



War Propaganda for the Gaming Generation How the US Military Turned *Call of Duty* into a Recruitment Tool

By CHARLIE NASH

Call of Duty might just be the biggest recruiter of youth for the US military in the 21st century. It's essentially a video game mouthpiece for the US military-industrial complex, and it does a good job at making horrific and bloody warfare look novel, and even fun. A few minutes of gameplay and many young people are already thinking about how cool it would be to join up.

In the 21st century, the *Call of Duty* games, and military first-person shooter games in general, have served to tell the public who the enemy of the day is, before dehumanising the 'enemy' by reducing them to hordes of husky-voiced, cartoon villains.

At the height of war in Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan, many first-person shooter games were set in the Middle East and Africa, serving up waves of brown people for players to gun down.

And, now that a Cold War has started up between the West and the East again, gunning down Bond villain-style Russians is the latest attraction.

The latest *Call of Duty* game, *Modern Warfare* (2019), features Russians as the enemies, as it did before in previous *Modern Warfare* titles, and portrays the jihadi-linked White Helmets as the good guys. And the reason is simple.

Video games have now taken the mantle from television as the tools to indoctrinate the mass population into a neoliberal, imperialist agenda.

Call of Duty narrative director Taylor Kurosaki even admitted that the latest game was inspired by documentaries like *The White Helmets* and *Last Man in Aleppo* – another partisan documentary about the White Helmets.

How many gamers even know about the White Helmets, let alone their alleged links to terrorism?

I'm willing to bet very few. But they'll be receiving the US-sanctioned message anyway – Russia, Syria, Iran: bad. American imperialism and 'moderate' rebels: good.

Even for gamers who are completely unaware of the intricate details of modern geopolitics, the games they're playing are reinforcing a certain line,



and conditioning the unsuspecting to support a drive to war.

As reported by Melbourne-based independent journalist Caitlin Johnstone, the White Helmets operation "is used to create footage implicating the Assad government in the slaughter of civilians via chemical weapons attacks and other camera-friendly war crimes," and there is a "mountain of evidence of their ties to literal terrorist organisations in Syria, and the Western funding and media manipulations that have been pouring into elevating the outfit."

"People playing these games, mostly impressionable young men, are manipulated into desiring to accomplish the goals that are laid out for them in order to win, all of which involve killing and many of which happen to align with preexisting US military agendas," Johnstone explained. "They are desensitised to mass military violence, trained to support and identify with US military campaigns, and taught that being a member of the military might just be a fun and noble way to spend one's future."

Call of Duty, in particular, has pushed the US imperial agenda on many occasions, with 2013's *Call of Duty: Ghosts* featuring missions foreshadowing the US aggression in Venezuela.

"We often think of video games as fiction, but the US government has weaponised them to advance its agenda," declared the Grayzone Project's Max Blumenthal in April. "*Call of Duty: Ghosts* is set in a dystopian future after the Middle East is destroyed by

nuclear weapons. A Venezuelan general comes into power establishing a socialist style Federation that spreads across Latin America like a disease, uniting all oil-producing nations and expelling US citizens. You as the player are part of an elite force of US commandos that invades the country, murders the socialist leader, and destroys his Federation."

"The US special operations forces open their assault by launching a rocket at a dam that looks strikingly similar to Venezuela's Guri dam – an act of deliberate terror that floods the streets of Caracas. The city has been recreated in vivid detail all the way down to the Chavista graffiti that colours its walls," he explained. "The mission ends with the execution-style killing of Venezuela's leader, who's shot in the back in slow motion by America's finest, and in case you weren't sure about his commitment to socialism, that leader is wearing a red beret, just like Hugo Chavez did."

Blumenthal also noted that "during a follow-up mission, the player returns to Caracas, breaks into a power plant, and inserts a computer virus into the electricity grid plunging the city into darkness."

Erily, years later in March 2019, the country was launched into darkness through electrical blackouts.

Johnstone and Blumenthal aren't the only writers to have noticed the underlying imperialist, neoconservative message of modern military first-person shooter games.

In 2017, a writer for *PC Gamer* magazine claimed *Call of Duty* "aligns with an idea that has dominated the past



two decades of politics: that these fears are unstoppable, war is inevitable, and the purpose of the state is to protect us with bigger and bigger militaries.”

“In *Call of Duty*’s universe, war will always come, whether waged by ultra-nationalist terrorists or the private armies of *Advanced Warfare* or the space fascists of *Infinite Warfare*, and we can only hope to contain it with heroism and sacrifice,” the writer continued.

Two years before, in 2015, *Paste* magazine published a similar critique.

Writer Patrick Lindsey explained that “the world of videogames is one that’s wrapped up tightly in a framework of neoconservative ideals and status quo-mongering.”

In 2009’s *Modern Warfare 2*, Lindsey writes, “the envelope is pushed to even greater extremes, as Russian military forces invade the US, annexing the nation’s capital and turning the country’s suburbs into warzones – hearkening back to the Red Scare of the ‘80s present in ridiculous movies like *Red Dawn*.”

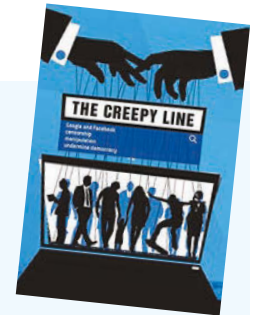
“In the nearly ten years since *Modern Warfare*’s release, the paradigm for popular games has settled into this hyper-Western aesthetic. Even games that purport to challenge these ideals, like Yager Development’s *Spec Ops: The Line* (2012) are deeply entrenched in Western militarism and Eurocentric interventionism,” he noted.

“Despite the personal-destruction narrative that follows the game’s protagonist Sgt. Walker, players still find themselves blasting through a 10-hour campaign in which they kill countless foreign insurgents on foreign soil. In other words, the subtext may be evolving, but the text itself has remained largely unchanged. Developers are trying to extrapolate increasingly charitable interpretations of what is essentially the same presentation.”

SOURCES: The US military is using video games and esports to recruit – it’s downright immoral by James McMahon, *The Independent*, 23 November 2018; ‘Call of Duty: Modern Warfare’ adds a female Middle Eastern soldier’s POV. Here’s why.’ by Todd Martens, *LA Times*, 30 May 2019; <https://medium.com/@caityjohnstone>; www.youtube.com/watch?v=72v7PWJUyxY; Don’t try to sell Call of Duty to us as anti-war by Tyler Wilde, pcgamer.com, 28 April 2017; Gamifying Neoconservatism: The Eurocentric Ideals of Games by Patrick Lindsey, www.pastemagazine.com, 29 July 2015

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The Creepy Line: How Society is Manipulated by Google & Facebook



A new documentary, *The Creepy Line*, reveals the stunning degree to which society is manipulated by Google and Facebook and blows the lid off the remarkably subtle – hence powerful – manner in which they do it.

The Creepy Line is a title culled from the words of former Google CEO Eric Schmidt, when during a 2010 interview he explained Google’s code of conduct: “The Google policy on a lot of things is to get right up to the creepy line and not cross it.”

But as the documentary shows, Google crosses the creepy line 24/7. To watch the movie and find out where it’s being screened, go to www.thecreepylines.com. The film interviews a range of experts, and the following is a taster of what they have to say:

PETER SCHWEIZER (investigative journalist & author): What Google will tell you is, “We’re very transparent. There’s a user agreement. Everybody knows that if you’re going to search on Google, and we’re going to give you access to this free information, we need to get paid, so we’re going to take your data.” The problem is most people don’t believe or don’t want to believe that that data is going to be used to manipulate you.

JARON LANIER (computer scientist & author): What happens is the best technical people with the biggest computers with the best bandwidth to those computers become more empowered than the others, and a great example of that is a company like Google, which for the most part is just scraping the same Internet and the same data any of us can access, and yet is able to build this huge business of directing what links we see in front of us, which is an incredible influence on the world, by having the bigger computers, the better scientists, and more access.

DR. ROBERT EPSTEIN (psychologist & author): Google has at its disposal on the search engine itself, at least three different ways of impacting your opinion and it is using them. We’re talking about a single company having the power to shift the opinions of literally billions of people without anyone having the slightest idea that they’re doing so.

DR. ROBERT EPSTEIN: Google has blacklists, and the biggest black list they have is called their quarantine list. Now, I’m guessing very few people have ever heard of this list, and yet I’m telling you it not only is a tool of censorship, it is by far the biggest and most dangerous list that Google maintains for the purpose of controlling information. The quarantine list is a list of websites that Google doesn’t want you to visit. Are there a thousand items on this list? No. There are millions of websites on this list. Google has the power to block access to websites, and there are no relevant regulations. There’s no oversight. There’s no advisory group. There’s nothing. No one even realises that Google is doing it. There was a particular day where Google shut down the entire Internet for 40 minutes. Google did not deny it. They shut down half of the Internet in Japan. And again, they acknowledged it. We are talking about a company with so much power. Well, who gave Google the power to shut down the Internet? Where did that come from?

DR. ROBERT EPSTEIN: I can’t believe in a system in which the power is separate from the people. We’re talking about some pretty arrogant people in my opinion, who think of themselves as gods of sort, and who really want to have a complete hold over humanity. These are basically big mind control machines, and mind control machines, they’re really good at controlling minds. It’s going to be harder and harder to fight them if we don’t do so, I would say, as soon as possible. The more rope we give them, the sooner we are all hanged.

PETER SCHWEIZER: The traditional notion of totalitarianism was resting on the premise or the idea that a government would try to achieve total control over your life, and they would do it by using the might and muscle of government to do so under compulsion. Well, today we essentially have a totalitarian force in the world, and that is these large tech companies. But guess what? They didn’t use Storm Troopers. They didn’t use the Gulag. They didn’t use the arrest of political prisoners to accomplish it.

PETER SCHWEIZER: We all opted in to do it ourselves. We volunteered for this arrangement. And we live in a world today where these tech giants have a level of control and an ability to manipulate us that Stalin, Mao, Hitler, and Mussolini could only have dreamed of. The power’s immense, and we are essentially trusting these large tech companies to make the right and good decision for us. I, for one, am not prepared to see that level of power to these individuals.