

akhbar

A photograph of a graduation ceremony. In the foreground, several graduates in black gowns and caps are cheering with their arms raised. Above them, numerous black graduation caps with red tassels are suspended in the air, having been thrown by the graduates. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar | Summer/Fall 2008

Hats Off

The Class of 2008
graduates in Doha



Striving for Peace

Carnegie Mellon Qatar hosts
weeklong PeaceMaker event

As the granddaughter of Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas, senior business administration student Hala Abbas has intimate knowledge of the inner workings of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Yet she faced many challenges while playing *PeaceMaker*, an educational video game inspired by real events in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that challenges players to succeed as a leader on both sides.

"This game is really hard. People are blowing up things and I can't control them. If I'm nice to people, they react negatively," Abbas says the Carnegie Mellon senior. "*PeaceMaker* shows you that there are a million factors to take into consideration and that every move you make has consequences."

Abbas was one of many people in Doha who took part in a five-day *PeaceMaker* event this spring. Anyone over the age of 18 was invited to campus to play. Students, staff, faculty and members of the Doha community, all turned out to see if they could achieve peace.

PeaceMaker tests skills, assumptions and prior knowledge, and challenges the player to bring peace to the region before his or her term in office is up. Not only did the *PeaceMaker* event provide an opportunity for people to try to reach peace and understanding in the long conflict, the special version of this game also captured how each person played.

"We are able to track every single action people make during the game," says Cleotilde Gonzalez, associate research professor in the Dynamic Decision Making Lab at Carnegie Mellon in Pittsburgh. "That allows us to see the sequence of actions taken to achieve peace."

In order to do this, gamers entered general demographic information such as gender, age, race, religion, political affiliation and nationality before they began playing. Once the study was over, researchers in the Dynamic Decision Making Lab took



PeaceMaker is an educational video game that challenges players to find peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Players must play as both sides and deal with the consequences of their actions.

this information and began analyzing it to see how roles and environmental events impact dynamic decision making in international relations.

One interesting factor about *PeaceMaker* is that all participants had to play the game from both sides: once as the Palestinian President and once as the Israeli Prime Minister. Each side requires different techniques and strategy in order to achieve peace. Gonzalez says this is done because players are usually in one of three camps: pro Israel, pro Palestine or neutral. By playing both sides, many young people who play the game walk away from it with a different view of the conflict.

Abbas, who has played the game before, walked away from this experience with a new perspective after achieving peace as the Israeli Prime Minister, but failing in the position held by her grandfather.

"I have a whole new respect for what my grandfather does," she says. "This game really shows how hard some of us are suffering. It teaches you that solving the conflict is not that easy. I know it's not easy, but not everyone else does."

Gonzalez says video games are excellent tools for the study of dynamic decision making. Data collection with *PeaceMaker* can help researchers understand behavioral and cultural issues that influence

the perception of the "self" and the "other."

She conducted research with the game on Pittsburgh's campus and found that the players were very similar demographically. She brought it to Doha to capture a more diverse population. While many players were American and European expatriates, several were Arabs and many were Palestinians who have a vested interest in the conflict.

Past data shows that the closer people are to the situation, the more passionate they are about reaching peace. Once emotional content is removed, players win better and more consistently than those who get involved emotionally. Gonzalez also says that personality, political affiliation and religion make a difference in how people plan the game.

Carnegie Mellon University graduates Eric Brown and Asi Burek conceived of and designed *PeaceMaker* with the idea that everyone can make a difference. "We wanted to create a game on social issues," Brown says. "Video games get a lot of bad publicity so we created one that would be emotionally engaging and give people a chance to see what transpires from the decisions they make."

To learn more about *PeaceMaker*, visit www.peacemakergame.com. **Q**