
Protecting the Past to Secure the Future

The Strategic Value of Heritage Training

By LAURIE W. RUSH and MATTHEW F. BOGDANOS

Inevitably, in the path of our advance will be found historical monuments and cultural centers which symbolize to the world all that we are fighting to preserve.

—Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1944

Given the highly publicized losses to cultural heritage during the last 5 years, and the consequent damage to U.S. prestige, it has become clear that strategic understanding of, respect for, and training in cultural heritage are force multipliers for the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD).¹ Add to this the undeniable evidence that antiquities trafficking is funding the insurgency in Iraq (just as opium trafficking is funding the Taliban in Afghanistan) and the U.S. Government's recent ratification of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property During Times of Armed Conflict, and it becomes clear that we cannot continue with business as usual. A permanent planning and training office within DOD responsible for cultural heritage could combine subject matter experts already employed by DOD with those from the academic community to train troops, assist planners, and provide value to commanders. The benefit would be a deploying force with a more sophisticated understanding of the battlefield environment—one that can recognize and react to cultural

heritage features in the landscape, enabling rapid response to previously unexpected cultural heritage events of strategic significance during combat and stability operations.

Failure to Plan

Over the last several years, media headlines in the Middle East, Europe, and the United States have been awash with our forces' failure to prevent the looting of the Iraq Museum in 2003 and our unintentional, but still serious, damage to Babylon in 2004. The enemy, whether in Iraq, Afghanistan, or elsewhere, recognizes the strategic value of using cultural properties such as cemeteries and mosques as firing points and as placement locations for improvised explosive devices and weapons caches. This approach takes advantage of U.S. rules of engagement, further complicating operations. Indeed, as recently as March 2008, Afghan insurgents were still caching weapons in cemeteries. We owe our personnel the opportunity to train and plan for these contingencies.

The cultural heritage issue has additional strategic importance during stability operations. Examples are legion. In 2006 and 2008, Air Force operations and infrastructure improvements in Kirkuk were delayed by discovery of ancient artifacts.² In 2007, the U.S. Embassy stopped construction of the U.S.-funded Afghan Defense Intelligence

Headquarters in Kabul after the international community complained about damage done to the historic citadel at Bala Hissar (the site of the British last stand during the Afghan wars of the 19th century)—with the result that the project was delayed by several months and more than \$2 million was misspent.³ These and many other examples of damage and waste, planned as they were without archaeological expertise, were avoidable.

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Moreover, a reputation for environmental degradation seriously compromises the ability of the United States to maintain old or to open new installations around the world. From the Dugong in Okinawa to sacred rock art in Darfur, the cultural heritage issue will continue to challenge and complicate U.S. operations planning into the foreseeable future.

The Solution

U.S. Central Command's response to the looting of the Iraq Museum—dispatching its

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Joint Interagency Coordination Group, headed by one of the authors, to begin an investigation that led to the recovery of thousands of priceless antiquities in eight countries—was a good start.⁴ But we need to do more. Using funding from the Office of the Secretary of Defense Legacy Heritage Management program (OSD-Legacy), DOD has initiated a substantial effort to address these issues through its Heritage Training Program for Deploying Personnel. Designed to coordinate academic assets with DOD commands and resources, this project, first funded in 2006, has made significant strides:⁵ the media-friendly archaeological playing cards, reference Web sites for Iraq and Afghanistan, a checklist on the “Dos and Don’ts for Military Operations in the Immediate Vicinity of Archaeological Properties,” and provision of archaeological expertise to both Bright Star and Eagle Resolve exercises.⁶ Other accomplishments include the creation of an Iraq Antiquities Working Group to coordinate with the U.S. Department of State on archaeological issues at U.S. installations in Iraq and the addition of archaeological data to U.S. Army and Air Force Central Commands’ Geographic Information Systems. This project has also begun to provide the Human Terrain System with cultural heritage insights as a vital component of human terrain.

One key to the success of this prototype program has been participation of the highly trained archaeologists already in place at every U.S. training installation. As social scientists, they are ready to provide cultural awareness and cultural heritage training through realistic field scenarios that include archaeological sites and cultural heritage properties. As archaeologists, they are uniquely qualified to strengthen DOD partnerships with regional subject matter experts and institutions such as the Archaeological Institute of America, Oriental Institute, and University of Alabama–Birmingham. They are also extremely skilled and experienced in implementing integrated programming across DOD.

Progress to Date

The In-Theater Heritage Training Program has exceeded its proof-of-concept expectations and is ready to be established as a permanent DOD program. The Austrian, Swiss, Polish, and Netherlands Ministries of Defense all have trained Cultural Property Officers to address cultural heritage issues. The United Kingdom’s (UK’s) Ministry of

Curator for historical sites at Ur explains how city looked several thousand years ago



U.S. Army (Lorin T. Smith)

Defence requested planning information from archaeologists during the initial invasion of Iraq and has a bill before Parliament to provide a trained cultural property protection officer at the UK equivalent of every brigade combat team by 2011. Representatives of all of these countries have expressed interest in working directly with the United States on improving cultural heritage protection during both kinetic and stability operations.

The Way Forward

DOD must transform the current training project into a formal Cultural Heritage Planning and Training Office to plan, coordinate, and implement cultural heritage training DOD-wide. A permanent and funded office would ensure, as General Robert Scales has observed,⁷ the participation of social scientists critical to helping the United States win any asymmetric war by establishing a formal relationship between military personnel and non-DOD subject matter expert partners and by creating constructive relationships with international and global cultural heritage agencies. The world’s cultural patrimony would be safe, al-Jazeera would have to find another way to show Western indifference, and terrorists would have to find another income source. It is up to DOD to mobilize and support the social science assets it already has. **JFQ**

NOTES

¹ *Cultural heritage* is defined as archaeological sites, sacred places, historic structures, and monuments.

² David Axe, “Back from the Brink,” *Archaeology* (July–August 2006), 59–65; and Trevor Tiernan, “Deployed Airmen find ancient artifacts at Iraqi air base,” December 31, 2007, available at <www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2007/12/mil-071228-afpn02.htm>.

³ D.C. Thomas, “Bala Hissar, Archaeological Impact Assessment,” available at <www.arch.cam.ac.uk/~alg1000/mjap/mgap.htm>.

⁴ Matthew F. Bogdanos, “Joint Interagency Cooperation: The First Step,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 37 (2^d Quarter 2005), 10; Matthew F. Bogdanos, *Thieves of Baghdad* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2005); see also James B. Cogbill, “Protection of Arts and Antiquities During Wartime: Examining the Past and Preparing for the Future,” *Military Review* (January–February 2008), 30–36, on the work of museum curator Major Cori Wegner, USA (Ret.).

⁵ Relevant DOD assets include Command Environmental Programs, Army and Marine Corps Centers for Lessons Learned, U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command, Defense Intelligence Agency, National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, Service-based cultural awareness training, Human Terrain System, and Installation Management Command cultural resource managers.

⁶ Other initiatives include the creation of checklists for cultural heritage management, preparation of archaeological sites for field training, development of a combined DOD–Archaeological Institute of America Working Group to address cultural heritage issues, development of an international military cultural heritage working group, and progress on a template for transferring archaeological Geographic Information Systems (GIS) information from universities and other sources into the command-planning GIS databases.

⁷ Robert H. Scales, “Clausewitz and World War IV,” *Armed Forces Journal* (July 2006), available at <www.armedforcesjournal.com/2006/07/1866019>.