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Targeting Cultural Sites is a War Crime

On behalf of more than 50,000 scholars and researchers in the humanities and social sciences, our scholarly and professional societies call upon people throughout the US and, indeed, around the world to remind the President of the United States that targeting cultural sites for military activity is a war crime except under the narrowest of circumstances, and cannot be justified under any circumstances.

The President has threatened via Twitter to target 52 sites in Iran, including cultural sites, if Iran retaliates for the assassination of Iranian general Qasem Soleimani, and he has reiterated that such an action is appropriate even after members of his administration attempted to express restraint. Whatever other efforts are underway to de-escalate hostilities and pursue diplomacy, the Administration must be dissuaded from continuing to threaten cultural sites and civilians.

Cultural sites at risk of damage or destruction by military activity are irreplaceable and result in a loss to civilization, history, and human understanding. The US Department of Defense has gone to extraordinary lengths to coordinate with knowledgeable experts over the past two decades to protect cultural sites in the region. This apparent reversal of strategy is misguided, short-sighted, and will only serve to enrage the Iranian people, for whom the President himself has professed his personal admiration.

Destruction of cultural sites must never be considered as a military objective. Please let the administration know how you feel about this issue, and let your Congressional delegation know as well.

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American Folklore Society
American Philosophical Association
American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies
Archaeological Institute of America
Coalition for American Heritage
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