

# Actor-Driven Threats Against Heritage - A Swedish Perspective

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Experiences from recent military conflict show that heritage is repeatedly damaged. This is evident not least in Ukraine, in light of Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and full-scale invasion in 2022. Harm to heritage can be collateral damage as presumed military targets are attacked. However, the intentional targeting of heritage, whether through military or hybrid threats, has become increasingly apparent. This could be part of a political or military strategy, in peacetime as well as during conflict. Hybrid threats are often not included in plans for how to protect heritage, leaving a considerable gap between the kind of threats heritage faces, and the kind of measures taken to protect it. Antagonists could, and to some extent already do, exploit this gap to harm not only the heritage but also the communities that value it.

THE FOLLOWING BRIEF presents and summarises the results of a conceptual study on potential actor-driven threats to heritage in Sweden; this specifically refers to instances where an actor damages, distorts, or otherwise uses heritage in order to cause harm. The study was conducted by the Swedish Defence Research Agency in 2023 on behalf of the Swedish National Heritage Board (Riksantikvarieämbetet).<sup>1</sup> The analysis was guided by the question: What kind of threats does heritage in Sweden currently face?<sup>2</sup> In addition to a summary of the result of the conducted study, both a brief description of the background to the study and the Swedish concept of Total Defence are provided. The brief concludes with a discussion of what aspects are important to take into consideration, nationally as well as internationally, if we are to strengthen resilience against these threats, as well as suggestions for future research. We argue that that physical protection of heritage in war and conflict

remains highly relevant, but that hybrid threats to heritage are far more prominent than previously thought, both in peacetime and during war.<sup>3</sup>

We also suggest that the capability to respond to or mitigate what can be considered traditional military threats as well as hybrid threats against heritage within European territory needs to be improved. National and international actors, such as states, NATO or the EU, should strengthen their capabilities to counter these threats.

## BACKGROUND

The geopolitical situation, which has evolved over the last 15 years, necessitates an assessment of threats to heritage. Following Russia's 2008 aggressions against Georgia and its 2014 invasion of Crimea and eastern Ukraine, the Swedish government concluded that it could no longer rule out Russian military action against

1 For a more extensive description in Swedish of the study and method used, see: McWilliams, A. and Olsson, S. *Hoten mot kulturarven – En analys av aktörsdrivna hot mot kulturarv i Sverige*. FOI-R--5490--SE. Stockholm: Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut, 2024. In short, unclassified general assessments of threats to Swedish national security, conducted by various Swedish state actors, were combined with a limited literature review and interviews with experts in fields such as military strategy, psychological defence, and the destructive effects of explosive weapons, as well as heritage professionals, including museum personnel. The result of the data collection was then analysed through a heritage lens and from a Swedish perspective. It thus represents an eclectic approach that combines heritage studies with several other areas of expertise, with the aim to produce an updated threat assessment for heritage in Sweden. In this text heritage includes material, immaterial as well as digital heritage.

2 The study focuses on heritage within Sweden that could be under threat. It should not be confused with the notion that a particular *Swedish heritage* is under threat. The latter is related to a nationalist view of heritage that developed in the 19th century and is not in line with more recent views on heritage, as discussed within the field of heritage studies.

3 Hybrid threats refer to the use of different non-military instruments of power and influence to pursue a particular interest or goal, see discussion in Treverton, G. F., Thvedt, A., Chen, A.R., Lee, K. and McCue, M. *Addressing hybrid threats*. 2018. Stockholm: Swedish Defence University.

Sweden. Consequently, planning for Sweden's Total Defence, a concept that encompasses both military and civilian defence, was reintroduced in 2015.<sup>4</sup> The full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 further demonstrated the necessity and importance of strengthening the military as well as the civil defence in Sweden.

The Swedish concept of Total Defence developed after the Second World War as a reaction to 20th-century warfare, where civilians were affected by war to a greater extent than before. This was clearly demonstrated, for example, during the targeted terror bombings of the Second World War.<sup>5</sup> Total Defence was a means to strengthen the whole of society's resilience and preparedness in case of armed conflict. Sweden's policy of non-alignment in peace and neutrality in war contributed to the assumption that the country would need to fend for itself.<sup>6</sup>

Historically, Sweden's heritage protection was based on the threat of physical destruction. This resulted in plans to either move the most valuable objects to safer areas or protect them *in situ*. Although some new threats were realised and incorporated into the planning throughout the latter half of the 20th century, most notably theft, as crime levels were perceived to increase in the 1970s, leading to improved security at museums, the idea of what kinds of threats heritage in Sweden faced remained constant.<sup>7</sup> As a result of a changed geopolitical situation after the end of the Cold War, Swedish Total Defence was dismantled in the early 2000s. Consequently, the planning for protecting heritage in war and conflict almost entirely ceased. Attention shifted to protection of heritage from natural disasters and accidents, whilst research of heritage protection focussed on heritage in international conflicts.<sup>8</sup>

With Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the Swedish government's assessment of an increased risk of war on Swedish territory, the issue of harm against heritage in conflict and war received renewed attention, which, among other things, is evident in the revival of contingency planning for protection of heritage in case of military conflict on Swedish soil.

## A BROAD ASSESSMENT: FOUR CATEGORIES OF THREATS

The following section summarises the results of the study. It shows that the actor-driven threats against heritage are diverse. They have been divided into four categories: physical destruction, theft, cyber threats, and as a means for influence and subversion. Some of the categories include subcategories.

Each threat category can be found in war as well as in peacetime and they are often intertwined or in a state of flux. The categorisation used in the study primarily serves to aid the reader's understanding of the threat and should not be considered as clear-cut, nor mutually exclusive. On the contrary, several of the threats are even more damaging and have potentially greater consequences if combined. It should also be noted that a threat is always hypothetical until such time that an actor chooses to realise it. However, the perception of threat itself can also cause harm, as it can influence people's behaviour, intentionally, or unintentionally.

### Physical destruction

Physical destruction is divided into four subcategories: collateral damage, intentional attacks, the use of heritage sites for military purposes, and sabotage.

#### *Collateral damage*

Physical destruction of heritage can result from collateral damage, such as when airstrikes on military or strategic targets affect nearby heritage sites. This highlights the need for heritage managers to be aware of what is located in surrounding areas. While advances in weapon technology have increased precision, it is still not guaranteed that the intended target will be the one hit. Several factors are at play, including the knowledge and experience of the person firing the weapon, the number of times it has been used, and the weather conditions.<sup>9</sup> Precise targeting also assumes correct information regarding the target's location and that the intent of those firing the weapon is to limit damage. Conflicts like the ongoing war in Ukraine provide countless

<sup>4</sup> Prop. 2014/15:109. *Försvarspolitisk inriktning – Sveriges försvar 2016–2020*. <https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/proposition/2015/04/prop.-201415109/>.

<sup>5</sup> Overy, R. J. *The bombers and the bombed: Allied air war over Europe 1940–1945*. New York: Viking, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Ingemarsdotter, J. and Eriksson, C. Vi får klara oss själva. *Hotbild och självbild i den svenska försörjningsberedskapen 1962–2002*. *Scania*. Vol. 89, No. 1, 2023.

<sup>7</sup> McWilliams, A. and Legnér, M. Threat assessments and heritage in the age of hybrid warfare, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 1–14, 2024.

<sup>8</sup> Haldén, P., Esparraga, F. and Karlborg, L. *Kulturarv i krig och konflikt – en forskningsöversikt*. Stockholm: Riksantikvarieämbetet, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD). *Explosive Weapon Effects: Final Report*, 2017.

examples of ethical or legal rules being sidestepped, where the intent is to terrorise civilians by deliberately targeting them to instil fear.<sup>10</sup> The severe bombing campaigns during World War II and the many airstrikes in modern-day Gaza are other examples of widespread destruction, which has also impacted heritage sites.<sup>11</sup>

When heritage is hit, intentionally or as collateral damage, the impact can either be limited to smaller parts of a site or a building or affect large areas. Shock waves and fragments from exploded ordnance can cause structural damage or cause buildings to catch fire. Damage to infrastructure connected to heritage, such as power or gas supply, can in turn cause further fires or explosions. The damage varies depending on the building material; stone and cement tend to withstand harm better than wood and glass. There are very few buildings, however, that can endure direct hits, and it is therefore risky to rely solely on assumptions about safer storage for heritage based on building material alone.<sup>12</sup>

#### *Intentional attacks*

Intentional attacks on heritage can have different motivations. Actors may want to destroy evidence underpinning a historical narrative that they do not agree with. It may be a means to create fear or confusion or to deny people access to knowledge connected to the targeted heritage. The results of an intentional, physical attack are often similar to those described above as collateral damage. The difference with an intentional attack is that the heritage is the intended target, meaning that the destruction tends to be more severe.

Results from the execution of this type of threat can be seen in Syria, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. In 2015, the terrorist group ISIS destroyed Roman remains at the world heritage site in Palmyra, Syria, and in 2001, the Taliban blew up Buddha statues in the Bamiyan Valley in Afghanistan. More recent examples are found in Ukraine as results of the Russian aggressions.

#### *Use of heritage sites for military purposes*

International conflicts have demonstrated that heritage sites and buildings are sometimes used for military purposes, for example, weapon storage or to house troops, because there is an assumption that heritage sites will not be targeted and hence are safer.<sup>13</sup> However, when heritage is used for military purposes, it can become a legitimate target in warfare. This increases the threat against it.

Another potential threat to heritage is the unintentional damage inflicted by military forces — whether adversarial, one's own, or allied — during military activities, including training and exercises, in proximity to heritage. One example is the movement of military equipment or vehicles on top of or near archaeological remains, which can cause irreversible damage. Collecting or receiving knowledge about the location of heritage sites in the terrain is therefore vital to protecting them.

#### *Sabotage*

Sabotage can be a strategy used in peacetime as well as during war and conflict. The motives behind it can differ. In recent years, activists have used sabotage to draw attention to the consequences of climate change. Activist groups have subjected several art galleries to attacks. In Potsdam, Germany, activists from Last Generation targeted Monet's painting *Meules* (Haystacks) by throwing mashed potatoes onto it, while Just Stop Oil poured tomato soup over Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* at the National Gallery in London, England.<sup>14</sup> In Stockholm, Sweden, in June 2023, activists threw paint at and tried to glue their hands to another Monet painting displayed at the Nationalmuseum.<sup>15</sup>

In each of these cases, the artwork was protected by glass and remained unharmed, suggesting that the intent behind these actions was not to damage the artwork itself but to gain attention and publicity for their various causes. Because the goal was not necessarily to harm

10 Clausen Mork, J. and Reichel, B. *När hot blir verklighet — betydelsen av det ryska angreppet mot Ukraina för svensk planering av civilt försvar*. FOI Memo 7836, 2022.

11 Legné, M. *Värden att värna*. Göteborg/Stocholm: Makadam, 2022; Koscieljew, M. The Divergent Fates of Wartime Israeli and Gazan (Palestinian) Cultural Heritage: A Preliminary Inventory and Conceptual Analysis of Heritagization Processes in GLAMs on Separate Sides of the Israel-Hamas War. *Heritage & Society*, 1–33. 2024.

12 Paradis, O. and Carlberg, T. Swedish Defence Research Agency, Department for Weapons, Protection and Security, personal communication 11 September 2023.

13 McWilliams, A. *Kulturarvets betydelse i krig och konflikt. En diskussion om behov av kulturarvsforskning för totalförsvaret*. FOI-R--5362-SE, 2022.

14 Medina, E. Climate Activists Throw Mashed Potatoes on Monet Painting. *New York Times*, 23 October 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/23/arts/claude-monet-mashed-potatoes-climate-activists.html>.

15 Holm, G. and Malmgren, K. Klimataktion mot tavla på Nationalmuseum. *Expressen*, 14 June 2023. <https://www.expressen.se/nyheter/tavla-av-monet-forstord--pa-nationalmuseum/>.

the heritage objects, the approach distinguishes itself from many of the other threats described in this report. Nevertheless, it is important to consider the instrumental use of heritage by activists. Protection measures may not always shield against this type of sabotage, and the fragility of the artwork can be greater than the activists assume.<sup>16</sup> Malign actors could also use this approach, for example, using groups as proxies to imitate their actions to cause disturbance or to divert attention from something else. The use of proxies is considered a tactic of hybrid threats.<sup>17</sup>

### Theft

International conflicts show that thefts of heritage, such as objects looted from museums or archaeological sites, are common.<sup>18</sup> This is partly due to difficulties in securing and protecting heritage in situations of unrest. Damage to buildings preserving heritage heightens the likelihood of unauthorised actors gaining access to these sites and exploiting the opportunity for theft. Another contributing factor is that police and security staff are likely occupied with other tasks and therefore cannot guarantee the security of heritage sites, further enabling unauthorised access.

Economic incentives can be a motivating factor behind theft. Heritage is frequently sold on black markets, and trade with stolen heritage can be systematic and well organised.<sup>19</sup> Studies show that social media plays a big part in both planning the theft itself and finding a buyer for stolen goods.<sup>20</sup> Items of precious metal and rare objects are a main target; however, theft is not limited to those objects. Heritage with symbolic value may be particularly sought after, as it holds both material and affective significance. Some objects may be stolen if they are deemed to have practical value; for example, historic weapons or vehicles that an antagonist can use.

### Cyber threats

Since the 1990s, heritage has become increasingly digital, including both born-digital materials and digitised content. Digital material can include metadata, which connects collections and archives to information about them, such as their origin and in what context they were found and documented.

The increase of digital heritage offers several benefits; it enhances accessibility and makes heritage protection more robust, by enabling the digital storage of material in more than one place. In Ukraine, where both physical and digital heritage are under attack, SUCHO, the Saving Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Online initiative, was created to aid in its protection. As part of the initiative, international volunteers cooperate to protect heritage in Ukraine by creating a continuously growing web archive.<sup>21</sup>

Cyberattacks, however, are an increasing threat towards heritage, and they are multifaceted. Cyberattacks, and the threat of them, are present in peacetime but can increase in war or during its buildup. They can cause direct harm to collections, networks, or people working within heritage institutions. The motives differ: cyberattacks can be used to destroy or steal information, and there may be economic incentives.

In October 2023, the British Library was subjected to a ransomware-attack. The attackers exfiltrated data, encrypted and destroyed some servers, and locked out all users from the network in order to collect ransom, which the Library did not pay.<sup>22</sup> In this case, the institution itself was the target; however, a cyberattack can also have secondary effects when a service provider is targeted.

Heritage protection that relies on the specific service provided can then be affected, even if it was not directly targeted. In addition to this complexity, cyberspace is more or less borderless, and an attack can have crossborder effects. Cyberattacks are generally difficult to attribute, making it difficult to pinpoint the perpetrator with certainty.

16 Cain, S. Climate activists attacking art ‘severely underestimate’ fragility of works, gallery directors warn. *The Guardian*, 11 November 2023.

17 See discussion in Treverton, G. F., Thvedt, A., Chen, A.R., Lee, K. and McCue, M. *Addressing hybrid threats*. 2018.

18 Haldén, P. Esparraga, F. and Karlborg, L. *Kulturarv i krig och konflikt – en forskningsöversikt*, 2016; Hausler, K. and Jakubowski, A. Combating Illicit Trade in Cultural Objects to Defend Peace and Security, in: C. Finkelstein, D. Gillman, and F. Rosén (eds.), *The Preservation of Art and Culture in Times of War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022.

19 Huor, J. and Rydell, A. *Förgör de falska gudarna: Palmyra och kriget mot kulturarvet*. Albert Bonnier Förlag, 2023.

20 Haldén, Esparraga, and Karlborg. *Kulturarv i krig och konflikt – en forskningsöversikt*, 2016.

21 SUCHO. *Saving Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Online*. SUCHO, 2023. <https://www.sucho.org/>.

22 British Library. *Learning Lessons from the Cyber-Attack*. *British Library Cyber Incident Review*. British Library, 8 March 2024.

## Heritage as a means for influence and subversion

This category has three subcategories: influence campaigns, harassment and threat of violence, and diplomatic and political use of heritage.

### Influence campaigns

Heritage can be highly valued by people and can be considered part of, or a manifestation of, people's history, identity and culture. This is why attacks on heritage can be such a powerful tool and why it can be used as a tactic that is part of a malign information campaign, propaganda, or other means of influence. Even though heritage appears to be the main target and may in fact be damaged, the intended target is the people who value the heritage.

Influence attempts and information campaigns can take many forms, but the primary goal is to affect a target audience's behaviour, opinions, or decision-making process. This includes many different kinds of tactics, such as spreading misleading information or false content in the information environment or using networks of bots to amplify certain messages. For example, deception can be created by imitating reliable sources or organisations, which can seriously damage trust in those institutions and the material they present.<sup>23</sup>

Historical narratives are occasionally used in this kind of activity. This becomes evident in Ukraine, where Russia is demonstrating its use of revisionist historical narratives in its propaganda, consisting of three main narratives: that Nazis control Ukraine, that the Russian diaspora in Ukraine is under threat, and that Ukrainian statehood is an artificial construct.<sup>24</sup> Similar narratives are evident in propaganda aimed at the Baltic States and Poland.<sup>25</sup> Heritage that goes against these narratives is therefore targeted for destruction or smearing, while heritage that can be manipulated to support these narratives is used to substantiate them.

## Harassment and threats of violence

Heritage can highlight different aspects of history, question established narratives, or open up for reinterpretation of the past as well as the present. This can lead to discussions and debates, which are vital functions of a democracy. Such debates, however, can at times cross over into harassment and outspoken threats against people, institutions, and the heritage itself. Harassment and threats can be used to cause anger and confusion, or to silence specific groups or opinions, and it can be easily spread and amplified via social media platforms. Online hate on social media may include threats of violence, sexual harassment, defamation, and bullying.

In 2023, the Swedish union for personnel working in the cultural sector (DIK) published the result of a survey in which 3428 of its members answered questions about threats and hatred.<sup>26</sup> A fifth of the respondents said that their workplace had been subjected to threats, including everything from bomb threats and stone-throwing to death threats against staff. Projects that "upset radical groups" were highlighted as triggers. As one example, DIK described the hatred that arose in connection with the exhibition *Modest Fashion* in Malmö, in which women created clothes of modern design based on their background, faith, and personal taste. In another example, DIK also cited the identification of female skeletons in graves interpreted as Viking warriors, which sparked tensions by challenging outdated and stereotypical gender norms.<sup>27</sup>

In certain cases, the harassments and threats are rooted in conspiracy theories. Research shows that conspiracy theories are frequently constructed according to a similar format and relate to historical or political events.<sup>28</sup> Heritage can be targeted physically or, for example, exploited as part of conspiracy theories or disinformation campaigns. The aim of the perpetrator can be to bend the narrative surrounding the event to fit a certain ideology or political agenda.<sup>29</sup>

23 For a practical overview of different tactics for information influence activities, as well as methods for identifying them, see, for example, The Swedish Psychological Defence Agency and The Swedish Contingencies Agency, *Countering information influence activities. A handbook for journalists*. Stockholm: The Swedish Psychological Defence Agency, 2024.

24 Shultz, D. and Jasparro, C. How Does Russia Exploit History and Cultural Heritage for Information Warfare? Recommendations for NATO. *Antiquities Coalition*. No. 11. April 2022.

25 Shultz and Jasparro. How Does Russia Exploit History and Cultural Heritage for Information Warfare? Recommendations for NATO, 2022.

26 DIK. "Hakkors utanför museet" – DIK-medlemmar om hat och hot på jobbet. DIK, 2023:2.

27 DIK. "Hakkors utanför museet" – DIK-medlemmar om hat och hot på jobbet. DIK, 2023:2.

28 Pollack Sarnecki, H. *Fascismens gröna rötter – Konspirationsteorier, kris och kollaps*. FOI-R--5161--SE, Stockholm: Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut, 2021.

29 Pollack Sarnecki. *Fascismens gröna rötter*, 2021. See, also, Pollack Sarnecki, H. Lioufas, L. and Jarlsbo, M. *Rutten demokrati – konspirationpropaganda, rasism och våld*. FOI-R--5473--SE. Stockholm: Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut, 2023.

### Diplomatic and political uses of heritage

The close relationship between heritage and diplomacy has been acknowledged by several researchers and is sometimes referred to as heritage diplomacy.<sup>30</sup> Here, heritage is a means to form relationships with other states or formulate and realise strategies and agendas, such as promoting one's own heritage as unique. This is not necessarily problematic but can become so if included in a threatening rhetoric or, for example, used as a way to claim historical rights to specific geographical areas in order to justify certain actions against it.<sup>31</sup> Heritage diplomacy has also caused tension between different states or groups. Criticism has been directed towards UNESCO nominations of World Heritage Sites as well as decisions regarding funding for the restoration of heritage. The process has been accused of being politicised and promoting the agendas of the states with the power and funds to direct them.<sup>32</sup>

Authoritarian states have used heritage to put pressure on migrants to influence a diaspora outside a state's own borders, a kind of "human geopolitics."<sup>33</sup> Diaspora groups often face pressure to portray the "home country" and its history in a favourable light, leading to the dissemination of revisionist historical narratives.<sup>34</sup>

Another area that connects heritage to politics and diplomacy is repatriation, the process of returning human remains or objects of religious or symbolic value that have previously been removed or stolen from their original context.<sup>35</sup> Not all processes of repatriation are connected with conflict. However, the relationships between heritage, power, politics, and security are not always transparent, and repatriation can in some cases reinforce or reactivate old colonial power relations between states or different groups.<sup>36</sup>

### CONCLUSION

As the study carried out by the Swedish Defence Research Agency in 2023 demonstrates, the threats against heritage are diverse, and there is therefore a need for a shift in how we view heritage protection to include hybrid as well as traditional military threats, in wartime as well as peace. Although the study summarised here was primarily carried out to aid national contingency planning for heritage protection as part of Sweden's Total Defence, the assessment and its results also benefit an international audience. It can provide inspiration for a broader discussion of how to understand the threats heritage are currently facing and thereby create resilience and ensure its protection, both on a national and multinational level.

### WHERE TO GO FROM HERE?

To create a shift in how to plan for the protection of heritage, including both traditional military as well as hybrid threats, will require the inclusion of, and cooperation with, other actors than those traditionally active within the heritage sector. The threats discussed above will not only affect heritage, but they can also present a broader security issue, both nationally and globally. Therefore, strengthening resilience against these threats requires consideration of several aspects, both nationally and transnationally. Below we discuss some of these aspects and also provide some suggestions for areas that require future work and research.

The war in Ukraine is a forceful reminder that from a European perspective it cannot be assumed that war is something that happens "in other places"; one needs to consider that it can also happen here. Furthermore, actors such as Russia are using and targeting heritage to reach their goals, while Sweden and Europe in general see heritage as something separated from national security and military strategy. Underestimating this difference puts European countries and other Western nations at a disadvantage.

30 Kersel, M.M. and Luke, C. Civil Societies? Heritage Diplomacy and Neo-Imperialism. In *Global Heritage: A reader*, in Meskill L. (ed). Malden: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 2015; Nakano, R. and Zhu, Y. Heritage as soft power: Japan and China in international politics. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 26:7, 2020: 869–881.

31 Meskill, L. Gridlock: UNESCO, global conflict and failed ambitions. *World Archaeology*, 47:2, 2015: 225–238.

32 Meskill, L. *A Future in Ruins. Unesco, World Heritage and The Dream of Peace*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

33 Ekman, I., Almén, O., Engqvist, M., Lindén, K. and Lund, A. *Diaspora och påverkan från främmande makt – En översikt över fem staters extraterritoriella auktoritära styre*. FOI-R--5436--SE. Stockholm: Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut, 2023.

34 Ekman, Almén, Engqvist, Lindén and Lund. *Diaspora och påverkan från främmande makt – En översikt över fem staters extraterritoriella auktoritära styre*, Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut, 2023.

35 Hicks, D. *The British Museums. The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution*, London: Pluto Press, 2020.

36 Hicks. *The British Museums. The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution*, 2020.

Hence, how heritage is targeted in war is not only a matter of national importance; these issues should also be addressed as a security concern within the EU and NATO.<sup>37</sup> Physical protection in war is still highly relevant. The destruction, but also protection, of heritage in, for example, Ukraine and in Gaza show that planning for how to physically secure heritage is important. It can be concluded that destruction can be caused by many different types of threats, such as the effects of weapons, sabotage, or troop movements. The prevalence of theft in conflict also means contingency planning needs to include this aspect.

One of the main conclusions from the study of threats to heritage in Sweden is that protection of heritage needs to expand to include, in addition to the physical aspect, other types of protection, in war as well as in peacetime. Resilience against hybrid threats needs to be included, as well as against bombs and airstrikes. It is critical to develop knowledge so that people can recognise these kinds of threats in peacetime. This will make it harder to exploit heritage while increasing resilience against such attempts. However, as Shultz and Jaspardo conclude, “NATO and its allies are not sufficiently postured and organized to counter or exploit adversary historical propaganda and cultural heritage exploitation.”<sup>38</sup> The assessment of threats against heritage in Sweden discussed in this text echoes these conclusions.

The knowledge needed to understand these threats, mitigate them, or respond if they materialise does not exist within the heritage sector alone. A diverse set

of actors must work together to achieve holistic protection — against cyberattacks, theft, and sabotage, as well as the exploitation of heritage for propaganda and disinformation aimed at harming both individuals and society as a whole. Combining the expertise from these different areas will not only be beneficial for the heritage sector, but will also provide a vital input in defence against hybrid warfare in general, as well as more traditional forms of military activity. Knowledge of the processes involved in how heritage is created, valued, and managed can be vital in understanding how adversaries are using the past to impact the present and the consequences this might have.

As heritage is becoming entangled in geopolitics, conflicts, and warfare, it is important to acknowledge that the issue is increasingly complex.<sup>39</sup> New and improved plans and strategies to mitigate and combat threats against heritage are necessary. Further research is therefore needed to better understand why heritage, as well as culture more broadly, is exploited by adversaries and what role it plays in relation to various instruments of power. ■

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*This is a publication produced as part of the Civil Defence Research Program at the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI). The purpose of the program is to contribute to the civilian defence efforts through research and analytical support. The research program was established in 2024 at FOI and is funded by the Swedish Ministry of Defence.*

<sup>37</sup> Rosén, F. Putin’s Upper Hand: Cultural Domain Warfare, *Journal of International Affairs*, April 24, 2024.

<sup>38</sup> Shultz and Jaspardo. How Does Russia Exploit History and Cultural Heritage for Information Warfare? Recommendations for NATO, 2022.

<sup>39</sup> Rosén, Putin’s Upper Hand: Cultural Domain Warfare, 2024; Paludan-Müller, C. The Geopolitical Context of Cultural Heritage Destruction, in: C. Finkelstein, D. Gillman, & F. Rosén (eds.), *The Preservation of Art and Culture in Times of War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022.

