

PeaceMaker: A Video Game to Teach Peace

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Abstract. PeaceMaker is a computer game simulation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is a tool that can be used to teach Israeli and Palestinian teenagers how both sides can work together to achieve peace. The player can choose to take the role of either the Israeli Prime Minister or the Palestinian President, react to in-game events, and interact with other political leaders and social groups to establish a stable resolution to the conflict. Derived from gameplay conventions found in commercial strategy games, PeaceMaker aims to prove that computer games can deal with current and serious political issues and that playing for peace and non-violence could be as challenging and satisfying as playing for the opposite goal.

1 Introduction

1.1 A Peace Game

Video games are a revolutionary medium for entertainment and education. They transport players to new places and allow them to explore, experiment, and learn at their own pace. Until now, many games have dealt with conquest, war, and destruction. PeaceMaker, however, is a game for the future—a game that can teach that peace and cohabitation, not war and annihilation, are the only real strategy worth fighting for.

1.2 Core Target Audience – Israelis and Palestinians

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a pervasive and long running global dilemma. Many aspects of the conflict have a universal importance and are deeply related to social, economic, and foreign policy issues throughout the world. The core target audience for PeaceMaker is Israeli and Palestinian teenagers. In high school and college clas-

rooms, teachers can use PeaceMaker as an engaging and fresh way to involve their students in discussing the conflict. The game will educate future leaders by allowing them to experiment and explore the roles they will someday inhabit.

2 Game Description

In PeaceMaker, the player can choose to take the role of either the Israeli Prime Minister or the Palestinian President. He can choose his role before playing or move seamlessly between the two perspectives during gameplay. As the leader of one of the sides, the player must react strategically to in-game events, from diplomatic negotiations to suicide bombing and military atrocities, and interact with eight other political leaders and social groups to establish a stable resolution of the conflict before his or her term in office ends.

2.1 Game and GUI Components

The game is implemented in two layers: (1) a simple click-and-drag graphical interface in Flash technology, over (2) a logical and AI engine in Java.

Player Actions. The player controls 17 role-based actions in 3 categories: (1) *Military*, (2) *Political* and (3) *Build* (long-term and strategic actions). Although a peace game, the player is not automatically penalized for committing military actions. In some occasions, a judicious use of military actions against extremists might achieve an overall positive progress.

Turn-Based Gameplay with Real-Time Feel. Similar to other strategy games, PeaceMaker is turn-based. The player chooses his actions carefully and ends his turn. Then, time passes and other actors' actions and external events are presented. To enhance real-time feel and urgency, extreme events might be presented during a turn.

Actors. PeaceMaker is a game about relations. Eight different actors are simulated and interact with the player based on conditional mood. Graphical thermometers present the level of anger and disapproval of each of the actors with the player's policies at any given time. Unbalanced relations with different actors can lead to a losing state.

Real-time and Location-Based Events. Videos and pictures from a library of real-time news events are interjected into gameplay. Relevant events are presented on a high-resolution map of Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip.

Score. The score plays a major role as an immediate and direct feedback to the player on his success or failure in promoting peace and non-violence in the region. The score system allows both positive and negative progress. The player starts at 0 (zero) at the level of "Mediocre Minister." The maximum score is 100, "Noble Prize Winner" level,

and the minimum score is -100, “War Criminal” level. The metrics are designed around tipping points that might improve or damage the player’s efforts dramatically.



Fig. 1. PeaceMaker – click-and-drag graphical interface

3 Design Process

3.1 Prototyping

PeaceMaker began as a group of board games. Playing the board games gave the development team insight as to how to model the stakeholders in the conflict. The board games were then adapted into a dice game that could be coded. The current version of PeaceMaker is based on many iterations of the original dice game model.

3.2 Main Focus

The development team set to prove that an educational peace game could be as challenging and engaging as any other game. Based on the “triangular” game theory, a core model was formed, as the player needs to maintain delicate balance between the well-being of his own people and the trust of the other side. Hence, in order to win, the player is forced into a slow and judicious gameplay. Every action that is taken has major consequences, some of which may be disastrous and tragic. The player stru g-

gles for peace by executing well-balanced policies and fighting the enemies of compromise.

3.3 Positive Results

Early tests show that the game highly engages students and causes them to ask significant questions about the conflict. The interaction forces the student to learn the geography of the region and understand the stakeholders' agendas. Additionally, PeaceMaker seems to have broader appeal than originally intended. Adults and non-gamers are often surprised that a computer game can be used to explore difficult political and social issues. This suggests that there may be a broader market that is not being engaged by the game industry.

4 Future Directions

4.1 A Framework to Explore Other Conflicts

Reusable Architecture. PeaceMaker's architecture may be used to create games about other historical and present conflicts, e.g. the Korean War and the Indian-Pakistani conflict over Kashmir. The digital assets that comprise the interface may be swapped easily, and changing the digital library of images and videos does not require a change in architecture. The primary challenge when creating a new game is selecting the proper variables to create a plausible model for the conflict in question.

Social Science Tool. The architecture may be used to explore political, social, and economic theories concerning both particular conflicts and general conflict resolution. The game model is a simple theory of the dynamics of the conflict. Playing the game may shed insight into theoretical issues and suggest possibilities for research.

4.2 A Multiplayer Version

Human Versus Artificial Intelligence. PeaceMaker could be changed into a multiplayer game. The primary advantage of a multiplayer version is that it reduces the number of actors that have to be modeled. No model can replace the intelligence that a human player brings to the game.

Role-Playing Tool. A multiplayer version of PeaceMaker could be used as a role-playing teaching tool. This could be very advantageous in classroom settings since all the players' actions could be logged in real-time. Upon completion of the simulation, the instructor has a complete history that may be used for both instruction and evaluation. Switching roles and replaying can deepen and enhance the learning experience by letting the students experience different perspectives in a shared virtual space.