NATO and Cultural Property
A Hybrid Threat Perspective

By Frederik Rosén

Recent armed conflicts, from the Balkans to Iraq, Afghanistan, Mali, Libya, Deash in Syria and Iraq, Yemen, and Nagorno-Karabakh, evidence how objects, places, and areas of significant cultural or religious value, so-called "cultural property" (CP), play an increasing role in conflicts.[1] Terrorists exploit the social power of cultural sites, from the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001 to recent attacks on places such as the Bataclan theater in Paris (2015), the Ariana Grande concert in Manchester (2017), and Christchurch in New Zealand (2019). Yet Russia presents us with the most daunting challenge in this matter.

Russia consistently integrates CP as part of cultural domain issues in national security strategies, foreign policy, and military practice. From the beginning of the illegal occupation of Crimea in 2014, Russia misappropriated and manipulated cultural heritage to establish cultural domination. Neither Ukraine nor allied nations had been prepared for the way Russia instantly started to exploit the cultural domain. While escalating its belligerence towards Ukraine, in 2016 Russia inaugurated a huge new-built Russian orthodox church in the middle of Paris at the Seine River close to the Eiffel Tower. Only a naïve person can consider this an innocent investment in church community. And since the 2022 invasion, Russia continues to destroy and loot Ukrainian cultural and religious places. In late October 2022, Russian forces looted the entire collection at the Kherson Fine Arts Museum. The overarching attitude framing these activities is an intense information warfare campaign[2] to rewrite history that ultimately boils down to claims about territories and the legitimization of mass atrocities and destruction as we see in Ukraine.

To be sure, it is difficult to speak about cultural groups and societies without speaking about what they regard as their cultural heritage as a territorial anchorage. Seeing the geopolitical link[3] between identity, society, territory, and cultural heritage makes it clear that cultural heritage easily becomes politicized and drawn into conflicts as markers of friend and enemy and territorial belonging and ownership.

While Russia, and before that the USSR, always viewed culture and CP as an issue of international security, Euro-Atlantic countries just recently started to recognise this nexus. Slowly, we are shifting our military

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focus on CP from the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC) obligations of protection and preservation to consider the strategic and tactical value of CP during campaigns and operations against asymmetric armed groups and great military powers alike.

We have started to understand better how CP matters increasingly to international security and military operations.[4] As analyzed by a growing body of academic scholarship, belligerents use CP to display power, to draw up contours of security communities, and to mobilize action. They use deliberate destruction, misappropriation, and manipulation of CP to hurt opponents and undermine their cultural roots and societal resilience. They attack it to fuel rage and antagonism or protect it to showcase fidelity. And information warfare, at least in the case of Russia, targets the meaning of cultural property as anchors of historical narratives and territorial claims. Destruction and misappropriation of CP also forms a central part of genocidal politics and ethnic cleansing.

The security challenges related to cultural property in connection with armed conflicts have thus moved way beyond legal protection. Rather, CP has become a societal vulnerability that lends itself to irregular attacks and disinformation campaigns, and its destruction or misappropriation may trigger destabilization and eruptions of violence: it has become a frontier.

Accordingly, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has broadened its view on CP from LOAC to view it as an essential component of the broader security environment. The NATO Secretary General's 2019 Annual Report highlights that, "The protection of CP and common heritage has been a core NATO value since its foundation in 1949. As an essential aspect of the security environment, CP and its protection can constitute a crucial element in strategic, operational, and tactical considerations."[5] Similarly, the NATO Operational Policy Committee states that "NATO recognizes Cultural Property

Protection (CPP) as an essential consideration in the military environment and a critical indicator of community security, cohesion, and identity."[6]

To help develop the military perspective on CP, this article examines a particular aspect of NATO's outlook, namely NATO's linking of CPP with NATO's agenda on countering hybrid threats. It identifies how the misappropriation, manipulation, and destruction of CP can be understood as a hybrid threat[7] component in the cognitive domain to create political, strategic, or tactical effects in support of policy objectives. Furthermore, it aims to elaborate how a security-framed understanding of CP's importance can inform NATO's development of comprehensive, preventive, and response measures against hybrid threats, as well as help us understand the wider connection between CP and conflict.

To this aim, the article first outlines the NATO framework on CP. It then clarifies the concept of CP and its developing role in conflicts, recently described as the "heritage-security nexus," before turning to NATO's concept of "hybrid threats," and places CP in that context to advance a concept of CP as a hybrid threat issue.

The Evolving NATO Framework for Cultural Property

NATO's approach to CP—places, objects, and areas of significant cultural value—has been guided primarily by LOAC and issues related to legal protection and the avoidance of combat-related damage to CP. Until 2015, the only unit in NATO that focused on CPP was NATO's Environment Protection Working Group (EPWG). The EPWG functions under the Military Committee Joint Standardization Board, which reports to the Military Committee. This relatively small and powerless working group serves to further cooperation and standardization on environmental protection among NATO, partner countries, and international organizations. The EPWG's mandate was limited to

The tragic aftermath of violence and aggression, as a church stands in ruins from the horrors of war in Bogorodichne, Donetsk region. Photo by "Drop of Light" (https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/scars-war-tragic-aftermath-violence-aggression-2270219641).

monitoring any CPP developments in NATO without authorization to take any active steps.

From 2015 and onward, propelled by a NATO Science for Peace and Security (SPS) Project on CPP,[8] NATO's attention to CPP started to move beyond LOAC. Building on lessons identified from NATO and non-NATO military operations, the focus on CPP shifted from environmental protection to viewing CPP as a separate cross-cutting issue placed along with other protection issues within the NATO Human Security Framework, and then towards a broader operational issue. Both of NATO's Strategic Commands, Supreme Allied Command Transformation (HQ SACT) and Supreme Headquarters Allied Power Europe (SHAPE), as well as NATO Headquarters, started to show an increasing interest in the topic.

NATO's recasting of CP as an element of the security environment and a challenge to be tackled at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of operational planning and execution is now reflected at the strategic command level, as enshrined in the NATO Bi-Strategic Command Directive, "Implementing CP Protection in NATO Operations and Missions," adopted in 2019.[9] The directive covers LOAC and financing of terrorism, as well as strategic issues related to navigation operations in geographical areas with culturally important places, including strategic communication.

In NATO Headquarters, allied nations attached the topic of CPP to the Human Security Unit, which is placed in the Office of the NATO Secretary General together with other protection issues (Gender, Children and Armed Conflict, Protection of Civilians, Human Trafficking). Hence, NATO does view CPP as integral to the Protection of Civilians (POC) agenda.[10] Yet, at the same time, NATO's rationalities for considering CP differ from

the humanitarian concerns about physical harm and suffering to humans underlying the other four topics of NATO's Human Security Framework, which are the protection of civilians, preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence, combating trafficking in human beings, and children and armed conflict.[11] Rather, the rationales underpinning NATO's approach to CPP concern *inter alia* LOAC, conflict escalation, troop protection, post-conflict stabilization, reconciliation, and resilience, as well as hybrid threats. On top of these come issues related to conflict economics including the financing of terrorism and armed groups. A policy is clearly needed to clarify and frame the topic.

CP: A Tool of Hybrid Warfare

Among the key rationales for establishing roles and responsibilities related to CPP across operational phases and functions, the 2019 NATO Bi-Strategic Command Directive on CPP mentions that "CP can be used as a tool of hybrid warfare. Attacks on CP may impact societal resilience and indicate an attempt to undermine national unity or identity. They may also impact the Alliance's cohesion. This reinforces the need for CP to be an integral part of NATO's continuous strategic awareness."

The directive also states that, "[p]owerful images of CP destruction, such as the destruction of World Heritage sites, have become tools of Information Warfare. Therefore, failure to protect CP may have tactical and strategic consequences" and that the "[d]estruction of CP may hamper reconciliation and healing of societies after conflict." The directive here echoes United Nations Security Resolution 2347 (2017), which stated that, "The unlawful destruction of cultural heritage (…) can

This image was taken in April 2017 during a UNESCO mission to Nineveh, Iraq, which was heavily destroyed and excavated by ISIS. Destruction of cultural heritage and archaeological looting is a global issue that threatens the preservation of our shared cultural heritage. Nineveh, Iraq, April 3, 2017. Photo by UNESCO (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:UNESCO_mission_to_Nineveh,_Iraq,_April_2017.jpg).

fuel and exacerbate conflict and hamper post-conflict national reconciliation, thereby undermining the security, stability, governance, social, economic and cultural development of affected States."

The Secretary General's 2019 Annual Report and the Bi-Strategic Command Directive indicate how NATO's attention to CP has moved beyond LOAC to embrace a wider set of tactical and strategic implications relevant for NATO operations. The development echoes the general turn in the international community and conflict analysis towards casting CP as an issue of international security.[12] It also echoes how the CP-related challenges NATO and its member states have encountered are not primarily about LOAC and protection.[13] The challenges to NATO rather lie with the various political implications related to CP in operational areas. The social power of CP has proved to be prone to exploitation by adversaries for the purpose of fueling antagonisms and spurring unrest, destabilization, and violence.[14]

One example is NATO's mission in Kosovo—KFOR—where destabilizing political issues related to CP remain one of the top three reasons for NATO to sustain the mission. NATO also tackled CP-related issues during Operation Unified Protector in Libya in 2011.[15] The Coalition Against Daesh benefitted from U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) CP database creation and CP decision-making support for targeting in Syria and Iraq,[16] and Daesh exploited CP for propaganda, recruitment campaigns, and financing. CP destruction became an iconic emblem of Daesh as the Taliban "trademarked" themselves by destroying the Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001.

And in recent decades, Iraq and Afghanistan have seen waves of suicide attacks on predominantly Shia mosques. Iraq offered plenty of examples of the challenges of navigating patrimonial places during urban fighting. Conflicts where CP formed parts of a territorial dispute include Ukraine, Yemen, Nagorno-Karabakh, Myanmar,

Cyprus, not to mention Israel-Palestine. However, CP forms part of the reality of violent conflicts all over the world, with Southeast Asia counting for the greatest prevalence of conflict-related attacks against CP.[17] It is a global challenge.

We have also seen how damage to CP can cause negative press and undermine the legitimacy of a mission. This was the case with the looting of the Museum in Baghdad after the U.S. invasion when U.S. troops drew considerable international attention and criticism for not safeguarding the museum, a stain which has still not been forgotten. Jihadi and other extremist religious groups also increasingly target CP, including places of worship (shrines, synagogues, mosques, churches) and places of significant symbolic value.

The Concept of CP

While NATO's strategic commands decided to link CP and hybrid warfare in a Command Directive, they failed to describe in which ways CP may be exploited for hybrid warfare purposes, or how it fits into NATO's evolving approach on countering hybrid threats. The first step towards a concept development on this matter is to demarcate the concept of CP and outline the developing role of such places and objects in contemporary security.

LOAC

LOAC provides a cornerstone for NATO's self-understanding and operations as all member states (apart from one) have ratified the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. Its concept of CP is thus well established in NATO. The Hague Convention offers a wide definition of what kinds of objects and places can be considered "CP." These include historical buildings and other monuments of historic, artistic, or architectural significance, objects and places of scientific value, places of worship, movable objects from paintings to antiquities,

manuscripts libraries, art collections, archives, and even digital collections.[18] It also covers underwater cultural objects and thus applies to naval operations.

Furthermore, Additional Protocols I and II to the Geneva Conventions expanded the common interpretation of "places of worship" from religious buildings representing a cultural value to places that "constitute the cultural or spiritual heritage of peoples," thus including places of worship (shrines, synagogues, churches, mosques, etc.) by their contemporary use and reverence value. Hence, when we speak of "CP" in a military context we speak about the broader area of objects and places of significant cultural or religious value.

Before the adoption of the 1954 Hague Convention, the world had neither a legal category nor a political concept that grouped diverse places and objects of cultural interest within the same legal category. Compared to the killing of soldiers and civilians during armed conflicts—another key LOAC topic—the historical debates and norm developments related to CP and warfare appear very limited. Hence, the international legal definition of CP is what lawyers call progressive lawmaking. It is lawmaking that to some extent "creates" its norms and subject matter rather than codifying already existing norms. It is worth mentioning here that today the terms "cultural heritage" and/or "CP" are often used inter-changeably[19] in common language as well as in international law. [20]

"CPP"

In that regard it may be noticed that the concept of "CP Protection" (CPP), which is used in NATO along with other cross-cutting protection issues (i.e., protection of civilians (POC), children and armed conflict (CAAC), human trafficking), is not a legal term. The expression is no more than a descriptive label for a range of practices geared towards respecting and safeguarding CP in the event of armed conflict. Many of these practices are obligatory as

a matter of international law. Others may not be. Some of the practices may aim at protection. Others may aim at strategic and tactical issues, which may also include hybrid threat considerations.

From a commander's perspective, LOAC's wide definition of CP sometimes creates confusion about how to build an operational approach around the legal concept of "CP," because exactly what should be the scope of it, and what is the value threshold for triggering legal protection? The Hague and Geneva Conventions' broad legal definitions of places and objects that may be considered CP offers a wide prism for the purpose of identifying and discussing CP as a hybrid threats issue. It may also be helpful to look beyond LOAC definitions of CP—for instance, to UNESCO's concept of Cultural Landscape, which emphasises landscapes that are believed to hold important religious or cultural values.[21] The cases of Kosovo and Ukraine may partly be understood through that lens, not to mention the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

From a hybrid threats perspective, however, it does not matter whether an object or place is protected or not by LOAC. What matters is the perceived cultural value and the potential emotional reaction in a certain historical context, and how this cognitive dimension may be exploited as an effect-creating part of a hybrid strategy, and as a tool of mobilization, coercion, domination, and destabilization. LOAC must be viewed merely as one element in an array of norms and values that distinguishes and ascribes strategic and tactical meaning to CP.

Recasting the Notion of CP

To understand the socio-political power of CP and its role in conflicts, including those of a hybrid nature, we need to zoom in on societal values and collective sentiments and emotions, the constitution of *significant cultural value*, which constitutes CP in the first place. CP *becomes valued* as CP due to collective sentiments, attitudes, and the perceived value

Archeological remains of the Bamiyan valley; view inside an empty niche where a Buddha statue was destroyed by the Taliban. Bamiyan, Afghanistan. UNESCO World Heritage site, Photo by Pvince73 (https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/afghanistan-bamiyan-bamian-bamyan-cultural-landscape-2208864837).

of the object or place in question. What matters is the underlying symbolic or "sacred" dimension of such objects and places, the value that objects and places hold to major entities, including to their notions of nationalism, ethnicity, and religion.

These places and objects may function as referents that articulate a sense of belonging to a distinctive group, cause, or territory. They are often material anchors of culture, identity, and notions of belonging to a community and ownership of territories, with an ability to mobilize strong sentiments, politics, and action. People's care for CP can be inflamed to such an extent that they are willing to sacrifice privileges—or even in its most intense form, their lives—to preserve and protect it—or to conquer it.

Historical and contemporary examples of how destruction, desecration, appropriation, vandalization, and misappropriation of *places and objects of significant cultural value* have fueled conflicts, been used to mobilize support for wars, and been exploited for the purpose of domination and destabilization should be researched and understood: the aim is never to destroy the enemy's military force or critical infrastructure, nor is the purpose to physically conquer territory or secure passageways. The aim is always to engage with feelings and affective dispositions of populations to steer the situation against a desired long or short-term end-state.

Therefore, from a hybrid threats perspective, "CP" becomes relevant as a cognitive domain issue with a propensity to spark strong emotional reactions. Regardless of its legal status, if destroyed, appropriated, vandalized, desecrated, or
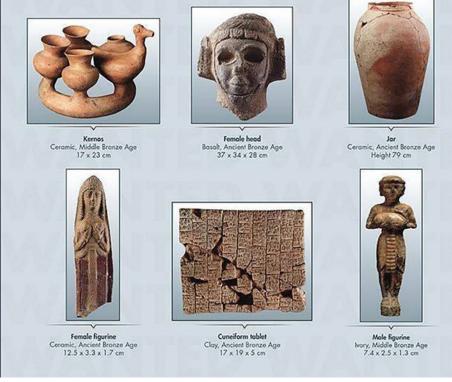
9,494 objects of invaluable cultural value were stolen in March 2015 from the Idlib Museum in Syria. At the request of the INTERPOL Bureau in Damascus, a poster featuring six of the stolen objects has been issued to raise awareness of the theft and to facilitate their recovery. Image by INTERPOL (https://www.facebook.com/AssociationforResearchintoCrimesAgainstArt/photos/a.10150345543074554/10157845131094554/?type=3).

misappropriated, it may even incite violence. This propensity constitutes a societal vulnerability that adversaries may exploit, and therefore it has tactical and strategic implications.

The Heritage-Security Nexus

The rise of CP as a hybrid threat issue comes with a history. In 2006, Samuel P. Huntington envisaged, "In the coming decades, questions of identity, meaning, cultural heritage, language, and religion will play a central role in politics," alluding to the shift in association and antagonism among the countries he analysed in his 1992 book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order.*[22]

Looking at current world politics and the role of CP in war and conflict, we can see how Huntington's prediction materializes: Belligerents and competing powers, states and non-state actors alike, today increasingly exploit the social power of CP to show moral superiority, induce fear,

provoke, destabilize communities and nations, escalate tensions and conflicts, and restructure the cultural dimension of geopolitical orders.[23] This has been noted by NATO, UNESCO, the EU, the UN General Assembly, the UN Security Council, and academic scholars.

A range of mutually reinforcing developments shapes this agenda. These include, but are not limited to, the rise of identity politics as conflict drivers; the transnationalization and globalization of conflicts, and the ensuing turn to cultural belonging and group identity rather than nation-state borders to demarcate security communities; the extensive growth and spread of new norms and laws related to cultural heritage in armed conflict as well as more generally;[24] the urbanization of warfare and the rise of asymmetric and hybrid forms of warfare; developments in global social media; and the rapidly evolving transnational market for illicit antiquities, enabling armed groups to more easily profit from looting and trafficking antiquities.

While not entirely new in kind, violence against CP today implicates a new and "modern" power base and involves new legal, political, and moral complexities for populations, states, international organizations—and militaries. Scholars have coined the term the "heritage-security nexus" to refer to this new framing of CP (cultural heritage) as a broader security issue.[25] The concept of the heritage-security nexus joins the recent family of "nexus"-concepts (the "development-security nexus," the "climate-security nexus," the "migration-security nexus," etc.) coined to describe cross-sectoral challenges and cooperation to understand and address complex problems. For instance, international legal instruments that were previously dedicated just to protecting CP against looting and illicit cross-border trade have today become instruments in curbing the financing of terrorism, and thus the protection of society.

At the heart of the concept of the "heritage-security nexus" lies the observation that if CP can be viewed as a stabilizing factor for groups and populations by functioning as references for shared cultural dispositions and preferences, it may, congruently, be exploited for the purpose of societal destabilization, conflict escalation, and domination, including towards minorities, as a security or even a defense issue. Even if NATO employs a distinction between hard-core deterrence and crisis management and security governance to separate operational aims, "the continuum between security and defence is well understood. As a matter of fact, such a continuum has characterised NATO's evolution over the last 30 years, as illustrated by its operations in the Western Balkans and Afghanistan."[26]

NATO and Hybrid Threats

The Strategy on NATO's Role in Countering Hybrid Warfare, agreed to by Allies in 2015, offers a perspective on how state as well as non-state actors may exploit vulnerabilities, differences, and/or any other perceived grievances to incite coercion, domination, and destabilization.[27]

The globalization of the geostrategic environment and advancement of technologies created many opportunities and also vulnerabilities in our societies and structures. Our understanding of a hybrid threat is blurred, and our defenses are incomparably weaker than against conventional weapons. As far back as 1999, Chinese military strategists concluded that "anything that can benefit mankind, can also harm it. This is to say that there is nothing in the world today that cannot become a weapon,"[28]—and we can add CP.

The concept of hybrid warfare remains contested, and recent commentators describe it "[as] at best simply a neologism for tactical innovation." It can be argued that, from a history of warfare perspective, there is nothing new under the sun when it comes to asymmetry and creative approaches to undermining the enemy. Historically viewed, the range of means and tricks opponents have used to undermine each other is very wide.

Hybrid methods of warfare follow the same model as any other form of war: Our adversaries have clearly set goals and end-states, they have dedicated and designed weapons to fight, and they have carefully chosen battlefields to maximise the effectiveness of their campaigns and their weapons. Admittedly, the goals are less about territorial gains than about the coercion, control, and disruption of societal order at all levels. In this war, the adversaries' main goal is to influence the will and manipulate strategic choices of our citizens and decisionmakers to shape perceptions, alter consciousness, and challenge strategic calculus.

However, it is also true that states, analysts, and commentators alike have tended to focus mostly on brute force when it comes to military affairs, something that has shaped state attitudes as well as the outlook and capabilities of military organizations. The 'aha' experience with hearts and minds issues

and the role of culture on the battlefield coming out of Afghanistan reveals an amnesia towards these "regular irregular" cultural dimensions of armed conflicts.

From NATO's perspective, adversaries aim to undermine the mutual confidence of the NATO countries and dissolve it from within by attacking all the vital and weak points of the Alliance. While this aim has historically remained the same, available tools for attack in the 21st century have changed. They are far more dangerous, in part because we as societies and organizations have changed too. The speed, interconnectedness, and unruliness of new Information and Communication Technology (ICT), including social media, is one major shift.

For this very reason, within the NATO HQ the responsibility for understanding, identifying, and responding to hybrid threats is shared among a number of civilian and military divisions such as Joint Intelligence, Operations, and Emerging Security Challenges. Complex and multi-dimensional challenges require multi-dimensional solutions.

NATO's 2018 definition of hybrid threat is a "type of threat that combines conventional, irregular and asymmetric activities in time and space."[29] The focus of the hybrid threat perspective lies predominantly on the asymmetrical and irregular tactics that "can be overt or covert, involving military, paramilitary, organized criminal networks, and civilian actors across all elements of power."[30] It may include a range of non-military tactics for destabilizing adversaries from within, ranging from propaganda, deception, and sabotage, to trolling, targeted disinformation, cyber-attacks, and covert use of military force. It is most commonly applied in a "grey area" of conflict, just below the threshold of armed conflict.

In addition to speed, synchronization, ambiguity, and coercion stand as key features of hybrid threats as several methods of destabilization may be employed simultaneously, in a more or less synchronized manner. NATO's approach to countering hybrid threats is continuously broadening to include new types of hybrid threats and developing new responses to counter them.

The cognitive domain stands central to NATO's emerging approach to counter hybrid threats and is by some considered a key hybrid threats domain.[31] As stated by a recent study from NATO Supreme Allied Command Operations' Innovation Hub, "[b]ecause the factors that affect the cognitive domain can be involved in all aspects of human society through the areas of will, concept, psychology and thinking among others, so that particular kind of warfare penetrates into all fields of society. It can be foreseen that the future information warfare will start from the cognitive domain first, to seize the political and diplomatic strategic initiative, but it will also end in the cognitive realm."[32] NATO's 2020 High-Level Reflection Group also proposed among its key recommendations that "NATO and Allies must develop more capabilities for operating in the cognitive and virtual dimensions, including at the tactical level."[33]

CP as a Hybrid Threat Challenge

Hostile activities towards CP including disinformation campaigns always occur in tandem with other means of aggression. The question is how and to what extent the range of objects and sites broadly identified as "CP" may be exploited as a tool of coercion, domination, and destabilization within the range of conventional and nonconventional means that NATO addresses through the lens of hybrid threats. What are the various roles CP can play in hybrid threat scenarios, and how do they fit into NATO's approach to countering hybrid threats? What does the developing role of CP in conflicts look like from the hybrid threats lens?

Conceptual frameworks for increasing resilience against hybrid threats focus mostly on critical infrastructure, such as energy security and supply, space infrastructure, maritime security, public health, transport (aviation, maritime, rail), cyber

Huge fire scars beloved Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, France, April 15, 2019. Photo by Godefroy Paris (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Notre-Dame_en_feu,_20h06.jpg).

security, communications, and financial systems. But "softer" vulnerabilities such as legitimacy, core values and liberties, societal cohesion, and minorities' rights have not yet been recognized and adequately protected against hybrid activities.

While not related to any conflict, the 2019 accidental fire that destroyed the cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris offers an example to start from. Many immediate reactions suspected that the fire was an arson attack by jihadists. The overwhelming global reaction to the fire, the intense broadcasting by regular media and social media fueling strong emotional response—including the instantly pledged almost $1 billion from private donations for reconstruction—indicates the socio-political power of CP. From a hybrid threats perspective, the question is what kind of response the Notre-Dame fire might have warranted if an armed group or even a foreign power stood behind it; perhaps as part of a broader subtle campaign including funding for right-wing organizations, cyber-attacks, terrorist attacks, and information campaigns.

What if the fire had been an arson attack by a group with links to a major paramilitary power and accompanied by synchronized hostile activities across Europe, including cyber-attacks, fake news campaigns, violation of airspace, and desecration of monuments and places of worship? If that had been the case the images of the Notre Dame ruin would no doubt have sparked even stronger emotional responses and become icons of a conflict escalation. It would have generated uncertainty and a feeling of insecurity in France as well as in Europe and beyond, and it would have triggered security responses at the highest level. It is not unthinkable that the event by itself or in combination with other hostile actions could have led to military responses and involved NATO.

Places of significant cultural value present us with a societal vulnerability. They are often easily accessible and easily destroyable places of great symbolic, spiritual, and political value. Yet, to constitute a vulnerability in the context of hybrid warfare, CP does not need to be as prominent as Notre Dame. What counts is that the effect of threatening, misappropriating, destroying, or attacking an object or place has an observable weight on security and stability. In other words, the effect must be of such an intensity that it reverberates with other conventional and nonconventional means.

A Cognitive Domain Issue

The impact that hostile misappropriation, manipulation, destruction, or attacks against CP may have on people is another valuable hybrid tool in the cognitive domain. Attacks on and manipulation of CP and its use for propaganda, mobilization purposes, or undermining political cohesion by amplifying divisions exploit the symbolic and emotional quality of CP as a shortcut for the mass consciousness and collective sentiments.

Furthermore, CP also typically provides the physical infrastructure for the organization of everyday cultural and spiritual life and the mindsets of groups and nations. A terrorist attack on, say, a church may thus all at once disrupt critical parts of local life, spark the outbreak of further violence, trigger global reactions, and be used to muster funds and terrorist recruits. The propaganda and mobilizing power of circulating iconic images of destroyed places of significant cultural importance on social media should not be underestimated. The effects of targeting CP as a cognitive domain element tend to reverberate across local, national, and global cognitive spheres.

Global news cycles and social media play a critical role by mainstreaming and dispersing images of destruction of CP with the potential of triggering strong emotions and reactions among people even living far from a conflict zone. Images of destruction travel easily on social media compared to those of human atrocities, which get filtered out. Similarly, combat related collateral damage to CP, no matter how unintentional, may entail considerable and complex strategic and tactical implications compared to collateral damage to places or objects without emotional timbre.

In that way we may say that CP spans the three hybrid threat domains: 1) the physical domain, as movable and immovable CP are physical places, things, objects, constructions; 2) the digital domain, as social media constitutes a main platform for spreading information from images of CP destructions to disinformation about historical ownership and meaning; and 3) the cognitive domain, that can be said to constitute the "main target area."

The overall effect of the impact of hostile misappropriation, manipulation, destruction, or attacks on CP will depend not only on its generally perceived value but also, and perhaps more important, on the political context. In an already tense situation, destruction or desecration of even less (emotionally) significant objects and places may polarize, destabilize, demoralize, fuel minority discontent, spark

conflict escalation, spread confusion (about who did it), and mobilize support among followers.

The effects of manipulation and destruction of CP as part of strategic cultural engineering as part of territorial conquest, as we see in Ukraine, are even harder to predict. Just as the value of CP escapes definitions, the effects of playing CP as a tool of hybrid warfare must be considered unpredictable and entirely contingent on the immediate political context.

Conclusion

The political gravity of CP and its tactical and strategic implications in relation to conflicts are likely to have some bearing on NATO operations and the Alliance's broader strategic agenda. This points at an added value for allied nations to further embrace CPP as a topic that warrants strategic, operational, and tactical considerations beyond LOAC. The question is, what would be the implications of understanding CP as a hybrid threat? What fails if we do not take this action? Currently, the best argument for urgently investing in capacities to handle CP as a hybrid threat issue is to match Russian policy and practice in this area. If not, Russia will remain one step ahead. Russia steams ahead with a national security driven view on CP while we contemplate LOAC and the meaning of CP. China also demonstrates growing interest in CP as a security issue, adding another argument for the Alliance to get up to speed. China has mapped cultural heritage sites in the South China Sea to support its maritime claims and argued that "archaeological findings prove that the Chinese people is the real owner of South China Sea Islands." One implication of the recasting of CP as a hybrid threat issue is that Human Security appears to be the wrong home for the topic in NATO and among allied nations. The kind of challenges this article has identified with regard CP requires an information-driven approach, a function that lies with intelligence branches.

Hence, viewing CP as a hybrid threat issue calls for a multi-dimensional approach anchored more firmly in Joint Intelligence, Operations and Emerging Security Challenges. PRISM

Notes

[1] See Claire Finkelstein, Derek Gilman, and Frederik Rosén (eds.) (2022): *The Preservation of Art and Culture in Times of War*. New York: Oxford University Press; Timothy Clack and Mark Dunkley (2022): *Cultural Heritage in Modern Conflict. Past, Propaganda, Parade*. London: Routledge; James Cuno and Thomas G. Weiss (ed.) (2022): *Cultural Heritage and Mass Atrocities*. Los Angeles: Getty Publications.

[2] Daniel Shultz and Christopher Jasparro (2022): 'How Does Russia Exploit History and Cultural Heritage for Information Warfare? Recommendations for NATO', Antiquities Coalition, Policy Brief No. 11.

[3] Carsten Paludan-Müller (2022): 'The Geopolitical Context of Cultural Heritage Destruction', in Claire Finkelstein, Derek Gilman, and Frederik Rosén (ed.) (2022): *The Preservation of Art and Culture in Times of War*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 414—447.

[4] 'NATO and Cultural Property Protection—Embracing New Challenges in the Era of Identity Wars', international conference organized by the Office of the Secretary General, Human Security Unit, in cooperation with the Nordic Center for Cultural Heritage and Armed Conflict, NATO Headquarters, Brussels, 15. to 16. of April 2019.

[5] NATO (2020): 'Secretary General's 2019 Annual Report', p. 77.

[6] NATO Operations Policy Committee (2021): 'Human Security Workshop', AC/332-N (2021)0013 (9 February 2021). Available at http://unescoblob.blob.core.windows.net/pdf/UploadCKEditor/Human%20Security%20Workshops.pdf.

[7] The author recognizes the contested meaning of the concept of "hybrid warfare." However, as the concept figures in NATO documents as the broader context of the more elaborate NATO concept on and framework of analysis for "Countering Hybrid Threats" and is thus used in this article.

[8] 'Best Practices for CP protection in NATO-led Military Operations', NATO Science for Peace and Security Series of Advanced Research Workshop (2015-2018) in NATO, often referred to as the "NATO SPS CPP" directed by the then Nordic Center for Cultural Heritage and Armed Conflict (Denmark). See outcome report, 'NATO and Cultural Property. Embracing New Challenges in the Era of Identity Wars'. Copenhagen: Nordic Center for Cultural Heritage and Armed Conflict, 2017.

[9] NATO Bi-Strategic Command Directive, "Implementing CP Protection in NATO Operations and Missions", Bi-Strategic Command Directive 086-005, 01 April 2019.

[10] Bernard Lebrun, Brigadier General, Head of the CIMIC Division of Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) (2021): Presentation at NATO Protection of Civilians Workshop—NATO's Human Security Conference 2021, Friday 26th February.

[11] North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Human Security," July 18, 2022, available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_181779.htm.

[12] Frederik Rosén (2022): 'Introduction', in Claire Finkelstein, Derek Gilman, and Frederik Rosén (eds.): *The Preservation of Art and Culture in Times of War*. New York: Oxford University Press.

[13] Research conducted in connection with the NATO SPS CPP found no considerable combat related damage to CP in NATO-led operations. It found some harm related to base camp construction and military-led infrastructure projects.

[14] Frederik Rosén (2020): 'The dark side of cultural heritage protection'. *International Journal of Cultural Property*, 27(4), pp. 495-510.

[15] 'Cultural Property Protection in the Operations Planning Process', JALLC/CG/12/285 (NATO Joint Analysis and Lessons Learned Centre, 20 December 2012)

[16] NATO Science for Peace and Security Advanced Research Workshop / GIS Technical Workshop, 1-2 September 2016, New York, USA.

[17] According to a 2020 database study conducted at Uppsala University, 27% of the attacks on CP in the period 1989 to 2014 occurred in the Middle East and 44% of the events occurred in Southeast Asia. See Croicu, M. and J. Kreutz (2020). 'Where do cultures clash? A cross-national investigation of attacks on religious sites.' Uppsala University: Working paper.

[18] Roger O'Keefe (2016): *Cultural Property Protection. Military Manual*. Paris: UNESCO, pp. 14f.

[19] As a political organization, NATO prefers the term 'CP' due to its definition in LOAC, namely the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of CP and the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions.

[20] Lyndell Prott and Patrick O'Keefe, '"Cultural Heritage" or "CP"?' 1 (1992) *International Journal of Cultural Property*, pp. 307-320

[21] See John Wylie (2007): *Landscape*. London: Routledge.

[22] Samuel P. Huntington (1996): *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

[23] Brosché, J., M. Legnér, J. Kreutz, and A. Ijla. (2017). 'Heritage under attack: motives for targeting CP during armed conflict', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 23:3, 248-260.

[24] Astrid Swenson (2013): *The Rise of Heritage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[25] Frederik Rosén (2022): 'Introduction', in Claire Finkelstein, Derek Gilman, and FrederikRosén (2022): *The Preservation of Heritage in Times of War*. New York City: Oxford University Press.

[26] See Thierry Tardy (2021): The risks of NATO's maladaptation, European Security, 30:1, 24-42, 27.

[27] Press statements by the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini (2 December 2015); see also NATO Topic Page https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_156338.htm.

[28] Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui (1999): *Unrestricted warfare*. Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House, p. 25.

[29] NATO Standardization Office, 'NATO Term The Official NATO Terminology Database', <https://nso.nato.int/natoterm/Web.mvc> accessed 31 May 2018.

[30] NATO White Paper, NATO Transformation Seminar 2015, Washington, DC 24-26 March 2015, p. 5, https://www.act.nato.int/images/stories/events/2015/nts/NATO_NTS_2015_White_Paper_Final_Public_Version.pdf.

[31] Gen. Robert Brown, "US General Brown: 'Multi-Domain Operations,' Warfare, Perception Management. (TARGETED INDIVIDUALS)," streamed live on 3 March 2019, YouTube video, 13:21, https://www.youtube.com/ .

[32] François du Cluzel (2020): 'Cognitive Warfare', NATO Allied Command Transformation Innovation Hub, p. 36.

[33] NATO 2030: United for a New Era. Analysis and Recommendations of the Reflection Group Appointed by the NATO Secretary General', 25 November 2020, p. 46, <https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/12/pdf/201201-Reflection-Group-Final-Report-Uni.pdf>.