

Group abandons plan to send troops 'Left Behind' games: Operation Straight Up

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An evangelical entertainment troupe has abandoned plans to send a controversial video game in care packages to U.S. troops in Iraq.

As a member of the Pentagon's "America Supports You" program, Dallas-based Operation Straight Up planned to include copies of the apocalyptic video game "Left Behind: Eternal Forces" in care packages for the military.

But those packages have been scrapped, according to a Pentagon public affairs officer who spoke on background because the Defense Department did not want to comment publicly about the decision.

Operation Straight Up did not respond to repeated requests for comment, and its telephone numbers were removed from the group's Web site.

The video game is based on the Left Behind novels, the runaway best sellers by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. The authors claim that the series has won converts to Christianity.

"Eternal Forces," an offshoot of the books and related movies, may be the franchise's most controversial product. The game purports to teach Christian values while allowing players to kill in the name of either Christianity or the Antichrist.

Although no reason was given for the decision to halt delivery of the care packages, U.S. customs restrictions prohibit mailing to Iraq bulk quantities of religious materials that run contrary to the tenets of the Islamic faith.

"The intent of the customs prohibition against mailing religious items stems from the host country's concern about distributing these materials to its citizens," the U.S. Postal Service's Web site states.

The Military Religious Freedom Foundation, an Albuquerque, New Mexico-based watchdog group founded by retired U.S. Air Force attorney Mikey Weinstein, has criticized the Department of Defense for working with Operation Straight Up, arguing that it jeopardizes the U.S. mission in Iraq.

“We’re fighting a war with an enemy that views us already as imperialists and crusaders, and yet we were going to send over a violent video game to our troops that focuses on killing those of other faiths,” Weinstein said. *-Religion News Service*