

US Military in Iraq Used Remote Sensors Near Archaeological Sites -- Unfortunately, Not to Monitor the Sites

Levi Keach, a graduate student at University of Nevada, Las Vegas and Iraq war veteran, has an interesting [post on the ASOR blog](#) linking to a presentation he gave at the ASOR meeting. Keach reports on the results of his Freedom of Information Act requests for information about anything the military might have been doing on or around some major archaeological sites. The response he got was expectedly frustrating -- at least they got back to him (I'm still waiting for a response to my 2008 request), and the findings, also not unexpectedly, show no evidence that the military did nothing much to protect sites.

There was, however, one puzzling set of slides included in the materials that the military eventually did provide Keach. Several slides show remote ground vibration sensors. These were available at least as early as 2006. That they are included in the materials Keach requested might lead one to conclude that the military used remote sensing to monitor possible looting activity. Unfortunately, as Keach notes, the equipment appears to have been associated with the site (and therefore sent to him) only because there also was apparently insurgent activity in the area, including the burial of IEDs that seems to have been detected by the equipment.

What can we conclude, albeit tentatively given the possibility that more information might eventually surface?

1. the military did have remote sensing equipment at its disposal
2. this equipment nonetheless was not deployed to protect archaeological sites, despite massive looting.

One further question then needs to be asked:

Were the civil-military affairs officers advising these commanders aware that these technologies were available? If so, did they ever advise commanders it would be a good idea to use them?

I am assuming the answer will be: "No, we were not aware -- but even if we had been aware that this equipment was available, it was not within our remit to hector commanders." Would that have been the attitude of the Monuments Men?

MNC-I Unattended Ground Sensors - SILENT WATCH (Harris Corp)

Role and Mission: Unmanned Ground-based Persistent Surveillance System. Provides close range detection capabilities in situations where imaging systems are not required or not feasible.

External Sensors: Two adjusting seismic sensors and two Passive Infrared sensors provide detection capabilities.

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USCENTCOM FOIA 13-0149

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