



OPINION

Trump's tweeted threats to Iran disregard peace treaty

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President Donald Trump took to his favorite public forum, Twitter, and channeled his anger toward Iran January 7 – but these threats violate an international treaty signed by the U.S.

Speaking on behalf of our entire country, Trump threatened to target 52 Iranian sites to represent the 52 American hostages taken by Iran in 1979—some at a “very high level and important to Iran and the Iranian culture,” and hit them “very fast and very hard.”

The president's response to Iranians' threats of retaliation after the killing of Iranian Major Gen. Qasem Soleimani sought to deter revenge, but the actions within this statement could be classified as war crimes.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif was quick to point this out in a responding tweet, saying, “Targeting cultural sites is a war crime... Whether kicking or screaming, end of U.S. malign presence in West Asia has begun.”

Post-World War II, many

countries came together in the wake of mass destruction to protect cultural sites from future warfare and to avoid the scorched-earth methods the world has suffered from in the past. The 1954 Hague Convention signed into law the protection of these sites.

In fact, the U.S. military utilizes several no-strike lists to avoid violation of the mandate and has also used other creative methods to safeguard these areas in the past. For example, playing cards issued by the Pentagon were given to American soldiers with pictures and descriptions of Middle Eastern sites to be avoided.

However, paragraph 5, article 8 of the document withdraws immunity from these sites if they are being used as a safeguard for military activity, weapons or purposes other than cultural display.

If Iran targeted the Statue of Liberty, for example, the president would be the first to bring up the Convention and condemn them for violating it, and rightfully so.

Destroying cultural history and harming citizens extends far beyond the eye-for-an-eye mentality. Dehumanizing war has grave consequences, and as



Claire Hutchinson Cartoonist

a global power, the U.S. sets an example for conduct in all aspects of governing in free world.

Defense Secretary Mike Esper and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo both publicly denounced the president's threats and assured the public that the U.S. would only partake in lawful strategies and techniques of war.

With regard to the threat itself, Trump was careless in his execution. He certainly has the time to display his opinions and plans in great detail through his Twitter account without filter. And

the truth is, if Iran cared about protecting their cultural sites at all costs, they would not use them as a shield.

If the events detailed in Trump's threats came to fruition, they might very well be legally justifiable if Iran is in fact using their cultural sites for military purposes. Swift retaliation is often necessary for keeping American citizens safe.

Trump is in the right to threaten anyone who dares attack the U.S., but he must be careful in his wording. A sentence explaining that targeting only sites used

illegally would have gone a long way in this situation.

It is important to respect heritage and culture because they are each civilization's diverse contribution to the world. They serve as a reminder in times of conflict that we are all human and share common intrinsic values. The U.S. must continue to abide by the laws of war and not stoop down to the level of terrorists.

Still, contradictory statements issued by the U.S. government chip away at the strong foundation of this country, which needs to be uniform when addressing foreign conflict.

This is not a time to appear weak and unorganized. Internal conflict, especially between party lines, is expected, but when it comes to the defense of American citizens, the government should issue statements on the same spectrum and not have to publicly apologize for one another.

In the face of war, the U.S. must appear unified.

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“To the African American community, it meant a lot to us, to see women like myself to be crowned. This is a representation of what America looks like.”

—Former pageant contestant and current judge, Patty Booke.

Black pageant winners make history, inspire Arkansas women, page 2

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War on Drugs still hurts racial minorities decades later

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Former President Richard Nixon introduced the War on Drugs in 1971 in an attempt to remove illicit drugs from the streets. But this same program fractured many marginalized communities, leaving millions in prison.

The Pew Research Center found in November 2019 that 59% of Americans supported legalization of medical and recreational marijuana use. This data reflects a current movement that goes against the established War on Drugs.

Oklahoma is a traditionally conservative state, according to the Oklahoma Historical Society. But even under the Republican party platform, state officials released more than 400 prisoners in November convicted of simple drug misdemeanors.

The organized release was in response to a growing societal shift toward leniency regarding drug possession and use. This shift reflects the effect tough drug enforcement has had on poorer communities, which are often filled with minority groups.

At the Washington County prison, overcrowding is to the point where some

prisoners sleep on the floor, according to reports from the Washington County Sheriff Department.

Arkansas needs to follow Oklahoma's decision in releasing prisoners with minor drug offenses rather than institute a jail expansion as Sheriff Tim Helder of Washington County proposed in 2019.

Instead of expansion, focus should be directed on the disproportionate arrests of minorities on drug charges.

In 2018, 541 people were arrested in Fayetteville on misdemeanor marijuana charges. Of those, 26% were black, 6% were Hispanic and 66% were white, according to the Fayetteville Police Department.

Based on the 2010 U.S. Census, the population of Fayetteville is 7% black, 8% Hispanic and 78% white.

2018 data from the Prison Policy Initiative illuminated the wide disparity between African-American and Hispanic arrests compared to white residents in the state of Arkansas. Though African-American and Hispanic Arkansans represented 21% of the Arkansas population, they accounted for 49% of the prison and jail records last year.

White Arkansas residents made up 75% of the state population but only 50% of the prison and jail population.

Though these arrests are not limited to drug-related charges, there is an inconsistent pattern in the relationship between resident makeup and arrests.

Nixon hailed the War on Drugs as the nation's leading force against drugs, which he defined as “the public enemy.”

Subsequently, the public learned that the program was secretly intended to silence hippies and African Americans through interviews with Nixon's aide, John Ehrlichman, which were published in an April 2016 Harper's Magazine article.

One study from the International Journal of Drug Policy revealed the correlation between drug violence and drug enforcement agencies in the U.S.

In the study, researchers analyzed independent cities, states and the nation collectively, theorizing that increased drug enforcement results in lower drug violence.

The study ultimately proved the opposite of the researchers' hypothesis was true, concluding that “scientific evidence suggests drug law enforcement contributes to gun violence and high homicide rates.”

As opposed to criminalization, there is an increasingly popular

agenda to prioritize community development, job employment, true educational equality and public access to treatment facilities to effectively reduce drug use.

Broken communities stem not only from this program, but the racial targeting that has explicitly followed. According to the Human Rights Watch and the American Civil Liberties Union, despite the data showing drug use is approximately equal between races, African-American people are arrested 2.5 times more than white people in Arkansas.

In areas like Manhattan, African American adults are 11 times more likely to be arrested for drug possession than white adults.

The movement to reduce drug sentences, change drug laws and decriminalize marijuana is not a sinister movement or an attempt to plague the nation with narcotics. It is about reflecting on the past several decades and acknowledging the harm that has been done, the injustice that has occurred and the pain that communities have suffered.

Tyler Tidwell is a sophomore political science major and staff columnist for the Arkansas Traveler.