

New videogames give civil uprising tips

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Protesters hold a day of action in support of the Occupy Wall Street movement on December 2, 2011 in San Francisco, California. The Arab Spring uprisings and Occupy-style US protests have inspired a new genre of serious videogames designed to help activists develop strategy -- all in the safety of cyberspace.

The Arab Spring uprisings and Occupy-style US protests have inspired a new genre of serious videogames designed to help activists develop strategy -- all in the safety of cyberspace.

Games like "People Power (The Game of Civil Resistance)" allow would-be protest leaders to build and test their plans for peacefully opposing the police or the government without actually hitting the streets.

The game, which promises "an opportunity to join a community of others who want to learn about civil resistance and nonviolent strategies," was created by York Zimmerman Inc, along with the International

Center on Nonviolent Conflict.

"We certainly did not aim at a [mass audience](#)," said Steve York, "People Power" executive producer. "I suppose it's not for everyone, certainly not casual players wanting to be entertained.

"Still, I think it will be interesting and fun for people who enjoy strategy games, even people who like chess," York added from the documentary production company's Washington headquarters.

"And for our primary audience, [activists](#) engaged in real-world conflicts for freedom or rights, it would be unhelpful to make a game which is too simple or too easy," he said.

"People Power" is a followup to a game launched in 2006, "A Force More Powerful," when the group realized there there was a need to help activists learn non-violent strategies.

"Most of all, they needed help -- experience, actually -- in developing a strategy. They knew how to choose and make tactics, such as protests, strikes, and boycotts. But they didn't know how to put everything together," said York.

"They sometimes neglected the essentials, like recruiting, organizing, and acquiring funding and resources. Too many of them relied almost exclusively on public protest and street action."

Specialist game designer Greg Costikyan told AFP: "People Power's focus is on building networks across a society in order to enlist support for a dissident movement.

"From a gameplay perspective, that's the most interesting aspect of the design: the use of the social graph as a gameplay mechanic. It does,

however, present a very simple model of what is, in reality... very complicated."

Using videogames as a training aid or to share views on current events is not new: for example the Pentagon uses virtual scenarios to help commanders and fighters understand war strategy, while so-called "newsgames" have existed for a decade or more.

It is no surprise then that the generation of activists behind the protests in the Middle East, North Africa and the West should look to videogames to help them develop their plans.

"Occupy The Game," created by activists in Arizona in November, advises players: "Collect money, water and the Constitution. Dodge the tear gas, bean bags and flash grenades thrown by riot police. Dont get arrested!"

"It's time to fix this broken machine," it adds.

National Public Radio (NPR) meanwhile last month launched "Occupy America: The Commemorative Game," a very basic online [game](#) in which players roll a dice to move from city to city, pitching as many tents as they can.

"Games are another medium in which new technologies can be used to empower people through education and potential fundraising," said Hanni Fakhoury of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, which promotes online freedom of expression.

"I think even more interestingly, videogames could raise money in support of protesters," he told AFP, citing "Humble Bundle," which offers games for whatever the player can pay, with money going to the organization they name.

"People may feel more comfortable contributing in these ways, rather than going to a Occupy camp where law enforcement presence is strong," he added.

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