

Thursday March 28, 2002

## <I>Counterstrike</I>, Yosemite Sam At Fault for Mid-East Violence

TEL AVIV, ISRAEL- Given the recent spate of suicide bombings and their associated helicopter gunship reprisals, Americans have all but given up on the notion of lasting peace in the region. To many, it seems that these two groups who have always hated one another will remain locked in perpetual combat no matter what. However, today a blue ribbon panel of experts weighed in on the matter, issuing their solution to the crisis: simply remove all access to violent videogames and cartoons.

In a report submitted to the United Nations on Wednesday, panel members described how plans like this have worked to curb street violence in cities around the world. One example cited was that of Osborne, Maryland. After several months of increased violence among teenagers in the area, area lawmakers took a stand, banning all videogames and "youth-oriented" music from public venues. While the Osborne plan itself was never enacted due to Constitutional concerns, the law's passage did reduce the appearance of street violence, curbing citizen complaints for <I>up to six months.</I>

"It's a known fact that a direct link exists between violent media and real life violence," says commission chairperson Mitch Poniel. "I can't imagine how these folks would get the idea to strap TNT around their chest and detonate it unless they saw it on a Warner Brothers cartoon. The same goes for the tanks rolling into the occupied West Bank. I'm sure all the Israeli soldiers grew up watching Bugs Bunny and his buddies pummeling one another with heavy artillery pieces."

Commission members say they were extremely disturbed at how realistic many of these games have become. <I>Counterstrike</I>, for example, features incredibly lifelike environments, some of which seem to be modeled after cities on the West Bank complete with dilapidated infrastructure and gun-toting toddlers. In what looks like a terrorism simulator, players engage in realistic terrorist or counter-terrorist operations: destroying cargo, executing hostages, using cheat codes to kill enemies instantly.

The similarities between games and the lives of those who play them are terrifying and eerie. Since members of the panel were unaware of the games until their current work on the subject, it seems as though the games have had a direct causal relationship on the violence and bloodshed in the region.

It doesn't help that every suicide bombing is announced on Palestinian television by a mechanized voice saying "Terrorists win."

One suicide bomber who died last week left behind a martyrdom message in which he indicated that blowing himself up in front of a Jerusalem bakery would allow him to "get the power up and win the game."

Another parallel commission recommended that Israel return to its borders to where they were in 1967, prior to acquiring the disputed territory. However, political observers say that this plan may be a hard sell since the one about videogames and cartoons is much easier to enact and makes a much better headline.

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