



Defending Cultural Assets Against a Cosmic Impact Risk

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Asteroid or comet impacts on Earth have the potential to destroy humanity's cultural heritage, ranging from local regions to total obliteration. Fortunately we now have means to cope with this hazard — if and only if we devote resources to finding, intercepting and deflecting threatening objects. Early preparations have already begun. Under auspices of the UN's Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) an International Asteroid Warning Network (IAWN) and a Space Mission Planning Advisory Group (SMPAG) have been set up. Upon validation of a threat by IAWN and SMPAG, agencies with capacity, funding and authority to launch intercept missions are to act. A model for this is the existing arrangement for organizing and dispatching UN peacekeeping forces. In this paper we describe current technical options and needed policy and legal developments to enable the world to divert threats and, if that fails or is impossible, to save lives through evacuation and civil defense. In parallel with those efforts, we advocate the creation of safe archives as backup for lost cultural treasures.