CULTURAL PROPERTY PROTECTION AND THE TRAINING CONTINUUM IN THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

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With the recent ratification of the 1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in Times of Armed Conflict by the United States Congress and a growing recognition of other legal drivers, it is incumbent on the US military to initiate formal training in cultural heritage awareness and cultural property protection (CPP) so as to avoid the kinds of negative cases of cultural property damage or destruction that have ensued from the U.S. presence in Iraq and Afghanistan. To date however, CPP training has not been institutionalized in the Department of Defense, although it could readily be accommodated within current training on general “cultural awareness” and cross-cultural competency by emphasizing the material side of behavioral and ideational components of culture that are part of this training. This paper shows how cultural awareness training itself has gaps in what can be termed the “training continuum” (from enlistment/enrollment in a particular service to in-theatre operations as joint force teams) and how current efforts at informal cultural property protection training have attempted to bridge those gaps. Finally, broader CPP training programs in the DoD are examined in terms of the benefits they would provide for the recognition and reporting of cultural property issues, both at the tactical and the strategic levels, so that negative impacts to the military mission and to host nation cultural properties can be avoided, minimized, or mitigated through proactive planning.

Introduction

In her 2006 volume entitled Uses of Heritage, author Laurajane Smith discusses the concept of “heritage” as an inherently cultural process that can be variably understood as experience, as identity, as intangible resource, as memory, as performance, and finally, as place. All of the above connotations are intangible manifestations of culture with the possible exception of place, which clearly has a physical manifestation. But as Smith (2006: 74) argues,
following anthropologist Arturo Escobar (2001), even this tangible heritage is both “a category of thought” as well as “a constructed reality.” Thus even tangible things and places—cultural properties, if you will—are imbued with social and cultural value such that heritage must be understood first and foremost as “the cultural process of meaning and memory making and remaking rather than a thing” (Smith 2006: 74). The implication here is that the physicality or materiality of cultural property may be less important than the intangible cultural processes that help define it.

As we examine the role of Cultural Property Protection (CPP) training and awareness in the US military, it is important to keep in mind this distinction between intangible cultural heritage and cultural property, which is at once tangible and intangible. “Cultural property,” then, and the need to protect it during military operations, must ultimately be understood within this larger concept of heritage as a cultural process, of property as the physical manifestation of these myriad associations that represent a people’s concept of shared heritage, or even dissonant or contested heritage between factional groups. Not only is the distinction important to legal definitions of “cultural property” (Handler 2003), but it is also of crucial importance in integrating CPP issues within the broader DoD training programs for language and culture as we shall see in greater detail below.

The discussion and recommendations in this study for the implementation of cultural property protection training in the U.S. Department of Defense derive from the author’s long-term association with the Combatant Command Cultural Heritage Action Group or CCHAG (see www.cchag.org). CCHAG supports the warfighter and the military mission through the development of reference, education, and training tools for military and DoD civilian personnel and contractors. Their mission is to enhance military capacity by promoting Cultural Property Protection (CPP) as a force multiplier. We improve cultural awareness within DoD, at the senior leadership, command and tactical levels by helping to ensure that CPP is considered during full spectrum operations so that U.S. personnel will perform in accordance with U.S. laws and military regulations and international laws and treaties. To fulfill this mission, the CCHAG provides Combatant Commands (COCOM, also known as CCMD) (Figure 1) and Joint Force (JF) Planners and Engineers with proactive mission support, a wide range of CPP

Brian Selmeski, William Kent, Thomas Livoti, Amir Gamliel, John Valainis, and Michael Hallett. I alone, however, remain responsible for any errors in fact or interpretation. This article does not represent official policy, programs, or doctrine of the Department of Defense of the United States Government.