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## Practicing the Art of War While Protecting Cultural Heritage: A Military Perspective

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While serving in Afghanistan in 2006, a special forces officer briefed Lieutenant General Karl Eikenberry, commander of Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan, about a night raid that his unit was going to conduct. Although Eikenberry did not have operational control of the mission, other units coordinated with him. The special forces unit wanted to capture a Taliban bombmaker responsible for the death of at least two members of their team. When the military located the bombmaker in a village, the unit prepared for a midnight attack. Eikenberry disagreed with this approach, contending that the operation would traumatize the village by raiding at midnight, having loud Blackhawk helicopters circling overhead, and disrespecting the culture by violating women’s privacy rules during the search. Even if the bombmaker was captured, the general contended, the exact threat would be replicated in a month, so he suggested apprehending him on the road and not in a village. According to Eikenberry, this anecdote reflects the imperative that “tactics be put in the larger context.”<sup>1</sup>

That context is one of protecting cultural heritage while engaged in military operations. Protecting cultural heritage sites has crucial strategic implications due to the symbolic and economic interconnections between cultural sites, artifacts, and populations. These inextricable links can incite populations to participate in actions against military forces when cultural sites are harmed. The US Armed Forces have long recognized the instrumental and moral value of protecting cultural heritage when conducting military operations abroad, yet two factors in recent decades have complicated this task. First, the changing context of modern war has presented new

dilemmas for US military commanders charged with safeguarding cultural heritage. The ever-widening access to digital communications and social media increases the risk that even seemingly minor and unintended harm to cultural heritage can quickly rouse local, regional, and international reactions. Second, the employment of twenty-first-century precision munitions reduces tolerance for collateral damage. Coupled with social media's potential elevation of tactical errors to strategic consequences, such expectations foster host nation resentment of foreign soldiers perceived as insensitive to their most prized cultural beliefs.

Although the law of armed conflict defines cultural property and delineates what armed forces may lawfully target, the US military also needs to be mindful of the broader definition of cultural heritage, the symbolism and economic value of cultural artifacts, and the disconnect between perception and legality. For example, in certain circumstances a mosque may legally be targeted, yet its damage or destruction can evoke reactions that have strategic consequences. Additionally, while an external military force, like that of the United States, might not be involved in damaging cultural heritage, during conflict it may be perceived by the host nation as required to protect cultural sites from attack. Here we define the boundaries of cultural heritage broadly to include cultural artifacts, property, and norms that may not be internationally or legally recognized but carry the potential to ignite passions if damaged or disrespected. This expanded definition is more relevant to practitioners in the fields of diplomacy, development, and defense.

Understanding the ramifications of protecting cultural heritage necessitates critical education and training in cultural awareness. This need, as President Franklin D. Roosevelt understood during World War II, was met by the creation of the US Army's Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives (MFAA) Section within the Civil Affairs branch; members of the MFAA were more famously known as the "Monuments Men." In 2019, the army revitalized a new generation of Monuments Men, who were credentialed cultural heritage experts trained in military and civil governance. Although promising, these heritage and preservation specialists cannot replace critical cultural heritage awareness training for the mass formations of soldiers, who must be able to identify and preserve cultural heritage during combat operations. The efficacy of this training and that of the heritage and preservation specialist program depend on the US Army's strategic outlook for cultural heritage protection. If limited to a property-based perspective of liability mitigation, the army will not induce institutional change to prioritize the heritage preservation of host nations. However, if it expands its perspective to protect heritage that includes a host nation's intangible traditions and ways of life, the United States will likely significantly improve diplomatic relations with such states.

The chapter explores the modern challenges of protecting cultural heritage sites during military operations and assesses the US Army's current practices and capabilities in this endeavor. It concentrates on recent military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan,

dealing mostly with counterinsurgency operations, in order to explore recent challenges to protecting cultural heritage sites during military operations, particularly the dramatic increases in the speed and proliferation of information and communications technologies. While the discussion focuses on one type of operation, the protection of cultural heritage and cultural awareness are relevant across the spectrum of armed conflict. The chapter concludes with a discussion of various means that the military can employ to ensure the priority of cultural heritage protection.<sup>2</sup>

### **Twenty-First-Century Challenges**

The pervasiveness of social media, the transformation of conflict which includes terrorism, and the use of precision munitions have had substantial effects on cultural heritage and its protection. Since 2001, the United States has been involved in wars that include battling nonstate armed groups, mostly in the Middle East and Central Asia. In both Iraq and Afghanistan such groups have used social media to document the destruction of cultural heritage. Whether it is destroyed as part of a terrorist group's strategy or inadvertently by foreign forces, the ramifications are similar. Although the demolition of cultural heritage has a long history, "what is new is the opportunity that the media revolution provides for the increased impact of destruction, both locally and globally."<sup>3</sup>

Adversaries have used the destruction of cultural heritage as a mechanism of communication. According to David Rapoport, the first wave of modern terrorism during the period of the "anarchists" in the 1880s reflected a novel way to communicate and mobilize people to action.<sup>4</sup> Terrorist groups destroy cultural heritage to expunge the identity of perceived enemies, recruit new followers, illustrate their power, and sow fear throughout the population. During armed conflict, some actors perceive the destruction of their adversary's tangible history and symbolism as connected with military success; in many cases, "conflicts are aimed specifically at the material and symbolic manifestations of ethnic, ethno-national, ideological or religious beliefs."<sup>5</sup> Erasing identities, especially in conflicts where the combatants possess a zero-sum attitude toward each other, serves as part of a group's strategy to communicate their ideology to their followers.

A key challenge for foreign militaries with regard to the protection of cultural heritage is that social media facilitates the immediate dissemination of an armed group's message to its intended audiences. With the changing nature of warfare, "information is a commodity receptive to weaponization, and the information environment has become vital to the success of military operations."<sup>6</sup> The videos of the destruction of cultural heritage by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, also known as ISIL or Da'esh) have been among their most popular posts, as evidenced by the number of views.<sup>7</sup> The filming and dissemination of beheadings and other extremist acts multiplies an armed group's audience exponentially and imparts its political message. New technology, particularly the video component of communication,

becomes part of the group's strategy of global propaganda.<sup>8</sup> In Iraq, ISIS encouraged the filming of cultural heritage destruction and scripted these demolitions with militants reciting the Quran in front of "idolatrous" sites, while negating any connection those groups have to the cultural identities of those living in the "caliphate."<sup>9</sup>

The rapid circulation of messages has created a dangerous environment for foreign militaries or peacekeepers in a host country. Coupled with the inflammatory videos of a site's destruction, social media includes commentary and explanation of an event from the group's perspective, without regard for facts. Insurgents and terrorist groups mold views concerning the destruction of cultural heritage sites by using blogs encouraging interaction and the development of groups with similar views. Social media creates virtual communities that champion causes and foster allegiances outside national boundaries.<sup>10</sup> The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan in February 2001 illustrates the magnified impact of modern communication on cultural heritage destruction. The Taliban's manipulation of the media by encouraging the photographing and documentation of the demolition reflect its profound understanding of social media's value in achieving its strategic objectives, including global propaganda and recruitment.

The ability of groups to manipulate messages through social media with strategic consequences impacts the efficacy of foreign forces and creates diplomatic tensions in a host country. Governments often perceive foreign forces as protectors of cultural sites and blame them for their destruction, even when foreign forces are not involved. Similar reactions occur when US munitions miss an intended target and inadvertently destroy a cultural site—cell phones capture the devastation and photographic evidence circulates the globe instantaneously. Such an event is no less impactful than when a terrorist or insurgent group destroys cultural heritage. More importantly, networked communication permits individuals to process events and express diverse opinions when sharing the incident through Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms. This contrasts with mass communication, which distributes information through central sources, such as state-owned media, that represents news from a particular perspective and where the flow of information is unidirectional.<sup>11</sup>

For foreign forces, even when military manuals set rules for cultural heritage protection, uncertainty and confusion in military operations lead to mistakes. Due to the rapidity with which the ramifications of these errors are captured by social media, outside forces often lack time to ameliorate the fallout. In 2003, the Iraq Museum in Baghdad was looted forty-eight hours after the United States toppled Saddam Hussein's government. Although some Iraqis pushed the Americans to protect the museum during the looting, the initial reaction by US troops was tepid and only occurred after an archaeologist found American marines in a nearby street and brought them to the museum.<sup>12</sup> Its looting reflects the issue of moral hazard. Unlike signatories to the 1954 Hague Convention which had also ratified it and are thereby obliged to protect cultural heritage, the United States, as a signatory only, lacked the pressure of enforcement. Yet

the absence of a robust response to the looting ignited Iraqi anger, amplifying the feeling by the local population that the United States had a responsibility to protect cultural heritage after invading. Significant outcry within the international community underscored the understanding that cultural heritage protection is interconnected with international human rights, as the destruction of cultural heritage is often intertwined with identity destruction.<sup>13</sup>

The impact of social media on US military operations has been significant. When General Eikenberry arrived in Afghanistan in 2002 as the US security coordinator, cell phones were a “luxury item” among the local population. However, when he returned in 2005 and then in 2009 as ambassador, they seemed ubiquitous. He also observed that “no matter where you are, even in the most remote region, there is access to social media.” The Taliban’s familiarity and deftness with social media continued to grow, posing significant trials for the US military. To combat this phenomenon, Eikenberry contends that commanders must maintain a profound understanding of how US military actions impact the local population, along with a clear recognition that cultural heritage encompasses intangibles such as cultural norms. For example, the US military used dogs to conduct searches, but in Islam dogs have a negative connotation. Additionally, the military conducted searches within family compounds, unwittingly violating female privacy rules. Eikenberry argues that despite any progress made, it only takes “certain camera shots to send you back on your heels.”<sup>14</sup>

There are other examples where the US military unintentionally disturbed a culturally significant site. In 2013, according to Lieutenant Kyle Staron, who served as an Afghan National Police development engineer, the US military was overseeing contractors’ construction of police stations in Kabul when excavators found a long-forgotten cemetery. Almost immediately, townspeople arrived on the scene and appeared upset by the discovery. They wanted compensation for damaging the cemetery, a request that was frustrating to the US military since, according to Staron, most of the local population had been unaware of the burial site’s existence. The military lacked a mechanism to distribute petty cash to manage problems on the ground, but fortunately the local contractor agreed to move the bodies and paid for lunch for the local bystanders at a cost of two hundred dollars. The contractor also paid the imam to consecrate the site where the bodies were relocated. Staron believed that in this case, had social media been more prevalent in the village, “we would have seen a much more dramatic episode in finding those bodies, which would have made the project much more complicated.”<sup>15</sup>

Interconnected with the difficulty that increased social media use has posed for US forces with regard to cultural heritage protection, the use of precision munitions has also proven challenging. The US Department of Defense defines a precision munition as a “guided weapon intended to destroy a point target and minimize collateral damage.”<sup>16</sup> Diminishing damage to cultural heritage and decreasing the number of civilian casualties provide a critical consequentialist argument for the benefits of such weapons.

For example, during the bombing of Libya by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 2011, coalition forces used precision munitions to destroy a radar installation that sat atop an ancient Roman fortification without damaging the ruin.

According to Eikenberry, a perception exists that using precision missiles should negate the possibility of ever hitting cultural heritage. Consequently, resentment increases when collateral damage does occur during their use. Although precision weapons have somewhat ameliorated the issue of collateral damage, their implementation remains problematic for cultural heritage. Colonel Andrew Scott DeJesse argues that although the weapons might have “struck targets cleanly” in Iraq, the military must consider second and third order effects of the strikes. For example, during the 2003 invasion, missiles hit the correct targets while also exploding water pipes which flooded adjacent buildings containing cultural heritage. Furthermore, when war was pending, to protect cultural heritage from potential strikes, items were moved and not always carefully tracked. They tended to be destroyed when hidden in government buildings which were targeted during the war. DeJesse’s bottom line is that “precision munitions do not negate destruction of cultural heritage property.”<sup>17</sup>

### **The US Army and Cultural Heritage Protection**

The destruction of cultural heritage during military operations, whether as intentional acts or collateral damage, has occurred throughout history, with examples from Carthage in 149–146 BCE to numerous cases during World War II.<sup>18</sup> During the latter, President Roosevelt recognized the significance of cultural heritage protection and created the Commission for the Protection of Cultural Treasures in War Areas with military officers, who were subject-matter experts, serving as advisors to commanders in the field.<sup>19</sup> They became members of the MFAA, tasked with creating lists of monuments, works of art, and other cultural heritage to protect during military operations. However, within the US Department of Defense, protecting cultural heritage lacked an institutionalized process and remained a voluntary endeavor until recently.<sup>20</sup>

The US military recognizes the challenges posed by the destruction of cultural heritage, the ramifications of which have been heightened and exacerbated by social media. The US Army’s current practices are incorporated in its formal doctrine, roles, and the capabilities developed recently to preserve cultural heritage during military operations.

The US Army’s Civil Affairs branch is responsible for executing the mission of cultural heritage preservation with the overall responsibility to improve the army’s relationship with local populations and institutions.<sup>21</sup> Deployed soldiers work directly with local government and civilian populations to support activities from providing humanitarian aid to improving the quality of governance.<sup>22</sup> Their efforts in both mitigating the effects of conflict and providing intelligence through civil reconnaissance have made lasting impacts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. Civil Affairs forces have coordinated with private telecommunications companies in Afghanistan to provide

mobile services and counter improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in Iraq through local networking that has provided critical intelligence.<sup>23</sup>

In 2015, Civil Affairs created the “military government specialist” role to bolster the government capabilities of host nations.<sup>24</sup> The role is designed for experts recruited as US Army Reserve officers to consult with host nation government officials. “Heritage and preservation specialist” is one of the eighteen specializations within this role, along with others such as “energy,” “commerce and trade,” and “transportation.”<sup>25</sup> Although these concentrations should contribute to significant improvements in state capacities for the host nation, the reality of this role conveys a different message.

The US Army has been recruiting experts into their ranks rather than relying on civilian experts from the private sector or other government agencies such as the Department of State.<sup>26</sup> However, demand for these positions has not materialized. Instead of commissioning experts as “military government specialists,” recruiters resolved to “getting what they could.” A second grade teacher would be recruited as the education specialist, for example, while a local town police officer would be hired as a law and border enforcement specialist, a role reserved for US Army experts who consult with host state officials to better enforce the rule of law.<sup>27</sup> Much of the misguided recruitment for military government specialists to include heritage and preservation specialists is due to the army’s lack of resourcing and lack of interest within Civil Affairs. As the branch is comprised of 90 percent reservists, it has had difficulty maintaining strategic and operational relevance with active duty units in theater. Civil Affairs elements are attached to most major deployed formations, yet US Army commanders are not trained to leverage these assets. The Civil Affairs primary staff officer position at each echelon, responsible for advising the commander on all Civil Affairs capabilities, is frequently vacant in deployed units.<sup>28</sup>

Upon assuming the mantle in 2019, Colonel DeJesse, the director of the military government specialist program, has sought to revalidate the military government specialist role, particularly that of cultural heritage and preservation specialists. An accomplished painter, DeJesse redesigned the heritage and preservation specialist program to develop interdisciplinary experts who are academically credentialed in fields related to cultural heritage and also trained in military and civil governance. Branding officers in the specialization as the “new Monuments Men,” the program’s inception in October 2019 was praised by the media.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the program’s public debut, it may be some time before there are major impacts from these new Monuments Men. As of this writing, there are only about twenty credentialed and fully qualified heritage preservation specialists, with another twenty currently in training.<sup>30</sup> A spring 2020 conference to develop doctrine for the redefined military government specialist program was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, further hampering the program’s momentum.<sup>31</sup> Even when the new Monuments Men reach a critical mass where expertise can be reliably and consistently leveraged in the field, they might confront challenges similar to those of other Civil



Affairs officers. Their relevance may be questioned by commanders who prioritize lethal force and training local police over Civil Affairs efforts in local governance and cultural heritage preservation.<sup>32</sup> Commanders may also be unaware of the expertise in their formations as they lack the Civil Affairs primary staff officer to inform them about such assets.

If some commanders may be uninformed as to their unit's expertise regarding cultural heritage protection, how can soldiers be equipped to prevent mistakes involving cultural heritage protection? Lower echelon leaders in the US Army are highly skilled in small group tactics and are trained to accept risk and take disciplined initiative while following the commander's intent for accomplishing the mission.<sup>33</sup> This increased initiative fosters agility and adaptability, with forces capable of maneuvering the battlespace within set parameters without having to seek permission for every action. Although this has been a tactical advantage during combat, smaller units may encounter ambiguous situations involving cultural heritage sites and artifacts. Without access to heritage and preservation specialists or any Civil Affairs assets, these soldiers may unknowingly desecrate sites or otherwise unintentionally provoke significant distress among the local population.

There have been numerous widely publicized incidents involving the US Army's failure to preserve cultural heritage during combat operations. With sufficient training to develop a basic understanding of heritage preservation and its significance to the local population, army units might have reconsidered the building of US bases on ancient citadels in Afghanistan, despite the strategic vantage points they offered.<sup>34</sup> Training requires more than simple awareness, as many cultural heritage sites are far less obvious than citadels, mosques, and libraries. For example, if soldiers are informed that a pile of stone in Afghanistan may signify a cemetery, they might avoid parking vehicles or setting up camp upon a sacred burial site.<sup>35</sup>

Beyond awareness and identification, the military has overlooked a psychological issue that necessitates cultural heritage training. American-born citizens are often unaware of the relative youth of their country and culture. The embedded psychological attachment a local population has to traditions spanning centuries can be an alien concept for many Americans.<sup>36</sup> Exploring the profound connection between the people and symbols of cultural heritage will help soldiers and commanders understand the behavior and values of local communities. This heightened understanding of social behavior will improve not only diplomatic ties but will ultimately enhance force effectiveness through better integration with the host nation populace.

Unfortunately, awareness of the US Army's role in cultural heritage protection is severely lacking throughout the military. Even within Civil Affairs, soldiers often are not cognizant that their branch is responsible for cultural heritage protection.<sup>37</sup> During the weeks prior to deployment, soldiers may receive perfunctory guidance about cultural heritage awareness as part of their training in rules of engagement.<sup>38</sup> Although mandatory training outside of the immediate mission set may be enforced, soldiers

understandably do not prioritize it and are seldom afforded the luxury to reflect on what they have learned.

The US Army maintains numerous training schools that could provide a more deliberate learning experience in cultural heritage protection, but the necessary courses are nonexistent. The Special Warfare Center, which trains all special forces, Civil Affairs, and psychological operations soldiers, does not conduct any training in cultural heritage protection.<sup>39</sup> The Combined Arms Center, responsible for the US Army's doctrine and training in combat and occupation, also neglects this topic.<sup>40</sup> Much of the reason for the absence of institutionalized training in cultural heritage protection lies with the US Army's Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC). There is no Civil Affairs general officer present at TRADOC to generate interest in heritage preservation training as there is for various other doctrine and training centers.<sup>41</sup> If commanders receive any relevant training, it would be designed by the active-duty Judge Advocate General proponent, which has a legal stake in cultural heritage protection. This would provide only a legal context for mitigating damage to cultural heritage, explored later in this section. Without proper advocacy, TRADOC leadership will continue to neglect systemic training for heritage preservation.

Eventually, if TRADOC does consider implementing heritage preservation training, the US Army could generate army-wide interest to a greater breadth of army leaders, rather than limiting it to Civil Affairs or predeployment training. Creating a common core course in cultural heritage within the Intermediate Level Education curriculum, which all Majors must complete, would contribute to generating this universal interest.<sup>42</sup> Including a similar core course in precommand training for future brigade and division commanders would also help this endeavor.

Although implementing the Immediate Level Education and precommand curricula could develop a universal appreciation and respect for cultural heritage across the military, a first step may be as simple as furnishing full-length manuals to leaders and soldiers upon deployment, such as the graphic training aid "Civil Affairs Arts, Monuments, and Archives Guide."<sup>43</sup> Initial research indicates that soldiers believe a full-length manual would be helpful during deployment and would read one if provided. More importantly, although a soldier's prior deployment experience generally increases their cultural heritage awareness, experience alone does not necessarily expand knowledge or efficacy of cultural heritage protection. However, according to the research, all deployed personnel significantly improved in awareness, knowledge, and comfort regarding cultural heritage protection after reading the training manual, regardless of prior deployment experience. Possessing a full-length manual during deployment would allow soldiers to refer to information that they have found difficult to retain, such as how to recover cultural heritage or set up a temporary position at a cultural site.<sup>44</sup>

A key challenge for cultural heritage protection is that proposing training and knowledge resources is moot if senior army leader interests are incompatible.

Understanding the strategic value of cultural heritage protection is critical for the military to prioritize this issue. A candid response from an army leader for the justification of protecting cultural heritage is often to avoid legal prosecution.<sup>45</sup> This reasoning, coupled with the predicted ire of the local population, has been the calculus when considering target locations that include cultural heritage.

The focus of the US Army to simply “mitigate” cultural heritage damage during combat operations undermines the psychological significance of cultural heritage. As discussed, the substantial psychological connection local people associate with ancient cultural traditions fundamentally shapes their identity, norms, and ways of life. A focus on cultural heritage should not rest on the superficial context of mitigating property damage. The context for its preservation should be expanded to encompass local norms and institutions, since understanding the deeper implications of cultural heritage allows the United States to better explain and potentially predict host nation behavior.<sup>46</sup> More importantly, preserving and rebuilding cultural heritage in conflict-ridden states may help to restore stability.<sup>47</sup> While cooperating with a host nation, preserving local mechanisms for the maintenance of the rule of law has also led to greater stability than installing a western liberal democratic ideal for the rule of law. For example, in Afghanistan, utilizing the *jirga* or tribal council proved more effective than foreign imposed measures.

The US Army has had some success implementing proactive measures to protect and rebuild cultural heritage. During a joint exercise with Honduras in the summer of 2017, US Civil Affairs soldiers learned that Honduran brigades were committed to cultural heritage site protection during interdiction missions intended to mitigate drug, weapons, and human smuggling. US soldiers improved their awareness of cultural heritage protection to work with their Honduran counterparts. Consequently, military relations between the United States and states throughout Central and South America were markedly improved.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, in Afghanistan in 2008, the US Department of State coordinated with the German and Afghan governments to restore the famous Herat Citadel.<sup>49</sup> With a three-million-dollar investment from the US Ambassador’s Fund for Cultural Preservation, tourism returned to the citadel after thirty-five years of disrepair.<sup>50</sup>

The milestone commitment to restoring the Herat Citadel reflects a positive direction for the United States in proactive cultural heritage protection. That investment was the cost equivalent of deploying three US Army soldiers to Afghanistan for one year, a small amount compared with the strategic benefits.<sup>51</sup>

### **The Way Forward**

Protections for cultural heritage can be improved by increased training and education, augmented partnerships with the host country and subject-matter experts, and enhanced information operations to counter terrorist group messaging. The training of US military personnel to protect cultural heritage is complicated by varying levels of

both understanding and commitment. To serve as a force multiplier by generating goodwill, cultural heritage protection should be planned prior to any military action. Although no guarantee, proper planning can diminish potential backlash, domestic instability, and international criticism.<sup>52</sup> Additionally, empirical evidence exists that failure to prevent looting of cultural artifacts can have strategic ramifications when those artifacts are sold to finance terrorist activities, although the amount of funding procured by the terrorist groups is in question.<sup>53</sup>

To foster commitment to cultural heritage protection, working effectively in another culture requires cultural knowledge and skills, and cross-cultural competence.<sup>54</sup> According to Montgomery McFate, “cultural knowledge of adversaries should be considered a national security priority.”<sup>55</sup> With regard to cultural heritage protection, knowledge of the cultures of both friends and foes is critical if the military is to retain support during operations in other countries and project a keen recognition of cultural heritage’s significance. Eikenberry emphasizes that military commanders must comprehend the cultural environment in which they operate. Recognizing that “culture does equal politics and politics equal culture,” the military must ensure that tactical decisions are informed by military, political, and cultural information.

Cultural knowledge, however, is insufficient for US military personnel to internalize the importance of cultural heritage to a local population. They also need to develop cross-cultural competence, which, even if lacking an in-depth knowledge of another culture, helps foster “the ability to quickly and accurately comprehend, then appropriately and effectively engage individuals from distinct cultural backgrounds to achieve the desired effect.”<sup>56</sup> Interconnected with cross-cultural competence is that military leaders must develop critical thinking skills to anticipate fallout from implemented actions.<sup>57</sup>

Developing this competence takes time and, where possible, should be done during training prior to one becoming an officer. At the US Military Academy at West Point, the Conflict and Human Security Studies program places cadets with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in developing countries during the summer months to enhance their ability to work effectively in other cultures. An objective of the program is to develop officers who can convey to their soldiers the strategic ramifications of discounting and disrespecting the norms, values, and behaviors of other cultures.

Coupled with developing cross-cultural competence, Laurie Rush recommends bolstering the relationship between host-country personnel and the military. General Stanley McChrystal stresses empathy and a long-term approach with the host country as well, warning against what he calls the “airport syndrome” of nearsighted priorities that could result from short deployment rotations.<sup>58</sup> To accomplish this, it is critical for the US military to learn which local cultural protections are available and with which key personnel to partner.<sup>59</sup> DeJesse emphasizes that partnering with local experts, such as those in museums, is the best training for soldiers and necessary for greater understanding of what a culture values.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, enhanced training should allow

commanders on the ground decision-making authority to bypass certain bureaucratic processes to save cultural heritage, which often is time sensitive.<sup>61</sup> Eikenberry underscores the requirement of building a database over time that details cultural heritage locations of mosques, cemeteries, and even the location of a village elder's home. His bottom line is that commanders must know which locations, if searched or attacked, could provoke an explosive reaction.<sup>62</sup>

Similarly, Rush stresses the necessity of a broader interpretation of cultural heritage by recognizing that local communities value cultural heritage that might be absent from lists. A commander's failure to understand the significance of such formally unrecognized heritage "could very well be interpreted as an act of hostility and provoke violent retribution." In addition, military commanders must acknowledge that the local population, not external powers, ascribes value to cultural heritage. Continuing with this concept of broader interpretation of cultural heritage, Rush advances an example of vineyards in Iraq and Afghanistan, which have important symbolic and economic value for the populations. According to the Quran, the destruction of these economic assets during warfare is forbidden and, if damaged, can heighten resentment toward the forces involved.<sup>63</sup>

Another illustration reflects the importance of cooperation between military and civilian counterparts to protect cultural heritage. When unrest surfaced in Libya in March 2011 as part of the Arab Spring sweeping the Middle East and North Africa, the US National Committee of the Blue Shield, an NGO, gathered information on important cultural heritage sites. The US government partnered with civilian institutions, particularly Oberlin College and New York University, to formulate Cultural Property Protection Lists, which were eventually passed to the special assistant to the US Army Judge Advocate General for Law of War Matters and Air Combat Command. These lists were transferred to the Department of Defense and shared with international partners such as the United Kingdom.<sup>64</sup> In this case, entering relevant information into a target database, coupled with the use of precision weapons, limited damage to the Roman fort Ra's al-Marqab.

Along with enhancing partnerships, Peter Chiarelli and Stephen Smith highlight the need to dominate the narrative in any operation, which is critical to successful US military operations in the twenty-first century. The vulnerability of information weaponization has strategic consequences for military operations. Dramatic improvements in technologies "allow instantaneous global transmission of information—and thus provide the potential to create weapons of almost unimaginable destruction."<sup>65</sup>

How adversaries and allies perceive war is critical even when the perception defies reality, as exemplified by the tactical defeat of the North Vietnamese during the TET offensive in 1968 that was perceived by Western powers as a strategic victory for the north.<sup>66</sup> In that particular case, the North Vietnamese precipitated over one hundred attacks on South Vietnam, which was allied with the United States, to pressure the latter

to end its support of South Vietnam and leave the region. The alliance held, but US public opinion further turned against the war.

The military performs for two audiences: “a global space where the world judges US actions and a domestic space where democratic citizens must remain convinced that action is necessary.”<sup>67</sup> As Michael Danti notes, the use of social media platforms provides “near continuous streams of potential data and updates,” although these are also “interspersed with distortions, rumor, propaganda, and deliberate misinformation.” In other cases, as information is being shared and forwarded, people add spurious details which leads to an “obfuscating snowball effect.”<sup>68</sup> As such, it is critical for the United States to develop capabilities to counter these threats.

The US Army acknowledges the importance of strategic communications and crafting messages that sway the audience to support the military’s objective.<sup>69</sup> The concept of strategic communications is a vital element of US grand strategy and, along with the evolution of warfare, communications that formerly derived solely from the press and media but currently also emanate from the Internet. Even military manuals have changed to highlight that victory is critical in the war of ideas. As state and nonstate actors manipulate both domestic and global opinion through social media, the US military must respond with information operations to counter the adversary. In 2007, the US military fostered the use of the Internet in earnest and by 2009 military bases stopped blocking the use of Twitter, Facebook, and Flickr after Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and other high-level military officials articulated both the US deficiency in this area and the significance of communicating a particular narrative to the outside world. To combat the effective use of social media by adversaries, the US military needs a cohesive communications strategy that encompasses social media. This recognition is contributing to improvements in the military’s information operations.<sup>70</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Significant twenty-first-century challenges have complicated cultural heritage protection during military operations. The increased use of social media provides instantaneous viewing and propagandizing of cultural heritage destruction, while precision munitions heighten the expectation that cultural heritage will be spared during armed conflict. This perspective often leads to increased resentment and frustration when sites are not protected or become what the military refers to as “collateral damage.” The US Army has created the modern-day Monuments Men to bolster the military’s commitment to cultural heritage protection, but the topic will not be prioritized without mass training of soldiers to recognize and comprehend the strategic significance of cultural heritage protection, along with persuading commanders that cultural heritage protection has strategic value.

The US military has recently made positive strides in expanding the strategic context for preserving cultural heritage and adapting to twenty-first-century challenges, though much still needs to be accomplished. If prioritized, working with local military

personnel and civilians to protect and preserve not only cultural heritage but also cultural norms will continue to improve foreign relations and increase the effectiveness of overseas missions for the United States. A more universal cross-cultural competence, rather than specific cultural awareness training, will better equip military forces to adapt to situations involving cultural heritage preservation. Concurrently, damage to cultural heritage can be better anticipated and mitigated by understanding the impact of precision munitions on cultural heritage, and by networking with allies and local officials to identify accurately the locations of cultural heritage in areas where military operations will occur. Finally, including information warfare and social media into all types of military operations will help the United States protect the narrative of cultural heritage preservation against adversaries who leverage events and pictures for their own gains. Aside from further examination to improve incentives, skills, and resources for military forces to better preserve cultural heritage, future research on the ramifications of long-term occupations on cultural heritage protection will benefit the field.

#### SUGGESTED READINGS

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#### NOTES

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