

On Bombing Cultural Heritage Sites, Drone Assassinations, and Spirituality

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In-depth Report: [IRAN: THE NEXT WAR?](#)

Pres. Donald Trump's threat to the Iranian government to bomb fifty-two designated cultural sites in that country was shocking and disturbing, for myriad reasons.[i] The specific number of fifty-two in his tweet of January 4, 2020 pointedly reminds us of the Americans taken hostage by student revolutionaries during what came to be called the Iran-Contra Affair; the hostage crisis ended on Jan. 21, 1981 when the Americans were freed.[ii] Trump's reference to the tragic situation of those hostages, however, fails to mention the thirty-seven years of misery and terror (1941-1979) that Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi imposed on the Iranian people—which would at least provide a context for why the hostages were taken in the first place.

In 1953 the popular Iranian prime minister Mohammad Mosaddegh was violently overthrown by forces of the Shah, actively supported by the United States and United Kingdom.[iii] Mosaddegh's efforts to nationalize Iran's oil, which for many decades had been controlled by the British, led to his downfall. How does one quantify the suffering inflicted on the Iranian people during all those years of the Shah's reign, which surely brought about the anger experienced by the student hostage-takers of the Americans? An individual life is an absolute value; Iranian lives are worth as much as the lives of any other people of the world. Mosaddegh's own words of December 19, 1953 provide insights into the frustration that was felt and continues to be felt by Iranians: ". . . my greatest sin is that I nationalized Iran's oil industry and discarded the system of political and economic exploitation by the world's greatest empire [the U.K.] . . . This at the cost to myself, my family; and at the risk of losing my life, my honor and my property."[iv]

One is reminded of the fate suffered by the Libyans, whose country was once arguably the most prosperous of Africa, but whose leader proposed switching the country's international transactions from the U.S. dollar to the dinar and introducing an organization of African nations bound by their mutual interests—which led to the killing of Muammar al-Gaddafi in 2011 by NATO forces. Oil pipelines and the countries they traverse reveal much about international politics. Similarly, the attitude demonstrated by a people towards their country's cultural heritage reveals their level of maturity as participants in the stream of world civilization.

The differing roles played by culture and spirituality in Iran and the U.S. can shed light on the importance, or lack thereof, of cultural heritage sites in each country. The history of Persia / Iran can be traced at least as far back as 7000 B.C. In more recent centuries this nation has defined itself through the Muslim faith, which in its creative force, prescribed daily prayer rule, and dietary laws has produced a centuries'-rich, exquisite body of art. What binds the people of any Islamic nation is their faith, the very fact that they craft

meaning in their lives through their connection with a divine being. Available photographs of Iranian Gen. Qasem Soleimani show him immersed in prayer; sympathetic accounts of his life describe his love for poetry and bravery in battle. The millions of Iranian citizens who poured into the streets of various cities of the country during the days of mourning and funeral procession of their fallen general were moved, in addition to the grave injustice, by a spiritual connection with him. Without idealizing or sanitizing the everyday existence of a people, one can describe Iranian lives as surrounded by the beauty of their art, defining rituals of their religion, and depth of understanding acquired through the enormously long history of their civilization. These are features that bind the people of a nation together in the face of demonization of their leaders and crippling sanctions by outsiders.

By contrast, the U.S. is a young country with Christian origins that evolved into a largely secular nation. There is little that binds the American people together, which may explain the misguided Wolfowitzian doctrine that seeks unity through maintaining the populace in a state of fear of imagined foreign enemies. Twenty-first-century American society is fragmented and atomized, as a powerful elite and cooperative media feed citizens a diet of identity-politics issues that emphasizes consumerism and narcissism. If Christian religious faith is present at all in national arenas, it is fleeting, light, and suspicious of poetry and other deep aspects of spirituality.

The U.S.'s drone assassination of Gen. Soleimani and Iraqi military commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis at the Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020 presents a compelling case study of selective information presented to the American people by the media. These were not reclusive terrorists hiding in caves, but rather government military officers charged with carrying out official responsibilities for their respective countries. Ilya Tsukanov notes, "Whether against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, or against Daesh and other terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq, Gen. Soleimani and the Quds Force have consistently fought the same Sunni Islamist Wahhabi fundamentalist forces which have targeted US forces across the Middle East and around the world, and which have vowed to destroy the West and America through acts of terror." [v] It is especially disturbing that Soleimani was traveling openly on a peace mission, with the Iraqi government as intermediary, to forge improved relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

The American media's reporting on this assassination exemplifies the ways in which the occasional fact may be used to obfuscate, rather than inform, readers desiring to learn the truth. Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky write: "But even more important [than suppressing information] . . . is the question of the attention given to a fact—its placement, tone, and repetitions, the framework of analysis within which it is presented, and the related facts that accompany it and give it meaning (or preclude understanding)." [vi] Demonization of Soleimani even extended to his being implicated by Vice President Pence in the 9/11 attacks, without any evidence presented. [vii] Such misbehavior on the part of American mainstream journalists stems from their increasingly compromised code of ethics as well as a lack of training in their own profession. The corporate culture to which they belong privileges conformity to a prescribed narrative over a deeper commitment to unbiased investigative work.

American society, with a steadily eroding educational system, lacks unifying civilizational or faith-based traditions that would come into play at critical times. In this utilitarian society, the concept of beauty is virtually lost. [viii] In one telling moment of a class session this author was conducting, not a single student could cite humankind's need for beauty as an

explanation for the gracefulness of major architectural styles. Beauty as a defining aesthetic category was absent in the students' system of meanings. In a country whose government budgets routinely take away funding for the arts, which has ceased to teach geography on its advanced levels, and which presents history so poorly that history professors lament the confusion experienced by students about world history, it is no wonder that many adults can be manipulated so easily by the media and politicians.

The questions arise: How can Americans grasp at all that the assassination of one of Iran's admired and respected generals would galvanize the country's people into a state of closer unity? Can one even imagine an American military official reciting poetry or engaged deep in thought about the transformational power of sublime beauty? Would Americans be distressed at a foreign power's threats to destroy over fifty of the U.S.'s cultural sites (if indeed they could name even half of such cherished places)? These questions suggest far-reaching implications for the understanding by the average American of the Middle East, and Iran in particular.

A new creative thinking needs to develop on the part of the U.S. leadership. Instead of economic pressure, threats to destroy a nation's cultural heritage, and invasions of the oil-rich countries of the Middle East, it would be salvific and productive for the U.S. to treat other nations from the principle of moral equivalency, rather than that of moral superiority—as I have argued elsewhere.[ix] This, along with a genuine respect for religious faith and a prioritizing of the arts born of an appreciation of the need for beauty for a civilization's depth and well-being, would effect positive change in the American people's worldview. Such innovations would benefit all parties concerned and could end the destructive cycle of Western colonization and plunder of more vulnerable countries.

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Notes

[i] <https://www.thedailybeast.com/trump-threatens-to-hit-iran-very-fast-and-very-hard>

[ii] <https://www.history.com/topics/middle-east/iran-hostage-crisis>; see also Robert Parry, *America's Stolen Narrative* (Arlington, VA: Media Consortium, 2012)

[iii] <http://www.mohammadmossadegh.com/biography/>

[iv] <http://www.mohammadmossadegh.com/biography/>

[v] <https://sputniknews.com/world/202001061077960305-arch-terrorist-or-inadvertent-ally-three-times-soleimani-saved-american-lives/>

[vi] Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (NY: Pantheon Books, 1988, 2002), lxii-lxiii. For obfuscation and invention of reasons justifying

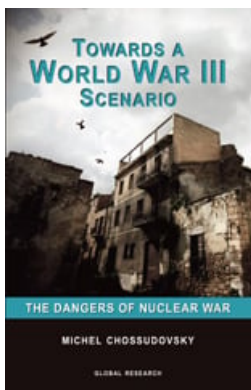
the killing of Soleimani, see, for example,

<https://www.fort-russ.com/2020/01/exposed-netanyahu-pompeo-lie-of-imminent-threat-that-justified-the-assassination-of-soleimani/>

[vii] <https://www.globalresearch.ca/low-point-us-politics-pence-shares-crazy-conspiracy-theory-about-iran/5703280>

[viii] See the TEDx talk by James Howard Kunstler “The Ghastly Tragedy of the Suburbs,” https://www.ted.com/talks/james_howard_kunstler_the_ghastly_tragedy_of_the_suburbs#t-23506

[ix] <https://russia-insider.com/en/politics/clash-worldviews-moral-equivalence-or-moral-superiority/ri20229>



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-Ellen Brown, author of 'Web of Debt' and president of the Public Banking Institute

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