When Do Insurgents Attack Cultural Sites?

Victor Asal, Brian Nussbaum and Lucy Sorensen

Cultural Artifacts as Insurgent Targets
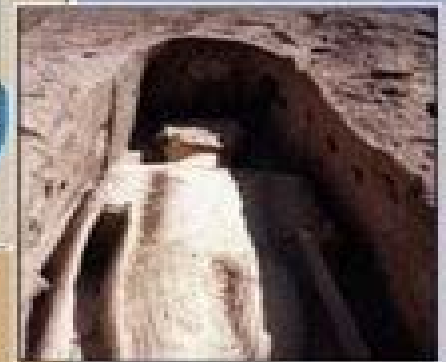
The Impact of Insurgency on Cultural Artifacts

- *"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.

BY JUSTINE DRENNAN | OCTOBER 17, 2014

- 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
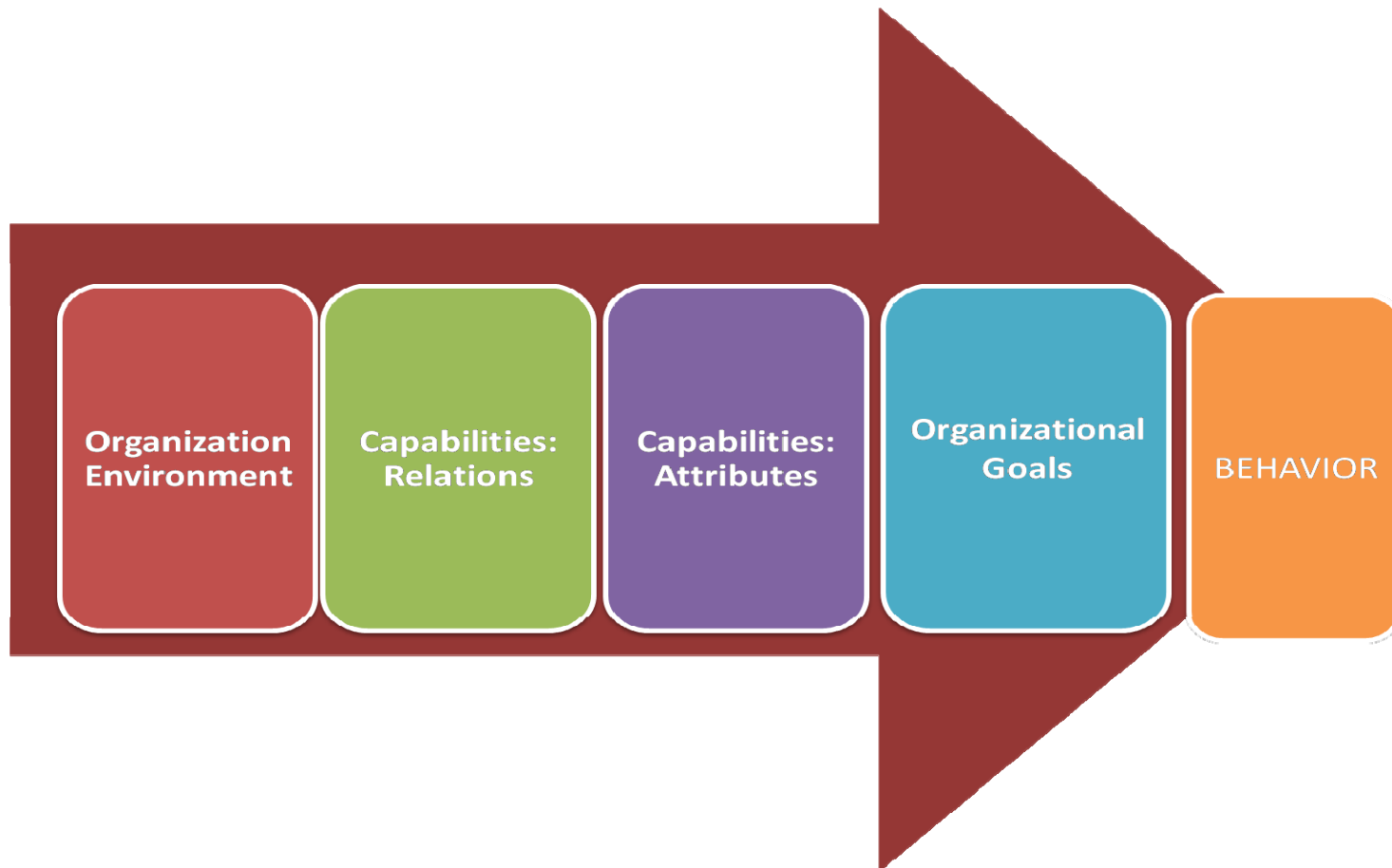
What might explain targeting such sites?

- 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

Variable	Change in probability with 2 tailed significance
Social Service Provision	NS
# of Battle Deaths	50.63%
Civillians Deaths	13.66%
Police Deaths not in battle	NS
Ethnic Ideology	NS
Religious Ideology	0.64%
Size	0.17%
Leadership Structure	NS
Territorial Control	NS
Rivals	NS
Allies	NS
Regime type of home country	NS
GDP per Capita of home country	NS

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