

Civilian War Games Capabilities

Civilian war games stay within easy reach. They are also technically dependable, graphically appealing and cheap. Are they to pose themselves as **an alternative to simulation-systems from a purely military source** or pave the way to other modes of rationale?

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Dissimilarities in design

As James F. Dunnigan¹ accurately noticed in his *War-games Handbook*, differences between civilian and military simulation-systems mainly lie with their designers'. **Most noticeable dissimilarities** are listed below.

- Considering the number of classified data informing military war-games, their designers must cope with obvious **confidentiality constraints**. Conversely, marketable war games are accessible to all and any. Thus all techniques of simulation supporting them can refresh out of a continuous feed-back from the open, critics and/or suggestions.
- A majority of marketed games are simulating **historical campaigns**, where the issue would replicate History "as written". Under this aspect, they are much different from other simulations supposed to replicate battles not yet fought.
- Finally, military war games must comply with **standards**, whose definition often involves a variety of authorities possibly hunting for distinct end-states². The commercial designers have only one person to deal with: themselves.

Hence, **civilian and military approaches would clearly split** on how a war game should conclude. This said, the history-track favored by commercial designers is worth being explored in support of current and future operations.

History as an anticipation tool

Asymmetric confrontations and Military Operations on Urbanized Terrain (MOUT) are far from being "new-fashion" subjects of interest, and both topics have inspired many **marketed simulation-games**. Wars in Vendée or against the Boers; Operations in Afghanistan and Nicaragua are a few of them; also Stalingrad and Berlin or, at a closer time, Hue. Most **upshots reported in history-books happened to validate the methodology** governing these games. Similar design could thus be of some interest to the military under two aspects. First, get aware of

the unaltered features of low/medium intensity combats and "urban warfare". Then, develop more relevant systems by the input in existing games of up-to-date factors such as the presence of many civilians requiring special care from the force, rogue factions committed to guerrilla activities, etc.

Upgrading commercialized games

As a matter of fact, a war gamer spends more time at pondering about his next go in the play than a real-life situation would permit. Also, he is pretty-well aware of the size and capabilities of "enemy troops". Thus, even ardent competitors can hardly feel the stress of running real operations. So, it is time to correct that default and consider any **upgrades that could better mirror the military picture of operations**.

Provisional patches suggested below are expected to meet the challenge.

- Tune up playing-sequences in accordance with the stressing tempo of real-life operations.
- Appoint referees who are totally familiar with all gaming rules in order to secure trouble-free assumptions on the results of moves and combats.
- Reproduce a full chain of command with its various decision-making and execution spheres of duty.
- Veil larger portions of the scenario so that players keep training in a "fog of war" situation.

Existing tracks to be explored

From tactics to high strategy, there exist an amazing number of simulation-games in shops. Pre-strategic level simulations have been already utilized with some success for preparing wide operations³, but the **tactical-level option is probably of a greater interest** where troops need to be trained in concrete conditions. Plenty of games simulating West/East clashes at all levels have been commercialized by the 80's. These were mainly reproducing W.W.II schemes, though revisited out of the lessons learned from a few modern conflicts such as the Kippur war; also conflicts opposing

India to Pakistan and USSR to Afghani factions; etc. Following the end of the Cold-War era, these products have been replaced in shops by W.W.II-related tactical games. Most of the time, infantry-combats are best represented in this newer series of games. Once beefed up with appropriate pieces of intelligence, they could possibly grow in fashionable **simulations on the subject of modern warfare.**

Compendium of games that are worth a try

Potential customers could easily find and get many reflection-based games at a reasonable price. Though a couple of them have probably run out of print⁴ by the time being, the tentative list below is worth exploring.

Asymmetrical and low-intensity operations

- *Search and Destroy* (SPI, 1974). This tactical-level game on the subject of Vietnam is mainly oriented to crisis-management and plays topics such as dealing with civilians, debriefing POW's and tracking hostile groups.

- *Central America* (Victory Games, 1987). A very inclusive, though much equipment-oriented game on counter-guerrilla warfare, where the US interventions in Nicaragua and Honduras (1980-1990) are implicitly evoked.

Infantry combats and MOUT activities

- City Fights (SPI, 1978) is a very complex, double-side game of reference. It is exclusively depicting contemporary forces at work in "street-fights". Both sides are strictly maintained in a thick fog of war⁵ throughout the game.
- Fire Team (West End Games, 1987) is opposing Soviet to US squads in a modern warfare tournament in Europe. The stress is put to doctrinal disparities between camps and some chaos situations specific to recent conflicts.
- En Pointe toujours, edition VaeVictis - "Indochine" (n° 16); "Normandie" (n° 31) and "Koursk" (n° 51). A tactical game oriented to the subject of leadership and moral, where squads are fighting in W.W.II situations or in Vietnam.



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CityFight

- 1- A high-profile "bit of character" known in the games-business, editor of the *Strategy & Tactics* review James F. Dunnigan founded SPI during the 70's. He has also created a number of war-games.
- 2- During the 70's, the Department of Defense contracted SPI for the purpose of exercising US officers based in Europe. Actually, SPI simply missed the point because the military did confuse the designers with contradictory directions and much optimistic speculations on resources and capabilities. The outcome of it is a medium-quality game disclosed to the open market under the name of *Firefight*.
- 3- August 1990, whilst Iraqi Forces were still at work occupying the whole Kuwait, the Pentagon was trying to "play" the sequence of events that could flow from this aggression. Existing military systems of simulation proved so slow that minds came to exploring the open market. *Gulf Strike* was selected. Having played this game one day only, its designer Mark Herman and a party of military experts came to the conclusion that Iraqi's defeat could be granted for certain. All conclusions drawn from this war-game have informed the policy further on decided for the month of August. Reference, J. Dunningan's *War-games Handbook* (Writers Club Press.).
- 4- Most of the games quoted here can be found in web-pages supporting auctions and classified adds; also in specialized papers.
- 5- The Fog of War can be mimicked as explained therein. Either two opposing sides operate one board each (double-blindness game) or they play on the same board (single blindness game). In the latter case, only one of the two camps will move pawns covertly at each turn.
- 6- An interim and quicker solution could be to simply develop games responding to updated security and defense rationale, out of an open-source (commercial) technology.

Cut from CityFight's map with posted Soviet and US units. Main interest of this game is to offer a large panel of European forces and a map for playing Military Operations on Urbanized Terrain (MOUT). Snapshot from Nicolas Stratigos.

Which military destiny for marketable war games?

Many countries like the United States have long stopped considering marketed war-games as mere hobby-things, whereas the French administration keeps standing on the "snoot-style" glare at them. For how long? Actually, many officers, NCOs and enlisted indulge in buying and playing simulation-games regularly. All in all, their enthusiasm and expertise in the matter sound like an incentive to revisiting them under the perspective of **an expedient tool for training battalions.** Provided they incorporate current policy concerns and adjust to the military procedures where necessary, marketable war games could open **newer perspectives.** Such cost-effective a solution could at least help train one generation of military personnel to meeting likely future challenges, until pertinent/handy computer-assisted tools⁶ are ultimately serviceable.