Foreign Ground

Contributed by Administrator
Tuesday, 26 September 2006

Foreign Ground- A Digital Game for Decision Making in Foreign Cultures

Anders Frank, Swedish National Defence College

“Foreign Ground” is a high quality digital game to illustrate typical situations in Peace Support Operations. The game is a First Persons Thinker in that sense combat situations is not the prime activity. Instead the game focuses on communication with civilians, conduct of own personnel and to solve the tasks by also non-violent means.

Background

Peace Support Operations (PSO) is nowadays one of the primary activity for the Swedish Armed Forces. Involvement of what is happing outside the national borders and participating in multi-national operations is something Swedish Armed Forces is restructuring and reorganizing towards. The development evokes new requirements and sets new standards regarding the simulation and training tools.

Photo by Försvarets bildbyrå

The training course for personnel about to be employed in PSO is carried out outside Stockholm. During this education personnel goes though several phases involving weapon, tactic as well as mission specific education. A couple of these phases involve education of Rules Of Engagement (ROE) and its implication on behaviour. The phases are often carried out in live environment with instructors and personnel as role-played aggressors.

In the field of Modelling and Simulation there are trends to move from traditional gun-powder simulations to simulations that addresses other factors in conflicts. One important factor is cultural and civil components. Ongoing Peace Support Operations around the world bear witness that there is more to simulate than just duel and combat situations.

At the same time the development of commercial games is expanding in a rapid, almost exploding, pace. Increased number of users, improved gaming hardware and more complex games have led to the development of the area of Serious Games – applications whose chief-mission is not to entertain.

Scope and Purpose

Foreign Ground is an initiative following the trends, developments and needs above. Foreign Ground is a single- and multiplayer game played in first person view to enable the user to get first hand experience of typical scenarios in PSO. Purpose is to involve the user in situations where he/she has to make decision relying on ROE and its implication on behaviour.

The scope is that Foreign Ground shall be used as a complement to the ordinary training course. It will consist of a series of games to address every multinational PSO participated by Swedish Armed Forces. The introduction of a PC based game as Foreign Ground in a training environment will enable collaborate training sessions, easy adjustable scenarios and especially expose the user to an interactive experience of situations that might occur.

The Game

The executable game prototype of the demonstrator looks like an ordinary First Person Shooter (like Quake, Doom and Unreal) but without relying on duels and combat. Instead the user shall play the role of a soldier or squadleader in a UN sanctioned PSO. In the scenario the user shall act and solve tasks driven by the scenario. It could be one of many types of scenarios or tasks; patrol by foot or vehicle, escort situations etc. The game will have a dialog engine and will thus enable the user to communicate with his surrounding through before-hand written sentences. The story will progress as the user initiating actions (or un-actions) and set him in new situations. A vital aspect of the game prototype is that the responses and action development will be somewhat based on cultural conditions. This means even though situations look the same in two mission areas situations developments may vary (for instance in Liberia compared to Kosovo).

Image from Foreign Ground

All the developments in the game shall be recorded to enable after action review. This means there will be a scenario player where the instructor can replay actions taken by the user – either from a first- or third person view.

The Demonstrator project - the overall picture

The goal of developing Foreign Ground is to demonstrate how digital games can be used as a trainer for personnel about to be employed in international operations. Foreign Ground is thus a game prototype in that sense it does not claim to be a fully operative training game ready to be installed in Swedish Armed Forces training courses.

We develop Foreign Ground to address three issues:

1. Commercial games, game technology and gaming can be used in training environments.
2. Develop tools for international operations.
3. The need of better portraying today conflicts in our simulations involving situations based on cultural and environment conditions.

The scenario chosen for the game prototype will be the ongoing UN mission in Liberia (UNMIL). A couple of routine tasks (patrol on foot, or vechicle) and more complicated situations (crowd intervention) will be playable in the game. The ambition is that the scenarios will be re-configurable in that sense it will be easy to change the conditions. This will enable a flexible use of the game in training sessions and for demonstration purposes. Another ambition is to have a scenario editor where instructor or user can add complete scenarios to the game.

Above development of a game prototype a report will be written to give the overall picture. It will answer question of what is needed to establish a live version of Foreign Ground, the benefits, where it fit in the organization, the conceivable method of using this game (and for whom it addresses).

Valueness – what are the benefits?
The key driving force to establish a game Foreign Ground in the Swedish Armed Forces are to show that games can be used as an educator or trainer preparing personnel for international missions.

By having a scenario driven digital game experiences and knowledge from earlier missions can be canalized back to mission specific educations. As a complement to lectures and reading diaries from other persons we can establish a modelling and simulation framework for the pupil to interactively experience various scenarios.

By having a digital game it is easy to reproduce the application and spread the game to a wide audience.

By having multiplayer functionality it is possible to have group training, distributed exercises as well as let the instructors take on roles of aggressors or civilians.

By having a recording functionality the instructor can replay missions to the pupil or class and thus enables deeper understanding and learning.

The Foreign Ground project is developed by Swedish National Defence College and funded by Swedish Materiel Administration through the Research and Development Program of Swedish Armed Forces. The development is carried out as a research project together with Luleå University of Technology

Contact

For further info contact:

Anders Frank – anders.frank@fhs.mil.se
Executive Producer

Kersti Larsdotter – kersti.larsdotter@fhs.mil.se
Subject Matter Expert

Nigel Papworth – nigel@258prod.com
Game Designer

More images from the Foreign Ground game.