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International Institute
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INSIGHTS

“Holy Defense” – Hezbollah’s New Computer Game

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On February 9, 2018, Lebanese Hezbollah’s online media unit launched a new 3-D game called “Holy Defense: Protecting the Homeland and the Holy Sites”. The game is designed for children and teenagers who are supposed to play a Hezbollah fighter in battles, which occurred in reality, against Islamic State fighters on Syrian soil and on the Lebanese border. The introduction to the game states:

“The game is not merely a game but rather a story that seeks to document one of the sacred stages of defense against the expansion of takfiri elements [referring to the Islamic State, which labels Muslims as infidels] and against the American-Zionist plan. It is intended to document the many victims who fell in battle in this way.”¹

The game consists of a number of levels, which include several tasks that the player must perform. Thus, the player is required to defend the grave of Zaynab, a holy Shi’ite site in Damascus, from Islamic State activists; purge territories from the presence of Islamic State fighters in order to stop the firing of rockets; free kidnapped civilians held in Islamic State captivity; assassinate a senior Islamic State commander responsible for the transfer of suicide bombers to Lebanese territory; and in the last level, to defend Baalbek in a battle known as “the battle for the homeland”.

As part of the marketing campaign for the new game, Hezbollah posted video clips on the subject and uploaded them to the social networks, YouTube,² Twitter,³ and Facebook⁴ and even launched a special Web site for the game.⁵ The game is available for installation on computers and mobile phones, and is available for purchase in Lebanon on a \$5 disc through two Hezbollah distribution centers:

- A. Dar al-Manar in Beirut
- B. Dar al-Ma’rif al-Islamiyya in Beirut, Nabatieh and Baalbek

¹ <http://holydefence.com/article.php?id=2&cid=1&catidval=0>

² <https://www.youtube.com/c/holydefence>

³ https://twitter.com/holy_defence

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/holydefence>

⁵ <http://holydefence.com>

Computer games are an inseparable part of Hezbollah's propaganda campaign, as well that as of other terrorist organizations such as Hamas and the Islamic State. Through them, these organizations seek to convey a message to the youth about the threats facing their community and the enemies against whom they must fight in order to remove the threat, to foster their identification with the organization's goals, and to strengthen the connection between them by presenting the organization as a defender of the community. The enjoyment and experience of the game only amplifies the messages and espouses a sense of belonging. In this manner, terrorist organizations aspire to lay the groundwork and recruit to their ranks members of the younger generation.



A banner in honor of the launch of the new game; “Holy Defense: Protecting the Homeland and the Holy Sites” – now on the market

Hezbollah, therefore, seeks to convey a message through the game to young Shi'ites in Lebanon and elsewhere that the organization is the spearhead in defending the Shi'ite community in Lebanon and holy Shia sites in Syria. In an article that Hezbollah published in its weekly, *Al-Ahed*, it emphasized that the game is designed to instill in the hearts of the Shi'ite youth in Lebanon a collective consciousness concerning their shared Muslim identity, culture and history. According to Hezbollah, the West is constantly working to blur the cultural and religious identity of Muslim youth in various ways, such as through encrypted chat programs, social networks and games that seek to "destroy our values and cause us to ignore our main problems". Therefore, the current game seeks to stop this.⁶ According to Lebanese researcher, Badia Salman, the game also serves as a tool to justify Hezbollah's activity in Syria after receiving a wave of criticism both in the Shi'ite community in Lebanon and abroad for its involvement in the Syrian civil war.

⁶ February 25, 2018. <https://alahednews.com.lb/161081/7/لعبة-الدفاع-المقدس-..مقاومة-جديدة-لمواجهة-الحرب-الناعمة>

In fact, this is not the first time Hezbollah has launched a computerized war game. In 2000, for example, after IDF forces withdrew from south Lebanon, the organization launched a computer game called “Special Force”, which simulates combat against the IDF, and launched another computer game after the Second Lebanon War in 2006. Thus, the organization launched a new Web site devoted to old computer games, most of which simulate battle against IDF forces (see photo).⁷



The banner of Hezbollah’s computer games Web site, including computer games, most of which simulate battle against IDF forces

⁷ <https://games.moqawama.org/>

ABOUT THE ICT

Founded in 1996, the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) is one of the leading academic institutes for counter-terrorism in the world, facilitating international cooperation in the global struggle against terrorism. ICT is an independent think tank providing expertise in terrorism, counter-terrorism, homeland security, threat vulnerability and risk assessment, intelligence analysis and national security and defense policy. ICT is a non-profit organization located at the Interdisciplinary Center (IDC), Herzliya, Israel which relies exclusively on private donations and revenue from events, projects and programs.

ABOUT THE JIHADI MONITORING GROUP

The Jihadi Websites Monitoring Group (JWMG) is a specialized research and analysis team at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT). Composed of researchers fluent in Arabic, the JWMG monitors websites that support and serve the Global Jihad organizations. The unique characteristic of JWMG publications is the team's integration of diverse materials from a wide variety of Arabic sources. JWMG connects each source to larger trends, providing a complete understanding of events on both a local and a global scale.

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