

Severing Jihadists' Revenue Sources Should Be Top Military Priority, NCPA Says

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A doctrinal change in how military strategy accounts for cultural heritage will help diminish an important funding stream that terrorist groups need to fund operations against American forces, and will improve the image of embedded US forces and discourage cultural infighting in their area of responsibility, according to a new report by National Center for Policy Analysis Senior (NCPA) Fellow David Grantham.

Stopping the illegal antiquities trade and protecting movable cultural heritage in conflict regions should be one of the United States' military's top priorities, according to the report.

"Since money earned from the sale of antiquities directly finances the very organizations pitted against US armed forces," Grantham said, adding "all relevant military assets and legal procedures should be used as tools for interaction and preservation."

Grantham asserted "the US government and the Department of Defense should give greater precedence to the protection of movable cultural heritage in wartime in order to diminish the capabilities of terrorist organizations."

"The illegal antiquities trade is often treated as a criminal operation – not a national security concern," says Grantham. "This mindset needs to change. Government indifference and customer ignorance here can be as dangerous as premeditated support for terrorism."

Last month ago, Grantham wrote, "Once treated as purely a criminal problem, the looting and sale of illicit antiquities has recently become matter of national security. The frequent contact between the US military and non-state actors, namely Islamic terrorist organizations, demands a doctrinal change in how military strategy accounts for cultural heritage. The US government and the Department of Defense should give greater precedence to the protection of movable cultural heritage in wartime in order to diminish the capabilities of terrorist organizations which remain the preeminent threat to the safety and security of the United States."

He said, "Set against the backdrop of cultural identity in the Middle East, this work establishes the nexus between movable cultural heritage and the success of military strategy by retracing the historical role antiquities plays in warfare and their current use as a funding mechanism for Islamic terrorist organizations."

