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PEACE OPERATIONS AND THE PROTECTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

Richard Gowan

International peacekeepers have witnessed attacks on cultural heritage since the earliest days of United Nations peacekeeping. In 1948, the UN Security Council mandated the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) to observe the armistice that ended the first Arab–Israeli war. The armistice line ran through Jerusalem, where Jordanian forces held the Old City and holy sites. Both sides were responsible for damage to historical buildings.[1] The Jordanians used synagogues in the Jewish quarter of the Old City as stables, while Israeli troops used churches on the front line as barracks. In 1954, new fighting erupted in Jerusalem, and while UNTSO observers tried to mediate ceasefires, Arab officials accused the Israelis of bombarding religious sites. The Lebanese permanent representative to the UN in New York complained to the Security Council that shells had hit the Old City's medieval citadel and Armenian monastery, and fallen close to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.[2]

With just a handful of military observers on the spot, UNTSO had neither the mandate nor the resources to focus on cultural heritage issues. But in the decades since, peacekeeping forces have grown in size and ambition. There are currently approximately 125,000 troops and police serving in over sixty peace operations run by the UN, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and other multilateral organizations worldwide, many with significant military resources and expansive mandates to protect civilians in danger.[3]

These forces have also continued to encounter threats to cultural heritage. Fifty years after the clash over the Old City of Jerusalem, German peacekeepers faced another outbreak of violence in another "Jerusalem," this time in Kosovo. Since 1999 NATO forces had been patrolling what was then still a province of Serbia, in order to keep the peace between ethnic Albanians and Serbs. Yet in March 2004, Albanian

rioters attacked a series of Serb communities and religious sites, including Serbian Orthodox churches dating back to the fourteenth century. Serb priests and polemicists had often described both Prizren and Kosovo as a whole as their Jerusalem, reflecting the wealth of religious architecture in the region. But the German contingent stationed in Prizren was unable or unwilling to protect this heritage: "There were reports of soldiers stepping away from their checkpoint positions as mobs approached. According to one persistent rumor, troops guarding one of Prizren's religious buildings asked a mob for time to remove their own equipment from it before the mob burned it down. The violence left 'the pearl and Jerusalem of Kosovo' a disfigured, mutilated and blackened remnant."[4]

This crisis in Kosovo, described further below, came after dismal failures by international forces to protect heritage cites elsewhere. In Afghanistan and Iraq, the United States and its allies proved unwilling to secure museums and heritage sites from epidemics of looting after intervening in 2001 and 2003, respectively. These episodes fueled a lengthy debate, driven by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and concerned countries, most notably Italy, about the role of international stabilization and peacekeeping missions in protecting cultural heritage. In June 2017 when the Security Council passed resolution 2347, its first general resolution on cultural heritage, sponsored by France and Italy, it affirmed that UN peacekeepers should, where appropriate, engage in "the protection of cultural heritage from destruction, illicit excavation, looting and smuggling in the context of armed conflicts."

Resolution 2347 was an important normative advance in discussions of peacekeeping and heritage. But as this chapter shows, its concrete impact to date has been limited. The Security Council has not followed up consistently, and the UN has not put heritage at the heart of its thinking on peace and security. Other multilateral organizations, including NATO and the European Union (EU), have also developed new policy guidance on heritage issues, but it is still not clear that this will be a priority for future peace operations.

Advocates of the protection of cultural heritage therefore need to redouble their efforts to convince policymakers at the UN and other multilateral organizations that heritage protection relates to three key aspects of peace operations. The first is that protecting heritage sites is tied to efforts to protect vulnerable civilians in conflict-affected areas. Second, the longer-term process of persuading the leaders of divided societies to agree to preserve heritage can be an important part of developing political settlements after war. And third, at a lower level, projects to reconstruct heritage sites can draw broken societies together. This chapter uses examples from past and current peace operations—including those in Cyprus and Mali in addition to Kosovo—to make this case, and it concludes with very brief thoughts on how to advance this agenda.

Protecting Cultural Heritage: Still Not a Peacekeeping Priority?

Discussions of protecting cultural heritage through peace operations have not resulted in comparable results on the ground. In 2013, the Security Council directed the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) "to assist the Malian authorities, as necessary and feasible, in protecting from attack the cultural and historical sites in Mali, in collaboration with UNESCO."[5] This was the first time that the council had used such language in a peacekeeping mandate, and it reflected widespread international outrage over jihadist groups' attacks on Muslim sites around Timbuktu in 2013. But MINUSMA had only limited resources to put its mandate into practice. Two officials at mission headquarters in the Malian capital, Bamako, were tasked with identifying how to realize the council's instructions, although they were also responsible for environmental issues.[6] While MINUSMA's civilian component did launch useful projects to assist its peacekeepers and local communities in the rehabilitation of Timbuktu, described further below, the United States persuaded other Security Council members in 2018 that this was no longer a priority, and it was cut from the mandate.

Resolution 2347's broader injunction on peace operations to protect heritage also bore little fruit. To date, the council has not referred to this task in any UN mission other than MINUSMA. And since 2017, it has not even held a thematic debate on threats to cultural heritage—as a general issue or a peacekeeping priority. As of mid-2021, the UN Department of Peace Operations' internal think tank (the Policy, Evaluation and Training Division) had no staff member focusing on heritage.[7]

Other multilateral institutions have arguably outpaced the UN in developing relevant policy. NATO published guidance on what it calls "cultural property protection" in 2019.[8] In May 2021, the European Council (the EU's top intergovernmental organ) agreed "conclusions on [the] EU approach to cultural heritage in conflict and crises," which included a call for a "dedicated mini-concept" on what the bloc's crisis operations could do in this area.[9] But these advances, while welcome, may have a limited impact. NATO, a major player in stabilization operations in the Balkans and Afghanistan, has now largely pivoted away from peacekeeping to refocus on its original role of deterring Russia in Europe. EU missions are mainly small security advisory efforts, lacking the muscle to provide security for cultural heritage sites directly. The European Council indicates that their focus is likely to be on "capacity building programmes or training activities."

By contrast, the UN continues to deploy over ninety thousand uniformed personnel worldwide and also acts as a hub for new policy thinking for other organizations fielding large-scale peace operations, such as the African Union. The UN's reluctance toward protecting cultural heritage is, therefore, not only troubling in its own right but also likely to influence other actors and thus requires explanation.

There are two main reasons for the UN's ambivalence. One is that Italy, the key proponent of resolution 2347, left the Security Council at the end of 2017, and no other member replaced it as a champion of cultural heritage, so the topic lost salience in UN debates. The second is more fundamental: diplomats and officials at the UN and other multilateral organizations worry that peace operations are overloaded with tasks. The Security Council regularly directs UN forces to address not only basic, but also human rights and gender issues, as well as a host of other concerns. In 2018, UN Secretary-General António Guterres told council members that one UN mission—in South Sudan—had accumulated 209 tasks.[10] Comparing these to baubles weighing down a Christmas tree, he pleaded with diplomats to simplify these mandates. It was against this backdrop that the United States persuaded other powers to drop cultural heritage from MINUSMA's mandate. This relatively new tasking may have looked like a more-or-less expendable point in contrast to well-established priorities such as human rights.

It is thus incumbent on those who believe that peacekeepers *should* concentrate on protecting cultural heritage to make a compelling case for why it should be a priority for troops, police, and civilians in difficult and often dangerous places. This needs to be framed not solely in terms of the inherent value of cultural heritage, but also in terms that make sense to those who direct and lead peace operations. Discussions of peace operations are distinct from those about the steps militaries should take to avoid damage to cultural heritage in wartime. While peacekeepers can use force to deal with violent groups, peacekeeping is not warfighting. UN and other forces may deploy to create stability in conflict zones, but they do not aim for victory in a traditional military sense. The goal of most operations is either to freeze a conflict while warring sides look for a political settlement—a process that can last indefinitely (UNTSO is still on the ground in the Middle East today)—or back the implementation of a peace agreement. International officials are humble about what peacekeepers can achieve, especially where parties to a conflict are not ready to make concessions to secure long-term peace. "A peacekeeping operation is not an army, a counter-terrorist force, or a humanitarian agency," Secretary-General Guterres told the Security Council in 2018. "It is a tool to create the space for a nationally-owned political solution."[11]

Against this backdrop, UN officials have highlighted three main priorities for peace operations. First, in so far as missions use military force, the primary goal should be saving civilians facing imminent violence—a moral priority reinforced by the memories of past peacekeeping failures in the Balkans and Rwanda—and where possible deterring such violence before it begins. Second, missions should concentrate on the "primacy of politics," focusing their efforts on creating the best possible conditions for conflict parties to compromise. And third, for the citizens of conflict-affected states to feel real ownership of the resulting political bargains, peacekeepers

should invest in community-level engagement to rebuild fractured societies rather than simply deal with political elites (an approach dubbed “people-centered peacekeeping”).

It is in this context that the case for treating the protection of cultural heritage as a priority must be made. The rest of the chapter endeavors to make this case by exploring protection, politics, and people-centered approaches in turn, highlighting not only the military potential of peace operations to defend heritage sites, but also the importance of missions’ civilian and political components. Although international media tend to highlight the successes and failures of the UN’s photogenic “blue helmets,” most peace operations involve sizeable civilian components. In early 2021, for example, MINUSMA employed 15,209 soldiers and police and 3,384 civilian staff.[12] This included logisticians and administrative staff, but also civil affairs officers, political advisers, and others who can contribute to preserving cultural heritage. Peace operations also work closely with agencies including UNESCO that offer further civilian expertise. Peacekeeping is not a solely military task—and its most effective contributions to heritage protection may often not be military at all.

Protection: Confronting Political Threats to Cultural Heritage

How can protecting cultural heritage contribute to broader efforts to halt and deter threats to civilians? The clearest case study of the problem in recent decades was in Kosovo, despite NATO’s failure to protect Serbian Orthodox sites in Prizren in 2004. NATO troops and UN police were deployed to Kosovo in 1999 after a NATO-led air campaign and a conflict had already resulted in major damage to Kosovo’s heritage. As the International Crisis Group (ICG) noted in early 2001, “Serb forces destroyed 218 mosques” in the relatively small territory in the late 1990s, and ethnic Albanian fighters launched reprisals including dynamiting Serbian Orthodox churches dating from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[13] Nonetheless, culturally important Orthodox monasteries and churches remained, including four that are now collectively listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site (“Medieval Monuments in Kosovo”). NATO recognized that it was necessary to secure them, as well as ethnically Serb towns and villages across Kosovo, to stem violence and discourage at least some ethnic Serbs from fleeing the area.

It was clear from the start that this was politically sensitive and potentially dangerous work. Canadian peacekeepers, for example, deployed to the monastery of Gračanica. This was not only one of the finest examples of ecclesiastical architecture in the region, with frescoes dating from the 1320s, but also the base of Bishop Artemije, a relatively moderate figure who had argued against ethnic violence but was still a target for Albanian radicals. The Canadians found themselves dealing with an unseen opponent—soon dubbed the “Mystery Mortar Man”—who would “set up on a hill, drop five or six mortar bombs, splash them down in the area of the monastery,

and then disappear."[14] These small-scale attacks failed to either do serious damage to the monastery or to force the bishop to flee, but created a "political hullabaloo" as Serb leaders condemned NATO for failing to protect the monastery and the bishop effectively.

NATO and the UN nonetheless faced a shock in 2004 when ethnic Albanians—angry at slow progress toward independence for Kosovo, and economic problems—launched a wave of attacks on Serb communities and religious sites. In some cases, ethnic Serbs retreated to churches for sanctuary. Concerned for their own safety and for the lives of these civilians, NATO contingents had to make rapid judgments about how to react. Their choices differed: as we saw, German troops in Prizren took no such risks, whereas an Italian unit guarding a church in the town of Djakovica (in Serbian, Gjakova in Albanian) faced a particularly stark choice between protecting the building and the lives of civilians inside. The Italians "opened fire to protect the church and four elderly Serb women living there. Nine rioters were wounded. The NATO troops escaped with the Serbs, after which the crowd further damaged the church and burned down the women's homes."[15]

These events in Kosovo—where order was only restored after thirty churches had been damaged, some severely—remind us that protecting cultural heritage is not a risk-free mandate for peacekeepers. Nonetheless, they also illustrate why peacekeeping forces should see protecting cultural heritage and protecting civilians as interwoven challenges. In many conflict zones, combatants target cultural sites associated with their adversaries for obvious symbolic reasons: destroying a community's holy places or other historical sites is one step toward extirpating that community from a region altogether. "Many Serbs felt that the Albanians were trying to remove all evidence that Serbs had ever lived in Kosovo," the ICG observed of the destruction of Orthodox religious sites after the 2004 events.[16] In more practical terms, religious sites in particular become targets when vulnerable civilians flee to them for shelter in a crisis.

In this context, effectively protecting cultural heritage sites may be a way that peacekeepers can keep violence from escalating. A robust security presence at symbolically important sites may signal to potential bad actors that acts of violence are not worth attempting. After the 2004 events, NATO continued to provide direct security for thirteen Orthodox churches and monasteries as late as 2013.[17] As noted below, international political efforts reduced the need for this presence, but NATO personnel still maintain a post at one vulnerable monastery today, Dečani.

It is nonetheless hard for a peace operation to dedicate military resources to such tasks for extended periods. Both before and after the 2004 events, NATO leaders in Kosovo were keen to shift from a strategy of static defense of religious sites (relying on checkpoints) to a more agile posture requiring less manpower.[18] In Mali, UN officials concluded that they lacked troop strength to provide general security for heritage

sites, as one told French researcher Mathilde Leloup: “Besides, the wording of the Security Council Resolution is confusing as it talks about ‘sites in Mali’ without mentioning anything specific. However, MINUSMA is not deployed everywhere in Mali and there are many historical and cultural sites outside our area of deployment.”[19]

This cautious assessment should not come as a surprise. Although the Security Council and UN officials have emphasized the need to protect civilians from violence, peacekeepers are often unable or reluctant to do so in a crisis. Limited resources, poor intelligence, and a desire to avoid casualties are all factors. These issues are also likely to dog future attempts to construct mandates for peace operations that offer direct physical protection to cultural heritage, and it would be prudent to assume that peacekeepers will only ever fulfill this demanding task on a selective and limited basis.

Protection: Confronting Nonpolitical Threats to Cultural Heritage

Notwithstanding their limits in the face of political violence, peacekeeping operations can protect cultural heritage sites and the communities around them against other potential forms of damage and destruction. This can include technical work to remove hazards like land mines and unexploded ordnance that threaten both heritage sites and civilians. In Afghanistan, NATO forces and UN demining specialists were able to take important steps toward rehabilitating the site of the Bamiyan Buddhas, destroyed by the Taliban in 2001. “An archaeologist commented how good the mine clearers were at excavating archaeological artefacts,” according to one expert on the Buddhas, as “the care and delicacy they had learned in mine clearance was the perfect translatable skill.”[20]

A broader task is to protect heritages sites and communities from *criminal* violence. As resolution 2347’s emphasis on “illicit excavation, looting and smuggling” underlines, looters and traffickers are likely to targets sites during conflicts and their immediate aftermath. This ties into another recurrent headache for peacekeepers and peacemakers: organized crime. “Transnational organized crime is a serious threat to long-term stability and/or undermines the establishment of functioning legitimate institutions in almost every theater where there are UN peace operations,” as one study of the subject notes.[21] It is hard to offer genuine protection to civilians in areas where criminal gangs and networks threaten their day-to-day security. While these networks traffic humans, drugs, and multiple other products, looted archaeological and cultural artefacts are frequently in the mix.

Protecting cultural heritage sites, and by extension the communities around them, from criminal threats is a serious challenge for peace operations. Peacekeeping forces often lack intelligence and expertise on criminal actors. Some forces have, however, chosen to respond robustly to the threat of looting. Italian Carabinieri police officers

in Iraq in the wake of the 2003 US-led invasion responded especially energetically to this problem. In reaction to widespread looting of archaeological sites in their area of responsibility, the Italians resorted to dramatic measures to take the culprits by surprise: "The Carabinieri would conduct aids using three helicopters coordinating together. During these raids the helicopters would approach the site from three directions. At the edge of the site, Carabinieri would slide down ropes to the ground, causing the looters to flee from them across the site. The helicopters would then fly to the opposite side of the site and land, trapping the looters between the advancing Carabinieri, who would capture them."[22]

The looters apparently found this experience "terrifying" but the Italian approach still had limitations. The sheer number of potential archaeological sites involved, the weakness of Iraqi security forces, and the need for helicopters for other missions meant that the Carabinieri were unable to stamp out looting during their tour of duty. Moreover, few current peace operations have the sort of resources available to the international force in Iraq in 2003—costly assets such as helicopters are often in short supply and some non-Western units are poorly equipped. But less well-resourced peace operations can still contribute to limiting the threat of looting by supporting the efforts of UNESCO and local authorities to combat trafficking. In Mali, MINUSMA has funded antilooting projects and worked with local police to train guards for archaeological sites.[23]

Facing both political and nonpolitical threats, therefore, peace operations should recognize that protecting cultural heritage is—at least in some cases—a significant part of responding to both challenges. Rather than treat it as a distraction, planners and leaders should factor threats to heritage sites into their strategies for dealing both with threats to the security of civilians and with crime. Nonetheless, as the cases above indicate, providing physical protection to heritage sites can create risks for missions and strain their resources in ways that cannot continue indefinitely. This is one reason it is essential to focus on political and community-level approaches to heritage protection.

Political Approaches to Heritage Protection

If peace operations can offer only limited physical protection for cultural heritage, they may also facilitate more political approaches to the problem. As noted, UN thinking on peace operations now aims to create space for national ownership of political solutions. It is necessary to ask how the future of cultural heritage sites can be factored into political processes enabled by peace operations. Here again Kosovo offers a model.

In the wake of the 2004 riots, Western powers concluded that it was necessary to expedite the territory's formal independence from Serbia to avoid further disorder, while Russia and China argued against this in the Security Council. In the meantime,

international officials recognized that it was necessary to frame Serbian Orthodox sites as possible loci for Serb–Albanian cooperation rather than conflict. Operating in parallel to NATO and the UN, the Council of Europe (a pan-European organization separate to the EU) launched a new Reconstruction Implementation Commission for the Balkans that brought together the Serbian Orthodox Church with Kosovo's fledgling (and ethnic Albanian–dominated ministries) to collaborate on rebuilding damaged buildings. A UN envoy, former Finnish president Martti Ahtisaari, worked up a plan (known colloquially as the "Ahtisaari Plan") for "conditional independence" for Kosovo, which proposed that the new country's police take responsibility for protecting most Serb religious sites. This also offered the Serbs some guarantees about the future of these sites, including the creation of surrounding "protective zones"—areas free from construction projects and other harmful activities—and reaffirming their ties to the Serbian Orthodox hierarchy.

The UN proposal sent Kosovo's ethnic Albanian leaders a clear message that they would be judged on how effectively they safeguarded Serbian Orthodox heritage. After Kosovo declared independence unilaterally in 2008, committing to fulfill Ahtisaari's proposal on cultural heritage, the United States and its European allies backed the creation of a new International Civilian Office to oversee the nascent state's behavior. The process was not entirely smooth. Serbia launched a prolonged diplomatic war of attrition with Kosovo within UNESCO over the status of the sites, including opposing the Kosovo government's efforts to join the organization in 2015.[24] Ethnic Albanians felt that the International Civilian Office was excessively focused on safeguarding Serb heritage (implicitly relegating the importance of its Muslim heritage) and that the Ahtisaari Plan's proposal for protective zones granted "extraterritoriality to the Serb Orthodox Church and Serbia within the territory of Kosovo."[25] Perhaps as a result, there was an uptick in security incidents at Orthodox sites after 2008.[26]

Yet for all these complaints and objections, the Ahtisaari Plan achieved its basic goal: the Kosovo authorities have succeeded in preserving Serb Orthodox sites from further serious violence, allowing NATO to draw down its security presence around most of them. The monasteries and churches are also once again open to tourists. Kosovo and Serbia continue to try to negotiate a final settlement of their differences but have to date agreed to leave the issue of cultural heritage sites to one side. In essence, both parties have recognized that it is in their political interest to ensure the security of these heritage sites, rather than treat them as targets for symbolic violence.

The UN, the EU, and other multilateral actors have attempted to frame the preservation of cultural heritage as a focus for political cooperation in other divided societies, most notably Cyprus. UN peacekeepers originally deployed to the former British colony to manage violence between the Greek and Turkish populations in the 1960s. In 1974, the Turkish military invaded the north of the island, leaving the UN

Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) to patrol the ceasefire line, or green line, dividing the country. Since the late 1970s, Cypriots and international observers alike have recognized that cooperation over cultural heritage could help ease tensions between the north and south of the island. In the 1980s the authorities in the divided capital Nicosia agreed to work together on reconstruction projects.[27] Then, in 2007, UNFICYP and the EU brokered talks between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot authorities on the future of Famagusta, a port town famous for its Venetian architecture and as the setting for Shakespeare's Othello. The following year, the EU and other international actors supported the creation of a bicommunal Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage in Cyprus, modeled in part on the Reconstruction Implementation Commission in Kosovo. UNFICYP's direct role in many of these activities has been limited, as it is a small mission with a relatively straightforward ceasefire monitoring role. Nonetheless, its continuing security presence is the basis for other parts of the UN system, including UNESCO and the UN Development Programme, and human rights experts to monitor heritage-related issues.

As yet, intercommunal discussions of challenges such as the preservation of Famagusta remain incomplete, as Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders have been unable to agree on plans to reunify the island. Heritage preservation in isolation is unlikely to offer a pathway to political settlements in divided societies. Nonetheless, the protection of heritage is one potential bargaining point in a wider political process. Moreover, the act of discussing heritage issues may reshape negotiators' perceptions of their opponents. Carlos Jaramillo, a technical specialist who worked on both the Reconstruction Implementation Commission in Kosovo and the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage in Cyprus observes that such heritage-related mechanisms require "a redefinition of identity, nationality and ethnicity that is inclusive and participatory in order to replace the polarized vision currently separating something [heritage] that is indivisible."[28]

Jaramillo admits that this is not yet a reality in Cyprus, and that political dialogue and compromise may offer a more sustainable approach to securing the future of cultural heritage sites than physical protection. This is a promising area for policy development. The EU's External Action Service (its foreign ministry) noted in 2021 that "the EU should seek to include cultural heritage as an important aspect of dialogue and mediation efforts, as a direct or cross-cutting issue, considering its strong symbolic importance for both the State and its local communities."[29]

People-Centered Peacekeeping and Protecting Cultural Heritage

While the cases of Kosovo and Cyprus may illustrate the advantages of a political approach to heritage protection through peace operations, some international officials and peacekeeping experts might argue that they are not relevant to many current conflicts. In both cases, peacekeepers have aimed to reconcile distinct ethnic

communities: Serb/Albanian and Turkish/Greek. They have also been able to negotiate with reasonably coherent political actors and institutions based on European models. These conditions do not apply in cases such as Mali, where state institutions are weak and conflict involves multiple and often incoherent factions.

In such cases, peacekeeping experts have encouraged the UN and other institutions to look for ways to promote peace below the level of national politics, by reaching out to local leaders, grassroots organizations, and nonstate actors. It is difficult for large-scale peace operations to respond to local actors flexibly, as they are often explicitly mandated to reinforce state authorities. When it comes to protecting cultural heritage in particular, there is a risk that international actors can seem more attached to safeguarding "world heritage" for its own sake than addressing local needs and preferences. One critic of UN efforts to reconstruct religious sites in Mali notes that some local inhabitants believe the international community is more concerned about preserving the image of the city as a cultural center than the population's needs and concerns.[30]

Nonetheless, the case of Mali also offers evidence that peacekeeping missions can take a more people-centered approach to heritage protection. This has been carefully documented by Mathilde Leloup, who notes that once MINUSMA's leadership had concluded that the mission could not fulfill its heritage-protection component through military means, there was "more proactive engagement from its civilian component."[31] In the first instance this involved providing logistical support to UNESCO officials and other experts on cultural issues. One former staff member jokes that the mission became "Air MINUSMA" in its early years, ferrying these experts around the country on transport aircraft and helicopters.[32] Nonetheless, the small office tasked with dealing with cultural heritage developed more innovative—and people-focused—approaches to meeting the mandate.

These included triangulating with UNESCO officials to offer local communities support in recovering from attacks by jihadists. In one case, a MINUSMA official discovered that UNESCO had plans to restore a war-damaged mosque in Timbuktu, but not the building next door used for ritual ablutions. MINUSMA was able to fund the restoration of the latter. Leloup notes that the peacekeepers were able to take on this task speedily, as the mission (like most UN operations) had a budget for "Quick Impact Projects" (QIPs): small, local initiatives aimed at improving relations with communities without the rigmarole associated with most large-scale development projects. MINUSMA also used QIPs funding to support antipillaging efforts and restore manuscript libraries damaged by the jihadists. UN officials saw a direct connection between these contributions to reconstructing heritage and the boosting of social cohesion after conflict and offering livelihoods to young people who might otherwise have joined armed groups for cash.[33]

This local approach to heritage management echoes past initiatives in the Balkans and elsewhere, where the UN and other international organizations saw small heritage management projects as vehicles for reconciling ethnic groups. Most of these projects focused not on the best-known cultural sites in post-conflict areas—which might suffer more damage from a botched if well-intentioned project—but secondary sites that may have greater local than international resonance. These projects have a potential to facilitate community-level reconciliation after conflict, and peace operations are well placed to get them going.

Conclusion

This chapter has made two connected arguments about why and how peace operations can best contribute to the protection of cultural heritage. First, there are direct links between heritage protection and the three overarching priorities for peace operations (and especially UN missions) today—protection of civilians, enabling political processes, and taking a people-centered approach to post-conflict societies. This claim has been designed to appeal to professional peacekeepers and peacemakers as well as heritage experts. A UN official with absolutely no cultural sensitives should be able to see that heritage sites are significant factors in her or his political and security work. An architectural historian or archaeologist with no interest in mediation or military patrols should, conversely, see the potential utility of working with the UN or NATO.

The second argument has been that the political and civilian work of peace operations may be equally or more important than their military components in the long term. This is not meant to suggest we discount the military dimension of protection altogether. During the early drafting of this chapter, Russian peacekeepers were deployed to end the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the long-contested enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh in late 2020. As Azerbaijani forces moved to take over previously Armenian-held territory, the Russians had to work out how to protect medieval Armenian Christian sites such as the twelfth century monastery of Dadivank. “As I spoke with the monastery’s abbot,” a *New York Times* correspondent noted while Russian troops tried to secure the area, “the monastery’s guard house below went up in flames.”[34] In some cases, military tools are essential to creating stability around heritage sites. Yet, as this chapter has shown, these tools need to be embedded in longer-term political–civilian protection strategies.

If the UN—and other multilateral organizations that take policy ideas from the UN—are to advance these arguments, it is time for the Security Council to take up the case for cultural heritage protection again after an unfortunate hiatus since 2017. The year 2022 will mark the fifth anniversary of resolution 2347. It would be fitting for the council to hold a fresh debate on the topic and ask UN Secretary-General Guterres to report on developments in the field of heritage protection—and how to better

integrate this task into the work of both UN and non-UN peace operations to save lives, forge political settlements, and work to assist the vulnerable.

BIOGRAPHY

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