

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 20, 2026

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Hegseth,

I write with urgent concern following U.S. military actions between February 28, 2026, and April 7, 2026, which, according to independent monitoring by Human Rights Activists in Iran (HRA), have resulted in significant harm to civilian life and damage to civilian infrastructure, namely the deaths of at least 1,701 civilians, including at least 254 children. There are at least 700 additional reported deaths under review.

On February 28, 2026, the opening day of hostilities, U.S. strikes hit both a girls' school in Minab, Iran, killing a reported 168 children and injuring 100 others, and a youth sports hall in Lamerd, killing 21 civilians, including 3 children, and injuring 110 others. Independent [experts](#) and [monitoring](#) groups have attributed both attacks to U.S. forces. The fact that these high-casualty incidents, involving clearly identifiable civilian objects, occurred on the first day of a campaign preceded by weeks, if not months, of intelligence gathering and target planning, raises serious concerns about U.S. targeting and precautionary measures and compliance with fundamental principles of the law of armed conflict. Minab marked the largest civilian death toll of any single U.S. attack since the Gulf War in 1991. Between February 28 and March 20, 2026, independent monitoring identified at least 12 incidents in which upwards of ten civilians were reportedly killed in a single strike. Given the limitations in the information environment, this figure is likely a significant undercount.

HRA has documented military strikes and impact damage on hospitals, emergency medical facilities, primary schools, universities, water desalination plants, power plants, civilian airports, places of worship, UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and countless densely populated residential areas. Several incidents investigated by HRA affecting schools resulted in the death or injury of students. In an incident on March 5, 2026, in Tehran, a nearby attack injured 56 people while they waited in line for bread. Another attack in Eastern Tehran on March 9, 2026, killed at least 20 civilians, including a child, as two twenty-unit residential apartment buildings collapsed from a missile strike.

Furthermore, [attacks on power stations](#) disrupt services essential to the survival of the civilian population, as hospitals, water treatment facilities, and the food supply chain rely on electricity. Electricity failure will trigger cascading humanitarian consequences, including public health crises, outbreaks of infectious disease, the denial of care to the wounded and sick, and food insecurity. Iran has limited capacity to repair damaged infrastructure, meaning that disruptions to essential services are likely to persist for months, if not years. Such protracted damage deepens the reverberating effects on civilian life and will undermine pathways to recovery. The impact is exacerbated by the highly restrictive operating environment for humanitarian organizations, which severely limits their presence and ability to respond at scale.

These events, in addition to a series of wildly outrageous and threatening [statements](#) by President Trump and echoed across the administration, raise serious concerns about violations of domestic and international law. Human rights [organizations](#) and legal experts have [underscored](#) that threats that “a whole civilization will die,” or calls for indiscriminate destruction, are unlawful because they disregard the fundamental principle of distinction between civilian and military targets and signal an intent wholly incompatible with the protection of civilian life. Notably, more than 200 leading human rights, humanitarian, civil liberties, faith-based, and environmental organizations and experts have [issued a joint urgent statement](#) in response to President Trump’s threatening rhetoric.

The prohibition of such conduct is not new. President Abraham Lincoln commissioned the drafting of the Lieber Code in 1863 as one of the first modern codifications of the laws of war. It sought to regulate the conduct of U.S. forces, prohibiting wanton destruction and protecting civilian populations, grounded in the principle that even in war, military necessity must be balanced with humanity. The Trump administration’s recent statements and actions not only undermine such law, but depart from longstanding U.S. military doctrine and values that have, since the Lieber Code, affirmed the protection of civilians as a core principle in warfare.

The administration’s lethal threats and conduct carry a significant risk for U.S. servicemembers of complicity in potential war crimes, as well as [moral and psychological](#) injury associated with causing civilian harm. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has identified exposure to [morally injurious](#) events as a risk factor for suicide, and an average of more than [17 veterans die by suicide each day](#). The U.S. Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response Action Plan ([CHMR-AP](#)) specifically recognizes that battlefield “successes may ultimately end in strategic failure if care is not taken to protect the civilian environment.” Related resources have been severely defunded and deprioritized in the current administration, eroding the support and oversight capacity for civilian harm mitigation throughout Operation Epic Fury, meant to protect both civilians and U.S. military personnel.

The administration’s threats and actions have moreover damaged our credibility and standing globally, undermining the moral clarity it has historically sought to project. The military assault

unleashed and threatened against the Iranian civilian population has already sown the seeds of resentment and further radicalization, counter to US strategic priorities.

In light of these developments, and statements by President Trump and the administration indicating the potential for widespread or total destruction, and consistent with Congress's oversight responsibilities, I request immediate clarification on the following:

1. What military and legal assessments were conducted within the Department of Defense regarding civilian harm mitigation and reduction, including damage to critical infrastructure such as energy, water, and medical systems?
2. What measures were taken by your department to ensure compliance with the laws of armed conflict, including the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precaution?
3. What mechanisms are in place to track, assess, and publicly report civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure resulting from U.S. strikes in Iran?
4. How does the Department reconcile public claims that it does not target civilians or civilian infrastructure with emerging reports suggesting otherwise?
5. How does the Department reconcile the credible reports regarding the incident in Lamerd on February 28, where multiple weapons experts, including former US military personnel, have identified a U.S. Precision Strike Missile (PrSM) as responsible for the strike?
6. How does the Department plan to take accountability, including through amends for victims, for the widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure resulting from its operations, particularly in light of credible reports of extensive damage to residential homes and the loss of civilian life?

I request a response no later than May 2, 2026.

Sincerely,


Yassamin Ansari
Member of Congress