

New video game propaganda whitewashes U.S. war crimes in Fallujah



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By Shabbir Rizvi *

Baghdad, July 2 (RHC)-- After over a decade of controversy, the U.S.-made video game "Six Days in Fallujah" -- based on the real-life combat between U.S. Marines and Iraqis -- was released on the streaming website Steam this week.

The video game puts players in the shoes of U.S. Marines fighting in Fallujah, an Iraqi city located around 69 kilometers west of Baghdad, during the illegal U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq.

For years, the video game was subject to intense criticism from peace and human rights activists for glorifying the illegal and ignominious war and whitewashing US war crimes and imperialism.

Some even called it an "Arab Murder Simulator" for openly glorifying the war after it barely ended.

To this day, Fallujah is still dealing with the cataclysmic effects of the war. The U.S. military used depleted uranium shells in Fallujah (both in 1991 and 2003-2004), which caused severe pollution in the environment. They also admitted to using white phosphorus, which is considered a war crime.

The air in the city on the banks of the Euphrates is still considered toxic, and results in miscarriages, cancer, or babies born with severe abnormalities that are more than often life-threatening.

The video game developers claimed they did not want to make the game "political" but rather immerse the player in a real-life war environment. Interestingly enough, some of the developers from the studio themselves participated in the war, and the studio itself is responsible for creating simulation technologies for the US Marines.

Peter Tamte, one of the developers, has been involved in military simulators for two decades. He was even CEO of Atomic Games, which published simulators used by the US Marine Corps and "training tools for the world's leading military and intelligence organizations.

But does Tamte really want to make an apolitical military simulation? Or is he complicit, knowingly or unknowingly, in the United States' nearly century-long collaboration with war propaganda in the media?

And most importantly, would the US military indeed tolerate a video game that if it were not whitewashed, would display the horrific actions and brutality of the illegal invasion and occupation? Certainly not – especially during a period where the military is struggling to meet its recruiting metrics.

The U.S. military cannot afford a bad image of itself. It also understands video games are immensely popular, and would drive certain perceptions of the war if painted in a negative (or realistic) manner.

An apolitical video game would likely have a fictional story, fictional characters, and perhaps even fictional weapons all within a fictional conflict. But the illegal Iraq invasion and occupation was very real, especially to the nearly million dead Iraqis.

Not only was it painfully real, it was painfully horrific, unpopular (in hindsight to Americans), and above all illegal. Making a video game about one of its battles, particularly where unlawful chemical weapons like white phosphorus were used against Iraqi civilians, is a blatant attempt to whitewash and normalize the crimes and illegal invasion by the United States.

The Iraq War claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of innocent people. The illegal US invasion ushered in a destabilization that created a serious power vacuum that Daesh and Al-Qaeda gladly took advantage of, causing further unexplainable horrors.

But, even if Tamte wanted to make an "apolitical" military simulator - would it really be "apolitical" even if it used a fictional conflict and fictional antagonists? Due to Pentagon and other weapons contracts, the

answer is no.

Take for example the critically acclaimed series “Call of Duty.” In the US, one does not even need to play the game to know what Call of Duty is.

The ads for the military shooter appear on TV, on energy drinks, and T-shirts. Some of the series are based on real conflicts like World War II or the Cold War. However, the later installments are based on fictional “modern” conflicts that immerse players in urban settings with advanced weapon technology.

The U.S. Department of Defense and other military agencies know the popularity of these games, so it is no surprise they resort to recruiting soldiers directly from these games.

Young gamers are presented with a positive view of the U.S. military, its missions, and its conduct, and the military then sends its recruiters to close the sales process and bring them in as real-life soldiers.

The video game industry also takes it a step further in its partnership with military enterprises. In order to use actual military hardware in the video game, the developers must obtain a license from the manufacturers themselves.

Thus, by using a Remington Shotgun in a SWAT video game (for example), the young video game player has directly played a role in supporting the military-industrial complex in the United States. Each real weapon requires a real license, so profits made by video game companies benefit the same arms manufacturers that drop bombs on children across the globe.

Lastly, if a video game series is particularly successful (like Call of Duty), developers can then also be invited to American think tanks like The Atlantic Council.

Here they can participate in mapping out real-life invasion scenarios, protocols, and logistics - and then bring it back to the video game world should it not remain classified. In this sense, the military genre of the video game industry is in direct collaboration with the military, its illegal adventures, and its track record of crimes.

Tamte and other video game developers can say that they wanted to create an “apolitical” experience. But there is no such thing as “apolitical” -- especially not in the U.S. military shooter genre, where the moment you pick up the controller is when you have contributed to a legacy of invasion and terror.

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