Blizzard calls off public event to promote Switch Overwatch launch

Enlarge / *Overwatch* running on the Nintendo Switch.
Samuel Axon

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Blizzard has canceled a planned event to promote tomorrow's launch of *Overwatch* on the Nintendo Switch at Nintendo World's New York City retail location. Nintendo announced the cancellation in a Twitter post late last night, attributing the decision to Blizzard and apologizing for "any inconvenience this may cause."

Blizzard has not responded to a request for comment from Ars Technica (Nintendo simply referred our request back to Blizzard). But the abrupt decision to abandon the long-planned event comes a week after the company briefly banned pro *Hearthstone* player Ng "Blitzchung" Wai Chung and stripped him of his tournament winnings. That move came after Blitzchung offered support for the ongoing and long-running Hong Kong protests during an official *Hearthstone* Grandmasters online broadcast.

The backlash continues

Blizzard later reinstated Blitzchung's winnings and reduced

his ban to a six-month suspension, but the damage among many fans seems to have already been done. The replies to Nintendo World's announcement tweet are already filled with hundreds of angry responses, most suggesting Blizzard is kowtowing to Chinese political interests to maintain access to the country's lucrative gaming market.

Had Blizzard gone forward with the *Overwatch* event, those kinds of views would likely have been overwhelmingly and loudly represented by in-person protesters at the Nintendo World store. And those protesters would be interacting with retail staffers and fans that had nothing to do with Blizzard's decision in the Blitzchung case.

The event's cancellation also comes as a group called Gamers for Freedom is organizing a protest targeting Blizzard's annual Blizzcon gathering, planned to take place on November 1 in Anaheim, California. Canceling such a major fan gathering on such short notice would be hard to imagine, after last year's event drew over 40,000 people. That said, Blizzard did fail to stage a Blizzcon in 2012 months ahead of time, citing a need to focus on a number of projects.

Other fans are organizing around the #BoycottBlizzard hashtag to try to put economic pressure on the company over its decision. Such boycott efforts pop up from time to time in the gaming space, often for much less politically fraught reasons. But those grassroots online efforts usually fail to make much of an impact on a publisher's bottom line. In any case, one week later, it seems clear that the story of Blizzard's relationship with China and the Hong Kong protesters hasn't quite blown over as much as the company may have hoped.

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