



Reshaping Cultural Heritage Protection Policies at a Time of Securitisation: France, Italy, and the United Kingdom

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ABSTRACT

In the context of the increasing securitisation of cultural heritage, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom have reacted differently to the recent wave of iconoclasm perpetrated by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and similar radical groups and terrorist organisations. With cultural heritage now discursively identified as a security concern, the three states enacted security practices to deal with the newly emerged security threats. All three cases show a tight association between the protection of cultural heritage, development and security policies. State-driven cultural heritage protection policies continue to be designed around the notion of multilateral cooperation, although innovative forms of public-private multilateralism and civil-military cooperation are increasingly being introduced.

KEYWORDS

Securitisation; foreign policy; cultural diplomacy; cultural heritage; terrorism

Deliberate and systemic attacks on cultural heritage have become a common feature of contemporary warfare. This is especially the case in conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, where religion-inspired radical groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, also known as Daesh) have resorted to iconoclasm as part of a well-planned tactic to assert their absolute domination over the population of a territory that has come under their control, including the social and cultural context in which that population lives.¹

The current and unprecedented wave of iconoclasm and the resulting public outrage this has generated worldwide have triggered a rapid process of securitisation that has elevated the destruction, damage and illicit trafficking of cultural heritage to a security issue. Against this background, the aim of this article is to analyse how France, Italy and the United Kingdom (UK) have responded to the securitisation of cultural heritage, examining the measures that the three countries have put in place to face the newly emerged security threat.²

The concept of securitisation was first developed by Ole Waever and Barry Buzan, who widened the spectrum of “security sectors”³ encompassing the traditional conception of

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¹Van der Auwera, “Contemporary Conflict”.

²These countries were chosen as they are key global cultural players, with significant engagement in a wide range of cultural diplomacy and cultural relations activities, and therefore well positioned to shape the international community's efforts at cultural heritage protection.

³Buzan, *People, States and Fear*.

military security to include environmental security, economic security, societal security and political security. The concept has been further expanded to embrace identity security, cultural security and, more recently, “ontological security”.⁴ Security emerges as an elastic concept potentially applicable to a number of issues, which cannot be predicted before they are narrated in terms of security. As Wæver points out,⁵ security is a speech act, that is, an utterance whose performative function and materialities come into being simply through its enunciation. Therefore, security emerges as intersubjective (rather than objective) and socially (and discursively) constructed, gradually stabilising over time to the point where it produces structural effects.⁶ When multiple referent objects are considered to be under threat, and security moves are consequently undertaken (such as emergency measures and extraordinary policies), a securitisation process begins. Securitisation is such that non-politicised issues (those debated and treated outside the public space) or politicised issues (which are publicly debated and processed) can be reframed as security issues by recalling existential threats to the survival of a community or a state.⁷

Evidence of the discursive construction of cultural heritage destruction as a security threat can be found in numerous instances of relevant “securitising actors” signalling and speaking of iconoclasm as an urgent and existential threat to global security. UNESCO’s former Director General Irina Bokova has repeatedly equated such acts to “cultural cleansing”, “war crimes”, “crimes against civilisation” and “cultural terrorism”.⁸ After the ISIS attacks in the museum of Mosul, she referred to the protection of heritage as not only “a matter of cultural urgency, but also a political and security necessity” and described culture as “a central consideration for any strategy for peace”.⁹ Quite similarly, Italian Minister of Cultural Heritage and Activities Dario Franceschini is on record as having referred to ISIS’ attacks against cultural sites as a “global humanitarian and security issue”. He added, “This is the reason why we are firmly convinced that the international community should finally find the strength to face this problem at the United Nations level.”¹⁰ In even stronger language, former French President François Hollande condemned the radical Islamism of obscurantism, fanaticism and fundamentalism and called on the world to take up arms against those who

forbid music, burn books, destroy cultural heritage and seek to cancel the memory of those who preceded them ... [because] we are at war – yes, a war – against the jihadi terrorism, we are not in a civilization war, but the murderers do not show any trace of civilization.¹¹

Finally, the securitisation of cultural heritage destruction has been endorsed by the head of the United Nations – the main international organisation responsible for the maintenance of world peace and security – who, in turn, has appealed to the international community of states to activate exceptional measures to address the threat, also described in the words of former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon as a “political and security imperative”.¹²

⁴Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics”.

⁵Wæver, “Securitisation and Desecuritisation”.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷For an in-depth analysis of the process of securitisation of cultural heritage that inspired the first section of this article, see Giusti and Russo, “Monuments Under Attack”.

⁸See, for instance, www.unesco.org/culture/pdf/iraq-syria/Iraq_SyriaReport-en.pdf.

⁹<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002325/232562e.pdf>, 5.

¹⁰www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/GBS/EXB/images/Italy_Eng.pdf.

¹¹www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/GBS/38GC/pdf/France2.pdf. As for the UK, it is noteworthy that no relevant statement by a political leader could be found, signalling the country’s low profile on the matter.

¹²<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002325/232562e.pdf>, 5.

With the rhetorical process of the speech act having reached an appropriate point of ripeness, the next three sections will look at the measures that France, Italy and the UK have taken to face the newly emerged security threat. Building on Rita Floyd's revised securitisation theory,¹³ security is conceptualised as a "strategic practice" comprising the practices used to securitise an issue (securitising practices) and the practices used to address it (security practices). Although practices to securitise and practices undertaken as a consequence of securitisation may not be clearly separable, the remainder of the article aims to go beyond the discursive identification of cultural heritage as a matter of security concern to explore the subsequent security practice generated by its securitisation in the three countries. As argued in the conclusion, analysis of such practices suggests that the protection of cultural heritage increasingly bridges soft and hard power manifestations.¹⁴

France: a strategic approach to leadership

The growing securitisation of cultural heritage has allowed France to develop a strategic approach, and since its intervention in Mali in 2013, the country has increasingly implemented it at the national, bilateral and multilateral levels. The aspiration to gain leadership in the field of international cultural protection seems to rest on a combination of material and symbolic factors, part of a renewed assertion of French symbolic power to allow it "to punch above [its] weight in international politics"¹⁵ at a time of declining hard power.

Following the conquest of parts of northern Mali by extremist groups in late 2012, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) decided in April 2013 to establish the stabilisation mission MINUSMA (the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali). For the first time, thanks to the French initiative, a cultural component was introduced in the mandate of a UN peacekeeping operation to "protect the cultural and historical sites".¹⁶ At the same time, French military operations in Mali (Operation Serval) included the protection of cultural heritage and all personnel were explicitly instructed to operate mindfully in the vicinity of cultural and historical sites.¹⁷ Furthermore, during a visit to Mali in February 2013 with UNESCO Director General Bokova, President Hollande declared that the issue was one of the drivers of French cultural diplomacy.¹⁸ This was only the beginning of an institutional narrative aimed at strengthening French soft power. In his speech at the 38th session of the UNESCO General Conference (November 2015), President

¹³Floyd, *Security and the Environment*; "Can Securitization Theory".

¹⁴This consideration is in line with the observations of heritage theorists like Tim Winter, in the emerging field of "heritage diplomacy" – to which this article aspires to contribute – in which the difference between the notion of soft and hard power tends progressively to blur. See in particular Winter, "Entangled Materialities of International Relations"; "Heritage Diplomacy".

¹⁵Rieker, "French Foreign Policy". Fostering this argument, Rieker asks whether international governmental organisations (IGOs) are useful. This article argues that the French approach to multilateral cultural cooperation is a good case in favour.

¹⁶United Nations Security Council, *Resolution on UN Mission in Mali*, 8. To implement its mandate, MINUSMA has engaged in various activities through its Environment and Culture Unit, including the training of all civil, military and police personnel to raise their awareness of Mali's cultural heritage; support to the programme coordinated by UNESCO and the Ministry of Culture to rehabilitate the damaged heritage sites in the north of Mali; support for the resumption of cultural events in the northern regions of Mali, contributing to the transmission of intangible heritage and social cohesion. The mission also launched a Quick Impact Project (QIP) for the rehabilitation of four manuscript libraries (<https://minusma.unmissions.org/en/cultural-heritage>). For an analysis of the cultural mandate of MINUSMA and its limitations, see Petrovic, "Cultural Dimension of Peace Operations".

¹⁷French soldiers were ordered to do "whatever it takes" to avoid collateral and direct damages in Gao and Timbuktu. See Martinez, *Cinquante propositions françaises*, 16.

¹⁸Presidency of the French Republic, *Press Kit*, 5.

Hollande confirmed France's commitment to safeguarding cultural heritage in cooperation with UNESCO and clarified French priorities: to fight against illicit trafficking of cultural property, prevent extremist groups from using cultural property for profit and preserve the world's common heritage.¹⁹

In recent years, France's strategic approach has taken the shape of several multilevel security practices, including strengthening its action at the UN level and investing in innovative forms of multilateral cooperation. Traditional multilateral activism involves proposing and backing relevant resolutions. In November 2014, a French initiative led to the adoption of Action 195/EX/31 on the protection of Iraq's heritage by UNESCO's Executive Board.²⁰ Soon afterward, a cultural component was inserted in resolution 2199, adopted by the UN Security Council in February 2015. Among the measures aimed at draining the Islamic State's income, French diplomacy succeeded in including a section on cultural heritage:

[A]ll ... [member states] shall take appropriate steps to prevent the trade in...cultural property... illegally removed from Iraq...and from Syria... including by prohibiting cross-border trade in such items, thereby allowing for their eventual safe return to the people of Iraq and Syria....²¹

France and Italy were behind the first-ever UNSC resolution entirely dedicated to the protection of cultural heritage (S/RES/2347, 2017). By endorsing the inclusion of a cultural component in the mandate of peacekeeping operations, it formalised the ground-breaking French initiative in Mali. Eventually, in March 2017, while advocating for resolution 2347, France ratified the second protocol (1999) to the Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954), thus reaching full compliance with the international protection regime represented by UNESCO conventions on culture.

Concurrently, France has undertaken a number of innovative initiatives. The International Conference on Safeguarding Endangered Cultural Heritage (Abu Dhabi, December 2016), co-organised by France and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) under the auspices of UNESCO, acted as a springboard.²² The conference had two main objectives: the creation of an international fund for the protection of endangered cultural heritage in armed conflict, and the creation of an international network of safe havens.²³ Both objectives have now been achieved.

With the Act on the Freedom of Creation, Architecture and Heritage (July 2016), France conformed its domestic legislation to international standards. Moreover, the Act introduced an innovative security practice, namely safe havens. Their purpose is to "temporarily safeguard cultural property endangered by armed conflicts or terrorism on their own territory...in a neighbouring country, or...in another country, in accordance with international law at the request of the governments concerned".²⁴ President Hollande proposed that the Louvre-Lens' storerooms be used as France's first safe haven.²⁵

France and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) also established the International Alliance for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in Conflict Areas (ALIPH) in early March 2017. This is an

¹⁹http://www.unesco.org/new/en/general-conference-38th/singleview/news/french_president_francois_hollande_invokes_the_unity_of_all/

²⁰UNESCO, *Decisions adopted at 195th session*, 40.

²¹United Nations Security Council, *Resolution on Adoption of Measures*, 5.

²²French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Conférence internationale*.

²³UNESCO, *UNESCO's Participation*, 2.

²⁴French Republic, *Act on Freedom of Creation, Architecture and Cultural Heritage*, Art. L111-11.

²⁵Willsher, "Louvre to Offer Shelter".

international fund in the form of a public-private foundation, whose purpose is “to attract... [and] manage...resources for the implementation of preventive and emergency protection programmes for cultural property in danger of destruction, damage or looting on account of armed conflict, and to contribute to [its] rehabilitation”.²⁶ The composition of the board is telling of the “polylateral framework”²⁷ that France is setting up: representatives of the donor countries and international governmental organisations, representatives of private donors, and experts in the protection of cultural heritage. ALIPH operates in close cooperation with UNESCO, which has agreed to join its board.²⁸ At its first Donors’ Conference, the Fund raised USD 76M of a planned USD100M. Most of the funding has come from France (USD 30M), the UAE (USD15M) and Saudi Arabia (USD 20M); other countries committed to providing additional funding, while Switzerland offered administrative support.²⁹

France seems particularly well positioned for developing a strategic approach to the securitisation of the protection of cultural heritage, thereby enhancing its soft power and status, especially in multilateral frameworks. First, France has been historically inclined to engage in multilateral frameworks for protecting cultural heritage. Second, the centralised and politicised model characterising French cultural diplomacy may have favoured the securitisation process. Third, France has a substantial cultural capital ready for deployment. The increasing number of ground-breaking initiatives has been corroborated by a consistent pattern of “discursive legitimisation” that has been developed to include the protection of cultural heritage among the priorities of French diplomacy.³⁰

The need to reassert state prerogatives may also have worked as a trigger. The changing architecture of international relations due to “the diminishing authority and capacity of national governments to act as the pre-eminent representatives of the national interest”³¹ has allowed non-state actors to be active in international relations. The establishment of ALIPH, an example of polylateral practice, is aimed at bringing cultural diplomacy back into the field of state action by developing a multilateral and multilevel instrument of cooperation wherein state actors take the lead and try to incorporate non-state actors in hierarchical public-private partnerships. While it is true that ALIPH legitimises the role of non-state actors, it does so by institutionalising their action within a framework shaped and driven by state actors, which maintain control of ALIPH’s main financial assets.

Furthermore, material dimensions have played a role. French initiatives on cultural heritage protection at the UN level have also addressed transnational security issues such

²⁶UNESCO, *UNESCO’s Participation*, Annex, 1.

²⁷Wiseman defines polylateralism as, “the conduct of relations between official entities...and at least one unofficial, non-state entity in which there is a reasonable expectation of systematic relationships, involving some form of reporting, communication, negotiation, and representation, but not involving mutual recognition as sovereign, equivalent entities”, in Wiseman, “Polylateralism”, 41.

²⁸UNESCO, *UNESCO’s Participation*, Annex, 2.

²⁹Noce, “Global fund to protect cultural heritage”. These figures were confirmed to the authors by a diplomat serving at the Directorate for Culture, Education, Research and the Network, France’s Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs (Paris, 5 April 2018).

³⁰In the words of former President Hollande, “[W]e must do whatever it takes to protect world cultural heritage...this includes diplomatic action...as well as military action... France will take responsibility for both” (translation by the authors), extract from Hollande, “Speech at Louvre”, 18 March 2015; “France will take all necessary action to improve the protection of artefacts and sites as well as to combat the trafficking that sustains the financing of terrorism”, extract from Hollande, “Speech at the Ambassadors’ Week”, 25 August 2015; “We have three priorities: to prevent extremists from seizing cultural property;... to prevent illicit trafficking and looting;...to restore [endangered cultural property]” (translation by the authors), extract from Hollande, “Speech at MET”, 20 September 2016.

³¹Ang *et al.*, “Cultural Diplomacy”, 371.

as countering terrorism,³² while activism in sub-Saharan Africa is related to France's wider projection. Moreover, the Abu Dhabi conference served the aim of a broader strengthening of economic and military partnerships between France and the UAE.³³

An important achievement of France's multilevel strategy is certainly the appointment of Audrey Azoulay, former French Minister of Culture, to the post of Director General of UNESCO on 10 November 2017. One of her first engagements was to report to the UNSC on the implementation of resolution 2347.³⁴ Meanwhile, President Emmanuel Macron flew to the UAE for the inauguration of the Louvre Abu Dhabi,³⁵ another component of French soft power.

Italy and the Blue Helmets for Culture initiative

Since the very beginning of the process of securitisation of cultural heritage, Italy has played a very active and visible role, both in the initial securitising phase and in the development of concrete security practices to address the newly emerged threat.

Since 2015, Italy has pursued a rather coherent and strategic course of action with the threefold goal of: (1) emphasising the extraordinary value of culture for humanity and raising awareness about the current challenges to its preservation; (2) strengthening the existing protection regime by developing new and more effective response measures; and (3) taking a leading role, given the relevance of culture in the country's national identity and international projection, and its expertise in cultural heritage protection.

With respect to the first goal, Italy has repeatedly presented culture not only as a fundamental human activity *per se*, but also as a vital element for the promotion of world peace and prosperity. This view was at the core of the international conference of the Ministers of Culture entitled 'Culture as an Instrument of Dialogue among Peoples' that Italy hosted during the Expo in Milan in 2015. During the conference, 83 countries signed a declaration in which culture is described as "a tool for dialogue, solidarity, growth and sustainable development" and which states that culture heritage "expresses ... universally recognized values of tolerance, dialogue and mutual understanding".³⁶ This position was reiterated on numerous occasions, including the first-ever G7 Ministerial Meeting on Culture, which Italy organised in Florence on 30/31 March 2017, and most recently in the 'Appeal' put forward by Italy and adopted by UNESCO's 39th General Conference on 14 November 2017. Significantly entitled "Protecting Culture and Promoting Cultural Pluralism: The Key to Lasting Peace", the statement again describes culture as an "essential element in ensuring sustainable peace and development".³⁷ From this perspective, it logically follows – very much in line with the securitisation model discussed in the first section – that an attack on cultural heritage represents a direct and existential security threat to peace and security. Accordingly, in very explicit language, the UNESCO Appeal reiterates the idea that

³²United Nations Security Council, *Resolution on Adoption of Measures*.

³³Presidency of the French Republic, *Press Kit*, 28.

³⁴UNESCO, *UN Security Council Highlights*.

³⁵Chrisafis, "Macron Hails Power of Beauty".

³⁶http://www.beniculturali.it/mibac/multimedia/MiBAC/documents/1441188687687_DICHIARAZIONE_DEI_MINISTRI_DELLA_CULTURA_5_DF_INGL_definitiva.pdf

³⁷http://www.unesco.org/culture/clt-commission/Appel_EN.pdf

the protection of culture and heritage is “not only a cultural emergency, but also a security and humanitarian imperative”.³⁸

As for the second goal of overcoming the limits of the current protection regime, Italy played an important role in laying the foundation for the establishment of a more robust international legal and normative framework, in which more effective and concrete protection measures can be brought forward. Among others, Italy’s most valuable and innovative contribution has been in developing what can be termed the new doctrine for ‘cultural peacebuilding’ (CPB), that is, the integration of a cultural component in the mandates of international interventions in contexts of crisis and conflict where cultural heritage is at risk.³⁹

To that end, sometimes in a leading position and often in close partnership with other countries, particularly France, Italy has carried out a well planned, coordinated and pressing series of initiatives at the multilateral level, especially within UNESCO. In April and October 2015, it presented two important resolutions that were adopted by the Executive Board of UNESCO with the aim of establishing, under UNESCO’s coordination and in collaboration with member states and relevant UN offices, a concrete mechanism for rapid intervention and mobilisation in areas where cultural heritage is at risk.

This initial proposal was further elaborated and then embraced by the 38th UNESCO General Conference, which passed an Italian resolution intended to reinforce action taken by the international community to protect culture and promote cultural pluralism in the event of armed conflict. Building on the positive experience of MINUSMA, the resolution adopts a strategy of which one of the key elements is the creation of task forces of experts in the protection of cultural heritage.⁴⁰

As a direct contribution to the implementation of the strategy, the Italian government and UNESCO signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in Rome on 16 February 2016 to establish the Italian United Heritage Task Force, to be deployed for the protection of cultural heritage at risk.⁴¹ The process of implementing and defining the operational aspects of UNESCO’s Blue Helmets for Culture is currently underway, and the actual impact of the initiative will depend on the way in which those aspects are specified in the operational agreement between UNESCO and Italy. While deployment in non-permissive environments or combat scenarios, such as active engagement to free archaeological sites of iconoclastic adversaries, is excluded and beyond any possible mandate, the task force has been designed to be rapidly mobilised in response to a request from a UNESCO member state to assess the risks and/or quantify the damage to cultural heritage in crisis areas, devise action plans, perform technical supervision, provide training courses for local staff, assist with the transport of movable objects to safe shelters and strengthen the fight against looting and the illegal traffic in cultural artefacts. The task force has been assembled, is undergoing training, and has been “tested” in the areas of central Italy affected by the earthquake of 24 August 2016 (this deployment, however, took place outside the framework of the MoU).⁴² The agreement also establishes the International Training and Research Centre on the

³⁸*ibid.*

³⁹On the emerging doctrine of ‘cultural peacebuilding’, see Foradori and Rosa, “Expanding the peacekeeping agenda”.

⁴⁰<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002351/235186E.pdf>

⁴¹<http://www.beniculturali.it/mibac/export/MiBAC/sito-MiBAC/Contenuti/MibacUnif/>

⁴²Kirchgaessner, “Italy’s ‘Monuments Men’”.

Economics of Culture and World Heritage, a specialised centre based in Turin (Italy), where experts in the cultural heritage protection sector will be able to receive training.

The protection of cultural heritage in crisis areas and the fight against illicit trafficking of works of art was also a priority theme of the already-mentioned meeting of G7 ministers of culture. The final joint declaration called for culture, cultural heritage and diversity to be factored into international humanitarian, security and peacebuilding policies and operations. The ministers explicitly call upon the United Nations to strengthen its cultural heritage protection activities, including initiatives “that may encompass, where appropriate and on a case-by-case basis, when authorised by the UN Security Council, a cultural heritage protection component in security and peacekeeping missions”.⁴³ The climax of this series of bilateral and multilateral initiatives, to the promotion of which Italy contributed with multiple follow-ups, such as UNESCO’s establishment of an Emergency Preparedness and Response Unit, was reached with the passing of UNSC resolution 2437, already mentioned.

To achieve the third goal of playing a central role in the global fight against cultural heritage destruction, Italy is determined to exert global leadership or at least avoid being relegated to a secondary position *vis-à-vis* its main ‘competitors’ in the realm of cultural diplomacy, notably France. Italy’s activism, international exposure and engagement in promoting cultural protection and particularly in supporting CPB can be explained by the sense of special responsibility or destiny that the country genuinely believes it possesses as the world’s (self-perceived/self-proclaimed) ‘cultural superpower’ and the good fit between the objectives of cultural heritage protection and the country’s broader foreign policy agenda.

Indeed, culture is at the heart of the Italian national identity and plays an important role in shaping the country’s foreign and security policy. Very proud of its extraordinary national cultural heritage and endowed with world’s highest concentration of UNESCO cultural heritage sites, Italy, in the words of its former Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, “might not be an economic nor a military superpower but we are a cultural superpower”.⁴⁴ Cultural diplomacy is a high priority within the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI), for which “culture has a fundamental role in the foreign policy of our country and is one of the main instruments of its international projection”.⁴⁵ In addition, the emerging doctrine of “cultural peacebuilding” suits Italy’s international and security identity perfectly, as participation in international missions abroad has become a distinctive feature of the country’s international role and credibility in the post-Cold War security environment.⁴⁶

Finally, Italy’s initiative and resourcefulness in CPB stem from the fact that the country already has great expertise, competences and capabilities to offer, without having to invest considerable additional resources, especially of a financial nature, at a time of severe economic crisis. A case in point is the Carabinieri Command for the Protection of Cultural Heritage, which was established in 1970 and has gained much experience domestically

⁴³http://www.beniculturali.it/mibac/multimedia/MiBAC/documents/1490881204940_DECLARATION-Dichiarazione.pdf.

⁴⁴This slogan has been used by the prime minister on multiple occasions, as in this case during United States President Barack Obama’s visit to Rome on 27 March 2014, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/03/27/remarks-president-obama-and-prime-minister-renzi-italy-joint-press-confe>.

⁴⁵(authors’ translation) http://www.esteri.it/mae/it/politica_estera/cultura.

⁴⁶Ignazi et al., *Italian Military Operations Abroad*.

and in crisis areas such as Kosovo and Iraq. The Carabinieri Command, internationally appreciated for its competences, will form the backbone of the Unite4Heritage Task Force.⁴⁷

The UK's decentralised management of cultural heritage

The way the UK has dealt with the question of the protection of cultural heritage, in a context of increasing securitisation, is very different from the proposals and policies put forward by both Italy and France. The British reaction has been twofold: on the one hand, the government has accelerated the ratification of important conventions on the matter,⁴⁸ and on the other, it has raised its financial commitment to programmes seeking to strengthen cultural protection through further empowerment of the British Council (BC), which has been tasked with specific goals.

On the legal side, the ratification of the 1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (February 2017) has committed the UK to establishing a Cultural Property Protection Unit to prepare its national armed forces for intervention in conflicts where cultural heritage is at risk.⁴⁹ This move has put an end to the country's isolation which so damaged its international standing. The dramatic destruction of cultural heritage in Iraq that followed the invasion of the US/UK-led coalition in 2003 was an incentive to ratify the Convention, which neither of the two countries had ratified at the time. Riding the wave of current securitisation, the UK is embracing the idea that cultural property experts need to work more closely with the military.⁵⁰

Unlike France and Italy, where foreign policy and culture ministries are responsible for cultural policies, in the UK the relevant body is the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, which cooperates with the BC. The BC has traditionally been understood as the fuzzy, soft power arm of the British state: it is tasked with negotiating bilateral relations between Britain and recipient nations so as not to recall the historical domination of the British Empire.⁵¹ While the BC does not come directly under the auspices of the British government, it was founded by the government, is funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), and operates like a 'quango' (quasi-non-governmental-organisation). In other words, it is a government organisation by virtue of its founding, its staffing, its funding, and its clear alignment with the British government's foreign policy objectives.

This unusual governance may explain why the UK has been more reticent than France and Italy to undertake initiatives that, while aimed at defending cultural heritage from attack, also seek to raise the countries' prestige and international standing. The UK has not set for itself a national strategic mission that puts it in competition with other European countries;

⁴⁷The Carabinieri Command for the Protection of Cultural Heritage has been described as the "most effective military policing force in the world for protecting works of art and archaeological property" (Rush and Benedettini Millington, *Carabinieri Command*, 1). The Carabinieri operated in Kosovo (2002-03) and Iraq (2003-06), where they performed a range of cultural heritage protection activities, including census, monitoring and protection of cultural heritage sites threatened by post-conflict instability; investigation and recovery of looted artefacts; advising, training and institutional and capacity-building activities.

⁴⁸The UK supported the unanimously adopted resolution UN 2347 (24 March 2017) on cultural heritage during armed conflict proposed by France and Italy.

⁴⁹This was possible after the government decided to include the Cultural Property (Armed Conflict) Bill as part of the Queen's Speech in 2016; it received Royal Assent on 23 February 2017. This unit builds on the UK's Joint Service Cultural Property Protection Working Group created in 2014 as a part of the British army.

⁵⁰Stone and Bajjaly, *Destruction of Cultural Heritage in Iraq*.

⁵¹A 2007 British government-commissioned report on cultural diplomacy explains this tension well. See, Bound *et al.*, *Cultural Diplomacy*.

it has simply adjusted its *modus operandi* to the intensification of threats to cultural heritage. This ‘minimalist’ attitude might also depend on the UK’s political momentum, which is currently absorbed by an overwhelming restructuring process after the decision to leave the European Union (EU).⁵²

In addition to the governance of cultural heritage, there is another important element to consider: financing. When, in June 2016, the government decided to launch the Cultural Protection Fund (CPF) in partnership with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the BC (under the rubric of the Culture and Development Programme), the £30M destined for the new fund came from Official Development Assistance (ODA). This implies that the BC has a contract with the government to carry out a specific mandate (this is not a contribution). In this way, the government can influence the BC’s geographic priorities and types of programming,⁵³ and has the right to assess the BC’s overall performance.⁵⁴ All CPF-financed actions fulfil the ODA’s four strategic objectives: (1) strengthening global peace, security and governance; (2) strengthening resilience and response to crises; (3) promoting global prosperity; and (4) tackling extreme poverty. In carrying out these tasks, which go well beyond the mission of cultural diplomacy, the BC, *de facto*, takes on a more political role – as does the British Museum (BM), which is an important partner in the management of the CPF. In the long run, however, this trend could distort the BC’s initial vocation and nature.

To support countries rich in monuments and artefacts that are under attack or have been vandalised, the UK primarily endeavours to build resilient societies, foster development, empower people and contribute to the overall stabilisation of the countries concerned (for example, Iraq). The first round of funding awards (to Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, the Palestinian Territories, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey) were allocated not only to projects focusing on archaeology and monuments, but also to museums, libraries, archives and intangible heritage.⁵⁵ All the projects financed seek to help build skills so that local experts can protect their own cultural assets, ensuring that sites under threat are documented, conserved and restored. They also seek to help local people identify and value cultural heritage.⁵⁶ With this scope, the CPF has cooperated widely with the BM, which works with local museums and other institutions, providing training and mentoring, especially concerning the restoration of damaged or ruined sites.

The museum’s philosophy also permeates cultural heritage policies, making the UK’s approach quite different from that of the two continental cases. In particular, British museums and academia are not in favour of the French idea of creating safe havens, possibly outside the countries where monuments are under attack. The stress in the UK is, rather, on the importance of recording, documenting and digitalising moveable heritage so as to create virtual heritage sites. The director of security at the Victoria and Albert Museum raised the point by underlining that

⁵²A lack of strategic thinking with respect to this matter in British foreign policy has been underlined by the policy community and academia (Edmund *et al.*, *British Foreign Policy and National Interest*).

⁵³Rivera, *Distinguishing Cultural Relations from Cultural Diplomacy*.

⁵⁴It is interesting to note the gradual increase in FCO grant-in-aid ODA to the British Council budget (from £119M in 2016/17 to £170M in 2020/21) against a sharp decrease in FCO grant-in-aid non-ODA (from £39M in 2016/17 to £0.0 in 2020/21). See British Council, *Corporate Plan 2017-2020*.

⁵⁵Included among the financed projects are a scheme led by the University of Liverpool focused on Yazidi historic shrines in Dohuk, Mosul and Sinjar in Iraq; and the creation of a database of cultural heritage on Soqatra, a Yemeni archipelago between Yemen and the Horn of Africa.

⁵⁶<https://www.britishcouncil.org/arts/culture-development/cultural-protection-fund/projects>.

any museum in the world is at risk...we could all suffer a natural disaster; but now we could also all suffer a terrorist attack as well. We could lose our objects at any time, so it would be good to think that there might be a way we can preserve these items digitally, for all of time.⁵⁷

A first example of this is the replica of the Arch of Triumph in Palmyra which was first displayed in London at Trafalgar Square (April 2016) and then exhibited in other cities. This replica was crafted thanks to the Institute for Digital Archaeology (IDA), a joint venture between Harvard University, Oxford University and Dubai's Museum of the Future.⁵⁸

The BM has also been critical of French and US museum outposts abroad (see the Louvre and the Guggenheim in Abu Dhabi); it would like to see more participation in the development of local museums instead (such as BM's assistance to the Zayed Museum in Abu Dhabi).⁵⁹ However, this stance needs to be balanced against ongoing criticism of the British Museum as an institution that has gained much from British imperial occupation of territories around the world, and that continues to retain many high-profile artefacts that other nations have requested be returned (for example, the Elgin marbles). The UK's 'transnational' view aimed at developing a global approach can therefore be traced back to a particular kind of governance of cultural heritage with attention to the contestation that certain policies could stir.

Conclusion

In all three countries, the securitisation of cultural heritage has created favourable conditions for reconsidering related policies and for proposing and adopting security practices. Thanks to a receptive audience widely exposed to images of vandalised cultural items and sites, political leaders enjoy ample room for manoeuvre in implementing specially designed measures, including those aimed at increasing the prestige of their countries and serving their national interests. They follow different patterns and the three countries have responded to the challenge by proposing and adopting cultural security practices that entail different approaches to the issue. Such diversity depends on traditional attitudes towards cultural heritage protection, leaders' contingent interests, political cycles, existing institutional frameworks and governance, and military doctrine.

France seems to have opted for a maximalist and highly strategic approach as part of an attempt to emerge as a global leader in the defence of cultural heritage. It could well achieve the goal, thanks to its historical engagement in multilateral cultural cooperation, its centralised and politicised model of cultural diplomacy, and substantial cultural capital ready for deployment. On those bases, France has recently been able to undertake several traditional and more innovative multilateral initiatives, making it a front-runner in the diplomatic subfield of cultural heritage protection. This strategic rationale is confirmed by the consistent "discursive legitimisation" of the priority French diplomacy attributes to the protection of cultural heritage.

French initiatives on cultural heritage protection at the UN level have also addressed transnational security issues such as countering terrorism, while its activism in sub-Saharan Africa is partially related to France's colonial past and the country's vexed interests in the

⁵⁷British Council, *In Harm's Way*, 26.

⁵⁸*The Guardian*, "Palmyra's Arch of Triumph recreated in Trafalgar Square", <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/video/2016/apr/19/palmyras-arch-of-triumph-replica-erected-in-central-london-video>

⁵⁹British Museum, *Soft Power and UK's Influence Committee*, 27.

area. Moreover, the Abu Dhabi conference served to expand and strengthen economic and military partnerships with the Gulf. So far, France is continuing its efforts to consolidate this multilevel strategic approach using culture to pursue broader objectives of development, security and stability.

Italy has taken a similarly maximalist approach to the issue, although it has pursued it in a more nuanced and less strategic fashion. As argued, Italy has contributed substantially to bringing the process of securitisation of cultural heritage to full completion and establishing direct links between culture, security, and peace. It has been very active in promoting new measures to strengthen the toolbox of cultural heritage protection instruments, in particular by putting in place a clear framework ready to be expanded for what this article has termed 'cultural peacebuilding'. The Blue Helmets for Culture Task Force, to be deployed under UNESCO auspices, is a first – but fundamental – step towards the elaboration of a full-fledged cultural peacebuilding doctrine. This article has also identified a good fit between Italy's cultural diplomacy and the country's broader foreign and security policy.

Compared to the French case, however, Italy's involvement in cultural heritage protection seems to be less connected with the country's narrower and more explicit national interests, and more strongly inspired by general and principled considerations of the universal value of culture and its preservation for the whole of humanity. Italy's less strategic approach is to a large extent the result of the country's long – one might say millenary – anti-hegemonic view of culture, which should not be considered an instrument of supremacy, dominance or external projection. As the leading Roman lyric poet, Horace, aptly put it in the first century BC, *Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit et artes intulit agresti Latio* [Greece, the captive, made her savage victor captive, and brought the arts into rustic Latium].⁶⁰

This specific attitude towards culture, together with the country's lighter colonial past, marks an important difference between the Italian approach, that of the UK and especially that of France. While the UK has maintained a relatively low profile, avoiding possible accusations of cultural neo-colonialism, France has exploited its network of relations with former colonies to assert its role as defender of culture heritage beyond its borders. Compared to Italy, France also benefits from greater influence within the UN system as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and from its historical links and greater geostrategic and geo-economic interests in the Middle Eastern, North African, Sahel and sub-Saharan regions, where the majority of the current cultural heritage crises are occurring.

The UK has reacted to the phenomenon of securitisation by accelerating the ratification of some international conventions on the protection of cultural heritage and filling the country's long-standing normative gap on the matter. These legal engagements have contributed to involving the military sector in the protection of cultural heritage. The UK has adapted its governance of cultural heritage to the new challenges without, however, proposing any new strategic course for the country. Rather, it has put forward 'transnational' proposals, such as the one for the digitalisation of monuments at risk of destruction, as a form of global protection of cultural heritage. As a consequence of the extra resources allocated to the BC from the ODA budget, it is proposing programmes that bring cultural heritage closer to security and development than traditional cultural diplomacy. While the BC, which is not a direct emanation of the government, is acquiring a more political role, it must also

⁶⁰Former Italian Minister of Cultural Heritage and Activities Francesco Rutelli in his intervention during the conference, "The Blue Helmets for Culture. The Italian role in cultural peacekeeping", Rome, 21 June 2017.

fulfil the government's mandate, and thus risks losing its autonomy. At the same time, by broadening the BC's responsibilities, the government – unlike what is happening in France and Italy – is not playing a high-profile political role in the field of cultural heritage. This, together with the political turmoil ensuing from the Brexit, might explain the UK's low strategic and minimalist approach.

The foregoing discussion suggests two final considerations. First, all three cases show a tight association between the protection of cultural heritage, and development and security policies. As a result of this securitisation process, the protection of cultural heritage is becoming an important policy simply for what it represents and symbolises. In other words, cultural heritage is less subject to “instrumentality” – “the use of cultural ventures and investments as a means or instrument to attain goals in other areas”⁶¹ – and is acquiring autonomy as a policy. In particular, the protection of cultural heritage has been elevated from the traditional sphere of cultural diplomacy – a subset of public diplomacy used to mobilise soft power – to that of a *sui generis* (mild) articulation of foreign policy. Indeed, it is increasingly connected with such high-profile issues and hard power dimensions as conflict resolution, peacebuilding, security, people empowerment, development, stability and military intervention.⁶²

Second, it seems clear that state-driven cultural heritage protection policies continue to be designed around the notion of multilateral cooperation, although this has been rapidly evolving in terms of actors, modalities and issues. Parallel to cooperation within the UNESCO framework, France, Italy and the UK have also put in place innovative forms of public-private multilateralism (such as the French ALIPH Foundation) and civil-military cooperation (such as the Italian CPB initiative).⁶³ The rapid evolution and transformation of multilateral cooperation on cultural heritage protection may also reflect states' efforts to rescale the governance of non-traditional security. Due to the process of securitisation, cultural heritage protection is turning into a transnational and non-traditional security issue; as such, it seems to prompt states to develop new instruments of regulatory and multilevel governance.⁶⁴ This attitude, however, does not preclude states from contemporaneously pursuing national agendas and using the securitisation context to maximise their national interest.

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⁶¹Vestheim, “Instrumental Cultural Policy”, 65.

⁶²The ongoing transformation of cultural heritage protection and the resulting emphasis on its security and development related dimensions has not meant the complete replacement or abandonment of ‘traditional’ cultural heritage projects. For example, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation continues to support archaeological, anthropological and ethnological missions abroad, which numbered 170 in 2015, many of which are unrelated to security/development considerations (https://www.esteri.it/mae/en/politica_estera/cultura/archeologiapatrimonioculturale.html). As for France, the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs is supporting 159 archaeological missions abroad in 2018, all of them characterized by cooperation and partnership with local stakeholders (data relating to French missions were provided to the authors by a diplomat serving at the Directorate for Culture, Education, Research and the Network, France's Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, Paris, 5 April 2018).

⁶³This consideration fits well into the discussion about the under-researched question of the complexities of the international ordering of cultural heritage governance. See Winter, “Heritage Diplomacy”, 16.

⁶⁴Hameiri and Jones, “The Politics of Non-traditional Security”.

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