When Do Insurgents Attack Cultural Sites?

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Cultural Artifacts as Insurgent Targets

Bamiyan Buddha

Seven years after Taliban dynamited two 1,500-year-old statues, a French-Afghan team uncovered a new Buddha buried in the earth.

Ongoing excavation for a 300-m reclining statue believed to be in the area.

Parts of 19-m statue discovered in Sept 2008.

The destroyed 55-m-high-statue.

Bamiyan valley


Altitude: 2,500 m

Residents: 300,000 (2005)

Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
The Impact of Insurgency on Cultural Artifacts

• “By undermining the cultural identity of local communities, destruction of religious monuments in political violence and theft of national collections hold tactical value for insurgencies and terrorist groups.”

• Erik Nemeth, RAND Corporation
Cultural sites and artifacts as Insurgent Targets vs. Cultural Artifacts as Lootable Resource

The Black-Market Battleground
Degrading and destroying ISIS could take place in the halls of auction houses, not the Pentagon.

• Logical Distinction:
  • Culturally symbolic target (like traditional terrorist targeting)
  • As opposed to lootable resources (like drugs, minerals, diamonds, etc.)

• Examples:
  • Iraq: ISIS and antiquities

In this analysis we focus on attacking cultural sites NOT looting or smuggling
BAAD 2 Insurgent Data

• Yearly data on 140 insurgent organizations (involved in at least one year of 25 battle deaths or more)
• 1998-2012 yearly soon to be 2014 & include all terrorist orgs
• Variables on
  • Size
  • Ideology
  • Structure
  • Violent and nonviolent behavior
    • Terrorist attacks and deaths
    • Social services
    • Political parties
    • More....
Matching insurgent attacks to cultural sites coding the dependent variable

• UNESCO World Heritage List data
  • 832 cultural sites
  • 206 natural sites
  • 35 mixed

• Match by geographical proximity to GTD data
  1. Restrict to insurgency attacks within boundaries of heritage site based on latitude and longitude
  2. For matches, confirm heritage site as intended target

• Match by heritage site name to GTD data
  1. Search for heritage site name as target or location using GTD search
  2. For matches, confirm heritage site as intended target
Such attacks by insurgent organizations are RARE

- 8 organizational years out of 1380 by Insurgent organizations:
  - Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) – 1 year
  - Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) – 1 year
  - Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) – 3 years
  - Taliban – 3 years

- Important to note that:
  - 24 attacks that could not be attributed to insurgent organizations
  - we currently can do this analysis only for insurgent organizations- our data collection on such attacks produced 8 more attacks done by terrorist organizations that have not achieved insurgency status
  - 16 attacks generically attributed and not to specific organization
Meta-Theoretical Model
What might explain targeting such sites?

• Culturally symbolic target - so perhaps organizational ideology
• Ease/soft target, mass gathering, tourist locale, etc. - so perhaps organizational strength or lack thereof
• Lethality against civilians - don’t care about norms
• Capability
  • Other types of lethality
  • Size
  • Alliances
• ?
Probabilities generated from Logistic Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Change in probability with 2 tailed significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Service Provision</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Battle Deaths</td>
<td>50.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civillians Deaths</td>
<td>13.66%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Police Deaths not in battle</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Ideology</td>
<td>NS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious Ideology</td>
<td>0.64%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>0.17%</td>
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<td>Leadership Structure</td>
<td>NS</td>
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<td>Territorial Control</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rivals</td>
<td>NS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allies</td>
<td>NS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regime type of home country</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per Capita of home country</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What makes insurgents more likely to attack cultural sites

• Killing and killing a lot- specifically killing soldiers on the battlefield and civilians

• Everything else is having either no or minimal impact

• In some way very surprising finding
Conclusion

• Room for more research- and data collection on attacks against cultural sites
  • Need to think about what else might impact

• Important next effort is to examine Cultural Artifacts as Lootable Resources