# Insane U.S. Military Utopians Use Video Games To Plan Iraq War

by Don Phau

A team of computer-science professors and programmers hired by the Department of Defense, is using Internet video games to prepare soldiers for an invasion of Iraq. The DOD team, located at the Modeling Virtual Environments and Simulation Institute (MOVES), a U.S. Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California, is following in the footsteps of mad utopians such as British science-fiction writer H.G. Wells. According to the school's director, Michael Zyda, it was the MOVES Institute which in the 1980s first developed Internet video games.

These are the same "first-person shooter" Internet video games that are being played today by millions of children worldwide. To take just the most recent example, Robert Steinhäuser, who shot and killed 17 students and teachers at his high school in Erfurt, Germany, in April, was immersed in the "Counter-Strike" video game.

Zyda first became known to *EIR* in 1999 when he created the Institute for Creative Technology (ICT), at the University of Southern California. *EIR*'s Anton Chaitkin exposed how, in 1997, Zygda had brought together Hollywood script-writers and directors, such as Stephen Spielberg, with Pentagon planners, to create war simulations, using thousands of players ("Army, Hollywood Plan Joint 'Virtual Reality' Institute," *EIR*, July 2, 1999). The MOVES Institute was founded in 1996 with Zyda as its director. Zyda told *EIR* on June 23, 2002, that his school now had 55 faculty and staff, and had recently designed a video game for training the U.S. Army for an invasion of Iraq. The institute also planned and designed the Army's first official video game, called "America's Army," whose $6.3 million in funding came from the U.S. government; it was released at the beginning of July. After its first week out, the U.S. Army announced that 400,000 people had downloaded the game from the Internet.

## 'Some Scary Stuff'

Zyda told *EIR* how his plans of a few years ago are now being realized: "Look at the Department of Defense, what they were talking about back in 1996: How can we model something like 'Desert Shield' and 'Desert Storm' fully in network simulation? If you think about that, that's fully 300,000 participants. From a defense standpoint, they would

like to model a full giant battle like that, a full simulation. There were 300,000 soldiers fighting in that thing, driving tanks, bringing ammunition and supplies, etc. That's why the DOD has said we would like to have 300,000 participate in our network simulation."

Zyda admitted that combat operations as large as those of 1991 are now impossible. "Our Army is one-third the size it was back in 1991. So, how would you do it? . . . So, when you say we are going to take six months and put large portions of the Army over there to take over Iraq, guess what? You don't have the men! So when you cut the military back that much, the end result is, you have to either do incredible Special Forces-type cooperation, or else you have to use more potent weapons. I think there's some scary stuff here. People are talking about using small nuclear weapons—'bunker busters.' And why are they talking like that? They would just like to take out the head, and not bring in all those troops, because they don't have all those troops."

But Zyda then says that smaller operations, now being planned, are right up his alley: "The type of simulations for Special Forces, for small types of new operations. I think that's exactly where we should be spending our money and time."

Zyda was asked to comment on press reports comparing his "America's Army" game to the popular first-person shooter "Counter-Strike" game. Zyda first quickly corrected *EIR*, saying, that it's "a 'first-person mission experience' game, as we like to call it, since it's a sensitive issue."

Zyda wasn't sensitive about comparing his game to "Counter-Strike," however, and could scarcely hide his glee that it was done by "the government": "It is better than 'Counter-Strike.' Our game takes advantage of graphics hardware that is way faster than when 'Counter-Strike' was built. From a natural progression, we have an order of magnitude more polygons and more detail in the game than 'Counter-Strike.' Plus our game is Army accurate. We have had complete access and cooperation from the U.S. Army. . . . You have to train on the weapon before you can fire it. If you are a total Army fanatic and you want to learn how the Army does things, this is the place. Why is it better than 'Counter-Strike'? 'Counter-Strike' is great entertainment, but I think our game

just looks better and it plays better, and on the whole is a pretty amazing effort.

"What's very strange about it, is we were able to do this inside the government, inside the MOVES Institute."

He then revealed plans for a new video game, called "MP." "The Army has funded five more years to develop ['America's Army']. . . . We're going to do an MP game, 'Military Police,' because, if you look at what's going on in Afghanistan, once the Special Forces take over, then it becomes a Military Police operation. You then have to worry about checkpoints: Is there a car bomb coming up? There's a whole game that's coming into our minds right now."

## 'Linking Entertainment and Defense'

For three days in October 1997, Zyda brought together representatives of Hollywood and the U.S. military in a conference called "Modeling and Simulation: Linking Entertainment and Defense." Attendees included representatives of Walt Disney, and of companies associated with film director George Lucas, the creator of the "Star Wars" movies, the Office of Naval Research, Office of the Secretary of Defense, and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA).

At the conference, whose proceedings were published in book form, the future of video-game tournaments on the Internet, over Local Area Networks (LAN), was planned out. Steinhäuser, the Erfurt shooter, was a constant participant in LAN tournaments. At the conference, Zyda predicted that LAN "is becoming increasingly important to both DOD and the entertainment industry. Both share a common need for adequate network infrastructure to support a growing number of participants. DOD's goal is to develop a networked training environment in which military operations can be rehearsed with a large number of participants while avoiding expenditures on fuel, machines, and travel. Participants can range *into the thousands or tens of thousands,* and include soldiers at work stations with weapons-system-specific interfaces" (emphasis added).

Zyda praised the Marine Corps for using the video game "Doom," "for training four-person fire teams." He said, "The game has been modified from its original version. It includes . . . Marine Corps weapons such as M-16, M-249 squad automatic weapons, and M-67 fragmentation grenades."

To mad utopians like Zyda, the benefit of his video games is that they turn the normal soldier into a Frankenstein's monster, a mindless animal. At the conference, he stated: "Immersive simulated environments are central to the goals and needs of both the DOD and the entertainment industry. . . . *If the user has to think* about the user interface, it is already in the way" (emphasis added).