

Theme Park Archipelago

Simulating War in an Urbanizing World

Unpublished paper

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A hidden archipelago of between 80 and 100 mini cities is rapidly being constructed across the world. Rising far from the world's main metropolitan corridors, in obscure edge-of-city and rural locations, these new 'cities' are set deep within military bases and training grounds. The vast majority are located in the United States, presenting jarring contrasts with the strip-mall suburbia that surrounds them. Others are rising out of the deserts of Kuwait and Israel, the downs of Southern England, the plains of Germany, and the islands of Singapore.

Some such cities are replete with lines of drying washing, continuous loop-tapes playing calls to prayer, wandering donkeys, Arabic graffiti, even ersatz 'minarets' and 'mosques.' Others have 'slum' or 'favela' districts' and underground sewers with built-in olfactory machines which can create the simulated smell of rotting corpses or untreated sewage on demand. Still others are populated occasionally by itinerant populations of Arab-Americans, bused in to wander about and role-play in Arab dress.

Beyond these temporary inhabitants, few, beyond military personnel, ever see or enter these new urban complexes. Unnoticed by urban design, architecture and planning communities, and invisible on maps, these sites constitute a kind of shadow world urban system. As a global system of military urban simulations, they lurk in the interstices between the planet's rapidly growing metropolitan areas.

Practised Destruction

Rather than being monuments to construction, dynamism and growth, these cities are violent theme parks for practicing urban destruction, erasure, and colonial violence targeting real, far-off cities. These sites are being constructed by US military specialists, with the help of military corporations, theme park designers, Hollywood experts, universities and video games specialists. They are simulations of the burgeoning Arab and Third World cities that are deemed the de facto

zones of current and future warfare for Western forces. It is in such complexes that Western and Israeli military forces learn to take on what Mike Davis has called our 'planet of slums.'¹ They are small capsules of space designed to mimic in some way what US military theorist, Richard Norton, has pejoratively labelled the 'feral' cities which Western military planners deem to be the strategic environments dominating contemporary geopolitics.²

After centuries when Western military doctrine preached an obsessive avoidance of urban combat, or the need to simply try and erase cities that did get in the way, the catastrophe on the streets of Iraq is helping to force the challenges of counter-insurgency or 'asymmetric warfare' within large, global south cities to the heart of Western military doctrine for the first time. US military doctrine increasingly stresses the challenge of controlling the micro-geographies of slums, favelas, industrial districts and casbahs, as well as the globe-spanning power of new network, stealth and surveillance technologies.³

Eyal Weizman⁴ emphasises that Israeli and Western military doctrine now stresses the need not just to enter and try to control large urban areas. Also important here is the challenge to physically reorganise colonised city spaces so that high-tech weapons and surveillance systems can work to the occupiers' advantage. Weizman calls this "design by destruction". As he puts it, "contemporary urban warfare plays itself out within a constructed, real or imaginary architecture, and through the destruction, construction, reorganisation, and subversion of space."⁵

Thus, as in Iraq, districts and neighbourhoods can be turned into camps through checkpoints, razor wire and the enforced use of

¹ Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, London, Verso, 2006; Mike Davis, 'The Pentagon as global slum lord', *TomDispatch*, <http://www.tomdispatch.com/>, April 19th 2004, accessed June 10th.; Mike Davis, 'The urbanization of Empire: Megacities and the laws of chaos,' *Social Text*, 22(4), pp. 9-15.

² Richard Norton, R. 'Feral cities', *Naval War College Review*, 2004, 56(4), pp. 97-106.

³ Mike Davis, 'The urbanization of Empire: Megacities and the laws of chaos,' *Social Text*, 22(4), pp. 9-15.

⁴ Phil Misselwitz and Eyal Weizman, 'Military operations as urban planning'. In Anselme Franke (ed.) *Territories*, KW Institute for Contemporary Art : Berlin 2003. pp. 272-275.

⁵ Eyal Weizman, 'Lethal theory,' *Gray Room* (forthcoming).

biometric identity cards. Areas deemed to be so dense and complex that they harbour resistance and shelter insurgents from the gaze of drones, satellites and aerial targeting can be physically bulldozed, as in Jenin in 2002.⁶ And the infrastructural systems that sustain life in all cities can be either totally destroyed – as in the urbicidal assaults on the infrastructure of Iraq in 1991 and Lebanon in 2006 – or manipulated so as to try and coerce resistant populations, fighters, and political leadership, through the forced immiserisation of a enduring a non-infrastructural urban life in a modern city.⁷

To support these forced restructurings of urban space, an extending body of theory and doctrine is being built up. Weizman has shown how Israeli military theorists of the urbanisation of war are even using the post-structuralist insights of critical theorists like Deleuze and Guatarri to try and find ways of ‘walking through walls’ to penetrate the refugee camps and dense casbahs of Gaza and Nablus.

Amongst US military thinkers, meanwhile, there is a powerful sense that the rapid urbanisation of Middle Eastern and Arab countries radically undermines the high-tech advantages that US forces have so expensively built up since the Cold War. This is widely assumed to directly support the decisions by various non-state adversaries of the United States to shelter within the three-dimensional entanglements of expanding urban areas. “The long term trend in open-area combat’, writes the rabidly hawkish U.S. ‘urban warfare’ commentator, Ralph Peters, “is toward overhead dominance by US forces.” As a result, he suggests that “battlefield awareness [for US forces] may prove so complete, that the United States’ “enemies will be forced into cities and other complex terrain, such as industrial developments and inter-city sprawl.”⁸

In keeping with this post-Cold war mutation of Western military doctrine into the planned remodelling of cities by force, the sole purpose of simulated urban warfare training cities is to allow US, Western and Israeli forces to hone their skills in designed urban

⁶ Stephen Graham, ‘Lessons in urbicide,’ *New Left Review* 19 (New Series) January February: 63-78, 2003.

⁷ Stephen Graham, ‘Switching cities off: US air power and urban infrastructure’, *City*, 9(2), 170-191, 2005.

⁸ Ralph Peters, “Our soldiers, their cities”, *Parameters*, Spring, 2006, 1-7.

destruction and incarceration. Following extensive training in these sites, Western and Israeli military units deploy to the real cities of Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon, or elsewhere, to undertake what, in military parlance, are termed 'Military Operations on Urban Terrain' (or simply 'MOUT' for short).

Like the rest of the world, then, military training sites are rapidly being urbanised. Colonel Thomas Hammes, writing in the *US Marine Corps Gazette* in 1999, was one of many defense planners arguing at that period that a wide range of new mock cities were needed because US military training sites were out of phase with "the urban sprawl that dominates critical areas of the world today." "We know we will fight mostly in urban areas," he continued. "Yet, we conduct the vast majority of our training in rural areas – the hills of Camp Pendleton, the deserts of Twenty Nine Palms, the woods of Camp Lejeune, the jungles of Okinawa, Japan." ⁹

The US military's response has been dramatic. Between 2005 and 2010, the US Army alone is planning to build a chain of 61 urban warfare training 'cities' across the world.¹⁰ Whilst some of these are little more than air-portable sets of containers, designed to provide basic urban warfare training when deployed around the world, others are complex spaces mimicking whole city districts or sets of villages, as well as surrounding countryside, infrastructure, even airports. Leading examples of the more complex sites include Fort Carson, Colorado (which, by 2006, had three different mock 'Iraqi villages'), the national 'Joint Readiness Training Center' at Fort Polk, Louisiana, 29 Palms in California, Fort Benning, Georgia, and Fort Richardson, Alaska.

Urban warfare training cities are stark embodiments of the imaginative and real urban geographies which lie at the heart of the global 'war on terror'. Powerful materialisations of what Derek Gregory has called our colonial present,¹¹ they need to be

⁹ Thomas Hammes, 'Time to get serious about urban warfare training', *Marine Corps Gazette*, April 1999. Available at www.jfsc.ndu.edu/library/publications/bibliography/urban_warfare.asp.

¹⁰ Grant McDonald, 'Bullets in the bricks; Urban operations training', T2Net, 23rd August 2006, available at www.t2net.org/briefs/news/Bullets_in_the_bricks.pdf

¹¹ Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, Blackwell: Oxford.

understood as part of a much wider effort at physically and electronically simulating Arab or global south cities for tightly-linked imperatives of war, profit and entertainment.

Such complexes thus take their place within a wide constellation of simulated Arab cities and urban landscapes, which draw on similar Orientalist traditions. These are emerging within video games, virtual reality military simulations, films, newspaper graphics and novels. Together, these contribute to one massive discursive trick: to construct Arab and Third World cities as stylised, purely physical, and labyrinthine worlds which are somehow both intrinsically terroristic and largely devoid of the civil society that characterises normal urban life.¹² The result is that Arab cities emerge here as little more than receiving points for US military ordinance and colonial military incursions – whether real or fantastical.

Where the cultures and sociologies of Arab cities have been considered in urban warfare simulations– as has started to be necessary since the military take over of Iraq’s cities turned to the challenges of occupation -- Orientalist cliché, or high-tech dehumanisation, have been the norm.¹³ When simulated Arab cities emerge with a population at all, it has been provided in person by role-players in keffiyehs muttering Orientalist clichés. Or it has simply been generated by computer software as electronically-imagined ‘crowds’ populating electronic simulations of Arab cities under simulated US or Israeli attack. Either way, this constellation of urban simulacra thereby do the important geopolitical work of continually reducing the complex social and cultural worlds of Arab or global south urbanism to the city as mere target, or ‘battlespace,’ to be assaulted in a purported campaign against ‘terror’, or for ‘freedom.’

The construction by militaries of physical simulations of places to be targeted and destroyed is not new, of course. Nor is the close relationship between play, toys, and war, or the mobilisation of Hollywood special effects for a war effort. In the Cold War, for example, atomic and thermonuclear bombs were regularly exploded near simulated suburban homes, complete with white picket-fences

¹² Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, Blackwell: Oxford, pp. 201-203.

¹³ Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, Blackwell: Oxford, pp. 229-230.

and nuclear families of mannequins placed around the table having mock meals.¹⁴ Earlier, during World War II, the Dugway Proving Grounds in Utah saw the construction of a village of extremely accurate Berlin tenements along with a cluster of Japanese wood and rice—paper houses.¹⁵

The former were designed by modernist luminary Eric Mendelsohn, freshly exiled from Germany. The latter were created by Antonin Raymond, a US architect with Japanese experience, who scoured the US for authentic types of Russian spruce wood to use in the construction. These buildings were then repeatedly burnt by the US Chemical Warfare Corps who used the new techniques of operations research to tailor the composition and design of incendiary bombs to the task of comprehensively razing Japanese and German cities. To ensure accuracy, real German furniture was placed within the tenements and the buildings were watered to mimic the temperate climates of Berlin.

‘The World’s Most Violent Theme Park’

The global complex of urban warfare training cities involve a different relationship to political violence to the atom-bombed suburban homes or fire-bombed tenements and rice-paper structures of the 20th century. For here, the simulation is not designed to sustain attempts at outright urban annihilation through total war. Rather, its purpose is to hone skills of occupation, counter-insurgency warfare, and urban remodelling via expeditionary, colonial war.

A bizarre, reverse urban beauty contest emerges here. As a mirror image to the more familiar global place marketing contests through which real cities parade themselves through gentrification, cultural planning, and boosterism, here the marks of success are decay and an architecture of collapse. Colonel James Cashwell, a US squadron commander, reported recently, after an exercise in an urban warfare training city within George Air Force base in California, that “the advantage of the base is that it is ugly, torn up, all the windows are

¹⁴ Laura McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home*, Princeton and Oxford; Princeton University Press.

¹⁵ Mike Davis, *Dead Cities , And Other Tales*, New Press, New York, 2002, pp 65-84.

broken [and trees] have fallen down in the street. It's perfect for the replication of a war-torn city.”¹⁶

Ted Leza, who runs the US Baumholder urban warfare training site in Germany, meanwhile reflects that soldiers using the site have repeatedly asked for it to be populated by a veritable menagerie of dead and live animals to help simulate life in Iraqi cities. Thus, along with realistic Baghdad-style orange and white taxis, the simulated taxi stand, and the market, the operators of the site are “trying to get that for them. I don't know if we'll get a camel. Maybe a donkey, goats... stuff like that.”¹⁷

Urban warfare training sites also integrate multi-sensory systems for projecting war-like special effects into the ersatz buildings, streets and structures. “We have a wide variety of special effects smells we can do,” admits Manuel Chaves, who runs the special effects suit built into the urban warfare site at Fort Wainwright, Alaska. “For instance: coffee, apple pie, dead bodies, burning rubber, diesel fumes. I can do nine different buildings, nine different smells. Generally, if it's a burning building, we put something really nasty in there like burning bodies.”¹⁸

A rather different complex, built with unintended irony from 23,000 cluster bombs containers discarded during the Vietnam war, is emerging at Yodaville in the Arizona desert This site, which opened in 1998, is the first simulated global south city created specifically for live, urban bombing and close air support training.¹⁹ A RAND report states that the US military's first urban bombing training site looks, from the ground, “like stacks of shot-up shipping containers.” From the viewpoint of the fighter pilots who continually target it with cluster

¹⁶ J. R. Wilson, 'Army expands home-based MOUT training', *Military Training Technology*, March 2003, accessed 10 June 2004. At <http://www.military-training-technology.com/article.cfm?DocID=361>

¹⁷ Cited in Terry Boyd, 'Training site replicates Iraqi village', *Stars and Stripes.Com*, July 26th 2006.

¹⁸ Associated press, 'Urban combat training center will be Army's largest', *Citizen Review Online*, December 2002, Available at www.citizenreviewonline.org/Dec_2002/urban.htm

¹⁹ Mark Shaffer, 'Yodaville exists for bombing runs -- Arizona's newest town inviting target', *Arizona republic*, August 23 1999. Available at <http://www.geocities.com/Pentagon/6453/yodavillea.html>

and ‘precision’ munitions, however, it is “convincingly urban.”²⁰ Mark Shaffer, reporter with the *Arizona Republic*, notes that the ‘town’, which has 167 buildings and encompasses “a large shanty town”, has a “decidedly Third World” feel. “A mock soccer field is painted green on the edge of town. Streets are narrow. There’s a large shantytown. And talk about ambience. The seeringly hot desert teems with sidewinders and an occasional scrub creosote bush or cactus.”²¹

Apparently, local militia groups are convinced that the Yoda complex is being used to train US and UN forces at the behest of a New World Order. Seven miles from the border with Mexico, bombing runs are stopped at least twice weekly so that immigrants, newly arrived across the border, can be removed from the site, before the ordinance once again rains in.²²

One of the most important training cities for US ground forces is at Fort Knox, Kentucky. Here, a new 30 acre, \$13 million MOUT facility has been constructed named Zussman village.²³ The site is able to accommodate hundreds of role-playing ‘insurgents’, who dress in keffiyehs and are armed with AK47s and RPGs, as well as 1500 US military personnel, along with their tanks, personnel carriers and helicopters. Zussman includes mock junkyards, mosques, cemeteries, petrol stations, sewers, electrical substations, train tracks and bridges. It is even equipped with radio and TV stations which can broadcast in Hebrew, Arabic or Russian. A “Third-World slum” is being constructed near the railroad.

To simulate a war-torn environment, the Zussman site is deliberately smothered in dirt and mud. The grass grows tall and the

²⁰ Russell Glenn, Jody Jacobs, Brian Nichiporuk, Christopher Paul, Barbara Raymond, Randall Steeb and Harry Thie, *Preparing for the Proven Inevitable: An Urban Operations Training Strategy for America*; Joint Force, Report prepared for the US Secretary of Defense, RAND National Defense Research Institute, Santa Monica, 2006.

²¹ Mark Shaffer, ‘Yodaville exists for bombing runs -- Arizona’s newest town inviting target’, *Arizona Republic*, August 23 1999. Available at <http://www.geocities.com/Pentagon/6453/yodavillea.html>

²² Mark Shaffer, ‘Yodaville exists for bombing runs -- Arizona’s newest town inviting target’, *Arizona Republic*, August 23 1999. Available at <http://www.geocities.com/Pentagon/6453/yodavillea.html>

²³ Roxana Tiron, ‘Army training site brings to life the horrors of war’, *National Defense Magazine*, July 2001 (available at http://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/issues/2001/Jul/Amy_Training.htm)

unmaintained sewer system is filled with live possums and rats, as well as rubber snakes bought from local toy shops. The simulated odours of rotting bodies, raw sewage and contaminated water can be produced on demand.

In some of Zussman's buildings, built-in pyrotechnic systems, modelled on those used in Hollywood film-sets, send vapourised propane into aerial fireballs on instruction. Five of the buildings can thus be 'burnt' on command. Ware Corporation, who set us the pyrotechnics, boast that, on entering the site, "deafening explosions rattle your body. Gun-toting guerrillas, the odor of raw sewage, the chaos and confusion of civilians on the street, and burning buildings with large, fiery explosions await those soldiers who train at Zussman Village." ²⁴ Daniel Hawkins, the engineer of the Zussman special effects system, boasts that "Hollywood has nothing on us. Whatever scenario you can imagine, you can create here. We've paid attention to the smallest detail – everything from our sewer 'smell-o'vision' to fully furnished hotel rooms. We also have several rigged 'surprises', like blowing up the bridge, knocking down a utility pole, or springing a dummy from behind furniture in a building." ²⁵

Andy Andrews, site manager, recalls the planning of the site. "We wanted it to be dirty and nasty – the way real war really is," he says. "Natural gas was out because the flame looks blue and [planners] wanted a realistic yellow/orange wood-burning fire. Liquid propane was considered because it produced the right color and it sticks and lingers. However, it was simply not a safe option, and, at that time, there was a new [health and safety] code being implemented for fire effects performed in front of an audience." "Ultimately," he recalls, "vaporised propane fitted the bill. It was easier to control, and since propane holds to the ground, it was easier and safer to create the mushroom or fireball effect. The propane would shoot up into the air

²⁴ Ware project summary, 'Zussman village, Fort Knox, Kentucky'. No date. Available at [www.wareinc.com/files/Zussman%20Village\(1\).pdf](http://www.wareinc.com/files/Zussman%20Village(1).pdf)

²⁵ Ware project summary, 'Zussman village, Fort Knox, Kentucky'. No date. Available at [www.wareinc.com/files/Zussman%20Village\(1\).pdf](http://www.wareinc.com/files/Zussman%20Village(1).pdf)

and would bellow back down to the ground, creating a spectacular effect.”²⁶

The largest US urban warfare complex, however, is emerging at the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, Louisiana. Here, 18 mock Iraqi villages are being constructed in what *Wired* Magazine has dubbed Fort Polk “the World’s most violent theme park.”²⁷ It is detailed down to kebab stands and simulated mass-graves created by burying loads of rotting bones and meat from local butchers shops. During the exercises -- attended by 44,000 Iraq-bound soldiers by 2005 alone -- this 100,000 acre facility is ‘inhabited’ by 1200 role players dressed in Arab-style clothing impersonating Iraqi tribesmen, police and civilians.²⁸ Two hundred of these are Arab-Americans, mostly originating from Iraq itself. Screenwriters are on hand to write ‘character sheets’ for each participant, based on whether they are they are programmed to be ‘friendly’, ‘neutral’ or ‘hostile’ towards US forces.

“Before, the role players were all local guys with Southern accents who would say ‘you ran over my goat’”, says Brig. General Mike Babero, the base commander. “Now you go into a ‘Kurdish’ village, and the ‘mayor’ is from northern Iraq.”²⁹ Some role players now do the \$220-a-day job full-time. During exercises, *Wired* reporter Vince Beiser found that a “a goofy Renaissance Faire atmospheres reigns” at the site. “People crack each other up talking in snippets of Arabic and Aladdin-esque gibberish: ‘Yaahabla blanabla!’ One greets another. ‘Mohammed Jihad!’ comes the reply.”

At an equivalent site at Fort Sill, Texas, meanwhile, Arab-American role-players are encouraged to provide their own ersatz realism during exercises. They cook Iraqi food, place prayer rugs around the

²⁶ Cited in Ware project summary, ‘Zussman village, Fort Knox, Kentucky’. No date. Available at [www.wareinc.com/files/Zussman%20Village\(1\).pdf](http://www.wareinc.com/files/Zussman%20Village(1).pdf)

²⁷ Vince Beiser, ‘Baghdad, USA’, *Wired* Magazine, 14(6), June, 2006.

²⁸ Ann Scott Tyson, ‘US tests new tactics in urban wargame’, *Christian Science Monitor*, November 9th, 2004 (available at <http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/1109/p01s01-usmi.html>)

²⁹ Ann Scott Tyson, ‘US tests new tactics in urban wargame’, *Christian Science Monitor*, November 9th, 2004 (available at <http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/1109/p01s01-usmi.html>)

site, and bring in additional furniture, artwork, and plants to equip 'houses'. These add to the level of detail provided by the in-house carpentry, sign-making and sewing workshops at the site.

But perhaps the most ambitious, and secretive, mock Arab city so far constructed is the \$14 million 'Chicago' facility at Israel's Ze'elim base in the Negev desert. The site has been explicitly built to generalise the purported military lessons of Israel's incursions into Palestinian cities and refugee camps since 2002 to the whole of Israel's armed forces. 'Chicago' simulates a complete Palestinian town.³⁰ It has simulated apartment buildings, a market place and a concrete 'casbah.' The 'town' is split into four 'quarters' and is wired up with surveillance equipment to monitor the 'combat'. Most notable at Chicago are a range of mechanical cut-outs bearded caricatures of Arab men which are programmed to pop-up in windows and street corners during live-fire exercises.

Israel has offered the Chicago facility for hire to Western forces undertaking urban warfare training. But, despite such forces co-operating closely with the IDF on urban warfare training and equipment since the 2002 invasion of West Bank cities, these offers have so far been rejected by Western militaries, probably for public relations reasons. However, the operators of "Chicago" are confident that western militaries will eventually train there.³¹

War Ghost Towns

Despite their recent proliferation, senior Pentagon officials are convinced that current urban warfare training sites are completely inadequate to train US forces to counter future urban insurgencies in fast-growing megacities. To explore future options, in 2006 the US Congress commissioned the RAND national military think-tank to

³⁰ Arie O'Sullivan, 'Army inaugurates warfare village', Jerusalem Post, January 13th 2005.

³¹ Ann Scott Tyson, 'US tests new tactics in urban wargame', Christian Science Monitor, November 9th, 2004 (available at <http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/1109/p01s01-usmi.html>)

produce a 400 page report on future provision of urban warfare facilities.³²

The report starts with the premise that “US armed forces have thus far been unable to adequately reproduce the challenges their soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen meet in the towns and cities of Iraq and Afghanistan.”³³ Initially, the RAND researchers evaluate the potential of the various existing urban warfare training sites for offering the architectural and infrastructural features deemed to be most challenging in undertaking military operations within large, global south cities. Those with “clutter/debris/filth”, “slums/shanty towns/ walled compounds,” “subterranean complexes” and simulated “government, hospital/prison/asylum structures,” such as the Marines’ 29 Palms facility in California, score highest.³⁴

To address the need for more realistic physical simulations of whole cities and city districts, the RAND team recommend the construction of four new urban warfare cities with more than 300 structures each located in the Kentucky/North Carolina/ Georgia, at the existing Fort Polk base, at Fort Hood in Texas, and in the US Southwest. They also explore the possibility of appropriating entire ‘ghosts towns’ within the continental US that have been catastrophically deindustrialised and largely abandoned. The report states that “the use of abandoned towns” [for urban warfare training] has moved beyond the concept phase into what might be considered the early test and development phase.”³⁵

³² Russell Glenn, Jody Jacobs, Brian Nichiporuk, Christopher Paul, Barbara Raymond, Randall Steeb and Harry Thie, *Preparing for the Proven Inevitable: An Urban Operations Training Strategy for America's Joint Force*, Report prepared for the US Secretary of Defense, RAND National Defense Research Institute, Santa Monica, 2006.

³³ Russell Glenn, Jody Jacobs, Brian Nichiporuk, Christopher Paul, Barbara Raymond, Randall Steeb and Harry Thie, *Preparing for the Proven Inevitable: An Urban Operations Training Strategy for America's Joint Force*, Report prepared for the US Secretary of Defense, RAND National Defense Research Institute, Santa Monica, 2006. pp. xv.

³⁴ Russell Glenn, Jody Jacobs, Brian Nichiporuk, Christopher Paul, Barbara Raymond, Randall Steeb and Harry Thie, *Preparing for the Proven Inevitable: An Urban Operations Training Strategy for America's Joint Force*, Report prepared for the US Secretary of Defense, RAND National Defense Research Institute, Santa Monica, 2006. pp. 243.

³⁵ Russell Glenn, Jody Jacobs, Brian Nichiporuk, Christopher Paul, Barbara Raymond, Randall Steeb and Harry Thie, *Preparing for the Proven Inevitable: An Urban Operations Training Strategy for*

Attention here is focusing on the virtually abandoned copper-mining town of Playas, in the South West corner of New Mexico. This town has already been used for the training of anti-suicide bomb squads for the US Department of Homeland Security. “Over the course of time, towns and cities eventually die,” writes Steve Rowell of the Center for Land Use Interpretation in Culver City, California. “Despite this and despite the receding U.S. economy, the industries of defense and disaster preparedness are flourishing, reversing this trend in some of the most remote areas of the nation. The war on terror is redefining the American pastoral in an unexpected way.”³⁶ In the case of Playas, its new role is “as a generic American suburb under simulated attack.” and, in future, as a simulated Arab city within which to hone skills of expeditionary war.

The entire town of Playas is rented for this purpose from New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology, who bought it explicitly for use as an urban warfare training site. However, live-fire exercises will probably not be possible in Playas “since the owners of the town would consider the structural repair costs prohibitive.”³⁷

RAND’s report considers that Playas would be improved as a training site its structures we’re rebuilt along Arab lines. It suggests that “the architecture of the abandoned town [should be] modified to include walled compounds of the type that US troops in Iraq and Afghanistan must at times isolate and clear.”³⁸

Despite being portrayed as a ‘ghost town’, a few remaining residents cling on in Playas. They largely make their living as extras in urban

America;s Joint Force, Report prepared fo the US Secretary of Defense, RAND NAtional Defense Research Institute, Santa Monica, 2006. pp. 63.

³⁶ Steve Rowell, ‘Plays, New Mexico: A Modern ghost town braces for the future’, Centre for Land Use Interpretation, at http://www.clui.org/clui_4_1/lotl/v28/i.html

³⁷ Russell Glenn, Jody Jacobs, Brian Nichiporuk, Christopher Paul, Barbara Raymond, Randall Steeb and Harry Thie, Preparing for the Proven Inevitable: An Urban Operations Training Strategy for America;s Joint Force, Report prepared fo the US Secretary of Defense, RAND NAtional Defense Research Institute, Santa Monica, 2006. pp.63.

³⁸ Russell Glenn, Jody Jacobs, Brian Nichiporuk, Christopher Paul, Barbara Raymond, Randall Steeb and Harry Thie, Preparing for the Proven Inevitable: An Urban Operations Training Strategy for America;s Joint Force, Report prepared fo the US Secretary of Defense, RAND NAtional Defense Research Institute, Santa Monica, 2006. pp. 63.

war and terrorist exercises; their down-at-heel town essentially makes its living being repeatedly assaulted and targeted by military power. Residents are apparently grateful for this new economic niche. “We’re glad things are going on down here,” Linda McCarty, a Playas resident, remarked to *USA Today*. “Until New Mexico Tech took over”, and the town was given over to urban warfare training, “it was really sad.”³⁹

A network of existing “low population” towns in North Dakota is also being considered for such a role. RAND also recommend use of a range of abandoned public infrastructures for urban war training across the US. Included here are ships (as “reasonable facsimile of subterranean environments” like urban subways; abandoned factories, office complexes and strip malls, abandoned schools and hospitals or disused entertainment complexes.⁴⁰ They note that some such facilities have already being taken over, or new simulations constructed, for rich consumers seeking the thrills of ‘urban warfare’ whilst staying at nearby luxury resorts.

The potential for real US metropolitan areas to act as urban warfare training grounds is also not ignored by RAND. They recommend a new range of urban warfare exercises, modelled on the Urban Warrior and Project Metropolis exercises, in which Marines “invaded” Little Rock, Arkansas, Chicago, Illinois, Oakland, California, and Charleston, South Carolina, between 1999 and 2002.⁴¹ Such exercises will be even more necessary in the future, RAND argue, because “no purpose-built urban training site and no simulation for many years to come will be able to present the heterogeneity and complexity of a modern megalopolis”⁴² Such exercises centre on

³⁹ Mimi Hall, ‘War on terror takes over a thankful town’, *USAToday.Com*, 13th March 2005, available at http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2005-03-13-smalltown-terror-drills_x.htm

⁴⁰ Russell Glenn, Jody Jacobs, Brian Nichiporuk, Christopher Paul, Barbara Raymond, Randall Steeb and Harry Thie, *Preparing for the Proven Inevitable: An Urban Operations Training Strategy for America’s Joint Force*, Report prepared for the US Secretary of Defense, RAND National Defense Research Institute, Santa Monica, 2006. pp. 67.

⁴¹ Elizabeth Book, ‘Project metropolis brings urban wards to U.S. cities’, *National Defense Magazine*, April 2002, available at www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/issues/2002/Apr/Project_Metropolis.htm.

⁴² Russell Glenn, Jody Jacobs, Brian Nichiporuk, Christopher Paul, Barbara Raymond, Randall Steeb and Harry Thie, *Preparing for the Proven Inevitable: An Urban Operations Training Strategy for*

learning to disable the electrical, communications, transport and water infrastructures of a real city. The Oakland experience in March 1999, for example, involved major amphibious and airborne landings, staged to generate recruitment interest, as well as exercise in abandoned hospitals and sewer networks.

To RAND, all these proposals, whilst recreating some of the challenges US forces face in occupying global south cities, will fail to even begin to approach those cities in scale. To address this, their most ambitious proposal, therefore, is for the construction of a 20 km by 20 km 'mega-MOUT' complex, incorporating a complete 900 building town, at the Marine base at Twenty Nine Palms in California.⁴³ Costing \$330 million by 2011, such a complex would, RAND imagine, allow an entire brigade to simulate taking a large-size Iraqi or Arab town with unprecedented levels of realism. For the first time, airforce elements would be completely integrated with ground forces. Entire port and industrial facilities would be integrated. And live ground and artillery fire would be possible.

Destruction Diorama

Whilst physical urban simulations for urban warfare training draw heavily on the expertise of Hollywood and theme park designers, a widening range of electronic ones link intimately into the booming video games and electronic simulations industries. Increasingly, such physical and electronic simulations of Arab cities are being produced together. The theory here, according to Scott Malo and Christopher Stapleton of the Media Convergence Laboratory at University of Central Florida, is that "the theme park technology of today adds the thrilling nature of full body stimulation and activity. So what if theme parks and video game combined their strengths?"⁴⁴

America's Joint Force, Report prepared for the US Secretary of Defense, RAND National Defense Research Institute, Santa Monica, 2006. pp. 83.

⁴³ Russell Glenn, Jody Jacobs, Brian Nichiporuk, Christopher Paul, Barbara Raymond, Randall Steeb and Harry Thie, Preparing for the Proven Inevitable: An Urban Operations Training Strategy for America's Joint Force, Report prepared for the US Secretary of Defense, RAND National Defense Research Institute, Santa Monica, 2006. pp. 152.

⁴⁴ Scott Malo and Christopher Stapleton, 'Going beyond reality: Creating extreme multimodal mixed reality for training simulation.' Paper given at the Interservice/Industry training, Simulation and Education Conference (IITSEC), 2004.

One such project, known as the 'Urban Terrain Module,' is based at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. It blurs the latest electronic simulation technologies seamlessly into physically-staged dioramas of devastated 'Arab' urban environments. This one-house space, embedded in a large media studio, is "decorated in a decidedly Middle-Eastern manner. A picture hangs on the wall, the smashed remnants of a small vase lie on a small circular table near the kitchen area. Like a Broadway show, walls and other set pieces can be swapped out as the training merits."⁴⁵

Built with the help of Hollywood stagecraft professionals, this site can project electronically simulated 'virtual humans,' with suitably swarthy 'Arab' features, who are programmed to 'populate' the electronic screen spaces between the physical, ruined diorama. The electronic screens can conjure up apparently lifelike Arabs as targets for the US military personnel who are 'embedded' within the module for their training session.

As well as all the now familiar stage-set paraphernalia of simulated explosions, smoke and a computerised, desert landscape, the project's designers argue that the electronic simulations at Fort Sill are so convincing that the borders between the virtualised and physical elements are increasingly indistinguishable to US soldiers undertaking training there.⁴⁶ One promotional brochure at a major military simulation conference recently gushed that such artificial intelligence packages "allows trainers to manipulate character responses on the fly, changing crowds into violent mobs with a keystroke."⁴⁷

Fort Sill's operators imagine that, in the near future, the simulation will be modified to project real satellite and digital mapping data from Iraq, or other urban warfare locations, so that, as project Director, Colonel Gary Kinne, puts it, "individuals could train on the actual terrain that they would occupy someday—maybe in a future theatre

⁴⁵ Associated Press, 'Army unveils new, ultra-real simulation', MSNBC.com, December 20, 2004.

⁴⁶ Heidi Loreda, 'Hollywood magic prepares Marines for combat', Marines.Com, July 2004, available at <http://www.marforres.usmc.mil/Archive/2004.08/mout.html>

⁴⁷ Heidi Loreda, 'Hollywood magic prepares Marines for combat', Marines.Com, July 2004, available at <http://www.marforres.usmc.mil/Archive/2004.08/mout.html>

of war.”⁴⁸ Simulated smells, like those used in physical urban war facilities, are also envisaged.

Here, digitised, human targets blur here with the tricks of Hollywood ‘war-wound artists’ to provide extra realism for such hybrid simulations. A similar facility, embedded inside San Diego’s only TV and movie studio at Stu Segall productions, even employs amputee Marines returning from Iraq. “They would go out on patrol with their squad” through the hybrid physical and virtual spaces of the simulated Iraqi city, reports Stu Segall, owner of the studio. “A bomb would explode, and we’d pretend they lost a leg.”⁴⁹

Immersion of War

Beyond these so-called ‘hybrid’ or ‘mixed reality’ simulations lie a whole universe of purely electronic ones. In these, virtual reality and electronic mapping and satellite image technologies are used to provide electronic renditions of the cities or nations that military personnel are about to attack or attempt to occupy which can be experienced immersively.

Middle Eastern, Asian and African cities, for example, are being mapped electronically and remotely, and their various physical geographies are being classified according to the types of urban terrain present. In 2004, for example, the Computer Science Corporation combined satellite and laser scanned imagery and digital pictures from the ground to “build” the entire nation of Iraq and all its major cities” within a ‘virtualised reality’ model accurate to within 1 metre resolution. This apparently allows trainees to “drive” via real-time models from Kuwait to Turkey” during war-games.⁵⁰

Entirely lacking in even virtual people, these simulations render Iraq as pure, physical battlespace. These virtual models and simulations

⁴⁸ Heidi Loredo, ‘Hollywood magic prepares Marines for combat’, Marines.Com, July 2004, available at <http://www.marforres.usmc.mil/Archive/2004.08/mout.html>

⁴⁹ Heidi Loredo, ‘Hollywood magic prepares Marines for combat’, Marines.Com, July 2004, available at <http://www.marforres.usmc.mil/Archive/2004.08/mout.html>

⁵⁰ Harrison Donnelly, ‘Geospatial data bolsters virtual training’, Military Geospatial technology, 4(4), October 2006, Online Edition, (available at <http://www.military-geospatial-technology.com/article.cfm?DocID=1708>).

are so detailed that Scott Allman, manager of virtual environments for CSC, boast proudly that “if you put a door on the side of the building, the soldier is trained for that. When he gets to the real environment, and the door is on the wrong side of the building, soldiers can get killed.”⁵¹

Such a simulation can, moreover be continually updated as physical violence disrupts or reorganises the subject city. Bruce Deal, an engineer on a similar programme underway at Berkeley, states that each urban combat “patrol can record new information about its surroundings, updating the model recorded by the previous patrol. Soldiers can keep up with changes to the cityscape, such as new barricades or destroyed buildings.”⁵²

Within such simulations, the structures and districts of Iraqi and Middle Eastern cities have also been classified using ‘Urban Terrain Zones’ based on international databases of the construction materials and practices used in the different parts of target cities: steel, glass and concrete in city cores, older brick, stone or mud in casbahs, and so on.

This is considered important because these physical characteristics respond differently to the various types of US military ordinance launched at them during attacks. Such various ‘rubbing’ effects have even been electronically simulated by Lockheed Martin analyst Dale Miller. Work here is moving from the effects of US weapons on generalised stereotypes of Arab urban structures, to modelling their specific or ‘geospecific’ effects on individual urban areas.⁵³ Miller stresses that his “customers want real cities” which are electronically ‘populated’ with “urban clutter: sheds, dumpsters, telephone polls, wires etc.” before the simulated weapons are unleashed upon them. His main difficulties, apparently, are to simulate the “holes in walls,” “rubble,” “holes in floors,” and “damage to underground bunkers from

⁵¹ Quoted in Harrison Donnelly, ‘Geospatial data bolsters virtual training’, *Military Geospatial technology*, 4(4), October 2006, Online Edition, (available at <http://www.military-geospatial-technology.com/article.cfm?DocID=1708>).

⁵² Quoted in Emily Singer, ‘The speedy way to capture a city’, *New Scientist*, 5th May 2005

⁵³ Dale Miller, ‘Weapons effects in urban terrain’. Paper given at the US Department of Defense, MOUT FACT Kick Of Conference, May 14th 2003.

penetrating munitions,” that transform urban landscapes once the shooting starts.⁵⁴

Much larger simulations of developing world megacities are also providing the sites for the main wargaming activities through which US forces are imagining full-scale counter insurgency warfare in the future. In the most important electronically simulated urban wargame -- named ‘Urban Resolve’ - a huge swathe of 8 square miles of Jakarta, in Indonesia, has been accurately digitised and ‘geo-specifically’ simulated in three-dimensions. This has been done down to the interior of the (1.6 million) buildings, and also involves 109,000 mobile ‘vehicles’ and ‘civilians’, as well as the subterranean infrastructures.

The initiative is being used as the basis for series massive military simulations, involving over 100 participants, and using some of the US military’s most sophisticated supercomputers, between 2003 and 2008. These project the city as the site of a massive urban war involving US forces in 2015, complete with a range of imagined new US sensors, surveillance systems and weapons geared specifically towards warfare unveiling the ‘fog of war’ in such a massive megacity. Opposition forces, who are programmed to fight autonomously within the virtualised megacity, meanwhile, are equipped with any technology imagined to be available on the open market in 2015: unmanned suicide vehicles.

Urban Resolve even simulates the daily rhythms of the virtualised ‘Jakarta’. “Roads are quiet at night, but during weekday rush hours they become clogged with traffic.” Virtualised “people go to work, take lunch breaks and visit restaurants, banks and churches” – apparently unaware that they inhabit a major war-zone. And “traffic and civilian presence increases around mosques at the appropriate times for daily prayers.”⁵⁵ Attention in Urban resolve is now being switched to a virtualised rendition of Baghdad. Later, a US city will be digitised and simulated for use in a major ‘homeland security’ exercise.

⁵⁴ Dale Miller, ‘Weapons effects in urban terrain’. Paper given at the US Department of Defense, MOUT FACT Kick Off Conference, May 14th 2003.

⁵⁵ Peter Wielhouwer, ‘Preparing for future joint urban operations: The role of simulation and the *Urban Resolve* experiment’, *Small Wars journal*, July 2005, available at <http://www.smallwarsjournal.com/documents/swjmag/v2/wielhouwer.htm>

An Army of Gamers

The simulation of Arab cities as targets for US military firepower, goes well beyond the military. As the military blur with entertainment industries,⁵⁶ so the electronic simulations of Arab cities used to train US soldiers are also used as the basis for successful commercial video games. Most notably here, *America's Army*⁵⁷ and the US Marines' equivalent, *Full Spectrum Warrior*,⁵⁸ have been developed by their respective forces, in partnership with entertainment industries, using urban training simulations as a basis.

Both games – which were amongst the world's most popular video game franchises in 2005 – centre overwhelmingly on the military challenges allegedly involved in occupying and pacifying stylised, Orientalised, Arab cities. Their immersive simulations “propel the player into the world of the gaming industry's latest fetish: modern urban warfare.”⁵⁹ *America's Army* also forces players to undertake basic training in an electronic simulation of one of the US military's largest physical urban warfare training site at Mount McKenna. Andrew Deck argues that the proliferation of urban warfare games based on actual, ongoing, US military interventions in Arab cities, works to “call forth a cult of ultra-patriotic xenophobes whose greatest joy is to destroy, regardless of how racist, imperialistic, and flimsy the rationale” for the simulated battle.⁶⁰

Such games work powerfully to further reinforce imaginary geographies equating Arab cities with ‘terrorism’ and the need for ‘pacification’ or ‘cleansing’ via US military invasion and occupation. More than further blurring the already fuzzy boundaries separating

⁵⁶ James Der Derian J, *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Complex*. Boulder, Co.: Westview, 2001.

⁵⁷ see <http://www.americasarmy.com>

⁵⁸ See www.fullspectrumwarrior.com

⁵⁹ DelPiano, S., ‘Review of Full Spectrum Warrior.’ *Games First*. 2004 At <http://www.gamesfirst.com/reviews/07.10.04/FullSpectrumRev/fullspectrumreview.htm>

⁶⁰ Andy Deck, ‘Demilitarizing the playground,’ *No Quarter*, 2004, at <http://artcontext.net/crit/essays/noQuarter/>

war from entertainment, they demonstrate that the US entertainment industry “has assumed a posture of co-operation towards a culture of permanent war.”⁶¹

Complex and self-reinforcing connections between war and entertainment are emerging here which deepen the long-established role of toys and films out outlets for militaristic propaganda. On the one hand, it has been estimated that around 90% of the 75,000 men and women who join the US Army each year are ‘casual’ gamers; 30% consider themselves ‘hardcore’ gamers. Immersive video games within which players endlessly practice counter-insurgency warfare within stylised Arab cities works here as a powerful recruitment, training and public relations device.

On the other hand, such is the familiarity of most military recruits with Playstation controls, that the US Marines have even mimicked these in the consoles for their new remotely controlled urban surveillance vehicle, named Dragon Runner, currently being used on the streets of Iraq’s cities. “We modeled the controller after the PlayStation2, because that’s what these 18-, 19-year-old Marines have been playing with pretty much all of their lives,” admitted Maj. Greg Heines, the system’s designer.⁶²

Within urban warfare video games it is striking that Arab cities are, once again, represented merely as “collections of objects not congeries of people.”⁶³ When people *are* represented, almost without exception, they are rendered as the shadowy, subhuman, radicalised Arab figure of some absolutely external ‘terrorist’ -- figures to be annihilated repeatedly in sanitised ‘action’ as entertainment, or military training, or a blurred version of both. *America’s Army* simulates ‘counter terror’ warfare in densely packed Arab cities in a fictional country of ‘Zekistan’. Almost every building is dark, shadowy, burning, and rendered in stylised Islamic architecture. “The mission” of the game, writes Steve O’Hagan, “is to slaughter evildoers, with something about ‘liberty’ [...] going on in the back

⁶¹ Andy Deck, ‘Demilitarizing the playground,’ No Quarter, 2004, at <http://artcontext.net/crit/essays/noQuarter/>

⁶² Noah Shachtman, ‘Why War Is Really Just a Game,’ Wired, May 24 2002 at <http://www.wired.com/news/politics/0,1283,52766,00.html>

⁶³ Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2004, pp. 201.

ground [...]. These games may be ultra-realistic down to the caliber of the weapons, but when bullets hit flesh people just crumple serenely into a heap. No blood. No exit wounds. No screams." ⁶⁴

Here, then, once again, the only role for Arab cities is as environments for military engagement. The militarisation of the everyday sites, artefacts, and spaces of the simulated city is total. "Cars are used as bombs, bystanders become victims [although they die without spilling blood], houses become headquarters, apartments become lookout points, and anything to be strewn in the street becomes suitable cover.⁶⁵ Indeed, there is some evidence that the actual physical geographies of Arab cities are being digitised to provide the three-dimensional 'battlespace' for each game. One games developer, Forterra systems, which also develops training games for the US military, boasts that "we've [digitally] built a portion of the downtown area of a large Middle Eastern capital city where we have a significant presence today".⁶⁶ Another games company, Kumar Reality Games – strap line "real war news, real war games" -- offers simulated games based on each of the many battles and counterinsurgency operations in Iraq since 2003. Kumar have been a main sponsor Fox News's jingoistic coverage of the 'war on terror,'

Virtual Stress

A powerful illustration of how far the US military have instinctively tried to inhabit virtualised renditions of Arab cities, rather than confront their social realities, is more beguiling still. Here we confront the use of virtual reality wargames to treat US veterans of Iraq suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The University of Southern California's Institute for Creative Technologies, a main player in the crossover between war and entertainment, has adapted *Full Spectrum Warrior's* immersive simulations of stylised Arab cities as the basis for treating traumatised soldiers. Patients are forced to go through simulations of the events that have most traumatised them: being inside mined or bombed vehicles and helicopters, motor

⁶⁴ Steve O'Hagan, S., 'Recruitment hard drive'. Guardian Guide. June 19-25: 2004, pp. 12-13.

⁶⁵ DelPiano, S., 'Review of Full Spectrum Warrior.' Games First. 2004 At <http://www.gamesfirst.com/reviews/07.10.04/FullSpectrumRev/fullspectrumreview.htm>

⁶⁶ Andy Deck, 'Demilitarizing the playground,' No Quarter, 2004, at <http://artcontext.net/crit/essays/noQuarter/>

attacks within compounds, or patrolling and being attacked on Iraqi streets.⁶⁷ Patients are placed within virtual reality “scenarios that resemble the setting in which the traumatic events initially occurred.”⁶⁸ This allows the war-zone experience to be replayed in what is called ‘Virtual Iraq exposure therapy’ which is about to be deployed across treatment centres in the US. “With its video game like qualities” the programme is deemed by its designers to, “resonate well with the current generation of war fighters”.

Thus the deployment of Orientalised urban immersions for US military deployments reaches full circle. As well as recruitment, training, entertainment and combat, the derealised, pixelated worlds of simulated urban warfare are used to try and allow soldiers to try and cope with the realities of the horrors that they actually experienced whilst fighting in Iraq. Perhaps the task here is to allow the soldiers to once again blur the real horrors of Iraq’s cities back into the background of the endless, Orientalised simulations of Arab urbanism that increasingly pervade Western culture. James Spira, a Navy psychologist using the system, stressed that clinicians using the system deliberately make sure that it is “not too realistic, to create more trauma.”⁶⁹

Mobilising the Simulacral Collective

The complex constellation of simulations of Arab and global south cities discussed here work most powerfully as a collective. Their various physical, electronic and blended physical-electronic manifestations operate together, as do all simulations, by collapsing the real with artifice to the extent that any simple boundary between the two effectively disappears.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Rick Rogers, ‘Military to try virtual combat stress remedy’, SignOnSanDiego.Com, March 17th, 2005.

⁶⁸ Rick Rogers, ‘Military to try virtual combat stress remedy’, SignOnSanDiego.Com, March 17th, 2005.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Rick Rogers, ‘Military to try virtual combat stress remedy’, SignOnSanDiego.Com, March 17th, 2005.

⁷⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

The military simulacral collective, in particular, works by naturalising Arab and global south cities as little but physical battlespace, populated, when peopled at all, by lurking, dehumanised, and radicalised ‘terrorists,’ to be assaulted and erased by violent Western or Israeli interventions, for the good of ‘freedom.’ It does this to the three closely linked imperatives of profit, commodified entertainment, and the culture of permanent war. For all of these benefit hugely from the seductive militaristic gloss and relentless sanitisation at play.

As well as producing endless fields of repetitive, symbolic and preparatory violence, the military simulacral collective forces its participants – whether in physical wargames, military electronic simulations, or video games -- to conform to the rituals of urban combat through aggressive and hyper-masculine military assault. Soldiers thus consume the various simulacra and use them to base their real treatments of the spaces and inhabitants of the global south cities that they patrol, assault and occupy. They inhabit the stylised and Orientalised worlds of US military video games whilst on leisure time in the encampments of Baghdad. And they even confront their post-war psychological traumas, by re-immersing themselves within more electronic, urban simulacral, as they all-too-real streets of Iraq’s cities recede into troubled sites of memory.

As a key site in the normalisation of warfare against global south cities, urban war simulations do much to symbolise and entrench a radical shift in US military doctrine and technology. No longer are the Pentagon’s theorists of high-tech warfare solely imagining an ageographical and planetary battlespace within which the overbearing networked power of US air and space platforms is rendered omniscient and omnipotent to kill and surveil, with impunity, from above.

Instead -- obsessed that the global high-tech military superpower can easily lose on a megacity’s streets -- the microgeographies of global south cities have now emerged as the paradigmatic conflict zones of the post Cold War world. Despite the abject failure against urban insurgents in Iraq, the archipelago of urban warfare simulations discussed here thus represent part of an attempts to make the occupation and control of these sites a key objective of a teetering and precarious US colonial project.

Tied intimately into entertainment industries, this simulacral collective produces the mock streets, immersive cities, and entire digital cityscapes of America's others as the key landscapes for perpetual violence, permanent war, and militarised entertainment. But these, as always in the history of colonialist warfare, actually say more about the preoccupations and assumptions of urban life in colonial heartlands - in this case, the United States -- than the realities of their current colonial target: Arab urbanism.

The military simulacral collective speaks volumes about the fragmenting landscapes and radicalised politics of US cities in the neoconservative era. This is particularly so as US law enforcement becomes increasingly militarised, and the US Army and Marines become more involved in 'urban military operations' centred on US cities. A key legitimisation here is the latest US military doctrine which sees all cities as key nodes within an all-encompassing global 'battlespace' within which a wide-spectrum of 'assymetric' conflicts need to be confronted, with no conventional military 'front' and back regions. Such doctrine increasingly undermines long-standing military distinctions between the 'inside' and 'outside' zones of colonial military power and security policy.

Along with the boom in 'homeland security' since 9/11, this means that the military simulacral collective now centres as much on simulating Los Angeles as on Baghdad, on imagining major military operations to 'take back' US cities from civil uprisings or social protests, as much as projecting forces to occupy Arab urban regions. The Los Angeles riots of 1992 appear on military urban warfare Powerpoints about 'lessons learned' as often as Mogadishu or Grozny.

Meanwhile, in the US, simulated Arab cities are being joined by dozens of physical simulations of US city districts in which law enforcement and National Guard personnel practise operations against civil unrest, terrorist attack and natural disaster. "Another architecture is rising in the expanding landscape of preparedness," write the programme notes for the Center for Land Use Interpretation's 'Emergency State' programme. "Condensed simulacrum of our existing urban environments are forming within our communities, where the first

responders to emergencies, on a small or large scale, practice their craft of dealing with disaster” and “the police contend with civil decay, robberies, hostage situations, looting, riots, and snipers.”⁷¹

Some evidence also suggests that the attitudes of military and law enforcement personnel towards such events within US cities has been strongly influenced by recent ‘urban operations’ in the Middle East. For example, in disturbing echoes of Baghdad and Fallujah, some US Army commanders, in response to Hurricane Katrina, talked openly in the *US Army Times* about the need to launch ‘urban combat’ operations to ‘take back’ the city from ‘insurgents’ who had bred anarchy and violence.⁷² More broadly, the familiar racialisations of US cities are never far below the surface of the treatment of Iraqi civilians by US forces, for example. White Marine snipers often label their targets “sand-niggers.”⁷³

Military simulacra are helping to produce US cities in another, more direct, way. For generating them now takes up large swathes of the US economy, especially in high-tech metropolitan areas. Some urban local economies -- such as around Orlando, Florida, and the beltway in Virginia -- are now heavily dominated by high concentrations of simulation corporations blending military, research and entertainment dimensions. Orlando’s 100 large military simulator firms generate around 17,000 jobs and are starting to overshadow even Disney as local economic drivers.

Finally, military simulacra themselves now take their place within the proliferating spectacles and themed, fantasy landscapes that dominate urban consumption in the US.⁷⁴ At Fort Belvoir, Virginia, for example, the US Army is considering a proposal from a private developer to complement a major new military museum at the site with a military theme park and simulation centre along with a massive

⁷¹ Center for Land Use Interpretation, ‘Emergency State: First Responders and Emergency Training Architecture’. At http://www.clui.org/clui_4_1/pro_pro/exhibits/emergency.html

⁷² Chenelly, J. (2005), “Troops begin combat operations in New Orleans”, *Army Times*, 2nd September 2005, (available at <http://www.armytimes.com/story.php?f=1-292925-1077495.php>, 10th October 2005).

⁷³ See Davis, M. (2004), “The Pentagon as global slum lord”, *TomDispatch*, <http://www.tomdispatch.com/>, April 19th, accessed June 10th.

⁷⁴ See, for example, Mark Gottdeiner, *The Theming of America, : Dreams, Visions and Commercial Spaces*, Boulder: Westview.

hotel complex. According to the *Washington Post*, the proposal promises that visitors will be able to “command the latest M-1 tank [or] feel the rush of a paratrooper’s free-fall, fly a Cobra gunship.”⁷⁵

With experience within such simulators becoming more and more indistinguishable from that of the ‘pilots’ or armed drones used in the CIA’s frequent assassination raids in the Middle East and Pakistan, a further and troubling blurring of colonial heartland and frontier war-zone emerges. For these pilots are actually located in anonymous commercial buildings in suburban US locations. “At the end of the work day”, one Predator operator recently boasted, “you walk back into the rest of life in America”.⁷⁶

Such connections, of course, go the other way, too. Iraq’s cities -- now increasingly wrapped in razor-wire and circled by biometric checkpoints -- are rarely described by US military personnel in terms of the real exemplar used as the basis for such tactics -- Israeli tactics in Palestine. Rather, they are more usually depicted in a language curiously reminiscent of a post-suburban United States. Describing the new cordon and checkpoint system enforced around Taramiyah in Iraq, for example, Dennis Steele, a military reporter writing in the *US Army* magazine, states that this is “the Iraqi version of a gated community – no luxury estates, no backyard pools, no country club—but the purposes are the same: keep out the bad elements.”⁷⁷

The military simulacral collective works by rendering our urbanising planet observable to the Orientalised and voyeuristic gaze of an army of consumers, designers and soldiers alike who can then enjoy fantasies of repetitive war-as-game cycles ad infinitum. It materialises and brings into being imaginations and fantasies of the relations between geography, race and power which lie at the heart of US military and politically neoconservative thought in the post-Cold War. Just as important, though, there emerges here a radical diffusion of paradigms of colonialism and militarism developed initially in the vast

⁷⁵ CNN.com, ‘C’mon kids, let’s go to Army world!’, August 8th, 2006 (available at <http://www.cnn.com/2006/US/08/08/military.theme.park.ap/index.html>)

⁷⁶ Quoted in Ricahrd Newman, “The joystick war”, *U.S. News*, 19th May, Available at www.usnews.com June 2003.

⁷⁷ Dennis Steele, ‘The gated community: Giving an Iraqi town a second chance’, *Army*, September 2006, pp. 24-28.

experimental architectures of Israel Palestine. For, it is Israeli experience of both urban incursion and killing, and physical and electronic urban simulation, that is proving the most influential exemplar in the reorganisation of Western forces as urban counter-insurgency units geared towards global south and especially Arab cities.

Perhaps most importantly, though, this constellation of simulacra is a powerful example of an entrenching cultural militarisation, especially within US society. For the various simulacra addressed here become both means through which colonial incursions into global south cities are naturalised, and a key site through which such excursions are indefinitely reiterated, consumed, and celebrated.

The radical denial of the social and cultural worlds, and lived urbanism, of such cities is the key to this encircling militarism. US nationalism and militarism thus increasingly rest not just on an extending and integrating army of immersive and physical simulations of war. They also rely on an extending archipelago of ersatz urban environments -- physical, electronic, and hybrid -- within which the calls to colonial and Orientalised violence can be enacted and repeated whilst at the same time being continually distanced from the real bodies, and places, destroyed by such violence.