

Technology Transforming War into Video Game

In 1983, a few years before starring in the cult classic “Ferris Buehler’s Day Off,” Matthew Broderick portrayed a young computer hacker who broke into a national defense computer system in the movie “War Games.”

Broderick’s character accesses a computer war simulation that he believes is a game. When he begins “playing,” he unwittingly causes an international crisis that nearly leads to an actual (not a simulated) nuclear war.

Tragically, what is portrayed in this movie has, in part, become a reality, because with each military technology “advancement,” we move further from conflict waged face-to-face on a battlefield and closer to conflict waged by people sitting at desks using computers.

A fall 2006 [article](#) in *The New Atlantis* provides a review of military technology development since World War II, revealing that while war still involves soldiers fighting on battlefields, it increasingly involves distant forms of warfare (such as remotely controlled missiles and drones).

A November 2012 [article](#) on the Huffington Post reports that remote controlled drone strikes have increased significantly under the Obama administration, and a [New American Foundation](#) article details the extent of U.S. drone warfare: “337 CIA drone strikes in Pakistan have killed an estimated 1,908 to 3,225 people since 2004, of which 1,618 - 2,769 were reported to be militants. This means the average non-militant casualty rate over the life of the program is 15-16 percent. In 2012 it has been 1-2 percent, down sharply from its peak in 2006 of over 60 percent.”

With this new technology, you stare at a video screen not a person, and you aim at a coordinate not a human.

Human lives are lost in both face-to-face conflict and drone strikes, but the latter is a colder and more calculated, sanitized and anesthetized conflict.

The enemy is dehumanized and becomes a number on a page because the person carrying out the attack does not have to look at the person whom they are killing.

Online opinion pieces on the [Washington Post](#) and [The Daily Beast](#) speak poignantly and disturbingly about the negative consequences of dehumanizing our enemies, which happens with alarming frequency even in face-to-face conflict.

How much easier, then, is it to dehumanize an enemy you never see? How much less real and destructive does the conflict seem when a drone attack can be carried out with fewer computer key strokes than it takes for me to write this sentence?

More troubling is the information about drone operations detailed in a September 2012 [article](#) in the U.K.'s *The Telegraph*, which notes that 40 nations are currently developing drones as a central aspect of their defense programs.

It seems that we are moving ever closer to the scenario portrayed in the movie "War Games."

I advocate dialogue and diplomacy to resolve differences and nonviolent resistance to address injustice.

That being said, because nations, tragically, often resolve differences through armed conflict, there is one profoundly important fact about war that is being lost due to technological advancement: Namely, that war is hell.

It is impossible to forget this fact when soldiers face one another on a battlefield, which is why nearly every war veteran would likely affirm that, indeed, "war is hell."

It becomes easier to forget the hell of war when the conflict is waged from a distance and the people sending the missiles or drones are staring, not at human

faces whose lives they are going to end, but at computer monitors.

Moreover, when war is waged on battlefields, there is a much greater ability to distinguish between combatants and non-combatants.

When war is waged by inputting coordinates in a program that controls a missile or drone strike, there is no way to be sure that non-combatants do not become casualties of war, as a November 2012 Huffington Post [article](#) makes clear.

The more military technology results in people sitting at computers, the more war begins to resemble playing a video game.

The obvious difference is that the people whose deaths are displayed on a video game screen are fictional, while those whose deaths are displayed on a military computer screen are very real.

In both circumstances, deaths result. Even though one can know intellectually there is a profound difference, one cannot help but imagine that over time the actions take on a disturbing similarity.

For years people have questioned the influence of violent video games on people's behavior.

Perhaps we should be less worried about people imitating violent video games and more worried about war imitating violent video games.

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