Virtual Invasion: 'Just War' and Orientalism in Call of Duty: Modern Warfare

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Before I was 18-years-old, I had cut short – virtually – thousands of lives. Feared throughout a pixelated world of war, 'terrorists' quaked at my seeming invincibility and impossible kill count. What would the United Kingdom and United States militaries do without me? In the virtual realm of war-based videogames, this is an experience shared among millions. As the most popular genre of videogame throughout the 'Western' world, military themed first-person shooters (FPS) are set in worlds of pixelated warfare, viewed through the eyes of an avatar that necessarily brandishes a weapon (Gough, 2019). Beloved in this category of computer-generated violence is the Call of Duty series.

Described by one Iraq war veteran as offering the "ultimate first-person shooter experiences" due to their "violent", "chaotic" yet "beautiful" portrayal of real life combat (Witchalls, 2017), Call of Duty titles have been consistently praised for their immersive gameplay, but criticised for their controversial political content (Stuart, 2019). Grounded in a distorted post-Cold War setting, the constructed political environment in Call of Duty is somewhat familiar. Nevertheless, wildly exaggerated violence, a binary of 'good' and 'evil', a reliance on racial stereotypes and a gross Euro-American bias to depictions of international relations, has condemned the series to a caricature of 'Western' propaganda in critical reviews. Even the limited academic scholarship on the implications of commercial war-based FPSs to international politics has highlighted Call of Duty as a series too implausible to be considered relevant to analysis (Gagnon, 2010). Attempting to shed this reputation, Call of Duty has adopted a more subtle approach in its latest release, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare. Swapping slaughter for stealth and relinquishing the bipartite portrayal of war for a slightly more nuanced narrative, Modern Warfare has been promoted as a truthful depiction of contemporary counter-insurgency. However, by relying on Orientalist caricatures, tendentious perceptions of violence and an overarching narrative of 'Western' righteousness, Modern Warfare is an insidious extension of previous Call of Duty titles.

In the following article I will apply Edward Said's classic Orientalism to 'Just War' international relations theory to illustrate the construction of a binary between the 'Western' sphere and 'Islamic civilisation'; central to the legitimisation of United States and United Kingdom-led counter-insurgency in the 'Middle East'. In doing this, I will draw parallels between narratives in Modern Warfare and mainstream media and political discourses regarding the 'altruism' of military intervention in the region. I am aware that by using the terms 'West' and 'Middle East' I am reifying and homogenizing both socio-geographical constructs (al-Azm, 1980). Howbeit, the operation of Modern Warfare and wider commentaries within this dichotomous framework requires referencing the two entities in this way in order to level an according critique. I will also tie Modern Warfare to the military-entertainment complex, making this article one of the first to forward the game as a work of consumable entertainment that benefits the armies of the UK and US through its reliance on Orientalist stereotypes and 'Just War' predilections. Following this, I will examine the role of war-games, of which Modern Warfare is a part, in the justification and proliferation of drone combat in the 'Middle East'. Lastly, by highlighting pro-'Western' perversions of historical and contemporary military events in Modern Warfare, I will demonstrate the impact of the game in manipulating past and present accounts of military intervention in the region.

Modern Warfare

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Marketed as the most 'realistic' of the Call of Duty series, Modern Warfare was released in October 2019. Set in the fictional 'Middle Eastern' state of Urzikstan, the Modern Warfare campaign depicts the endeavors of a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officer, British Special Air Service forces (SAS) and local rebels, the Urzikstan Liberation Force (ULF), in their struggle to 'free' the state of the conquering Russian military. Led by the brutal General Roman Barkov, and aided by the 'Islamic terrorist organisation' Al-Qatala, the Russians invaded Urzikstan in 1999, ostensibly seeking to bring peace and stability to the region. However, by developing and deploying a lethal chemical gas to pacify and massacre local civilians, as well as forcing Urzikstani's into slave labour, General Barkov provoked an international war, fuelled by the intervention of 'Western'-aligned powers, namely the United States and United Kingdom, further destabilising the state. Twenty years later, when Modern Warfare is set, war continues to rage. It is the mission of the games protagonists, from the CIA, SAS and ULF, to terminate the Barkov regime and quash the influence of Al-Qatala, thus establishing an era of liberal-democratic defined 'freedom' for the 'Middle Eastern' state.

Modern Warfare was met with great critical acclaim in the gaming world. It was rated 4.5/5 by PCMAG and was generally praised for attempting to move away from the overblown violence and wildly unrealistic depiction of war that had come to characterise previous titles in the series. The critical success of Modern Warfare was accompanied by financial reward. Within the first 3 days of its release Modern Warfare generated over $600 million in sales and surpassed the $1 billion mark in under 2 months (Strickland, 2019). To put this in to perspective, the highest grossing war film ever made, American Sniper, has generated just $547 million in box office and streaming sales up until 2020 (Rico, 2020). This suggests war games as an entertainment medium are much more profitable than war films. The reach of Modern Warfare has also been massive. Aided by continuously updating online game types, such as the hugely popular 'War Zone', Modern Warfare has become the most played game of this console generation. As of May 2020, over 47.5 million gamers have played Modern Warfare on the Playstation 4 alone. Of these 42% are from North America, 35% from Western and Northern Europe and only 3% from the 'Middle East' (Gamestat, 2020), indicating Modern Warfare is unquestionably a game made for, and played by, a 'Western' audience.

Defining the military-entertainment complex, Orientalism and 'Just War'

The critical, commercial and sweeping success of Modern Warfare intimately entwines the game with the military-entertainment complex. Defined by Sebastian Kaempf as the stretching of the arena of war further than physical battlefields, the military-entertainment complex involves the active collusion of the military with producers of culture for mutual benefit (Kaempf, 2019). Initially cooperation between the United States and United Kingdom's militaries was confined to war movies, literature, documentaries and television series. Yet the 21st century's financial and cultural capital available in an ever-expanding gaming market, has encouraged the Pentagon, and other 'Western' states security apparatuses, to increasingly invest in military focused FPSs developing titles such as America's Army (Kaempf, 2019). Modern Warfare, on the other hand, is not directly developed by the US and UK's militaries. Yet both armies still gain economically from its production. In their pursuit of 'realism', Activision, the developers of Modern Warfare, must pay the US and UK militaries a large license fee for using official weaponry and equipment in the game (Parkin, 2019), establishing an additional source of revenue for the armies, as well as premium advertising for 'Western' produced gadgetry.

This focus on 'genuineness' in Modern Warfare produces other ties with the US and UK militaries. As was widely publicized before the release of the game, Activision consulted retired Navy SEALs in the production process and even reproduced the SEALs movements through motion capture recording. This further increased the "authenticity", and thus legitimacy, of Modern Warfare in the eyes of potential consumers (Hume, 2019). Members of the Modern Warfare game development team are also known to have intimate links with the international security policy of the United States. For example, in 2014 Dave Anthony – a writer and games designer for Call of Duty – was recruited by Steve Grundman, a former Pentagon official, to the Atlantic Council, an international affairs think tank based in Washington DC. His role is to forward and evaluate non-traditional security scenarios that are potential threats to the stability of the United States. His assessments are then forwarded on to senior officers within the US military (Piesing, 2015). Clearly the links between the producers of Modern Warfare and the US and UK militaries run deep, providing a mutually beneficial relationship. The game receives authentication through the inclusion of branded weaponry and official tactics, while the militaries gain revenue, in the sphere of policy design and seminally through the socialization of war, which will be the main focus of this essay.

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Perhaps the most beneficial element of this relationship to the United States and United Kingdoms' armed forces is the legitimization of 'Western' military intervention in the 'Middle East' in Modern Warfare. As previously noted, Modern Warfare is an incredibly prolific FPS with a majority of its gamers residing in North America and Europe. By playing a game that lauds the necessity of 'Western' foreign intervention in the 'Middle East', participants in the campaign of the game internalise discourses and misrepresentations of warfare that support the presence of the US and UK militaries in the region. Driving the endorsement of 'Western' military presence in the 'Middle East' in Modern Warfare are Orientalist depictions of the region. This is dependent on a polarized imagining of the 'West' and the 'East' in which 'Western' states embark on a 'Just War' against 'Islamic terror', aligning with wider pro-'Western' portrayals of warfare in the region present in both media and political narratives.

Orientalism, as described by Edward Said, is a "'Western' style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the 'Orient'" (1978:3). Rather than existing as a real geographical space, the 'Orient', like the 'Middle East' and the 'West', is "an idea that has a history and tradition of thought, imagery and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the 'West'" (1978:5). A colonial continuation, Orientalism produces and reproduces imperial logics and action in all tiers of 'Western' society, including mainstream academic scholarship, political and media discourses and beyond, legitimising domineering state practices in a region where the geographical boundaries shift with 'Western' preference. Imagined as the antithesis to the reasonable and righteous 'West', the 'Orient', or the 'Middle East', and its inhabitants are homogenised and depicted as 'Islamic', irrational, backward and inherently violent. Such a dichotomy authorises the presence of 'Western' militaries in the 'Middle East' to deliver 'freedom', 'stability' and 'democracy', albeit of a 'Western' liberal-democratic kind, to a region that would otherwise fall in to tyranny (1978). Modern Warfare presents a modern manifestation of this Orientalist rationale.

Since 9/11, and the subsequent US and UK-led 'War on Terror', Orientalist discourses and ensuing state action in the 'Middle East' has increasingly relied on the linking of a homogenised 'Islam' with 'terrorism'. Islamic concepts, such as martyrdom, jihad, and the unification of religion with politics, have been misconstrued and manipulated in 'Western' scholarship and by political elites to construct and present an "Islamic culture of death" (Asad, 2007). Clichéd Orientalist tropes of premodernity, irrationality and an innate tendency towards violence have been applied to Islam and the 'Middle East', the imagined heart of the religion, to justify 'Western' imperial action in the region (Asad, 2010:3). US and UK-led counter-insurgencies that fall outside the parameters of international law have been excused and presented as both essential and moral in quelling the 'threat' of 'Islamic terrorism'. Rooted in medieval Christian theory, the 'Just War' paradigm, in which the 'War on Terror' is framed, exonerates 'Western' international and extrajudicial violence in the 'Middle East' through a lens of necessity and virtuosity (Asad, 2010). Margaret Denike has expanded on the above by claiming the 'Just' 'War on Terror', and the accompanying invasion of states in the 'Middle East', has been validated by the supposed provision of 'Western'-defined international human rights. Human rights abuses in the 'Middle East' are "invoked as an ethical justification, or 'just cause' for states to resort to military force against those that threaten them" (Denike, 2008:96). However, by invading states in the 'Middle East' in the name of human rights provision, 'Western' states often undermine their purported objective by violating the rights they seek to instil (Denike, 2008). Again, Modern Warfare is saturated with rights-based vindications for UK and US military intervention in the 'Middle East'.

The next section will examine the use of Orientalist constructions and pro-'Western' discourses in Modern Warfare. It will be asserted that this discourse frames US and UK-led counter-insurgencies in the 'Middle East' as 'Just'. Consequentially, the narrative within the game feeds the military-entertainment complex, whereby Modern Warfare is an instrument of propaganda that validates the presence of the UK and US armed forces in the 'Middle East'.

Orientalist dichotomies in Modern Warfare

Constructing virtual space in Modern Warfare

Crucial to the vilification of the 'Middle East' in Modern Warfare is the construction of virtual space within the game. Starting with the manufacturing of territorial nation-states, Modern Warfare relies on Orientalist dichotomies that solidify distorted conceptions of cultural, social and political content in the 'West' and 'Middle East'.

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Contrary to the inclusion of 'Western' states and their militaries as entities that reflect, albeit favourably, countries that exist in reality, Modern Warfare manufactures an imagined 'Middle Eastern' state in the form of Urzikstan. Conforming to an increasingly prevalent trend in 'Western' entertainment media, whereby states in the 'Middle East' are excluded from content to "eliminate the potential for offensiveness" (Alsultany, 2012:26), the fictionalisation of Urzikstan was justified by Jacob Minkoff, the single player design director of Modern Warfare, to avoid getting "wrapped up in the politics of any specific real world country" (Hall, 2019). The decision to exclude 'Middle Eastern' states whilst including 'Western' states in the game is inherently political. Proudly parading the flags of the United States and the United Kingdom in a quest for virtual 'freedom', Modern Warfare naturalises the existence of the UK and US. Such naturalisation is juxtaposed against the construction of an imagined 'Islamic' 'terrorist' state. The fictionalisation of Urzikstan undermines realities of war and suffering for the actual inhabitants of the targeted region.

A dry, arid and wilting wasteland, the geographical construction of Urzikstan epitomises a 'Western' tradition of representing the 'Middle East' as a timeless cultural vacuum. According to James Morris Blaut, such Orientalist depictions of a deserted 'Middle East' have been prominent since the 18th century and serve to construct the region as inherently despotic. By portraying the 'Middle East' as a geographical void, an accompanying political and cultural timelessness is assumed. Blaut contends that this has allowed Orientalist scholars and 'Western' political elites to link the stagnant region to that of the Orient in the Old Testament. The region is presumed not to have 'developed' in millennia and power relations are considered permanent. 'Western' powers, past and present, have rationalised their imperial expansion in the region, promising 'freedom' and a transformation of autocratic power relations, yet embody this form of tyranny through their invasion (Blaut, 1993)(Said, 1978).

Depictions of urban life in Urzikstan further reinforce Orientalist tropes regarding place through the medium of virtual space. In line with representations of 'Middle Eastern' cities in wider 'Western' media, the conurbations of Urzikstan are bombed-out shells, devoid of life other than 'Islamic terrorist' activity and war. Sparse, formless and desolate, the cities of Urzikstan act as hunting grounds for players to massacre hundreds of Al-Qatala fighters with almost no regard for their wider surroundings. Similar to the US and UK-led assault on Fallujah in Iraq between 2003-2004, in which the city was presented as a "terrorist nest" that relied on an ancient "impenetrability and structurelessness" for its defence, players in Modern Warfare are encouraged to "shoot anything that moves and anything that doesn't move" in their assault on Urzikstani cities (Graham, 2005:5). With no regard for international law, as is common in 'Western'-led counter-insurgencies in the 'Middle East', the protagonists of Modern Warfare use their "technologised mastery" to bring a "legitimate" and "rational" form of 'civilisation' to the urban spaces of Urzikstan (Graham, 2005:5). Incidentally, the only scenes of ordinary civilian life within Urzikstan occur in the US embassy, which falls victim to an attack by Al-Qatala. Presented as a space of bureaucracy and organisation, the embassy embodies the imagined 'rationality' of the 'West', as conceptualised by Said (1978), whilst the assault emphasises the violence and 'irrationality' of 'Islamic terror'. Simultaneously, by only including moments of civilian life in a domain of the US, players of Modern Warfare are prevented from recognising humanity that falls outside the boundaries of 'Western' nation-states.

Necessary for the Orientalisation of 'Middle Eastern' space in Modern Warfare is the oppositional representation of 'Western' geography. Whilst Urzikstan is constructed as a dehumanised zone of 'terrorist' violence, 'Western' cities in the game are true to life representations. In the second mission of the campaign, Al-Qatala 'terrorists' set off bombs and gun down civilians in the heart of London. Red post boxes, phone boxes, tube stations and the blazing signs of Piccadilly Circus indicate the action is taking place in England's capital. These markers of place concretise the 'threat' of 'terrorism' to the 'West' by demonstrating a virtual but conceivable situation whereby 'Islamic terrorists' attack a recognisable location. Heroic civilians and valiant policemen aid players in fending off the 'terrorists', humanising the 'West' and giving agency, denied to those in the 'Middle East', to its citizens. Sergeant Crowley, a member of the Counter Terrorist Specialist Firearms unit, directs the player throughout the mission and remarks upon its conclusion, "fucking hell, look what they did to our home". At no point in Urzikstan are the consequences of the 'War on Terror' for the civilian population remarked upon, normalising violence in the 'Middle East', whilst constructing "our home", or 'the West', as a safe haven where violence is exceptional. Furthermore, by choosing London, and specifically central London, a 'multicultural' homeland of capitalist and liberal-democratic ideology, as the location for the attack, Modern Warfare actively juxtaposes the 'irrational' violence of the homogenised 'Islamic terrorist' with the imagined epitomisation of 'civilized' 'Western' society.

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Racialised and gendered stereotypes in Modern Warfare

Reflecting their relevant geographies, the combatants of the 'Middle East' embody a monolithic and distorted representation of Islam, whilst the UK and US militaries are virtual incarnations of a glorified multi-ethnic and gender-equal liberal ideal.

In a classically Orientalist manner, the Al-Qatala militants are constructed as uniquely Arab and Muslim. Reflecting a trend in 'Western' media and popular culture, emphasised since 9/11, of representing "all Muslims as Arab and all Arabs as terrorists" (Merskin, 2004), Modern Warfare condemns inhabitants of the 'Middle East' to an affiliation with violence. Bypassing the specific sectarian affiliations and ethnic heterogeneity of real 'Islamic terror' organisations such as Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram and Islamic State, Modern Warfare manufactures a monolithic and racialised 'Islam' as the international 'enemy', legitimising 'Western' violence against non-combatants in the region.

Gendered Orientalist tropes in Modern Warfare further reinforce a notion of the 'Islamic Middle East' as a violent and patriarchal entity, justifying UK and US military intervention in the region. When featured in the game, the wives of Al-Qatala members are held in captivity by their militant husbands and plead for a cessation to the violence surrounding them. During a SAS raid on an Al-Qatala 'trap house' in Camden, one woman cries, "don't shoot they were going to kill me" – in reference to her male captors – whilst another protects herself by presenting her baby. By employing stereotypes of feminine passivity, fragility and motherhood, Modern Warfare entrenches Orientalist conceptions of Muslim women as "veiled, oppressed and in need of rescue" (Alsultany, 2012:71) and their male counterparts as inherently patriarchal, violent and controlling.

In reality, this gendered stereotype of Muslim women, and Islam as a whole, has countenanced UK and US military intervention in the 'Middle East'. Lila Abu-Lughod contends the imposition of 'universal human rights' have been championed by the liberal-democratic 'West' to justify "moral crusades", or 'Just War', in the 'Islamic world'. In a quest to "save brown women" from the assumed violence of "brown men", the 'West' has utilised notions of 'gender equality' to invade various states in the 'Middle East' (Spivak, 1988; Abu-Lughod, 2013). For instance, by linking the "fight against terrorism" to a "fight for the dignity and rights for women", former first lady Laura Bush forwarded a gender-based precedent for the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 (Berry, 2003:137). However, despite being the longest war in US history, with over $2 trillion spent on the invasion and at least 157,000 deaths, 43,000 of which have been civilians, Afghanistan is still ranked by Amnesty International as the worst place in the world to be a woman (Amnesty International, 2020; Crawford, 2020). Clearly the rights-based, 'Just War' rationale for intervention in Afghanistan is an example of Denike's critique of the UK and US militaries, whereby invasion is legitimised through a rhetoric of 'universal freedoms' yet in reality undermines and violates these 'rights' (Denike, 2008).

Contrary to the monolithic, racialised and gendered presentation of 'Islamic terror' organisations, is the multi-ethnic and gender equal portrayal of the UK and US militaries in Modern Warfare. Kyle Garrick, the main protagonist of the game, is a black Londoner serving in the SAS. Non-white characters in the CIA include multiple African-Americans, Dominique Tam and Daniel Shinoda, both of 'East-Asian' heritage and Alexia Valenzuela, of Mexican heritage. In fact, over half of the 'Western' soldiers in Modern Warfare are non-white, presenting a glorified liberal ideal of ethnic diversity and equality in the UK and US militaries. However, there are no characters in the CIA or SAS from a 'Middle Eastern' background in Modern Warfare, enforcing a subliminal racial othering. These exemptions of the 'Middle Eastern' subject from the imagining of national identity ostracises citizens of the region and enhances conceptions of an 'Islamic enemy'.

Women are also given a primary role in the 'Western' militaries of Modern Warfare. Kate Laswell, a Station Chief of the CIA, is one of the games most perspicacious characters, offering intelligent insight to aid completing each mission, whilst Charlotte Johnstone, a Scottish member of the SAS, is a valiant fighter with an impressive success rate in her missions. Just two of the multiple female characters in Modern Warfare, these women break gendered stereotypes of femininity that shackle 'Middle Eastern' women in the game. The prominence of these female characters in Modern Warfare has come in-line with a recent recruitment drive for women in both the CIA and SAS, furthering the case that the military and the entertainment industry harbour symbiotic connections. Since 2018, the SAS has actively attempted to recruit women to match obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty, whilst the

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CIA had its top 3 directorates filled by women in 2019 (Martin, 2020)(Newburger, 2019). Though gender equality is admirable, the push for female representation in the UK and US militaries should be seen as part of the "self-declared emancipatory feminist project" (Khalili, 2011:21), whereby 'Western' armed forces actively position themselves against their patriarchal 'Islamic' enemies. Again, it is worth emphasising that a rights-based discourse has been used to legitimise counter-insurgency in the 'Middle East'.

Orientalist depictions of violence in Modern Warfare

Contrasting goals, language, tactics, ability and modes of violence between Al-Qatala militants and 'Western'-aligned combatants in Modern Warfare further entrenches a 'Clash of Civilisations' (Huntington, 1993) understanding in the 'Western' imaginary. Whilst 'Islamic terrorism' is depicted as inherently irrational, brutal and evil, the violence of the US and UK militaries is put forward as necessary and 'Just'.

A virtual manifestation of the 'new terrorism' thesis, common in mainstream 'Western' political and media discourse, the Al-Qatala fighters of Modern Warfare are motivated by "hatred, fanaticism and extremism rather than political ideology" (Jackson, 2007:408). As with the construction of the aims of Al-Qaeda and other militant 'Islamic' organisations operating in the 'Middle East', the antagonists of Al-Qatala employ a "murderous and irrational" violence to "rectify humiliation" brought on by the 'West', with "no possibility of negotiation, compromise or appeasement" (Jackson, 2007:409). During a raid on his underground bunker the aptly named, shadowy leader of Al-Qatala, 'the Wolf', declares, "to wage war without sympathy, that is the only way to become a true soldier" and "to shed blood in revenge is always a victory". Never are the complex theological, social, economic and political doctrines that drive 'Islamic terror' organisations discussed in Modern Warfare. Even the name of the group, which roughly translates to 'The Slayers', condenses all aims in to an overarching objective of irrational violence.

In contrast to the narrow and villainous goals of Al-Qatala, is the 'Just' rationale of the UK and US militaries for war. Siding with the ULF, labelled 'freedom fighters' rather than 'terrorists', 'Western'-aligned soldiers in Modern Warfare seek only to 'liberate' Urzikstan from the threat posed by Russian forces and Al-Qatala. No wider geopolitical motivations for intervention are raised, suggesting 'Western' military presence in the 'Middle East' is an inherently altruistic venture that will unquestionably bring benefits to the occupied territory and its inhabitants, rather than for gains in global power and the control of resources (Khalili, 2011)(Hinnebusch, 2007).

Language also serves a dichotomous purpose in Modern Warfare. Al-Qatala militants persistently use religious, violent and informal speech during combat, imparting a perception of disorganisation and irrationality. Invoking Allah whilst spraying bullets from an AK-47, the 'terrorists' tie a specifically 'Islamic' religiosity to their violence and seem driven by irrationality – faith, emotion and evil – rather than sensibility. Again, reinforcing Orientalist conceptions of 'Islamic terrorists' and 'Middle Eastern' people.

In opposition to the unreasoned speech of Al-Qatala fighters is the rational – formalised, technical, detached – language of the US and UK militaries. Enemies are 'tangos', whilst an area rid of 'hostiles' is 'secure', separating the player from the carnage of war and loss of life through the medium of impersonal and unemotional military lingo. Consistent use of the phonetic alphabet further reinforces the organisational capacity of 'Western' militaries. By coordinating their activities through a practiced tongue of efficiency, the protagonists of Modern Warfare lend an air of structure, and thus respectability, to their violence. Moreover, the rigid language of the US and UK militaries serves as a metaphor for the purported structure an imposed liberal-democracy will bring to the lives of civilians in the 'Middle East'.

Associated with the disjunction of language between Al-Qatala fighters and the UK and US militaries is their contrasting tactics in Modern Warfare. Rather than the complex guerrilla operational warfare employed by militant 'Islamic' organisations in the 'Middle East' (Bunker, 2007), Al-Qatala fighters employ methods impossible in the real world of combat. For instance the Al-Qaeda tactic of 'swarming', whereby "five or more autonomous units" converge on a target and then "scatter for defensive purposes" (Bunker, 2007:325), has been manipulated to portray the Al-Qatala fighters as inept and irrational. In the game, instead of retreating to protect their lives, the militants stand their ground, determined in their quest to die for the cause. Activision have misrepresented martyrdom, connecting

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irrationality and incompetence with a will to sacrifice life in the name of God. Moreover, the ineptitude of the Al-Qatala fighters lends an inevitability to each mission, whereby 'terrorism' can only be defeated when confronted by 'Western' dominance.

The UK and US military strategy is presented as superior in Modern Warfare. 'Western' soldiers rarely die in the game, whereas one player can massacre literally hundreds of Al-Qatala members. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, the modelling of gameplay around real methods employed by the Navy SEALs entails a complexity to 'Western' combat not afforded to the Orientalised enemy. Players utilise the latest licensed advanced weaponry and equipment, including hand-held drones, night-vision goggles, various grenades, combat knives and motion-sensor radars, to systematically eliminate the enemy in an array of clinical approaches unavailable to the 'uncivilised' 'terrorist'.

The only weapons technology consistently used by Al-Qatala militants is the bomb. Beginning the game, players are transported into a van filled with 'terrorists' ready to trigger explosives strapped to their chests. The theme of 'suicide terrorism' runs throughout Modern Warfare, culminating in the execution of 'the Wolf' to thwart his self-detonation. Given the 'Western' obsession with 'Islamic suicide terrorism' since 9/11 (Asad, 2007), the primacy of the bomb in Modern Warfare is unsurprising. According to Talal Asad, 'Western' horror invoked by 'suicide terrorism' stems from the uncontrollability of the strike, as well as its inherent opposition to 'Western' liberal-rational norms. An act of true freedom that necessarily breaches a states' monopoly on violence, 'suicide terrorism' cannot be confined or sanctified by the nation-state. It is the ultimate visible protest against unjust state practice in the name of a believed higher power. The naturalised authority of the nation-state is superseded by a belief in the divine, whilst perpetrators elude the 'justice' of a law court, a bulwark of liberal-democratic legitimacy and order (Asad, 2007). Instead God is left to judge the subject, robbing the state of its power to dispense justice .The promotion in value of the non-material above the nation-state, the embodiment of 'Western' rational authority, positions 'Islamic suicide terrorism' as the antithesis of 'Western' power.

Comparatively, the total devastation of 'suicide terrorism' cements the act as 'irrational' in the 'Western' imaginary. Rather than taking life to save life, a common justification of liberal-democratic war, 'suicide terrorism' requires a momentary sacrifice of bodily mortality for a higher cause. Such forfeiting of material existence violates the secular and Judeo-Christian tradition that emphasises the salience of bodily mortality (Asad, 2007). As such, 'Western' logic rejects the notion that the immaterial self can ever take precedence over the material body. Therefore, 'suicide terrorism' has come to symbolise violence motivated by reasoning incomprehensible to secular 'Western' rationale. By continuously invoking 'suicide terrorism' as a technology of the Al-Qatala militants, Modern Warfare reinforces pre-existing Orientalist narratives in which Islam is demonised as an unintelligible ideology that produces a violence that too cannot be understood, exacerbating the players fear of 'Islamic terror'.

The use of chemical weapons by Russian and Al-Qatala forces in Modern Warfare further divides the 'Just' UK and US militaries from their 'uncivilised' enemies. Prohibited by international law, the supposed utilisation of chemical weapons by 'rogue' states and their 'terrorist' allies has consistently been used as a justification for military intervention in the 'Middle East' throughout the 'War on Terror' (Price, 1995). For instance, Iraq, Libya and Syria, all subject to UK and US-led counter-insurgency operations since 9/11, have been linked to developing chemical weaponry. Branded as "weapons of the weak", chemical weapons have been constructed as "cruel and treacherous" by 'Western' technological powers that govern the boundaries of acceptable 'civilised' warfare (Price, 1995:98). Contrary to the sanctioned proliferation of nuclear weapons as "tools of legitimate diplomacy" by authorised global powers, chemical weapons have become a "symbol of unacceptable violence" in the 'Western' dominated international sphere, demonstrating a Foucauldian "interpretive reversal" whereby powerful international actors set the boundaries of permissible action and discourse to maintain hegemony (Price, 1995:99). By delegitimising chemical weapons, the UK and US can simultaneously continue developing and using massively destructive conventional weapons in the 'War on Terror' and beyond without fear of an international outcry, whilst positing their adversaries as inferior and barbaric. Furthermore, as 'Islamic terrorists' have been constructed as morally unrestrained and irrational in the "lethality and indiscriminate nature" of their violence they may inflict, it is therefore assumed they are "more likely to use weapons of mass destruction" (Jackson, 2007:409).

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This Orientalising narrative of 'Islamic incivility' has justified controversial UK and US military ventures in the 'Middle East'. Rationalised in this way was the illegal invasion of Iraq in 2003, whereby UK and US government-led myths of collusion between Saddam Hussein and Al-Qaeda to manufacture weapons of mass destruction vindicated an essentially economic military venture in the 'Middle Eastern' state (Ahmed, 2014). The centrality of chemical weapons development by Al-Qatala to the storyline of Modern Warfare simultaneously serves to reinforce conceptions of 'Islamic terrorist' violence as inferior, illegitimate and inhumane, whilst justifying the presence, and violence, of 'Western' armed forces in the 'Middle East' through a framework of international law.

Suicide bombing and chemical weapons deployments are not the only tools of violence that actively distinguish 'enemies' of the 'West' from the UK and US militaries in Modern Warfare. Explicit acts of torture carried out by the 'enemy' enhances the dichotomy between the 'barbaric' and 'uncivilised' violence of the 'non-West' as opposed to the 'Just' and necessary means of the UK and US militaries. At the start of the "Captive" mission, players are held in an underground dungeon and must endure scenes of mock executions, ruthless beatings and waterboarding to advance in the game. Intensified by the sounds of screaming prisoners and systematic murder, this deeply disturbing section of Modern Warfare is a reminder of the abundance of prisoner abuse that has accompanied the 'War on Terror'. 'Islamic' militants have undeniably enacted part of this prisoner abuse since 9/11. The infamous 'Beatles' torture squad of Islamic State pummelled, water boarded, electrocuted and beheaded 'Western' captives in a prison in Syria (Sommerville, 2018). Additionally, a 2014 report by Amnesty International entitled Escape From Hell – subtly implying a link between the 'Middle East' and the Abrahamic underworld – reported crimes against humanity by Islamic State in Iraq, including torture, systematic rape and sexual slavery (Amnesty International, 2014). In this case Modern Warfare does not overemphasise the brutality of 'Islamic terror' organisations in the 'Middle East'.

Nevertheless, by neglecting the extent of organised torture enacted by the US and UK militaries during the 'War on Terror', Modern Warfare actively disregards human rights abuses carried out by 'Western' forces in the 'Middle East'. In its quest for gritty 'realism', Modern Warfare includes a scene of torture performed by the SAS soldiers Captain Price and Kyle Garrick. However, the abuse is justified, sanitised and individualised. Detecting Kyle's discomfort with the 'interrogation', Price defends his actions by stating, "if we get dirty the world stays clean", bolstering the 'Just War' narrative and condoning extrajudicial violence that runs throughout the game. Furthermore, the 'interrogation', compared to that enacted by 'the enemy', is relatively benign, with almost no force exerted to extract the necessary information, deepening the perception of 'Western' violence as 'civilised'. Lastly, by declaring the single act of torture an unauthorised "rogue" endeavour, Captain Price divorces the questionable morality of the act from the wider institutions of the UK and US militaries and their commanding governments. These elements combine to present 'interrogation' as infrequent yet occasionally unavoidable in the 'Just War' against 'Islamic terror'.

In reality, the UK and US militaries have frequently used malicious government-sanctioned torture techniques throughout the 'War on Terror'. Ruth Blakely has demonstrated "beyond reasonable doubt" that the UK has assisted the US in systematic prisoner abuse and torture since 9/11. The CIA and SAS have been accused of "drowning prisoners to the point of unconsciousness, repeated beatings, the use of ice baths and hoses to induce hypothermia, sleep deprivation for more than a week at a time, prolonged confinement in extremely small boxes and sexual assault", including "forced feeding through the rectum" (Blakely, 2017:246). Elaborating on the above, Laleh Khalili has recounted the specifically Islamophobic nature of prisoner abuse that occurred in Guantánamo Bay during the early years of the 'War on Terror'. In one particularly gruelling report a former guard explains the sexualised abuse of Muslim captives, whereby a female guard would rub her breasts on the inmate and then spread (fake) menstrual blood on his face (Khalili, 2011:13). Exploiting the prohibition of extramarital sexual intercourse outlined in the hadith of Anas Ibn Malik, this form of torture forces a feeling of sexual deviance onto the Muslim prisoner. By purposefully attacking the dignity, piety and humanity of the inmate with a malevolent and base act of gendered violence, the 'civilised' and rights-based legitimacy of 'Western' militaries is undermined. Government-sanctioned use of torture by the UK and US militaries since 9/11 directly contradicts these states commitment to Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which explicitly prohibits "torture" or "cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment" (UN General Assembly). By unambiguously violating the UDHR, a bulwark of liberal-democratic legitimacy, the UK and US militaries further elucidate the paradox of 'Just War' in the 'Middle East', whereby the 'need' for 'international rights' justifies foreign invasion yet simultaneously undermines their provision.

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The influence of Modern Warfare on drone combat in the 'War on Terror'

Integral to the positioning of the UK and US militaries as more 'advanced' and 'civilised' than their Al-Qatala enemies is the inclusion of drones in Modern Warfare. Players can use a vast range of licensed Unmanned Arial Vehicles (UAVs) deployed in real-world conflict in the 'Middle East'. Recon drones, EMP drones, assault drones, MQ-1 Predator drones and VTOL drones are but a few of the remote controlled weapons that a player can equip to clinically dispatch 'terrorist' enemies. Lethal and impersonal, UAV's are fundamental to completing a significant proportion of Modern Warfare's Urzikstan-based missions. By incorporating drones into gameplay, Activision economically bolsters the US and UK militaries through the payment of the necessary licensing fee, thus strengthening the military-entertainment complex. Further consolidating the link between Modern Warfare and the UK and US armed forces is the situating of drones as a form of 'civilised', or 'Just' violence, as well as the active recruitment of gamers by 'Western' militaries to fly UAVs.

Increased deployment and weaponisation of drones occurred almost immediately after 9/11, binding their use to the 'War on Terror'. The US was the first state to use armed drones in active warfare, with an aerial strike on Kandahar Province, Afghanistan in 2001. Since then, the US has become the chief international user and exporter of combat UAVs, seeking to expand its artillery with 1,000 more weaponised drones by 2029. The UK military also plans to increase its drone use, aiming to buy 16 next-generation Protector drones by 2023. With the vast majority of drone strikes occurring in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as Iraq, Somalia, Yemen, Libya and Syria, the 'Middle East' is clearly the testing ground for this latest form of 'clinical' warfare (Sabbagh, 2019).

Defended by the UK and US militaries as being in line with International Humanitarian Law (IHL), UAVs are said to fall within the ethical guidelines of a 'Just War' due to their adherence to the principles of 'distinction' and 'proportionality' (Kreps & Kaag, 2012). Despite the ethical and legal complexities of determining a combatant from an innocent civilian in asymmetrical warfare ('distinction'), and discerning the commensurate response to violence of the adversary ('proportionality'), UK and US drone strikes clearly violate both commitments to IHL. Though figures for casualties due to drone attacks are difficult to acquire, increasingly so after Donald Trump banned reporting on drone casualty details in March 2019, a 2014 Reprieve report found that "in an attempt to kill 41 individuals, the US killed as many as 1,147 other people" when using drones in the 'Middle East' (Sabbagh, 2019). Therefore 'proportionality' and 'distinction' legitimise the use of combat UAVs in the 'Middle East', yet their violence breaches both principles of IHL, reinforcing the paradox of 'Just War' in the region whereby 'universal rights' are used to enact violence that fundamentally infringes on these liberties.

Opposed to the use of chemical weapons and suicide bombing, categorised as 'barbaric' in the 'Western' international imaginary, drones strikes have been constructed as a 'civilised' form of violence. Characterised as 'rational', due to their lack of emotional vulnerabilities, 'humane', because of their purported precise lethality and 'modern', owing to their technological complexity, combat drones have been constituted as the antithesis to the tempestuous, remorseless and 'backward' violence of 'Islamic terrorists' (Espinoza, 2018). Given the high number of civilian casualties resulting from UK and US drone strikes in the 'Middle East' (Sabbagh, 2019), and the bloody nature of explosive killing that combat UAVs inevitably produce, this assertion can be categorically rebuked. Furthermore, as drones and their operators "align with the Orientalist bias of colonial (and neo-colonial) knowledge" by targeting Muslim or 'Middle Eastern' males presumed to be 'terrorists' (Espinoza, 2018:381), UAVs exacerbate a dependence on 'othering' that has been crucial to the legitimisation of the 'War on Terror'.

Fuelling the Orientalist logic that authorises the extrajudicial murder of 'Islamic terrorists' and civilians in the 'Middle East' are videogames such as Modern Warfare. By dehumanising the inhabitants of the region, war-based videogames create remoteness from the pain and violence that drone warfare entails. However, this is not the sole role of Modern Warfare in augmenting drone-based violence in the region. In what Joseph Pugliese describes as the "gamification of war", Modern Warfare and other war-based videogames are increasingly being used to train and recruit members of the US military and the British navy involved in drone combat (Pugliese, 2016), strengthening the relationship between military videogames and 'Western' armed forces. Furthermore, UAV operating systems are progressively beginning to resemble computer game technologies with some drones manoeuvred with Playstation or Xbox controllers (Broersma, 2015; Wintour, 2016; Pugliese, 2016). Removed from the violence of the physical

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battlefield, with many US pilots stationed at the Creech Air Force Base in Nevada, drone operators drop bombs on 'terrorists' and in the 'Middle East' through the medium of a screen, reproducing skills learnt on games such as Modern Warfare (Pugliese, 2016). Such evidence bolsters Rochelle Davis' claim that "counterterrorism relies on targeted attacks and assassination by drones and robots operated by people in control rooms who have never had to interact with other cultures, languages or even people" (Davis, 2012:25). Desensitised to violence and coerced into subordinating the value of life in the 'Middle East' through playing Orientalist war-based videogames such as Modern Warfare, drone operators replicate a violence learnt in a virtual sphere with maximum efficiency in the real world. Considering the detachment of 'Western' military personnel from a violence that has been engineered as 'Just' through media, entertainment and international political discourse, the proliferation of drone combat in the 'Middle East' is alarming.

Rewriting history and subverting the present

Not only do war videogames such as Modern Warfare construct enemies and acceptable forms of violence in the international imaginary. They also manipulate history and subvert contemporary political narratives by lending a pro-'Western' bias to conflict in the 'Middle East'.

Upon its release, Modern Warfare received widespread criticism from both the general public and the media for its unfavourable depiction of the Russian state and military. Continuing a tradition of anti-Russian sentiment in the Call of Duty series, Modern Warfare was specifically criticised for modifying history in its 'Highway of Death' mission. Stranded along the 'Highway', players control Alex, a CIA officer who must slaughter waves of Russian soldiers to escape an ambush set by the enemy.

In reality the 'Highway of Death' is the name given to a stretch of road that leads from Kuwait City northwest to the border with Iraq. On the 26th February 1991 in the final stages of the Gulf War, notably labelled a 'video-game' war because of the frequent use of "precision bombing and night-vision equipment" lending a perceived "humanity to the violence", thousands of vehicles carrying Iraqi military personnel were ordered by Baghdad to "withdraw immediately and unconditionally" in compliance with UN Resolution 660 (DeGhett, 2014). Though Iraqi forces were retreating from combat, US aircraft including helicopter gunships and A-10 Warthogs, both available as playable vehicles in Modern Warfare, trapped the convoy by disabling vehicles at the front and back. One marine general has described the ensuing violence as a "turkey shoot". Throughout day and night, bullets and missiles rained down, destroying approximately 2,000 vehicles and killing an unknown number of Iraqi soldiers, as well as their families, foreign workers and refugees (Patowary, 2016). US General Norman Schwarzkopf justified the unprovoked massacre, clearly in breach of IHL and the Geneva Convention on Human Rights, as necessary to eliminate the "rapists, murderers and thugs" that made up the convoy (Whalen, 2019). Firstly, legitimised in Orientalist terms the massacre of the 'Highway of Death' is a blatant example of a war crime committed by the US military that has been excused because of the sanitised and detached nature of aerial bombardment. Secondly, by actively altering the content of a real military event in the 'Middle East', Modern Warfare continues a trend in US produced entertainment media and war-based videogames of shifting the accountability for 'uncivilised' violence that contravenes international law away from the 'Just' militaries of the 'West' and onto their adversaries. Indeed, distortions of the 'Highway of Death' have appeared in other war games, including popular titles such as Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Conviction and Battlefield 3, suggesting this form of biased historical rendering is commonplace in the virtual sphere.

Citing the 'Highway of Death' mission and an infamous mission in a previous title in the series, in which players control Russian ultranationalists to perpetrate a mass shooting in a Moscow airport, Ilya Davydov, an influential Russian gamer, accused Activision of presenting "Russians as war criminals", thus backing out of a deal with the developer. Rossiya 24, a state owned television channel, levelled a similar allegation and physical copies of Modern Warfare are no longer available to purchase in Russia (Horton, 2019).

Condemnation of Modern Warfare for portraying the Russian military as war criminals is justified, particularly as Activision has knowingly shifted the culpability of crimes committed by the US and UK militaries in the 'Middle East' onto their international adversaries through a virtual rewriting of history.

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Distorting portrayals of war in the 'Middle East' is not consigned to past conflicts in Modern Warfare. Although Taylor Kurosaki, the narrative director of the game, claimed he was "heavily inspired" by current "events in Iraq and Syria" to lend "authenticity" to Modern Warfare (Stuart, 2019), the game misrepresents contemporary conflicts in the 'Middle East' by lending a pro-'Western', reductive and Orientalised bias to events in the region.

Drawing heavily from the Kurdish Yekîneyên Parastina Jin, or 'Womens Protection Units' (YPJ) that mainly operate in northern Syria, Activision constructed the Urzikstan Liberation Force (ULF): the local 'freedom fighters' that assist the CIA and SAS throughout the Modern Warfare campaign. Lauded by the 'Western' press for their 'progressive' stance on female military participation, the YPJ have become a symbol of acceptable local resistance in the Syrian conflict and receive supplies, armed assistance and capital from both the US and UK (Knapp, 2016). Continuing this rights-based discourse by reflecting 'Western' interpretations of the YPJ, Modern Warfare presents the ULF as an organization intent on freeing their country from foreign, meaning Russian, subjugation and defeating the presence of 'Islamic terrorism'. Led by Farah Karim, the only woman of the three playable protagonists in Modern Warfare, the group wishes to restore order to their country and "modernise" Urzikstan by "freeing its people from old fashioned ways" (Activision, 2019).

A clearly Orientalist and reductionist rendering of the motivations of 'freedom fighters' in the 'Middle East', Modern Warfare assumes the region to be 'backward' and those that fight for liberation to be inspired by 'Western' notions of 'development'. Furthermore, by linking the goals of the ULF to those of the CIA and SAS in Modern Warfare the fate of the local militia is inherently tied to that of the 'West', replicating a classic Orientalist trope whereby the actions of the inhabitants of the 'Middle East' can only exist in relation to the 'West' (Said, 1978). Similar to 'Western' depictions of the YPJ, assumed to have arisen to defeat Islamic State and stripped of a revolutionary context born out of colonialism and historical oppression (Azeez, 2019), the ULF exist as an extension of US and UK military power, robbed of their agency and consigned to a footnote in the domination of the 'Middle East' by the 'West'.

The women that fight in the ULF, though virtual, are exceptionally beautiful, exacerbating another Orientalist trope whereby 'Middle Eastern' women are only visible when sexualised and fetishised (Said, 1978). Indeed, the actress that plays Farah, Claudia Doumit, has appeared in multiple American television series as a seductive love interest, undermining her credibility as a battle-hardened 'freedom fighter'. The sexualisation of 'virtuous' 'Middle Eastern' women in Modern Warfare reflects mainstream 'Western' media depictions of the YPJ. For instance the death of Asia Antar, a YPJ fighter likened to 'Western beauties' such as Angelina Jolie and Penelope Cruz because of her purported good looks, garnered significantly more media attention than the passing of thousands of other YPJ members in their quest for liberation (Azeez, 2019). Clearly, Modern Warfare acts as an extension of 'Western' Orientalist media and entertainment whereby women from the 'Middle East' are only 'virtuous' if they conform to 'Western' standards of beauty and promote liberal-democratic ideals.

Lastly, Modern Warfare misrepresents the relationship between 'progressive' 'resistance fighters' in the 'Middle East' and the UK and US militaries. Rather than the strong relationship built on mutual respectability and trust, as depicted in Modern Warfare, the reality is more tenuous. For instance, in 2019 President Donald Trump withdrew his troops from northern Syria, leaving the YPJ and local Kurdish civilians vulnerable to a massacre by advancing Turkish soldiers (Borger, 2019). By abandoning their former allies, the US military has provided another example of their acquisitive interest in the region, undermining 'Western' media depictions, of which Modern Warfare is a part, that present US and UK military intervention in the 'Middle East' as somehow 'Just' or 'necessary'.

Conclusion

Attempting to move away from the quixotic representation of counter-insurgency in the 'Middle East' that has come to define previous titles in the Call of Duty series, Modern Warfare has positioned itself as the most 'realistic' war-game on the market. However, Modern Warfare offers similar warped presentations of military intervention in the region, albeit in a slightly subtler manner, lending it a pro-'Western' bias that advocates the 'War on Terror' in the 'Middle East'. Therefore, Modern Warfare conforms to wider media and political depictions of counter-insurgency in the region that present 'Western' intervention as 'Just', and binds the game to the military-entertainment complexes of the United Kingdom and United States by acting as an instrument of unofficial propaganda.

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In a virtual replication of the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement, in which arbitrary boundaries were drawn by 'Western' powers to divide the 'Middle East' in to nation-states (Mather, 2014), Modern Warfare creates its own fictionalised, homogenised and Orientalised 'Middle Eastern' state in the form of Urzikstan. A geographical and cultural desert, Urzikstan epitomizes Orientalist conceptions of the 'Middle East' as a timeless vacuum, riddled with 'Islamic terrorist' violence. Opposed to the precise, dynamic and agentic portrayal of 'Western' geographies, encapsulated in the city of London, the conurbations of Urzikstan are amorphous, dangerous, devoid of civilians and therefore in need of a 'civilising' interposition from the UK and US militaries.

The US and UK militaries are assuredly represented as 'civilised' in Modern Warfare. Encapsulating liberal-democratic ideals of multi-ethnic and gender equality that replicate military discourses existing in reality, the 'Western' armed forces of Modern Warfare bolster the legitimacy of the actual UK and US militaries through their rights-based representation. In opposition, and necessary for the dichotomous contrast that Orientalism requires, is the presentation of the Al-Qatala militants. Uniquely Arab, male and adherent to an unspecified and monolithic 'Islam', the 'terrorist' enemy is subordinated to an inherently violent, fervently religious, patriarchal and ultimately 'irrational' enemy, driven by a thirst for cruelty rather than ideology. This is in line with wider narratives that have justified the 'War on Terror' and military intervention in the 'Middle East'.

Modern Warfare, as with broader 'Western' political and media discourses, delegitimises the violence of 'Islamic terrorism'. Reliant on technologies of violence that contravene international law, namely chemical weapons deployment and torture, the Al-Qatala fighters are presented as fighters incapable of conforming to international norms of warfare that grant the 'West' legitimacy in the 'War on Terror'. Furthermore, a persistent use of suicide bombing by the militants entrench conceptions of 'Islamic terrorism' as inherently 'irrational', violent and thus 'uncivilised'. Contrary to the illegitimate modes of violence of Al-Qatala is the portrayal of 'Western' militarism as 'humane' and necessary. Sanitised depictions of torture and a technologised superiority in equipment and weaponry serve to excuse illegal violence of the UK and US militaries, whilst constructing their violence as 'Just', 'civilised' and 'necessary'.

In line with a 'Western'-centric international legal framework, and particularly prominent to the portrayal of 'Western' violence in the 'Middle East' as 'humane', is the condoning of drone combat by the UK and US militaries in Modern Warfare. Conferred as a 'clinical' and 'rational' technology of violence, the endorsement of weaponised UAVs in Modern Warfare aligns with actual 'Western' military discourses that posit drone warfare as 'civilised'. Moreover, the increased reliance of the UK and US militaries on recruiting gamers, desensitised to violence and trained on war-based videogames such as Modern Warfare, to operate drones in the 'Middle East', strengthens the relationship between 'Western' militaries and video entertainment industries, thus bolstering the military-entertainment complex. Given the ever-expanding videogame market, as well as the US militaries recent decision to invest $50 million into videogame development (Thompson, 2019), the significance of war-based games, such as Modern Warfare, in producing soldiers for 'Western' armies, subjugating 'Middle Eastern' populations through Orientalist representations and rewriting historical and contemporary political narratives of war in the 'Middle East', should not be understated. As a result, more research should be undertaken to analyse the effect of war-based videogames on the psyche of soldiers and potential combatants, particularly in light of the growing relationship between videogames and the lethal, and increasingly popular, mode of violence that is drone warfare.

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