

Opinion – Will NATO Collapse? Gamers Rejoice

Written by Jack Dulgarian

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JACK DULGARIAN, NOV 4 2025

World War III is underway and the liberal world order is officially over. NATO members have defected from America's national security sphere in favor of outsourcing their warfighting to the mysterious "Pax Armata" ("Armed Peace"). This is not our reality...yet? Game enthusiasts have long awaited the newest release of *Battlefield 6* set in the near future. The game's sales have shattered record revenues thus far. A former CEO from *Battlefield's* competitor and higher grossing game franchise, *Call of Duty*, recently said his former title will suffer to *Battlefield's* success. It will likely gross tens, if not, hundreds of millions of dollars for the publicly traded company Electronic Arts, now purchased by Saudi Arabia just before the game's release. Why should we care about a video game depicting a fictional intra-civilizational war? In short, because millions are going to spend countless hours on *Battlefield 6*, a far greater amount of time on this medium of entertainment than television, film, and social media, combined. Therefore, the themes of war expressed are necessary to discuss as it will probably shape public opinion for years to come.

Yet of course, it is necessary to qualify that in most video games, mechanical design and player retention almost always upstage adherence to real simulation. Especially considering features at the tactical level, such as a playable medic with a defibrillator who can instantly resuscitate a comrade hit by a tank projectile at near point-blank range. Also immortalized by *Battlefield* fans, a pilot ejecting from his fighter jet, then firing a rocket propelled grenade at an enemy jet to destroy it, and free fall back safely back into his aircraft. Therefore, when speculating on the reasons for why NATO may fight a conventional war against a private military contractor (or "PMC") organization in Western (or Eurasian) countries, we can only truly compare the fictional themes to modern geopolitical narratives.

In *Battlefield 6's* signature multiplayer mode, more than 30 players on each side fight for either American led NATO or European Pax Armata displaying the horrors of a modern conventional war fought on Western soil, including the Iberian Peninsula and Brooklyn, New York. The fictional plot begins as NATO members are leaving the alliance, outsourcing their national security entirely to Pax Armata. Yet, America and Pax overtly clash for the first time when a NATO military base in Mukhrovani, Georgia experiences what one fictional character describes as a "Pearl Harbor surprise attack," slaughtering American men and women mercilessly (*Battlefield 6* probably chose real life non-NATO member Georgia as a nation-state defecting to Pax to avoid a controversial prediction of a real ally leaving Washington's sphere). Thus begins the worst war of the 21st century, including the assassination of the NATO Secretary General and sleeper cell attacks across the continental United States.

There have been many video games which explore the concept of a modern great war between the West and Russia, China, and/or North Korea. Interestingly for our reality, a 2012 *Call of Duty* game correctly predicted the themes of "Cold War II," drone warfare, and information campaigns leading to political violence and extremism. Moreover, Electronic Arts is no stranger to mercenary warfighting including *Army of Two*, in which the U.S. Government nearly privatizes the entire Department of Defense (Department of War) to the evil Miami-based "Security and Strategy Corporation". The game's theme of mercenaries and a multi-national "Western Civil War" begs the question on the plausibility in our world. How does this scenario align with one that may happen in our reality?

It seems the game developers wanted to make America's enemy exclusively Western. Although the game does not explicitly include details on Pax Armata's financial backers, details emerge that the Western PMC group was born out of assisting NATO militaries with their national security needs. Pax is led a British SAS veteran and mercenaries shout orders in English wearing European inspired uniforms. PMCs use some Soviet/Russian and Chinese

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weaponry, but the majority are Western, not to mention their vehicles.

Notably there are no confirmations of outside support, suggesting that Washington's current real-life adversaries such as China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, and terrorist organizations are abstaining or minimally intervening in a Western Intra-Civilizational War. That is quite the plot hole! Gamers have already speculated on these adversarial interventions from information currently presented. Some have pointed out that China and Russia have war fatigue from the fictional 2020 War with the US (*Battlefield 4*).

Returning to our reality, we should look to one of the great experts on modern mercenaries, Dr. Sean McFate, a professor of war, military strategist, former U.S. Army soldier and mercenary himself. His two books, *The Modern Mercenary* and *The New Rules of War*, were developed following experiences with African warlords, the extractive industry, arms deals, and preventing genocide in the Rwanda region, according to his biography.

To overgeneralize McFate's two recommended books, modern governments are facing challenges to field native militaries capable of projecting power and defending territory. Therefore, it is simply more affordable to outsource warfighting to private organizations who are battle tested on a variety of tactics, techniques, and procedures to fight and win. PMC prominence is nothing new, it is a return to a pre-modern era of warfare where autocrats would outsource their best military means to the strongest warriors for hire. McFate argues that we will soon live in an era where mercenary armies are backed by the world's most financially powerful private individuals or institutions.

It seems that *Battlefield's* plot was modeled after a real-life PMC conflict that could have changed history forever. The Wagner Group, a Russian PMC organization notoriously caught headlines from the late 2010s to the early 2020s. Wagner has deployed throughout many regions of Africa, once fought against the United States in Syria, and held a very large role in the Russia-Ukraine War. The ill-famed group was led by Russian President Vladimir Putin's former political ally and chef, Yevgeny Prigozhin, who (for many reasons outside the scope of this analysis) decided in 2023 to use force to remove the Russian Defense Ministry (some claimed a coup against Putin himself).

Wagner's march from Rostov-on-Don lasted only about one day and with PMCs about 200 km outside Moscow, as Prigozhin claimed. It was Wagner's most consequential defeat and their permanent end as an independent Russian military force. One month later, Prigozhin, along with co-founder and neo-Nazi Dimitri Utkin would die in a plane crash from St. Petersburg to Moscow. A BBC judgement from a Russian telegram channel stated that the Wagner jet was shot down by Russian government air defense systems. Today, Wagner appears to be directly managed by the Russian Ministry of Defense.

The public-private transactional relationship from cooperation to crisis to outright conflict mirrors the NATO-Pax Armata fictitious story (the author will not spoil the game's ending). We have yet to see a PMC group which can match the capabilities and partnerships of Western governments, but that doesn't mean that themes of *Battlefield 6's* story can be taken for granted. The West's war fatigue is very real after (1) decades of counter-insurgent unconventional wars in Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen and elsewhere, (2) a proxy war with Russia, (3) shadow conflicts with Iran and Venezuela, (4) a nuclear standoff with North Korea and (5) a cold war with China.

Ongoing crises are leading to fears of a catastrophic conventional war, not fought between terrorists in civilian clothing and the U.S. Military, but rather, great power nations. *Battlefield 6's* PMC plot may not be realistic now, but we can certainly speculate that mercenary organizations over the next decade may come to comparable power status as nation-states. This reality would be inconceivable to politicians and security experts at the time of the American "unipolar moment" and Soviet Union collapse. But that was then, the future is very uncertain now. The emerging new world order is making events more complex than ever before. Governments and citizens around the world have the choices of peace, war, and grand private armies. No innocent person is safe as the future of organized violence in the hands of powerful entities with advanced technology is upon us. *Battlefield 6* will thematically remind us of this future while we enjoy shooting each other in the virtual representations of countries we call home.

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Jack Dulgarian is a Washington, D.C. based analyst and consultant working in national security and defense focusing on the near east, eastern Europe and great power competition. This is Dulgarian's second video game-geopolitical fusion analysis, previously exploring Call of Duty: Black Ops 2's predictions for 2025. He has been referenced by National Defense University's Joint Quarterly Magazine and given lectures to the State Department's Foreign Service Institute. You can follow him on Substack.