

## WARGAMES, PREEMPTION AND A LOT OF OTHER CURIOUS BEHAVIOR

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### ABSTRACT

The post-September 11, 2001 controversy over invading Iraq raised a number of questions about American policy making. One of them was: has anyone worked out the details about such a war? The answer is yes, sort of. The tools used were an arcane product of the Industrial Revolution called wargames. And the United States is the world leader in the use of wargames, spending billions of dollars a year to create wargames for everyone from individual soldiers to the President (or at least members of his staff.)

Wargames have been used by the American military for over a century. And for good reason, they work. A wargame is an attempt to get a jump on the future by obtaining a better understanding of the present and the past. A

wargame is a combination of “game,” history and science. Wargames are ancient. Chess was originally a realistic wargame of ancient battles. Modern wargames are chess with some important differences. The playing board looks like a detailed map of the combat zone. The playing pieces are more varied than chess pieces, as they vary more in their movement and combat capability. In modern wargames, you don’t “take” the other players piece, but “attack” it. Numerical evaluations of each playing piece (called “combat units”) are compared and probabilities are used to determine what damage is done to each side. Each side can have hundreds of combat units in play at the same time, and with computerized wargames, all these pieces can be moving at once. Department of Defense wargames have as many as a dozen, up to hundreds, of human players on each side. The players come up with tactics and strategies, and give orders to the combat units. Modern wargames are electronic time-machines that can give you a better view of how the past worked, and, less accurately, a peek at many possible futures. In other words, chess on steroids.

See *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* <<http://www.watsoninstitute.org/bjwa/archive/10.1/WarGaming/Dunnigan.pdf>> for further details.

### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

**JAMES F. DUNNIGAN** is a well-known author, game designer, and military news analyst. Among his 9 books are the *Wargames Handbook*, *Dirty Little Secrets of the Twentieth Century*, and his most recent book, *The Perfect Soldier*. Mr. Dunnigan is probably best known as a designer of war games, an activity he started in 1966, continued with his company, Simulation Publications Inc. (SPI), and more recently has expanded into on-line games. He lives and works in New York, where he neither owns nor operates automobiles or televisions. He continues to write books on military affairs, technology and history, builds his own computers, considers risk management a splendid leisure time activity, manages software development, conjures up simulations on anything and still considers problem solving a favorite indoor sport.