
Down with the Commies: Anti-Communist Propaganda in American Cold War Video Games

Video games are often sold by publishers as being apolitical because they are mainly accessed in our leisure time, but their potential for communicating political content and ideologies should not be underestimated.¹ This relationship between politics and video games is intrinsically linked to the medium's origin, with many war simulations among the first video games.² In addition, many innocuous games, such as *Tennis for Two* (1958), showed some affiliation with military projects.³ While early digital worlds, such as *The Bradley Trainer* (1981),⁴ targeted military personnel, later games, such as *America's Army* (2002),⁵ were intended for the public.⁶ These games flaunt their agenda, namely creating positive associations with the US military in their players, and as cultural artefacts are, in Marx and Engels's words, "a mere training to act as a machine."⁷

This paper asks whether Cold War video games played from an American perspective and created by American or Western game studios after 2000 act as Louis Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses by reproducing anti-communist ideologies. For Althusser, ideology is defined by two key characteristics: it "represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence"⁸ and it "has a material existence."⁹ Unlike Marx and Engels, who argued that ideology creates a false consciousness and hides the real world,¹⁰ Althusser contends that ideology displays the "imaginary relationship of individuals"¹¹ to reality. Ideology, then, does not reflect the real world but a state that is already removed one step from reality. The reason for this is that we need language as a tool to establish our reality and, thus, we cannot have unmediated access to reality. For the second characteristic, Althusser notes that "ideology always exists in an apparatus"¹² and that it prevails through actions, such as cultural practices or norms. Through performing these actions, and through the relationship established to them, the individual becomes a subject in a process of interpellation.¹³

The ruling class has a strong interest in keeping this ideology upright and reproduces it through two mechanisms: The Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA). The RSA, which is formed by the "Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons, etc.,"¹⁴ proceeds through violence and physical power. This is to enforce the dominance of the ruling class over a population through a system of public control. ISA, contrarily, operate within more private contexts, such as education, religion, the family, media, or culture. The apparatuses rely on ideology in the sense of norms and rituals, yet they can also exert physical and non-physical violence as mechanisms to control subjects, for example through censorship or expulsion.¹⁵ Although ISA can take on various forms, they share the same ideology as their foundation, which serves to uphold the power of the ruling class and consequently supports and strengthens the RSA.

In this paper, I argue that video games, as cultural and media products, function as ISA in order to communicate a certain ideology. To be precise, I will be looking at political ideology and the ways video games can communicate forms of propaganda to support a dominant ideology in the form of a discourse prevailing in a society, country, or a conglomerate of states. Video games communicate this ideology either overtly, such as *America's Army*, or covertly, such as in the games forming the corpus of this study, which are presented as leisure-time activities rather than politically-motivated media. I propose that video games take part in discourses of anti-communist propaganda, communicated in two modes: a flagrant portrayal of communism or socialism as a failure and threat;¹⁶ and an emphasis on the US as democratic, (politically) free, and peaceful, being the only weapon against corrupting communist forces. Through condemning communism and socialism, these games reiterate an idea of "American Exceptionalism"¹⁷ – a national ideology that America's place in the world is different from, and

potentially superior to, other nations.

In the first part of this paper, I will discuss the relationship between games and the military in the US from the 1980s onwards, when the first games developed for military purposes became accessible to the wider population. Based on this preliminary discussion, I will investigate the role of video games during the later phase of the Cold War era, emphasising their potential use for anti-communist propaganda in the US and in the West as well as their reception in socialist countries, which is explored in relation to *Raid Over Moscow* (1984).¹⁸ This leads to a discussion on the relationship between video games and ideology, exploring how the concept of interpellation works in video games, namely through imposing rule-based structures onto our engagement with them. Thus, video games communicate an ideology and function as or incorporate ISA, while they frequently display forms of the RSA. In the analytical part, four modes of anti-communist ideology frequently found in Cold War themed video games played from an American perspective will be engaged with, namely the unrightful seizure of land by communist/socialist forces, false games and intrigues, lacking morality, as well as biased media and mind control used for manipulation.

The games serving as primary examples are mainly AAA games because “mainstream historical videogames seem to have a tendency toward deeply hegemonic interpretations of and perspectives on the past – particularly in terms of gender and ethnicity/race (with the games by far favouring the historical experience of white, European, males).”¹⁹ From a temporal perspective, the chosen games were mostly produced after the fall of the Iron Curtain for reasons connected to technological developments, resulting in much richer game-worlds allowing for a varied communication of ideologies.

The analysed games incorporate anti-communist propaganda in different topoi. *Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis* (2001)²⁰ raises questions about morality by portraying communist actions as unrightful and unethical. *Homefront* (2011)²¹ depicts a dystopian future where North Korean forces threaten America’s democracy. *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (2010)²² thematises lies, deception, and paranoia generated by the US government to vilify communism.²³ In this sense, the game not only criticises the USSR but also the propaganda spread by the US. *Alekhine’s Gun* (2016)²⁴ focuses on a KGB agent working alongside the CIA, who recognises them as righteous, thus showing the player the moral superiority of the Americans through the moral perspective of the protagonist. *Freedom Fighters* (2003)²⁵ addresses media utilised as propaganda tools. *Command & Conquer: Red Alert 2* (2000)²⁶ demonstrates how mind control is used by the Soviets to force their ideology onto people.

Through the analysis of these games, various modes of anti-communist propaganda can be addressed, which vilify communism, socialism and/or the USSR while manifestly presenting the USA as virtuous and righteous. These games use instances of ISA, such as media or the family, to communicate their anti-communism or they themselves function as ISA through reproducing an ideology that establishes a distinct friend-foe-discrimination.

Video Games as Political: The Virtual Military-Entertainment Complex

Video games are defined by the circumstances in which they are produced and the discourses out of which they originate.²⁷ In the US, the influence of the Department of Defense on media production is conspicuously strong with examples of its authority exerted in movies, TV programmes, literature, music, and video games.²⁸ In this light, it is fair to say that war-themed video games have displayed an intrinsic link to the military from the beginning, both with regards to their production and content. The history of war simulations and games cannot be

recounted without considering the influence of the military, creating today what Bruce Sterling has termed the “virtual military/entertainment complex.”²⁹ This, however, is not only true for the US. Historically, war games have their origin in tactical simulations for the Prussian army.³⁰ Based on these didactical games for officers, tabletop games for young people were developed at the Braunschweig court in the 18th century, when tactical warfare was still part of the education for aristocratic adolescents. In the 19th century, these games were further developed by Prussian warfare strategists, who added more detail to the maps and combined tactics with chance. Education and war strategics were at the centre of these games.

The military’s impact on war games is still pronounced today. On the one hand, the influence of the US military on some video games is evident when looking at the origins of the first digital war simulators and games, which were produced to allow military personnel to practice their warfare skills and tactics. *The Bradley Trainer*³¹ (also known as *Army Battlezone* or *Military Battlezone*), for example, was a version of the arcade game *Battlezone* (1980),³² for which Atari has been commissioned by retired consultant generals who wanted to use it as a target practice simulator for the Bradley Fighting Vehicle.³³ This combat vehicle has originally been designed during the early Cold War era in response to the fear of having to face conflict in Europe, potentially including nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons.³⁴ The vehicle allowed soldiers to fight from within the self-contained system generated by the vessel, minimising physical enemy-contact. *The Bradley Trainer* was seen as a cost-effective form to train soldiers in this form of combat by placing the trainee as the vehicle’s gunner. Later games, such as *America’s Army*,³⁵ which came out more than twenty years after *The Bradley Trainer*, reached beyond military employees by also targeting civilians as an audience to create positive associations with the military.³⁶ More recently, military recruitment has moved to the online space through Twitch channels in order to counter the enlistment crisis the US military as a whole has faced since 2018.³⁷ The change to how wars are fought, namely mediated through technology rather than as a physical confrontation, thus resonates with the way new soldiers are recruited.

On the other hand, the connection between the military and entertainment media is also noticeable in media content, and video games depict warfare in many different ways. Through those various forms how war is portrayed, the military can influence video games without necessarily having to be overt about their involvement or even having to play a role in the production of war-themed games.³⁸ That is, the military need not directly influence video games because video games advertise the agendas of the military on their own accord, which is owed to the discursive assertions in our society and in popular culture. The concept of war thereby constitutes a form of grand narrative that is associated with specific characteristics (tactics, conflict, weapon handling, missions, friend-and-foe-discrimination, morality, justice, etc.) and hence war-themed video games are not in need of the military’s direct influence on their story and gameplay. Based on these preliminary considerations, it has to be asked whether video games – as cultural products – can create a false consciousness and oppressive or discriminating ideologies.³⁹

Despite their potential for communicating state-directed ideologies to a large audience, video games were not central to the dissemination of propaganda during the Cold War era, both in the West and the East. Until the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, computers were not accessed by many people, particularly in comparison to the radio, television or newspapers. Whereas Western technology could potentially be utilised for detailed propaganda in video games, the computers available in the Eastern Bloc were either not built to run simulations or had to be obtained semi-legally or illegally from the West, such as the Commodore 64.⁴⁰ Although video games hardly ever engaged the attention of the state censors, some were considered morally corrupting and thus interdicted by the authorities of socialist countries, such as the GDR.⁴¹ The anti-communist ideology presented in one game even stirred a large-scale political debate in

the 1980s: *Raid Over Moscow*.⁴²

The game begins with the launching of a Soviet missile, targeting a North American city. Players need to navigate a spaceplane to missile silos in Leningrad, Kiev, Minsk, and Saratov, encountering several obstacles on the way. Once they have destroyed all silos, they need to find a way into the Defence Centre and locate the nuclear reactor. In the final stage, robots feeding the nuclear reactor with coolant need to be destroyed. If all robots are killed, the reactor is incapacitated and the game is won. The game was hugely successful and generally received positive reviews.⁴³ However, the theme of a nuclear attack launched by the USSR led to contestation in East Germany and Finland. In the GDR, the Stasi monitored the use of private computers, yet the regime appears to have underestimated their potential for disseminating counter-political propaganda.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, video games with “a particularly militaristic and inhumane nature,”⁴⁵ and amongst them *Raid Over Moscow*,⁴⁶ were indexed while some pirated copies found their way into the GDR.⁴⁷ The game has been indexed for its potential to instigate anger in its adolescent players rather than for its political content by West German authorities as early as 1985.⁴⁸ Interestingly, it has only been removed from the German index in 2010.⁴⁹

In Finland, controversy surrounding the anti-communist message of *Raid Over Moscow*⁵⁰ was addressed in parliamentary debates. The game was reviewed by the Finnish magazine *MikroBitti* in 1985, which, according to Tero Pasanen,

triggered a chain of events that started with a written parliamentary question, continued by an unofficial petition from the Soviet Union to restrict the marketing and sales of the game, and ended with a diplomatic protest towards anti-Soviet material and publications in Finnish media.⁵¹

This éclat was followed by an apology by the Finnish foreign minister to the USSR for the review’s publication, which soothed the waters between the two countries.⁵² Ironically, the game subsequently became the bestselling Commodore 64 game in Finland.⁵³

The game was also faced with protest – although more socio-cultural than political – in Western countries. Once the game became available in the UK through publisher US Gold, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), a pressure group in the UK, picketed outside the publisher’s offices. Its founder, Geoff Brown, however, saw that those protests had the effect of boosting sales rather than leading to the game’s ban:

I thought it was fantastic. I mean how could it get any better? It was in every newspaper. They were there every day. We used to give them coffee and they used to walk around with banners like ‘ban the bomb’. I kept saying you’ll be better off if you didn’t keep coming here, it would actually sell less.⁵⁴

As the example of *Raid Over Moscow*⁵⁵ shows, the ideological content of video games can have an impact on current politics and policies, yet they certainly were not a key medium for spreading propaganda.⁵⁶ Analysed retrospectively, however, the ideology presented in Cold War themed video games can influence today’s players’ perception of this particular historical era and the ideology associated with it. This is as true for video games produced before the fall of the Iron Curtain as it is for the disproportionately larger group of games published since the 1990s that thematically draw on the Cold War. The reason for this is that video games impose ideological structures onto our habits of engaging with them despite their potential temporal distance from the era or action they portray.

Games incorporate ideological mechanisms because they communicate systems of beliefs and values that influence how we respond to the world surrounding us. Althusser's concept of interpellation explains how the process of being addressed by ideology turns us into ideological subjects based on our interaction with ideological discourses.⁵⁷ This moulds our identity through the ideology that impacts our actions. These mechanisms can also be found in games since they operate on rule-based structures to which players respond.⁵⁸ As players, we subsequently become subjects to the game's logic through the process of interpellation, and the game's ideology administers our actions committed in the game. Put differently, we play the game according to the rule-governed ideology it imposes on us. War games in particular are "ideologically biased media"⁵⁹ capable of manipulating their audience's attitudes and beliefs. This is notably true for Cold War themed video games played from an American perspective, which may incorporate modes of anti-communist propaganda that influence the player's perception of friend-and-foe-images.⁶⁰

To pursue this argument further, it is essential to determine the relationship between Althusser's concept of ideology (and ISA) and video games. Unlike the RSA, such as the military and courts, which, according to Althusser, "should be understood [...] in the strong, precise sense of 'using *physical violence*' (direct or indirect, legal or 'illegal'),"⁶¹ ISA mostly follow their goals more subtly but are present in and impact every aspect of our lives. Ideological ideas are incorporated into public concepts, which, superficially, appear apolitical, but can be used for deeply political aims in their structure, such as the family, education, or, one might add, games. Althusser has argued that through these ISA, individuals are trained for a "submission to the rules of respect for the established order."⁶²

Cold War themed video games incorporate some of these ISA and toy with their potential for propaganda. Since they frequently function covertly, their ideology is often communicated through a propaganda that aims at creating a positive image of the producer(s) of ideology, while the opponents are portrayed negatively.⁶³ Hence, only in recourse to propaganda, two of Althusser's key definitional characteristics of ideology, namely that "[i]deology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence"⁶⁴ and "[i]deology has material existence,"⁶⁵ are valid for Cold War themed video games played from an American perspective. The reason for this is that propaganda generates a hyperreal condition in Jean Baudrillard's sense – "the transmogrification of reality within the conditions of simulation and reproduction"⁶⁶ – and implements a sense of "American Exceptionalism"⁶⁷ in the population. It portrays America's role in the Cold War as righteous and moral, whereas the USSR and their communist/socialist allies' actions are seen as condemnable.

While Cold War themed video games – as artefacts – hence function as ISA, their content mainly shows instances associated with the RSA, such as the army or the police. They exert power over the avatar, while the avatar, in turn, functions as an executor of his or her own country's RSA. In this sense, at least two antagonistic RSA are at work in Cold War themed video games, one which needs to be fought and one which needs to be implemented by the player. Both create ideologies functioning by means of opposition, such as lawful versus unlawful, right versus wrong or good versus bad.

The ideological outlook of American Cold War themed video games allows for two modes of anti-communist propaganda: Firstly, a flagrant portrayal of communism and socialism as failure and threat to the world,⁶⁸ and secondly, depicting the USA as haven of democracy, (political) freedom, and peace, being the only renitence against corrupting communist forces. Both concepts are intrinsically linked yet communicating anti-communism through positive images of America will only be marginally addressed here since this passive mode works from an *ex negativo* position (i.e. Americans are good, hence the others are bad).⁶⁹

The following section engages with different forms of anti-communist propaganda in Cold War themed video games created after the fall of the Iron Curtain and played from an American perspective. The focus lies on the ways they function as ISA despite (or maybe even because) of the temporal distance to the Cold War. Four prominent thematic fields will be engaged with by exploring exemplary games, namely the unrightful seizure of land by communist/socialist forces, false games and intrigues, lacking morality, as well as biased media and mind control used for manipulation.

Anti-Communist Propaganda in Cold War Themed Video Games

Many Cold War themed video games played from an American perspective imply or overtly present anti-communist propaganda from various perspectives. One thematic field shared by the majority of them is the unrightful seizure of lands, settlements or objects by communist or socialist forces, which have to be reclaimed by the US or a conglomerate of states symbolising Western values, such as the NATO. These games explicitly position the USSR, communist, and socialist forces as acting unlawfully and unethically while the actions of Western powers are seen as justified by following the aim of restoring peace.

The tactical shooter *Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis*⁷⁰ is set in 1985. Mikhail Gorbachev has initiated a new course for the USSR, significantly improving the country's relationship with the West. However, in the game, his new political, social, and economic direction is met with aggressive opposition from hardliner communists, whose political outlook is rooted in an opposition to the West, wishing to end his reforms. Besides its insinuation of real-life historical events, the game is set in a fictive geographical surrounding. Its actions take place on the three islands of Everon (neutral zone), Malden (NATO occupied), and Kolgujev (Soviet occupied). General Aleksei Guba, determined to replace Gorbachev, invades Everon with his army of renegade soldiers in an attempt to attack the American forces. The player takes on the role of different American NATO soldiers whose aim is to undermine Guba's power and prevent the coup to restore peace on the islands.

The game heavily relies on anti-communist ideology, which conversely serves the purpose of navigating the players' actions in their response to Guba's attacks. Most prominently, the American and the Soviet government both deny the invasion to avert panic. By aligning their official stances, they put themselves on one side of the conflict. The communist hardliners under Guba form the opposition, attributed with characteristics such as moral inferiority, aggression, and a thirst for power, which faces ideas associated with Western attributes, namely freedom, peace, and rightfulness. *Operation Flashpoint*⁷¹ creates this antinomy through an ISA that is the product of actions committed by bodies identified as RSA, particularly the army and militia. Put differently, the "physical violence"⁷² assigned to the RSA by Althusser is translated into an ideology having material existence because not only two armies oppose each other in the conflict but also two contrasting sets of political, cultural, social, and historical ideas.

A similar situation can be observed in *Homefront*,⁷³ yet rather than resembling the USA/USSR conflict forming the core of the Cold War crisis, it is set in an alternate future, in which communist united Korean forces under the leadership of Kim Jong-un invade the USA. The game translates the ideological sentiments created during Cold War period into a futuristic distribution of political power, which is reminiscent of the opposition between communism/socialism and capitalism. The story of *Homefront* was written by John Milius, who directed the movie *Red Dawn* (1984),⁷⁴ which depicts the USSR and communist invasion of the US.

*Homefront*⁷⁵ emphasises and reverses many ideological concepts, such as a focus on strong capitalist power normally associated with Western countries yet now assigned to communist forces as well as the wealth of the individual associated with this. This reversal generates a sense in the game that these genuinely American characteristics have been taken away by the Korean forces and now need to be reclaimed in battle. The most prominent anti-communist ideological sentiment found in *Homefront*⁷⁶ draws on Kim Jong-un's lust for power, manifest in a rapid annexation of lands, combined with an absolute disregard for its inhabitants. Assigning this trait to the communist forces further suggests that their opponents, namely former American soldiers organised in a resistance camp, fight for a just cause. The foe-image formed in the game is guided by emotions of hate, created through presenting enemy soldiers as ruthless.⁷⁷ Their unscrupulousness is depicted in many gruesome scenes, such as mass graves or the slaughter of innocent people, which are grounded in an ideological undertone suggesting that these traits are implicitly communist because the individual is unworthy in comparison to the state. While RSA clearly dominate in *Homefront*,⁷⁸ the game itself becomes an ISA through communicating anti-communist propaganda in a highly emotional mode, which results in strong friend-and-foe-images. In this sense, the ideology created through the game's story arises out of RSA, while the game, as a cultural object, functions as an ISA, which exerts its ideological stance through ideas and not physical power.

The unjustified capture of land and the reversal of the 'victim-myth',⁷⁹ which form the thematic core of *Operation Flashpoint*⁸⁰ and *Homefront*,⁸¹ is connected to a second field, namely the *mise en scène* of false games, lies, and deception as genuinely communist traits. The ideology communicated in many games suggests that communists are incapable of truth and honesty, hence it follows that they can never bring about peace and freedom since they are playing false games for their own benefit. One game where this topic predominates is *Call of Duty: Black Ops*,⁸² in which CIA operative Alex Mason is urged to recall his memories to pinpoint a secret number broadcasting system that activates Soviet sleeper cells in the US. Mason needs to determine how to differentiate between truth and lie in order to judge whether or not his memories are accurate and relevant to the mission. This already becomes evident in Mason's introduction in the game's trailer, when he declares that

[a] lie is a lie. Just because they write it down and call it history doesn't make it the truth. We live in a world where seeing is not believing, where only a few know what really happened. We live in a world where everything you know is wrong.⁸³

As it turns out, the friend-and-foe-imagery set up early on in the game blurs to the effect that the assumed honesty of some of his CIA colleagues has to be questioned. Instances that illustrate this confusion are, for example, the vital role of former Soviet soldier Viktor Reznov for Mason's survival or Mason's own part in John F. Kennedy's assassination. The latest instalment of the *Black Ops* series, entitled *Call of Duty: Black Ops Cold War* (2020),⁸⁴ makes breaking the line between Eastern and Western forces the core theme of its story. The game is set in the 1980s – a time when hostilities between the two fronts sharply increased.⁸⁵ CIA officer Russell Adler is on the hunt for the alleged Soviet defector Perseus, who wants to shift the power dynamics in favour of the USSR. In order to stop Perseus, Adler and his team rely on a dense network of KGB deserters to the effect that the distinction between the two fronts seems to be drawn based on political attitude rather than nationality.

The mode how *Call of Duty: Black Ops*⁸⁶ makes use of ISA is two-sided. On the one hand, it toys with stereotypes constituted by a Western ideological outlook associated with communism, which is most notable in the character of Mason's antagonist, Major General Nikita Dragovich. On the other hand, the game also reminds us that these ideologies are constructed and need not match reality if a black-and-white-interpretation of Cold War

sentiments is regarded critically. Hence, the game both presents the dominant ideology produced by the US government during the Cold War era and undermines its authority.

A third thematic field that is heavily influenced by ideology constituted through ISA during the Cold War era and that features prominently in the kind of games discussed here is morality. Morality not only occurs as a popular theme in games that establish a dichotomy between Eastern and Western forces but also in some games that centrally focus on the American side of the conflict. An example is *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Conviction* (2010),⁸⁷ in which a lack of morality in order to achieve personal gains drives the story, for instance when Third Echelon director Tom Reed plots on assassinating president Patricia Caldwell to bring the favourable vice president Calvin Samson into power or when Grim uses Fisher's daughter Sarah as leverage in order for him to execute her commands. Similar to truth and honesty, communist forces are assumed to be incapable of possessing morality. They do not fight for the individual but focus on the gain of the state and the collective, whose strength is the highest goal. By contrast, the alleged moral superiority of the West, based on the nation's sense of exceptionalism, is strongly emphasised, which further underlines their opponent's lacking morality. This idea that favouring the collective over the individual is seen as morally inferior is due to the fact that in neoliberalism, the individual has been raised to the highest moral authority. This leads us back to Marx' argument that "the ideas of the dominant classes tend to be the dominant ideas,"⁸⁸ ironically grounding the morality of individualism in the thoughts of the collective. The opposition between East/communism and West/capitalism is pronouncedly illustrated by focusing on two agents from either side who are collaborating to save the world, which often can only be achieved by favouring Western tactics. Such games heavily rely on stereotyping, both with regard to Eastern and Western forces.

In *Alekhine's Gun*,⁸⁹ the player assumes the role of Soviet agent Semion Strogov, codename Alekhine, who works alongside CIA agent Vincent Rambaldi to save the US and potentially the world. In order to justify this collaboration without portraying Alekhine as a traitor, their relationship is traced back to the Second World War, during which both fought the Nazis as their common enemy. The game communicates an ideology that is not necessarily connected to one side of the conflict but to tensions and Cold War sentiments in general, such as double agents, lies, and intrigues. The game, thus, draws on themes popularised by the spy fiction genre, dominated by authors such as Ian Flemming, Jean le Carré, and Tom Clancy. While *Alekhine's Gun* is not overtly anti-communist, it does emphasise the righteousness of the actions performed by the US. This shows that ideological mindsets permeate history and historical thinking to the effect that the historical narratives constituted as a kind of cultural ethos are influenced by ISA, such as video games. To put it candidly, in *Alekhine's Gun*,⁹⁰ the predominant ideology is that although some American agents play false games, the American way can bring peace while the Soviets are disinterested in potentially saving the world.

The final instance of anti-communist propaganda considered here are video games showing media control as biased and policing, following the aim of influencing and infiltrating the characters' thoughts. The predominance of controlled/controlling media is mostly portrayed in a highly exaggerated mode, stimulating a critical evaluation of media content. This is the case in *Freedom Fighters*,⁹¹ whose premise is that the USSR won the Second World War after dropping an atomic bomb on Berlin, causing many countries to become communist states. New York City has been invaded by Soviet forces and their SAFN media network instils communist propaganda throughout the city. The underground resistance sees the destruction of this propaganda through infiltrating the media as a key to combating the occupiers. While Althusser sees media as ISA since they do not proceed by means of physical power, their part in *Freedom Fighters*⁹² is akin to the RSA because they function as a weapon.⁹³ Both sides realise that through media control, the people's attitude can be governed while simultaneously generating an ideology working with demarcations between images of good and bad.

Similar to media control, mind control is frequently found in Cold War themed video games. In the allied campaign of *Command & Conquer: Red Alert 2*,⁹⁴ the American government is forced into Canadian exile after being manipulated through a Soviet mind controlling device. Later, a psychic amplifier is installed in Chicago, potentially reaching every American citizen. The US exile government manages to destroy the device but the city is subsequently wiped out by the Soviets who detonate an atomic bomb. This thematic basis for the game's friend-and-foe portrayal is notable due to its reversal of actions committed during the real Cold War. Like many other games, *Command & Conquer: Red Alert 2* assigns the danger of dropping an atomic bomb to the Soviets, while in reality, this act has only ever been committed by the US. In the game, Russian aggression is met with science in the form of a chromosphere developed by Albert Einstein, allowing allied forces to teleport troops outside the Kremlin and to end Soviet supremacy. Although the mechanism of mind controlling does not function through propaganda, the game evokes stereotypes and ideas associated with the USSR, such as the aim of seizing countries and turning them into communist vassal states, placing the integrity of the state as the system's highest goal, and proceeding through domination rather than voluntariness.

Conclusion

Cold War themed video games played from an American perspective heavily rely on anti-communist ideology, generated between the 1950s and the 1990s. On the one hand, these games thematically focus on ISA to communicate their ideology, such as negative features of communist, socialist, and Soviet forces, namely lies, deception, unrightfully claiming lands, lacking morality, and putting the intactness of the state and the system as the highest good to be protected. Conversely, they draw on positive features associated with capitalist and Western societies, such as the freedom of the individual, family, peace, and truth, amongst others. On the other hand, these games themselves function as ISA – systems that communicate a certain ideology – that thematically present instances of the RSA, such as the army, militia, or the police. Although they mainly work through violence and thus exert physical power over the game's characters, they are also capable of generating and communicating an ideology, in this case anti-communism.

While these video games either portray ISA (and RSA) or are themselves ISA, their direct influence on the player's perception of the Cold War and related friend-and-foe-images cannot be inferred. This means that while stereotyping and black-and-white-thinking dominate the games, players may nevertheless view those images critically because a meta-perspective on the ideas communicated by the ISA is presented in the form of hyperbolic content (if players understand them as such) and temporal distance. The games discussed here all allow us to explore aspects of Cold War thinking without being directly affected by the propaganda and the potential real-life consequences of the nuclear stand-off. Nonetheless, through displaying a part of history in a highly emotional way, its presentation unavoidably becomes biased and one-sided. Our experience of historical epochs through video games, in this case the Cold War era, thus calls for a critical perspective on the way the discourses of history are presented to the generations that follow.

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