"You’ve Got to Destroy the Foundations": Destruction of Sacred Spaces as Preludes to Genocide in China and Bosnia

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INTRODUCTION

How do states use “security concerns” to justify the destruction of sacred spaces? Moreover, is the securitization and consequent destruction of religious sites valid, or simply used to justify human rights violations and other forms of violence?

SECURITY CONCERNS?

- Eerily similar to the Bosnian war and eventual genocide, China projects real security threats (violent separatists) onto non-combatants (Uighurs) in the name of state security.
- However, these ‘security’ arguments regarding religious communities (especially minority religious communities, as in the case of Bosnia and China) are often lacking, and do not provide enough evidence of imminent threat to state sovereignty.

THESIS

Bosnia and China’s ‘security’ concerns are illegitimate, and do not warrant the destruction of religious spaces to alleviate those alleged concerns. Furthermore, the destruction of sacred spaces is not only a form of physical and psychological violence, but a prelude to ethnic cleansing and genocide.

RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) International organizations and regional organizations must take more seriously the destruction of religious sites as a factor that may signal human rights abuses.

(2) Intervening actors must also be willing to interact with local religious actors, and engage religious institutions in religious conflicts in a more sophisticated matter.

(3) Furthermore, actors should closely monitor “speech acts” as early warning signs of ethnic cleansing and tensions.

METHODOLOGY

- Sacred spaces were defined using several religious backgrounds, definitions of sacred spaces as defined by architects, environmentalists, humanists, and political scientists’ definitions of sacredness.
- Theories of Ole Waever’s “securitization” were used to explain the “securitization” of religious sites through “speech acts” in Bosnia and China.

CONCLUSION

The international community must not only establish expectations that sacred spaces are sensitive points of history and connection to the surrounding land, but regional and state actors must make a concerted effort to protect and reconstruct monuments following conflict. Approaching “never again” does not just mean harder work, but smarter work to understand the subtle, more sinister methods of ethnic cleansing.