



Forum: General Assembly 4

Issue: UN peacekeeping operations and the protection of historical and cultural sites

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Introduction

The bombing and destruction of the Christian Church of Saint Porphyry in Gaza¹, one of the few churches in Palestine, is a recent example of the destruction of cultural heritage. This bombing has affected the Palestinian heritage with it being one of the only Christian Churches in the region. Cultural heritage is what holds a country and a population together and the destruction of it has become increasingly present. With more conflicts arising and political instability becoming a recurring theme on the world's stage the destruction of cultural heritage is increasing with it.

The United Nations has dealt with the destruction of cultural heritage with the help of its peacekeeping operations. The UN has protected cultural heritage as it is part of human identity and deserves to be protected, it is also protected because the threat of it being destroyed increases tensions and fuels conflicts. Such operations allow for the host state to tackle a conflict or problem with the help of the UN. In the face of cultural heritage, these UN peacekeeping missions help maintain the identity and history of a country while protecting it in the face of current problems. UNESCO has been one of the driving forces that sustains the protection of cultural and world heritage. One of the first UN peacekeeping operations to primarily focus on cultural heritage was the MINUSMA in Mali and since then the UN has prioritized the protection of cultural and world heritage from destruction.

Definition of Key Terms

UN Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO)



UNPKOs are tools used by the UN to turn conflict into peace, they use strategies such as legal frameworks and mandates that help sustain troops and create peace. There are currently 11 peacekeeping operations underway in 3 continents².

Rules of Engagement (RoE)

Rules of Engagement are orders issued by host countries of peacekeeping operations outlining permissions and limitations. Specifically in the aspect of force and to what extent peacekeepers can use it.

Blue Helmets

The Blue Helmets is a colloquial UN term used to describe the UN's military personnel, consisting of around 600,000³ as of this moment. Blue helmets are used to promote stability, security, and the peace process on land. The UN states "Blue Helmets are protecting populations against threats and contributing to a secure environment."⁴

Cultural Heritage

UNESCO defines cultural heritage as "including artefacts, monuments, a group of buildings and sites, museums that have a diversity of values including symbolic, historic, artistic, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological, scientific and social significance."

World Heritage Sites

A world heritage site is a part of cultural heritage of a structure of outstanding universal value to humanity that is described on a list from UNESCO.⁵

UNESCO

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organization specializes in strengthening humanity through education, science, culture, and communication. UNESCO focuses mainly on developing knowledge and finding solutions to humanitarian challenges while maintaining equality and peace.



Background Information

The first part of this issue tackles the UN Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO) around the world and how they have helped maintain cultural and historical heritage. To understand how such operations help cultural protection it is important to understand what UNPKOs are and why they are important in the international world in general. UN Peacekeeping Operations serve as the final resorts to maintaining international peace and security through the development of UN-mandated forces. These forces serve the purpose of promoting stability, providing protection, and respecting any other mandate in the host country.

The structure of a UNPKO starts with the UN Security Council (UNSC) authorizing missions under Chapters VI or VII⁶ and looking at a crisis on a case-by-case basis. The Security Council further looks at whether a ceasefire, a political goal, or whether a precise mandate is necessary before creating a peace operation. Once accepted by the UNSC, the Secretariat deploys a technical assessment mission to the country or territory, analyzing security, political, military, humanitarian, and human rights situations in the area to draft a coherent PKO. If the UNSC further believes that deploying a UNPKO is the best step for greater peace it will formally authorize it through an adopted resolution. The resolution sets out the operation's mandate, size, details and tasks it will be responsible for performing. There are other steps in between the adoption of a UNSC resolution and the deployment of the operation which all entitle logistical fixes so that the UNPKO can act as soon as deployed.

Additionally, the significance of a UN Peacekeeping Operation is not only to stabilize and assist the government or host nation, but also to protect civilians. UNPKOs in most cases have strict mandates against the use of deadly force to prevent, deter or respond to threats of physical violence against civilians. Regarding the issue of this research report the next topic is how UN Peacekeeping Operations are protecting cultural and historical heritage.

Cultural and historical heritage is the identity of and memory of a community and country. Cultural heritage is passed down through centuries of language, art, knowledge, artefacts, and monuments which all together create historical heritage. Each country on the globe has a certain identity that is backed and supported by these kinds of heritages. Therefore when conflicts and crises do arise it is important to protect these countries' identity and their cultural and historical heritages. The most imminent threat when there is a conflict are the collateral damages that may occur towards historical monuments or other pieces of heritage. Conflicts also sometimes target certain ethnicities or cultural identities, characterised as cultural/ethnic cleansing which hurts the cultural heritage of a nation, and must be protected.

The United Nations and UNESCO have unanimously worked together in the protection of cultural and historical heritage in the face of conflict or crisis. While the UN majorly focuses on finding consensus in political challenges, UNESCO continues to provide extended reach towards cultural and historical heritage of



a nation. The UN Peacekeeping Operations along with providing assistance towards host nations in times of crisis have recently switched towards also focusing on the cultural heritage, and protecting it. Recently, UNIFIL peacekeepers joined collaboration with UNESCO⁷ in the protection of cultural heritage sites with a reinforcement of the pressing issue at hand.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

UN and International Involvement

- UN Security Council Resolution 2347, 24 March 2017 (**S/RES/2347**)

The resolution condemns destruction of cultural heritage and promotes the notion of global cooperation in the area. It is the first UNSC resolution to be fully dedicated to cultural heritage protection.

- UN Security Council Resolution 2199, 12 February 2015 (**S/RES/2199**)

The resolution bans the illicit trade of cultural property from Iraq and Syria, cutting the funding to terrorist groups through heritage trafficking.

- UN Security Council Resolution 2322, 12 December 2016 (**S/RES/2322**)

Encourages international cooperation against cultural property trafficking which subsequently strengthens global law enforcement coordination.

- UN Security Council Resolution 2100, 25 April 2013 (**S/RES/2100**)

The resolution creates the MINUSMA mission in Mali with heritage protection in the mandate, marking the first peacekeeping mission tasked with heritage protection.

- United Nations Educational Scientific, and Cultural Organization (**UNESCO**)

UNESCO is the main UN agency for global cultural-heritage protection and World Heritage Sites and leads emergency missions to conflict areas to assess and stabilize endangered heritage. UNESCO also coordinates international responses to destruction and has partnered with peacekeeping missions and institutions.

Mali

Mali was the host nation of the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) which was the first peacekeeping mission with a focus on protection of cultural heritage in its mandate.



MINUSMA is a perfect example of a successful UN Peacekeeping Operation (UNPKO).

Iraq

In the same way Mali had a peacekeeping mission, so did Iraq with the United Nations Assistance Mission to Iraq (UNAMI). In the mandate, UNAMI was stated to prioritize supporting political decisions, and support the government without any use of Blue Helmets.

United States of America

The USA is the major donor to heritage-protection programs especially in the Middle East, supporting cultural property protection through the Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation⁸. The USA also enforces strict import restrictions to reduce illicit trafficking of artefacts from conflict zones.

India

India is one of the main contributors of personnel to UN peacekeeping operations⁹ and advocates strongly towards heritage protection. India has proposed initiatives focusing on the protection of cultural property in conflict zones at the UN.

Italy

Italy is the global leader of cultural-heritage policing and protection through the Carabinieri Command for Protection of Cultural Heritage (TPC)¹⁰. Italy also frequently deploys heritage protection experts in areas of conflict or post conflict. Furthermore Italy works closely with UNESCO on anti-trafficking and cultural-property recovery.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
May 14th, 1954	Adoption of the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the event of armed conflict. Marking this first international treaty dedicated to protecting cultural property.
November 14th, 1970	Adoption of the UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural property.
October 17th, 2003	The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural



Heritage is put into effect. Aiming to extend heritage protection to intangible cultural heritage.

June - December, 2012	In the duration of the occupation of Northern Mali, including Timbuktu, armed groups destroyed 14 to 16 mausoleums and other heritage sites, all part of the World Heritage-listed cultural property.
April 25th, 2013	UN Security Council resolution 2100 establishes the peacekeeping mission Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) which for the first time includes protection of cultural and heritage sites in its mandate.
March 24th, 2017	Adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2347, first resolution solely dedicated to protecting cultural heritage and condemning destruction in cultural property.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

The first attempt at better safeguarding cultural heritage in UN PKOs was the 1954 Hague Convention for the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict. It established the first comprehensive international legal framework for protecting cultural heritage in the event of conflict or wartime. It also created obligations for states to safeguard and respect cultural property in anything they did and introduced the Blue Shield emblem as the mark of protected sites. In theory this sounds as a plausible solution but when real conflicts occurred there was an inconsistency in maintaining the obligations of the convention and they were often ignored. It also lacked strong enforcement mechanisms or penalties for a violation and many parties in modern conflict zones were not bound to it, resulting in gaping holes in the possible solution.

Another example of a past solution was the UNESCO emergency safeguarding and reconstruction initiatives between Mali 2012 to 2016, and Iraq post 2014. This solution provided proactive technical support along with funds for restoration of damaged or destroyed sites. In general such an act resulted in an increase in international awareness and mobilized states to support cultural protection efforts. Although it was an actionable step towards solving the issue, it was a reactive effort rather than a maintained effort to protect cultural heritage. After these efforts there were also limited security constraints implemented to further prevent an event like this to happen again. There was poor collaboration and commitment from funding and political factors which lead to a slower implementation of a solution.



Possible Solutions

A possible solution towards this issue is to implement a real actionable legal framework that ensures Member States abide by it, that unanimously protects cultural heritage sites within every country. Member States can also focus on specific conflicts that would need further action taken to protect their identity as a country. The organization of UNESCO is a perfect organization to expand and find methods to further protect the World's and individual country's historical and cultural heritage sites.

End Notes

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