the killing

of civilians and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), while celebrating more palatable elements like spectacular explosions, battlefield tactics, and recreations of historical firefights'.³⁸ For critics, therefore, there is a stark difference between making a game appear realistic in terms of visual fidelity, and offering a realistic representation of war given the inevitable horrors of the battlefield.³⁹

[H2]Consequences of Representations

Following the 1991 Gulf War, conflict has been increasingly presented to the public in highly visual terms as a form of spectacle through rolling 24-hour news coverage and war-related popular culture, contributing to what Stahl terms the growth of *Militainment*: that is, the increasing framing of the military and war as entertainment.⁴⁰ He argues that war reporting increasingly began to resemble sports coverage, alternating between news anchor and highlights, using specific scenes for 'slow motion instant replay', while 'military experts provided color commentary'.⁴¹

The consequences of this increasing portrayal of war as entertainment – a shift to which rising sales of military videogames contribute – may suggest a move towards an increasingly soporific citizenry which becomes progressively disengaged, no longer questioning '*why we fight*' and instead losing 'itself in the fact *that we fight*'.⁴² Reflecting this view, there remains an overwhelming assumption within the literature of an acquiescent citizenry, with the playing of military games seen as implicitly demonstrating support for war and the messages within military videogames engendering support for the military and military action more generally. Yet citizens are in fact seen to demonstrate a variety of responses – from the 'distraction, bedazzlement and voyeurism' of the soporific 'citizen spectator' in Stahl's terms to being

positively mobilised to actively support military action (a 'virtual citizen soldier' engaging in 'interactive war' as Stahl puts it).⁴³

Indeed, it is important to remember that the public is not necessarily passively receiving media imagery – it is not 'absorbent sponges', according to Colin McInnes – but remains capable of independent thought and judgement.⁴⁴ While there is currently a lack of research exploring the links between public attitudes and the consumption of military games, a study in 2013 by Ruth Festl, Michael Scharkow and Thorsten Quandt that explored the relationship between support for the military among both gamers and non-gamers reaffirms McInnes's views, finding no positive correlation between gaming and support for the military, even among those who were heavy players of military videogames.⁴⁵ A more recent study by Toby Hopp, Scott Parrott and Yuan Wang published in 2018 broadly supports this earlier work, albeit with some findings which suggest that players of military videogames were more likely to support violent acts against others and see them as 'worthy, just, necessary, or inconsequential' (what they term 'moral disengagement').⁴⁶

Furthermore, the desire to make 'authentic' games has resulted in some controversy and critical reaction, from gamers and non-gamers alike.⁴⁷ Perhaps most infamously, the release of *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (2009) with its 'airport massacre' sequence resulted in debate in the UK House of Commons in relation to videogame related violence,⁴⁸ while cuts were made in Russian to the content of the game.⁴⁹ *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands* (released in 2017) was also involved in controversy; the Bolivian government filed a formal complaint to the French embassy in relation to the depiction of Bolivia as being over-run by narco-terrorists.⁵⁰ *Medal of Honor* (2010), set in the contemporary War in Afghanistan, also provoked considerable opposition in the UK and the US. Objections centred on the multiplayer mode in which it was originally envisaged that players would be able to play as either American forces or the Taliban. In particular, the then UK Defence Secretary Liam Fox called for

the game to be banned, stating that he was 'disgusted' by it – his intervention being framed in terms of players being able to kill British soldiers, even though they were not represented in the game.⁵¹ In the US, some retailers proposed banning the game⁵² and there was extensive criticism from the families of US military personnel, with the developers ultimately backing down and renaming the Taliban as Opposing Force (Op-For).⁵³

In terms of players, there have also been important examples of opposition and resistance targeted at military videogames: whether through protests within military game spaces (for example, Joseph DeLappe's activities in *America's Army* under the moniker 'DeadInIraq' in which he logged onto the servers of the game once a day and typed in the names of American service personnel killed in action);⁵⁴ modifications to existing games to protest against war (such as the modification 'Velvet Strike' which alters the online shooter *Counter Strike* allowing players to spray peace symbols within the game); or through the development of videogames – both commercial and activist made games – which explicitly set out to critique war.⁵⁵ In part, these actions reflect ethical questions about the depiction of war within military videogames, with, for example, the Red Cross criticising the portrayal of war in military games for failing to reflect the rules of military engagement and failing to portray civilian casualties, so presenting war as 'clean' and without collateral damage.⁵⁶

Perhaps most significantly, in terms of demonstrating the critical faculties and agency of gamers, there was widespread opposition to what was deemed to be 'excessive militarism' within the promotional campaign for the game *Medal of Honor Warfighter* (2012). The developer produced a series of advertisements which announced official partnerships with weapons and military equipment companies, with the developer's website containing click-through links in the US to partner websites so enabling the purchase of semi-automatic weapons and sniper rifles alongside a licensed tomahawk axe.⁵⁷ The response of the videogaming community was extremely hostile, emphasising the inappropriateness of such

formal links between the games industry and weapons manufacturers.⁵⁸ This controversy had an important legacy: since then, there has been far less emphasis on the explicit celebration of formal links between military videogames and weapons companies.

[H1] Contemporary Representations: Vacating the Post-9/11 Imaginary

Following these controversies, sparked by engagement with contemporary conflicts and battlefields, there have been significant shifts in recent years away from making games which are influenced by the War on Terror. These shifts – which the existing literature fails to acknowledge, analyse or account for – serve to close off spaces for popular culture to explicitly engage with contemporary war – with important implications, as this article shows below in the discussion of why this has happened, and why it matters.⁵⁹

First, the two key military shooter franchises (*Battlefield* and *Call of Duty*) have both turned to the past with recent releases that have focused on the First and Second World Wars. *Battlefield 1* (2016; total sales: 12.39 million) is set in the First World War; and *Call of Duty: WW2* (2017; total sales: 19.72 million) and *Battlefield 5* (2018; total sales: 7.3 million) are set in the Second World War.⁶⁰

Second, a number of games have been released that are set in the future and/or near future with quite different enemies to those games set in the present or past. For example, *Call of Duty: Black Ops III* (set in the period 2065–70; total sales: 26.69 million) offers enemies which are a combination of a terrorist faction from Singapore alongside a state-based supranational military entity (the Nile River Faction) which combines forces from Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, Kenya and Uganda. Similarly, *Call of Duty: Ghosts* (set in 2027; total sales: 28.8 million) pits the player against a collaboration of South American countries (the

Federation), albeit under the leadership of a former senior US Special Forces operative who was captured and brainwashed by the Federation in 2015.

Third, there has been the growth of videogames based in contemporary settings but sitting outside the frame of the War on Terror. These 'domestic insurgency games' usually cast the player in the role of either a secret national security team neutralising domestic terrorist threats or as a highly militarised police officer involved in a 'war' against drugs cartels or organised gangs. These games thus reduce complex social problems such as the 'war on drugs' to conflict with finite networks of actors who can be successfully eliminated by the player. *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Wildlands* (total sales: 4.77 million),⁶¹ for example, plays out in a setting in which a Mexican drugs cartel has invaded neighbouring Bolivia and destabilised the region due to the presence of its criminal activity and drug dealing. The game places the player in the role of a member of US Special Forces (Ghosts) charged with destroying the cartel and providing military assistance to local rebel groups who are fighting the same organisation. In such games, while nominally bound by the rule of law, the player – as in military combat games – relies on a shoot-and-destroy mechanic for success. The games thus promote a highly problematic assumption that complex social and political problems such as the war on drugs or domestic insecurity can be solved militarily.

Cumulatively, these moves have served to change the nature of the enemies depicted in many contemporary videogames, moving beyond the axis of evil and Cold War enemies. They change the setting from conventional wars between states to wars against non-state actors such as terrorists and drug cartels, and promote the view that war is ubiquitous and everywhere. The key shift, however, enabled by the change in temporal frames, is one from the War on Terror – which cannot be won – either to a fantasy future where victory is possible, or to past wars - First and Second World Wars - which have always and already been won.

These changes in representational focus have important implications for production and have been reflected in changes to key aspects of the military–entertainment complex set out above. While, post-9/11 military videogames, such as *Medal of Honor* (discussed above), made extensive use of military consultants and actively emphasised the central role that the links to the military had in the game developer's ability to deliver an authentic experience to the gamer, in contrast, the development of historically focused games such as *Battlefield 1* (set in the First World War) or *Call of Duty WWII* have relied instead on active collaboration with military historians. *Call of Duty WWII*, for example, was developed with the involvement of historian Martin K A Morgan who accompanied the developers on field trips to battlefield sites in Europe as senior members of the development team sought to develop an affective experience of the battlefield.⁶² This change is important as it suggests a weakening of the central role of the military–entertainment complex to the production of military videogames.

In the case of future-focused games there have also been important, albeit less pronounced, changes to the nature of the military–entertainment complex. Given the future setting and hence speculative nature of games such as *Call of Duty Black Ops II* (which is set in two time periods – 1987–89 and 2025) and *Call of Duty Black Ops III* (set in 2065), they involve the player using military technologies and weapons systems which have not yet been developed and are based on conflict settings which are more fantastical in nature. The developers of such games have thus turned to work with military futurists and academic experts on future war, marking an important shift in the nature of their links with the military.⁶³ The military–entertainment complex has been further solidified as some videogame developers have become active as consultants to policymakers and think tanks on the basis of their capacity to imagine plausible future war scenarios. For example, Dave Anthony (writer and producer on *Call of Duty Black Ops*, *Call of Duty Black Ops II* and *Call of Duty Black Ops III*) has worked as a fellow of the Atlantic Council and as an adviser to US military strategists.⁶⁴ In

the case of future-centred wargames, therefore, what has increasingly emerged is a pattern which began to develop in the aftermath of 9/11 with the military and entertainment sectors collaborating to prepare for future war based on the creative impetus of the film and videogames industry. For example, research on the Institute for Creative Technologies (established in 1999) has emphasised the way in which US universities, the military and entertainment sectors formally work together in what Michael J Shapiro has termed 'the tertiary spatialization of terrorism'.⁶⁵ Overall, therefore, the changes in representations identified here have been matched by important changes to the nature of the links between the military and videogames developers which are integral to the history of the medium, with the existing literature failing to adequately account for either.

[H2] Beyond 9/11: Why has this happened?

There are three important and inter-related explanations as to why such changes in representation have occurred.

The shift could simply reflect cyclical and commercially driven shifts in the industry based around 'fatigue', namely the perception that players have reached saturation with 9/11-based games and so seek new experiences, either set in the past or future. Such an explanation links to marketing considerations and would emphasise falling sales of contemporary 9/11 wargames.⁶⁶ The proliferation of Second World War-themed games would thus reflect a cyclical return to earlier periods of military game development – the period between the late 1990s and early 2000s when Second World War-themed games were particularly commercially successful. Similarly, the growth of future war settings can be seen as offering endless possible scenarios which are engaging to players. Yet this article argues that an emphasis on *exclusively* commercial considerations fails to link these shifts to their

geopolitical parallels. The shifts within the industry instead reflect a wider sense of war fatigue, a search for nostalgia and the problems with making videogame representations of intractable conflicts.⁶⁷

The development of military games set in the past can thus instead be linked to the growth of nostalgia for past glories and certainties.⁶⁸ Unlike the War on Terror, which has uncertain outcomes, both the First World War and the Second World War offer scenarios that Western audiences know they can win, and know that they did win: there is thus a certain outcome. Military videogames present both the First and Second World Wars similarly, with no account taken of the work of military historians who present the First World War as less 'clear cut', for example, in terms of military casualties from trench warfare and the relatively limited effectiveness of military leadership compared with the Second World War.⁶⁹ Furthermore, such historical games offer settings in which there is a clear demarcation between allies (friends) and enemies with little contestation about right and wrong. The past offers up playable scenarios with clear enemies and clear ends.

These games therefore illustrate a sharp contrast with military videogames set in the 9/11-infused present, which must confront the political reality that contemporary conflicts are increasingly seen as intractable. The West is not winning the contemporary War on Terror – indeed this war has been increasingly and painfully acknowledged to be unwinnable, certainly when compared with the First and Second World Wars.⁷⁰ In terms of the broader public understanding and political framing of present war, therefore, its framing in Manichean terms as a heroic struggle between good and evil is increasingly difficult, and the optimism of winning the war has dissipated. At the same time, a focus on military strategy is no longer seen as the solution to 'winning' the War on Terror, with policymakers, the media and public increasingly acknowledging that networked terror, for example, cannot be eliminated militarily. The implications for the players and producers of military videogames alike are profound,

posing the question: how do you provide entertainment about an intractable unwinnable conflict? The answer appears to be that you cannot, and do not.

[H2] Why Does it Matter?

So why does this matter? And how do these changes in focus serve to simultaneously depoliticise and re-politicise popular culture?

If military games have a role – as with all other elements of popular culture – in shaping public attitudes, the absence of videogames and popular culture (more generally) which explicitly engage with scenarios from the 9/11 present may lessen support for the military and/or conflict. If popular culture is seen as integral to building support for war among the public – as was seen during the Second World War, for example – then its absence may have important implications.

In addition, the shifting focus of military games away from the 9/11-infused present to a focus on the past and future offers up important insights into shifting public values, away from the overwhelming support for military action which immediately followed 9/11. The West now finds itself in a period in which politicians and the public alike increasingly acknowledge that the War on Terror cannot be 'won' militarily; indeed, it is increasingly impossible to know what 'winning' would look like. This has given rise to a growth of popular culture which vacates the challenging present to deliver experiences which can be won: a proliferation of science fiction, superhero films, and nostalgic films and videogames centred on the past, that in different contexts present a variety of scenarios in which war is both virtuous and winnable.

Such nostalgia for past (or future events) – Tracy C Davis refers to the latter as 'future nostalgia', in which fears of the future find solace in the certainties of the past, so contributing to the making of shared understandings – creates powerful reference points, which also

suggests that society is not yet ready to critique and/or learn from present military problems.⁷¹ The pattern in the present is brought into striking focus when compared with the role of popular culture in the Vietnam War. The moral certainties of US military action were ruptured by the Vietnam War, and the US film industry moved from producing films in the early years of the war that were centred on an optimistic narrative about winning to a much darker perspective. As the US began to acknowledge the intractability and failure of the conflict, the soldier was increasingly portrayed as psychologically and physically destroyed: a proxy for the tattered social and political fabric of the US following that failure which was represented, for example, in films such as *The Deer Hunter* (1978), *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and *Taxi Driver* (1976).

To return to the present, the framing certainties of the War on Terror have long dissipated, and Western societies are tired of their governments' involvement in intractable and unwinnable wars. But where the failure of the Vietnam War gave rise to critique, today's film makers, and game developers and publishers have abandoned the popular cultural representation of conflict set in the present and instead retreated to a nostalgic past. Films such as *Fury* (2014), *Darkest Hour* (2017) and *Dunkirk* (2017) and games such as *Call of Duty WWII* (2017) and *Battlefield 1* (2016) reveal a hunger to return once more to the World Wars which the West has already won and in which its position as virtuous was assured.⁷² This suggests that – unlike the responses of popular culture to the final traumas of Vietnam – neither the UK or the US have yet fully faced up to, or recognised, the scarring effects of the present conflicts on their own polity and society. The implications are felt most acutely in the UK and North America as they have been the principal consumers of military videogames throughout the post 9/11 period, with most of these games made in North America. And given that the UK and the US were the primary contributors of troops to the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan (prior to the shifts in relative troop balance in the recent deployments in

Afghanistan), the implications for them in terms of war fatigue are greater, not least given that they invested more ethical and moral capital on a military solution in the aftermath of 9/11, and have suffered greater numbers of military casualties.

So why does this matter? It is only a game after all. In answering this question, there are four inter-related implications worthy of consideration. First, the shift in focus retains the commercial and cultural viability of military videogaming, keeping players engaged in virtual war and, through that, retaining an interest and engagement in conflict. Second, it closes off spaces for popular culture to explicitly engage with contemporary war. In so doing, this trend towards nostalgia in military videogames simultaneously depoliticises *and* repoliticises popular culture, as contemporary war is normalised and decontextualised through a shift to representations set in the past and future. Third, the production of both future and historic wargames powerfully suggests that war is ever present, with the West permanently engaged in war with fluid enemies. Finally, in shifting beyond the War on Terror towards non-military frames, these recent representations serve to underpin arguments that non-military problems such as the war on drugs should be resolved militarily. Overall, as Steven Poole argues, 'the more naturalistic videogames become in their modes of representation and modelling of real-life phenomena, the more they will find themselves implicated in political questions, and will need to have their ideology interrogated'.⁷³ This article goes some way to doing precisely that.

[Author bio] Nick Robinson is...

Nick Robinson is Associate Professor in Politics and International Studies, University of Leeds, UK. His ongoing research on the militarisation of social media and the politics of military videogames has been published in journals including *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, *Critical Studies on Security*, *Perspectives on Politics*, *Political Studies*, and *Political Quarterly*.

[Acknowledgements]

The author would like to thank Adam Chapman; David Mutimer; Jo Robinson; Matthew Kearns; Simon Philpott; Susan Jackson; the anonymous reviewers and the editors at RUSI.

¹ The terms 'videogame' and 'game' as discussed here encapsulate both console-based videogames and those played on personal computers and range from commercially produced boxed retail products to activist games made freely available for download.

² See Roger Stahl, 'Have You Played the War on Terror?', *Critical Studies in Media Communication* (Vol. 23, No. 2, June 2006), p. 118.

³ Charles Hables Gray, *Peace, War, and Computers* (London: Routledge, 2005); Marcus Power, 'Digitized Virtuosity: Video War Games and Post-9/11 Cyber-Deterrence', *Security Dialogue* (Vol. 38, No. 2, June 2007), pp. 276-78; Timothy Lenoir and Henry Lowood, 'Theaters of War: The Military-Entertainment Complex', in Helmar Schramm, Ludger Schwarte and Jan Lazardzig (eds), *Collection, Laboratory, Theater: Scenes of Knowledge in the 17th Century* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005).

⁴ Patrick Crogan, *Gameplay Mode: War, Simulation, and Technoculture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), pp. 14-15. On the use of gaming to enhance combat readiness see John Pettegrew, *Light it Up: The Marine Eye for Battle in the War for Iraq* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), p. 77.

⁵ Research and Markets, 'The Global Military Simulation and Virtual Training Market 2018-2028', July 2018, <https://www.researchandmarkets.com/research/32pfg5/global_military?w=4>, accessed 17 October 2018.

⁶ Bohemia Interactive Simulations, 'New AI Behaviors and Military Vehicle Capabilities in VBS3', 24 August 2017, <<https://bisimulations.com/company/news/press-releases/thu-08242017-0954/new-ai-behaviors-and-military-vehicle-capabilities-vbs3>>, accessed 29 October 2018.

⁷ America's Army, 'America's Army Backgrounder July 17', <<https://www.americasarmy.com/press>>, accessed 18 October 2018.

⁸ Roger Stahl, *Militainment, Inc.: War, Media, and Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 107.

⁹ Lev Grossman, 'The Army's Killer App', *Time Magazine*, 28 February 2005.

¹⁰ Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard, *The Hollywood War Machine: U.S. Militarism and Popular Culture*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 38-41, 47-63.

¹¹ On the central role of the Office of War Information to the production of pro-US Hollywood films during the Second World War see Clayton R Koppes and Gregory D Black, 'What to Show the World: The Office of War Information and Hollywood, 1942-1945', *Journal of American History* (Vol. 64, No. 1, June 1977), pp. 87-105.

¹² The literature here is extensive but see, for example, Daniel C Hallin and Todd Gitlin, 'Agon and Ritual: The Gulf War as Popular Culture and as Television Drama', *Political Communication* (Vol. 10, No. 4, 1993), pp. 411-24.

¹³ This can be quantified through the numbers of military games that are sold (their reach), the number that are produced and released in a given year (their scale), and the sales value of military games

(economic worth). See Nina B Huntemann, 'Playing with Fear: Catharsis and Resistance in Military-Themed Video Games', in Nina B Huntemann and Matthew Thomas Payne (eds), *Joystick Soldiers: The Politics of Play in Military Video Games* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 225–27.

¹⁴ On music see Christina L Baade, *Victory Through Harmony: The BBC and Popular Music in World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 11. On film see Boggs and Pollard, *The Hollywood War Machine*. On film as wartime propaganda see Jo Fox, *Film Propaganda in Britain and Nazi Germany: World War II Cinema* (Oxford: Berg, 2007). On film and its implications for collective memory of the past see Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2004). On the synergy between film and music see Kate Guthrie 'Vera Lynn on Screen: Popular Music and the "People's War"', *Twentieth-Century Music* (Vol. 14, No. 2, June 2017), pp. 249–52.

¹⁵ Santanu Das, 'Reframing First World War Poetry: An Introduction', in Santanu Das (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Poetry of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 4; Martin Stephen, *The Price of Pity: Poetry, History and Myth in the Great War* (London: Leo Cooper, 1996), p. xii. On poetry and British memory of the First World War see Jay Winter, 'Beyond Glory: First World War Poetry and Cultural Memory', in Das (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion*, pp. 242–43.

¹⁶ For sales figures see Activision, 'Activision Blizzard First Quarter Calendar 2019 Results Conference Call', 2 May 2019, <https://investor.activision.com/events/event-details/activision-blizzard-first-quarter-calendar-2019-results-conference-call>, accessed 30 July 2019. Revenue figures are estimated by the author from combining the following: Activision's 2016 announced figures which set out total revenues up until early 2016 are in Activision, 'Activision Press Release: Activision Blizzard Announces Fourth Quarter and Full Year 2015 Financial Results', 11 February 2016, <<http://investor.activision.com/releasedetail.cfm?ReleaseID=954612>>, accessed 16 October 2018; revenue figures for Call of Duty WW2 are reported at over 1bn in Gamespot, 'Call Of Duty: WW 2 Passes \$1 Billion In Worldwide Sales', 20 December 2017, <<https://www.gamespot.com/articles/call-of-duty-ww-2-passes-1-billion-in-worldwide-sa/1100-6455775/>>, accessed 30 July 2019; figures for Call of Duty Black Ops 4 are reported at over 1bn in Fox Sports, 'Call of Duty: Black Ops 4 makes over \$1 billion in under a month to become best-selling game of 2018', 24 November 2018, <<https://www.foxsportsasia.com/esports/callofduty/982991/call-of-duty-black-ops-4-makes-over-1-billion-in-under-a-month-to-become-best-selling-game-of-2018/>>, accessed 30 July 2019.

¹⁷ Stahl, 'Have You Played', p. 118.

¹⁸ J C Herz, *Joystick Nation: How Videogames Gobbled Our Money, Won Our Hearts and Rewired Our Minds* (London: Abacus, 1997), pp. 197–213; Tanner Mirrlees, *Hearts and Mines: The US Empire's Culture Industry* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016),

¹⁹ Tanner Mirrlees, 'Transforming *Transformers* into Militainment: Interrogating the DoD-Hollywood Complex', *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* (Vol. 76, No. 2, March 2017), pp. 416–23

²⁰ Nick Robinson, 'Militarism and Opposition in the Living Room: The Case of Military Videogames', *Critical Studies on Security* (Vol. 4, No. 3, November 2016), pp. 261–63; Tanner Mirrlees, 'Medal of

Honor: Militarism', in Matthew T Payne and Nina B Huntemann (eds), *How to Play Video Games* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2019), pp. 242–49.

²¹ Lenoir and Lowood, 'Theaters of War'.

²² Herz, *Joystick Nation*, pp. 209–11; Timothy Lenoir, 'All but War is Simulation: The Military-Entertainment Complex', *Configurations* (Vol. 8, No. 3, Fall 2000), pp. 322–28.

²³ Brendan Sinclair, 'America's Army Bill: \$32.8 million', 9 December 2009, <<https://www.gamespot.com/articles/americas-army-bill-328-million/1100-6242635/>>, accessed 29 October 2018.

²⁴ America's Army, 'America's Army Backgrounder July 17', <<https://www.americasarmy.com/press>>, accessed 18 October 2018.

²⁵ <http://www.armyjobs.mod.uk/startthinkingsoldier/Pages/Default.aspx>. Other examples in the UK case include *Operation X* (RAF), which simulates the role of the air force in a humanitarian operation, and the Royal Navy's *Green Ops* game for recruitment to the Royal Marines. I am grateful to Matthew Kearns on this point.

²⁶ Bilal Zain, quoted in Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 2nd edition (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 209.

²⁷ Peter Wignell, Sabine Tan and Kay L O'Halloran, 'Under the Shade of AK47s: A Multimodal Approach to Violent Extremist Recruitment Strategies for Foreign Fighters', *Critical Studies on Terrorism* (Vol. 10, No. 3, 2017), pp. 445–46.

²⁸ Stahl, *Militainment, Inc.*, p. 96.

²⁹ Data based on author's calculations from vgchartz.com. Total worldwide PC sales are recorded as 8.55 million of total sales of 266.9 million (October 31st 2017).

³⁰ Much of the key literature is cited below but for a key book-length study see Matthew Thomas Payne, *Playing War: Military Video Games after 9/11* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2016).

³¹ The representations in the *Call of Duty Modern Warfare* series are problematised by the end of *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* which reveals that a conspiracy of convenience between an American military general (who wishes to maintain the military capabilities of the US) and a Russian ultranationalist (who is similarly motivated to enhance/maintain the military credibility of Russia) prompted the Russian invasion of the USA.

³² Jack Holland, *Selling the War on Terror: Foreign Policy Discourses After 9/11* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 110–18; Johan Höglund, 'Electronic Empire: Orientalism Revisited in the Military Shooter', *Game Studies* (Vol. 8, No. 1, September 2008), p. 10.

³³ Vít Šisler, 'Digital Arabs: Representation in Video Games', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* (Vol. 11, No. 2, May 2008), p. 208.

³⁴ Taesuh Cha, 'American Exceptionalism at the Crossroads: Three Responses', *Political Studies Review* (Vol. 13, No. 3, August 2015), p. 360.

³⁵ Höglund, 'Electronic Empire', pp. 4–5.

³⁶ Gametrailers.com, 'GDC 2012: Tier 1 Returns Interview', <<http://www.gametrailers.com/videos/6i53fj/medal-of-honor-warfighter-gdc-2012-tier-1-returns-interview>>, accessed 4 September 2013; cited in Robinson, 'Militarism and Opposition in the Living Room', p. 262.

³⁷ Matthew Thomas Payne, 'War Bytes: The Critique of Militainment in *Spec Ops: The Line*', *Critical Studies in Media Communication* (Vol. 31, No. 4, October 2014), p. 267.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

³⁹ The discussion of realism is also further explored by Alexander Galloway who uses the term in ways derived from cinema and art theory, with a 'realist game' being associated with social and political struggle. Realism, for Galloway, is thus not to be conflated with visual or gameplay authenticity but is in fact centred on the perspective which the player takes on the war being depicted (what Galloway terms the 'fidelity of context' of the player). Alexander R Galloway, *Gaming: Essays in Algorithmic Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

⁴⁰ Stahl, *Militainment Inc.*, p. 6, p. 41.

⁴¹ Christina Scodari cited in Stahl, *Militainment Inc.*, p. 51. See also Christina Scodari, 'Operation Desert Storm as "Wargames": Sport, War, and Media Intertextuality', *Journal of American Culture* (Vol. 16, No. 1, 1993), pp. 1–5.

⁴² Stahl, *Militainment Inc.*, p. 31. Emphasis in original.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 42; Robin Andersen, *A Century of Media, A Century of War* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), p. 244.

⁴⁴ Colin McInnes, *Spectator-Sport War: The West and Contemporary Conflict* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002), p. 146.

⁴⁵ Ruth Festl, Michael Scharkow and Thorsten Quandt, 'Militaristic Attitudes and the Use of Digital Games', *Games and Culture* (Vol. 8, No. 6, November 2013), pp. 397–403. See also Huntemann, 'Playing with Fear', pp. 231–33; Payne, *Playing War*, pp. 186–90.

⁴⁶ Toby Hopp, Scott Parrott and Yuang Wang, 'Use of military-themed first-person shooter games and militarism: An investigation of two potential facilitating mechanisms', *Computers in Human Behavior* (Vol. 78, No. 1, January 2018), pp. 193. See pp. 196–7 for discussion of the results.

⁴⁷ The examples offered here are certainly not the only cases of controversy in relation to military videogames but they are illustrative of the general trends. The proposed game *Six Days in Fallujah* centred on six days of heavy fighting in 2004 in Iraq was cancelled in 2009 following considerable criticism about the appropriateness of developing a game focused on such a recent period of conflict given the casualties.

⁴⁸ *Hansard*, House of Commons, 'Byron Review', Parliamentary Debates, 9 November 2009, cols 9–10.

⁴⁹ Nick Cowen, 'Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 Edited for Russia', *The Telegraph*, 17 November 2009.

⁵⁰ *Reuters*, 'Bolivia Complains to France about its Portrayal in Video Game', 2 March 2017.

⁵¹ BBC, 'Liam Fox Defends Call for Ban of Medal of Honor Game', 23 August 2010.

<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-11056581>>, accessed 23 August 2010.

⁵² Brian Crecente, 'Video Game Pulled Globally from Military Stores over Taliban Inclusion', *Kotaku*, 2 September 2010, <<http://kotaku.com/5628741/gamestop-pulls-video-game-from-military-stores-over-taliban-inclusion>>, accessed 10 March 2012.

⁵³ Simon Parkin, 'Military Stores Ban Medal of Honor Despite Removal of Taliban Name', *Gamasutra*, 6 October 2010,

<http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/121536/Military_Stores_Ban_Medal_of_Honor_Despite_Removal_O

f_Taliban_Name.php>, accessed 25 March 2013. For an overview see Robinson, 'Militarism and Opposition in the Living Room', pp. 266–67.

⁵⁴ Dean Chan, 'Dead-in-Iraq: The Spatial Politics of Digital Game Art Activism and the In-Game Protest', in Huntemann and Payne (eds), *Joystick Soldiers*, pp. 272–86.

⁵⁵ Examples of commercial games which seek to critique war include *Spec Ops: The Line* and the *Metal Gear Solid* series; examples of activist-made games include *Unmanned*, *Killbox* and *September 12th*. See Nick Robinson, 'Videogames, Persuasion and the War on Terror: Escaping or Embedding the Military–Entertainment Complex?', *Political Studies* (Vol. 60, No. 3, October 2012), pp. 513–109.

⁵⁶ Cited in Brian Crecente, 'War Crimes in Video Games Draw Red Cross Scrutiny', Kotaku, 2 December 2011, <<https://kotaku.com/5863817/war-crimes-in-video-games-draw-red-cross-scrutiny>>, accessed 9 November 2018. The Red Cross has since removed the original video and report from the internet.

⁵⁷ Ryan Smith, 'Partners in Arms: In their Quest for Realism, Military Shooters have Ventured into Murky Moral Territory', *The Gameological Society*, 13 August 2012, <<http://gameological.com/2012/08/partners-in-arms/>>, accessed 25 March 2013. The content has now been removed from the internet by the publisher Electronic Arts.

⁵⁸ Robinson, 'Militarism and Opposition in the Living Room', pp. 268–70.

⁵⁹ In offering the following analysis, this article notes that there are also a number of military games (for example, the *Halo*, *Gears of War* and *Doom* series) which are based in a science fiction setting and which can be seen as embracing metaphor, allegory and fantasy in their depiction of military conflict and which, therefore, can be seen to engage with contemporary political concerns. Such games, while important, are beyond the scope of this analysis. On zombie Nazi games as historical allegory see Adam Chapman, 'The Undead Past in the Present – Historical Anxiety and the Nazi Zombie', in Stephen J Webley and Peter Zackariasson (eds), *The Playful Undead and Video Games: Critical Analyses of Zombies and Gameplay* (London: Routledge, 2019). I am grateful to one of the reviewers for this insight.

⁶⁰ Sales estimates are compiled from vgchartz.com. It is important to emphasise that data related to more recent titles is likely to be a significant underestimate due to difficulties with capturing digital sales which are increasing rapidly. *Battlefield 5* sales from Matthew Rocco, 'Game Makers' Shares Hit in Battle Royale with "Fortnite"', *Financial Times*, 5 February 2019.

⁶¹ Estimate from vgchartz.com. Ubisoft reports 10 million registered players, including those purchasing second-hand copies of the game. See Ubisoft, 'Ubisoft Reports Full-Year 2017-18 Sales and Earnings Figures', 17 May 2018, <https://globenewswire.com/news-release/2018/05/17/1508389/0/en/UBISOFT-REPORTS-FULL-YEAR-2017-18-SALES-AND-EARNINGS-FIGURES.html>>, accessed 12 February 2019

⁶² This was extensively emphasised by Activision in its promotional campaign for the game. See, for example, Activision, 'Official Call of Duty®: WWII – "Brotherhood of Heroes" Documentary', <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ffKKIhCVB8&feature=share>>, accessed 10 May 2019; *GamesTM*, 'Call of Duty WWII', October 2017, pp. 28–37.

⁶³ See, for example, Yannick LeJacq, 'Speakeasy: Secrets of Call of Duty: Black Ops II', *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 November 2012, <<https://blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/2012/11/12/secrets-of-call-of-duty-black-ops-ii/>>, accessed 30 July 2019.

⁶⁴ On the links between Dave Anthony and think tanks/the military see Mark Piesing, 'Call of Duty Designer Dave Anthony is Advising America on the Threats that Could Cause the Apocalyptic', *The*

Independent, 21 October 2015; Atlantic Council, 'Call of Duty Writer and Director Dave Anthony Named Nonresident Fellow at Atlantic Council', 22 September 2014, <<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/news/press-releases/call-of-duty-writer-and-director-dave-anthony-named-nonresident-fellow-at-atlantic-council>>, accessed 10 May 2019; *BBC News*, 'Can US Military Learn from Call of Duty?', 3 November 2014.

⁶⁵ Michael J Shapiro, *Cinematic Geopolitics* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 30.

⁶⁶ Looking at sales of the best-selling *Call of Duty* series, however, challenges the assumption that the change in focus of military games has been driven by commercial considerations with the broadly similar sales regardless of temporal setting. For example, sales of 9/11-inspired *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3* (released: 2011; 30.71 million in sales) are similar to both past/future-set *Call of Duty Black Ops 2* (released: 2012; 29.17 million in sales) and future-set *Call of Duty Ghosts* (released: 2013; 28.8 million in sales).

⁶⁷ For a landmark on how war and compassion fatigue interrelate, see Susan D Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999). See also Philip Hammond, *Framing Post-Cold War Conflicts: The Media and International Intervention* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

⁶⁸ For more on nostalgia and the film industry, see Boggs and Pollard, *The Hollywood War Machine*, pp. 97–126.

⁶⁹ For a highly useful comparison see, for example, G D Sheffield (ed.), *Leadership and Command: The Anglo-American Military Experience Since 1861* (London: Brassey's), pp. 1–16 (Chapter 1). For a stinging critique of First World War leadership, see John Laffin, *British Butchers and Bunglers of World War One* (Stroud: Budding Books, 2003). For a multifaceted (and more sympathetic) discussion of First World War leadership which incorporates the impact of communication, the centralisation and decentralisation of military command, military culture and personal ties alongside the effectiveness of leadership and impact of personality see Jonathan Boff, *Winning and Losing on the Western Front: The British Third Army and the Defeat of Germany in 1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 179–225.

⁷⁰ Theo Farrell, *Unwinnable: Britain's War in Afghanistan 2001-2014* (London: Vintage, 2018); Max Fisher, 'In Afghanistan's Unwinnable War, What's the Best Loss to Hope For?', *New York Times*, 1 February 2018.

⁷¹ Tracy C Davis, 'Performative Time', in Charlotte M Canning and Thomas Postlewait (eds), *Representing the Past: Essays in Performance and Historiography* (Iowa City, IA: Iowa University Press, 2010), pp. 149–51.

⁷² There are, of course a few exceptions such as the film *In the valley of Elah* and the game *Spec Ops: The Line*, both of which offer narratives and representations that portray the soldier as traumatised. See also the game *This War of Mine* which opens up a space for a critique of war by presenting it from the perspective of its civilian victims. See also Shapiro, *Cinematic Geopolitics*, pp. 37–38.

⁷³ Steven Poole, 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames', revised edition, Fourth Estate, 2004, <<http://stevenpoole.net/trigger-happy/afterword-2004/>>, accessed 10 September 2008.