

Cultural heritage as a hybrid threat

Mathias Desmet

Ghent University – Belgian Intelligence Studies Center
(BISC)





Palmyra
Syria
1st century AD
Roman empire
UNESCO world heritage

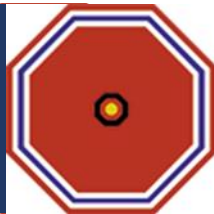
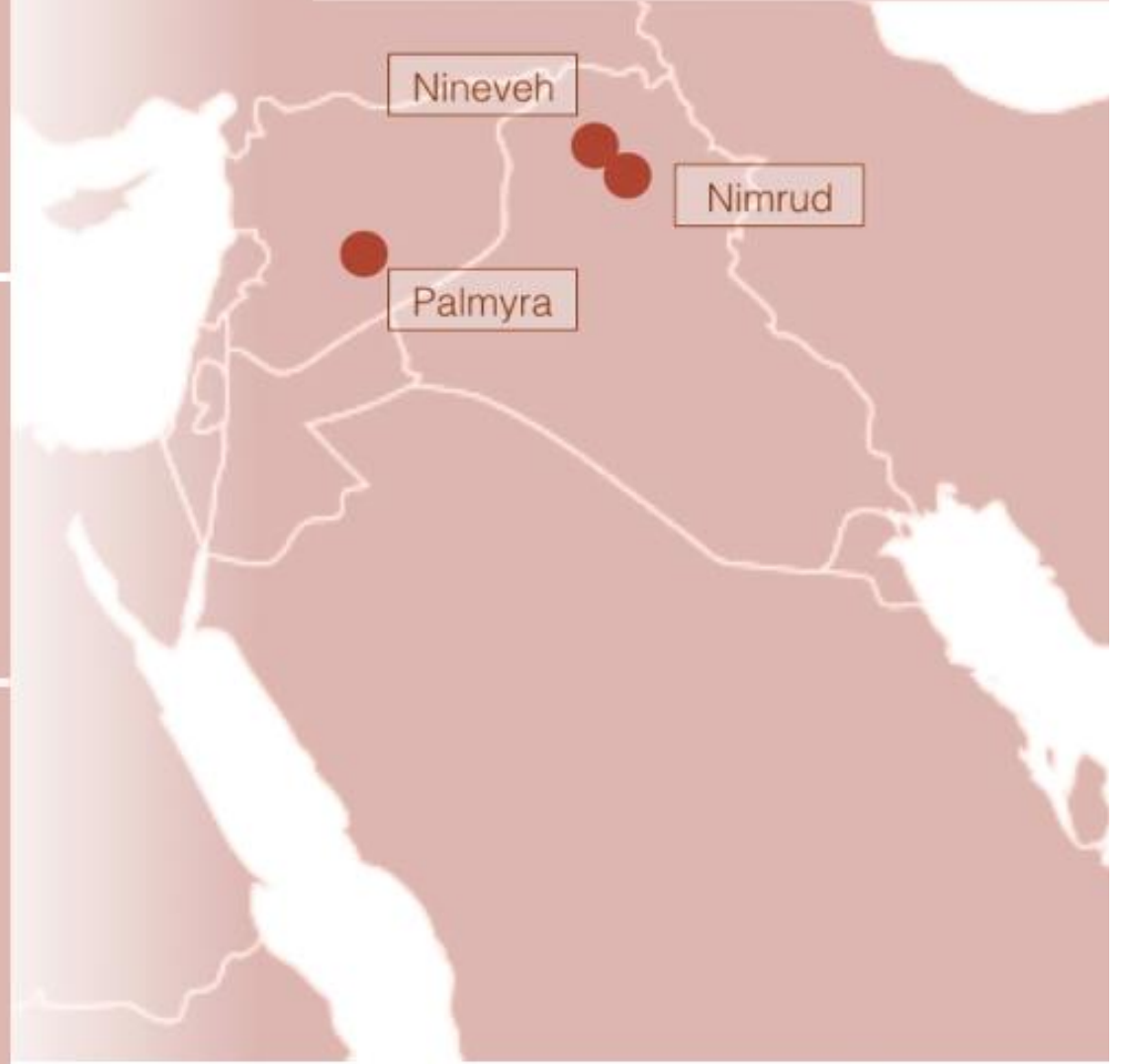


Nineveh
Iraq
7th century BC
Assyria



Nimrud
Iraq
9th century BC
Assyria

Destruction by IS



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Definitions

Cultural heritage = **physical artefacts** with cultural, historic, artistic, aesthetic, symbolic, ethnological, anthropological, scientific, social... significance and **intangible attributes** of a group or society (UNESCO)

Hybrid threats = type of threat that combines **conventional, irregular and asymmetric activities** in time and space (NATO)

- Include non-military tactics for destabilizing adversaries: propaganda, deception, sabotage, trolling, disinformation, cyber-attacks...
- In a grey area: just below the threshold of armed conflict
- Speed, synchronisation and coordination, ambiguity
- Actions oriented towards enemy vulnerabilities

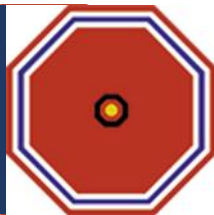
Relevance of cultural heritage

Social importance

- Collective sentiments, attitudes and perceived value of the object/place
- Identity building
- → Underlying symbolic/sacred dimension
- Important for nation states

Economic importance

- Tourism
- Territorial attractiveness



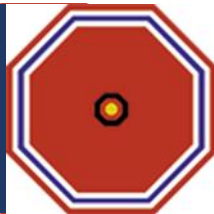
How is cultural heritage targeted?

Cognitive warfare
Heritage-security
nexus

Destruction
Looting
Smuggling
...



Undermine cultural
roots
Assault on dignity and
identity
Sow fear
Disrupt social cohesion
and possible resistance
...



How can CH be leveraged as a hybrid threat?

Militarily

- Strategic attacks to undermine opponents, demonstrate power, erase identity

Politically

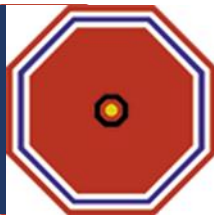
- Exploitation of cultural sites to justify territorial claims or political agendas, propaganda

Economically

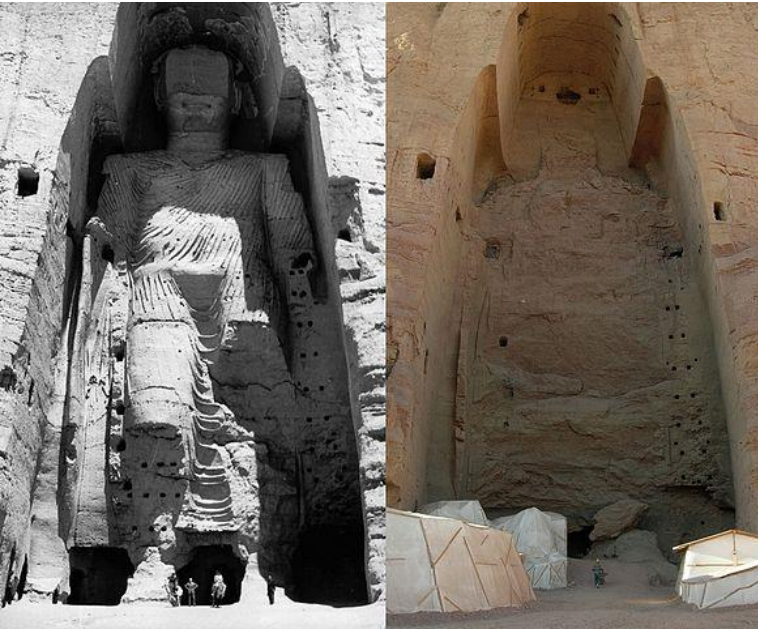
- Illicit trade of cultural artefacts, lasting economic impacts

Socially

- Fear, division within societies, undermining social coherence, conflict escalation



Examples



Afghanistan – Bamiyan Buddhas

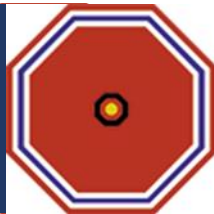


Armenia/Azerbaijan – Nagorno-Karabach



Myanmar – Rohingya

Also: Ukraine, South China Sea, Mali, Syria/Iraq, Gaza/West Bank...



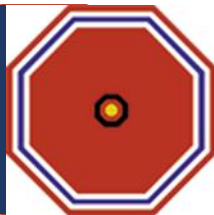
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Closing remarks

Definitional debate

Countering the threat

- NATO – EU
- UNESCO
- ICC - Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi
- Intelligence: information-driven approach



Thank you for your attention!

Mathias Desmet

Academic assistant

PhD researcher

Ghent University, Belgium



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