

Cultural Property Protection (CPP)

What is Cultural Property (CP)?

NATO uses the concept of Cultural Property as defined by the Laws of Armed Conflict (LOAC). In everyday-language, CP includes objects, monuments, buildings and places of significant cultural, religious, archaeological, historical or scientific value, including ancient constructions, museums, libraries, and works of art as well as historical documents. Places of worship such as shrines, temples, churches, and mosques are also typically covered by the concept of CP.

The concept of CP is today used interchangeable with the concept of 'Cultural Heritage'.



What is the role of CP in armed conflict?

Culture is a fundamental element of and plays an essential role in modern-day conflict. CP can be viewed as the material expression and anchorage of culture and collective identity.

The rise of culture and identity-politics as drivers of armed conflict has in various ways turned CP into targets.

- CP is used as a weapon of war to systematically target cultural, ethnic or religious groups. Examples are the Balkans in the 1990s, Daesh in Syria, Ansar-Dine in Mali, and Taliban in Afghanistan.
- Terrorist tend to choose targets of cultural or spiritual significance: from the 2001 attack on WTC in New York City to the 2019 attack on the Christchurch Mosque in New Zealand in 2019. Odds on, the next terrorist attack will target a place qualifying as CP.
- Big military powers also explore CP as potential vulnerabilities and sources of resilience.

The developing role of CP in armed conflict has received high attention from the UN Security Council, the UN General Assembly, NATO, UNESCO, NGOs, states and academics.

What's in it for NATO?

The protection of cultural property and common heritage has always been one of NATO's core values. The preamble to the North Atlantic Treaty states that the Alliance is "Determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples", thus stressing the moral obligation to respect other people's values and preserve cultural property for future generations. NATO remains committed to continuing its multiple efforts in the field of Cultural Property Protection as part of the protection of civilians' mechanism and the comprehensive approach to crisis.

The Alliance recognizes the importance of physical objects of cultural significance like historic buildings, monuments, artefacts, archaeological sites, museums, libraries, and works of art as well as historical documents that are part of collective identity. Destroying such symbols can shatter links to the past thus erasing an identity from (local) historical memory. For instance, in the Kosovo conflict, one of NATO's tasks was and still is to protect and support the protection of cultural sites connected to the area's cultural identity.



Cultural Property Protection (CPP)

Cultural property protection' (CPP) is not a legal term. The expression is a descriptive label for a range of practices geared towards respecting, safeguarding and responding to challenges rising from cultural property during military operations. Some of these practices are obligatory as a matter of international law. Others may not be. Some of them may aim at protection. Other may involve military strategic considerations.

Often, protection and strategy goes hand in hand. Harming CP during operations may cause a severe blow to the legitimacy of an operation, trigger outbreak of violence, and thus backfire on the mission. The recent Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) against Daesh in Iraq and Syria thus included CPP in decision making support for air and ground operations.

NATO recognizes the link between CPP and the Protection of Civilians. Atrocities to CP and Civilians often dovetails; and attacks on CP is an attack on civilians.