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Testimony before the
Counterterrorism and Intelligence Subcommittee of the
Committee on Homeland Security

“Following the Money: Examining Current Terrorist
Financing Trends and the Threat to the Homeland”
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It is an honor to appear before the House Committee on Homeland Security’s Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence at the hearing on “Following the Money: Examining the Current Terrorist Financing Trends and the Threat to the Homeland.” We commend the Committee for its focus on cutting off all aspects of financing for terrorist organizations, including from antiquities trafficking.

Culture is increasingly a weapon of war and a fundraising tool for violent extremist organizations, especially in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Millions of archeological, historic, and religious sites in this region—including the Cradle of Civilization—are threatened by organized plunder or destruction from armed conflict by terrorist organizations such as ISIL, the Al Nusrah Front, and other Al Qaeda affiliates. The sheer number of sites provides a consistent source of revenue for the foreseeable future.

Not since the Nazis have we seen more calculated and widespread attacks on heritage, which as witnessed in World War II, are an inseparable part of broader attacks against ethnic and religious minorities.

These terrorist acts against culture —whether bombing ancient temples in Palmyra, plundering the Mosul Museum, or burning libraries with historic texts in Mali—land violent extremists on the front page of international newspapers and generate attention in social media. The propaganda value of this publicity cannot be overstated. These attacks strike at the economies of the countries targeted, intimidate local populations, and eradicate their past and ours—all while bringing in millions of dollars to fund additional violence.

Certainly, antiquities looting has occurred since there was buried treasure. ISIL is not the first terrorist organization to benefit from it: we have much evidence of organized involvement by Al Qaeda and the Taliban going back to the turn of the millennium. But ISIL and its sympathizers have taken it to a new level.

They are intentionally targeting the symbols of our cultures—the very foundations of our history—as a means to destroy our spirit. ISIL’s use of culture as a weapon strikes at the

values we cherish: the freedom of expression and religion. And they are trafficking these plundered antiquities, which have become with oil and kidnapping a critical source of funding, to arm their deadly cause.

The problem is widespread across the MENA region. Many of the attacks on heritage are targeted at its economy, which is reliant on cultural tourism. A slowing economy threatens political stability, a point not lost on ISIL.

In Egypt, earlier this year, a bomb was disarmed at the Pyramids. Just last summer, a suicide bomber detonated his explosive device outside of the Temple of Karnak in Luxor. And the bombing of the airliner from Sharm el Sheikh was carrying Russian tourists, who were Egypt's single largest source of tourism revenues.

In Tunisia, ISIL targeted the Bardo Museum—killing 21 foreign tourists and injuring many more. Cultural heritage tourism, a top source of revenue for the country, has declined precipitously since then which has placed a heavy burden on the economy.

In Mali, Yemen, and Libya, historic libraries have been raided, artifacts pillaged, and ancient structures razed, along with Shiite and Sufi places of worship.

Nowhere has heritage suffered more than Syria and Iraq. The list of destruction is long: Palmyra, Mosul, Nineveh and hundreds of others from throughout millennia of history, culture, and religion, including historical sites meaningful to the foundations of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Priceless treasures from these sites have been stolen, unceremoniously ripped from the ground, losing all sense of history and context, perhaps never to be seen again.

Sometimes, in our work, we are confronted with what we believe to be a false dichotomy: the supposed choice between saving lives or “saving stones.” The director of National Museum of Iraq answered this question eloquently when he explained: "Yes, they're just statues, but for us, they're living things. We came from them, we are part of them. That is our culture and our belief."

These attacks are so much more than the destruction of heritage. They are the eradication of a shared history. They are the elimination of economic opportunity. They are precursors to genocide. They are a crime of war. It is the use of our shared heritage and culture to fund their terrorist activities.

The Abu Sayyaf raid was the confirmation of these linkages between the promotion of illicit digging and trafficking of antiquities for profit and its financing of international terrorism.

The raid in May 2015 by U.S. Special Operations Forces on the compound of the ISIL leader Abu Sayyaf, the group's director of financial operations and proclaimed “Emir of Oil and Gas,” uncovered a treasure trove of documents that exposed the illicit trade of antiquities in detail. These records confirmed that ISIL's antiquities operations are far

more systematic than the opportunistic grave robbing that has taken part in the region for centuries. It also confirmed that ISIL is making significant profits from them.

ISIL's use of cultural racketeering is industrial, methodical, and strictly controlled from the highest levels of the organization's leadership. The recovered papers revealed that Abu Sayyaf headed ISIL's *Diwan Al-Rikaz* or Ministry of Resources. This office includes an entire antiquities department, itself subdivided by geography and specialization. Bureaus have been carved out for administration, exploration and identification of new sites, investigation of known sites, excavation, and marketing and sale of antiquities.

By placing the antiquities departments under the Diwan Al Rikaz, ISIL clearly views cultural heritage as a resource to be exploited like oil and gas. It has created an institutionalized and legalized form of plunder.

Under their established system, ISIL issues permits to loot and sell antiquities, subject to a traditional 20% *khums* tax, a religious levy on spoils of war. Receipts for these transactions, signed by Sayyaf or other top officials in the Diwan, were discovered in the raid.

Just three months of these receipts indicated total sales worth \$1.25 million, or \$5 million on an annualized basis. Counterterrorism experts tell us that attacks such as the one in Paris cost approximately \$30,000 to finance. While not on the scale of oil revenues, sales of these illicit treasures can still fund a significant number of terrorist attacks globally. Especially when there is a virtual endless number of archaeological sites yet to be excavated in the region.

Moreover, a cache of antiquities was found in the compound, awaiting sale beyond the group's borders. Most of these were small and easily transportable, but photos found on a computer showed larger items that had already been sold. Some of these recovered antiquities came from the Mosul Museum with their museum inventory numbers still intact. This is definite proof that while ISIL was destroying artifacts on camera at the Mosul Museum in February 2015, as part of their propaganda efforts, behind the scenes they were plundering and trafficking them for profit.

The organized looting and trafficking of antiquities, or cultural racketeering, is a criminal industry that spans the globe. All countries with a past worth protecting are at risk, but countries in crisis are most vulnerable, especially during times of war.

The United States has the opportunity and responsibility to play a leadership role in the fight against cultural racketeering and deal an effective blow against the overall illicit market. The United States is the largest art market, accounting for 43% of the global trade, and leads world demand for antiquities.

So what can be done?

There is much that can be accomplished—both by individuals and institutions.

I launched the Antiquities Coalition—and we emphasize the Coalition aspect of our name in bringing together a broad range of interests in fighting this crime—to focus on practical, viable solutions to cultural racketeering.

Last spring, we united ten governments in the MENA region, Foreign and Antiquities Ministries, to issue the [Cairo Declaration](#), which is an action plan to protect the region's heritage. This year, we will bring fourteen MENA countries and the Arab League together in Jordan, to explore how to implement the commitments in the *Cairo Declaration*. It will also include the first meeting of a MENA-wide task force, where governments designate a principal coordinator for their country to work within their own governments on this important initiative.

During the U.N. General Assembly meetings in New York last fall, the Antiquities Coalition convened foreign ministers, ambassadors, and leaders in the archaeological, law enforcement, and museum communities for the first time to explore solutions. Our #CultureUnderThreat Task Force was created as a result of these discussions. The Antiquities Coalition will convene this high-level group again in New York this September to continue the momentum for the necessary political will to win this fight. Our goal is to support individual countries in their efforts to better protect their own heritage. Most importantly—we focus on action—and implementing what we have recommended.

In April, the Antiquities Coalition released a task force report, along with the Middle East Institute and the Asia Society, [#CultureUnderThreat: Recommendations for the U.S. Government](#), to promote solutions to this growing crisis and serve as an ongoing resource for policy makers.

The report puts forward a series of recommendations for the U.S. government, the international community, and the global art market. It also details the importance of halting antiquities looting and trafficking as part of the fight against violent extremism and organized crime. Cultural crimes are linked to security threats such as money laundering, transnational organized crime, and international terrorist financing.

We fully support the recommendations in H.R. 2285, *The Prevent Trafficking in Cultural Property Act*, for Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). These organizations are on the front lines of our war against cultural racketeering, and essential to preventing the United States from being a major source of terrorist financing, especially from looted antiquities.

In addition, we congratulate each member of the Committee for passage of H.R. 1493, *The Protect and Preserve International Cultural Property Act*, which will ensure that the United States is in compliance with U.N. Security Resolution 2199. H.R. 1493 will restrict imports of Syrian antiquities so that the United States market will no longer be a destination of choice for conflict antiquities.

Additional recommendations that the Committee could consider include our calls to:

- Develop a coordinated whole-of-government strategy in conjunction with the Executive Branch. A point person at the National Security Council should be appointed who can coordinate with relevant agencies including ICE and CBP, as well as with Congress, including this critical committee, to ensure that policies to halt antiquities as well as other illicit sources of financing for terrorism and organized crime are cut off.
- Shift the focus of law enforcement to dismantling criminal networks through more criminal prosecutions instead of primarily seizing and repatriating antiquities.
- Restrict the import and export of cultural property to designated ports in order to more effectively monitor the antiquities trade. This step has already been taken to better oversee the wildlife trade.
- The Department of Homeland Security could also further raise awareness at ports of entry about not importing conflict antiquities.
- U.S. Customs and Border patrol should work with the World Customs Organization (WCO) to join and further develop ARCHEO, a web based application that allows real time communication between government authorities and international experts to prevent antiquities trafficking.
- The Department of Homeland Security could support State Department efforts to negotiate cultural memoranda of understandings with countries in crisis. These agreements provide the legal basis for closing the U.S. market to illicit antiquities from signatory countries.

These steps are important not only to combat financing to ISIL—but also to other violent extremist organizations such as the Al Nusrah Front, Al Qaeda, and the Taliban, as well as armed insurgents and organized criminals operating in countries in crisis. We must stop American dollars from funding conflict and crime through cultural racketeering. This is not a problem that started with ISIL, and it will not end with ISIL, even if they were to be defeated tomorrow. So we must work together to create a framework for combating the illicit trade in antiquities globally.

I thank the Committee for the work that you are already doing to combat this illicit and dangerous trade, and thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am happy to answer any questions.

Culture in Conflict:

Where can ISIS get \$1 Million?



TERROR GROUPS SUCH AS ISIS AND THE AL NUSRA FRONT ARE FUNDING THEIR MARCH OF DESTRUCTION THROUGH THE LOOTING AND TRAFFICKING OF ANTIQUITIES



ANTIQUITIES SPANNING 10,000 YEARS OF HISTORY ARE AT RISK FROM THIS CULTURAL RACKETEERING



ONE OF THESE MASTERPIECES FROM THE CRADLE OF CIVILIZATION CAN BRING AS MUCH AS

\$1 Million

ON THE INTERNATIONAL ANTIQUITIES MARKET

What ISIS can buy with \$1 Million

\$1,000,000

CAN FUND THOUSANDS OF WEAPONS AND AMMUNITION FOR TERRORIST GROUPS IN SYRIA AND IRAQ AT CURRENT BLACK MARKET PRICES IN THE REGION

11,667

AK-47s

and

2.5 million

Bullets



OR

1,250

Rocket Launchers

and

5,000

Mortars



#COMBATLOOTING

*Weapons pricing data from Terror Asymmetries Project on Strategy, Tactics and Radical Ideologies. Hudson NY
*Antiquities pictured are images from the ICOM Emergency Red List of Syrian Antiquities and red List of Iraqi Antiquities
*Terror groups may only receive a portion of the final end value of an auctioned artifact.

ANTIQUITIES COALITION

MORE THAN JUST DIGGING

DAESH ANTIQUITIES TRAFFICKING AN INSTITUTIONALIZED PROCESS

BLOOD ANTIQUITIES are an institutionalized funding source under the terror group Daesh. This graphic illustrates how Daesh has built a bureaucratic structure to promote illicit antiquities trafficking in Iraq and Syria.

DAESH DEPARTMENT OF ANTIQUITIES



DAESH ANTIQUITIES DEPARTMENT IN MANBIJ, SYRIA

Daesh's Diwan al Rikaz (Office of Resources) has established a Department of Antiquities.

STAGE 1 LOOTING LICENSES & PERMITS



PERMIT FOR LOOTING

PERMIT TO USE HEAVY MACHINERY

Looters purchase a permit or license from the Diwan al Rikaz to plunder archaeological sites.

STAGE 2 ILLICIT DIGGING & LOOTING



LOOTING WITH DAESH PERMIT

ILLICIT DIGGING WITH DAESH HEAVY MACHINERY PERMIT

Illicit digging is carried out in Daesh-controlled territory with the permits issued by the group.

FINAL STAGE ARTIFACTS HANDED OVER TO DIWAN AL RIKAZ TO SELL AT AUCTION



If the Department of Antiquities cannot find a buyer, artifacts are turned over to the Diwan al Rikaz which sells them at auction in Raqqa, Syria.

20% of sale goes to looter
80% of sale goes to Daesh

STAGE 4 DEPT. OF ANTIQUITIES RECLAIMS ARTIFACTS TO FIND BUYER



IF NO BUYER IS FOUND...

IF NO BUYER IS FOUND...

The Daesh Department of Antiquities reclaims artifacts from looter and searches for buyer for 4-5 weeks.

40% of sale goes to looter
60% of sale goes to Daesh

STAGE 3 FINDING BUYERS FOR ARTIFACTS



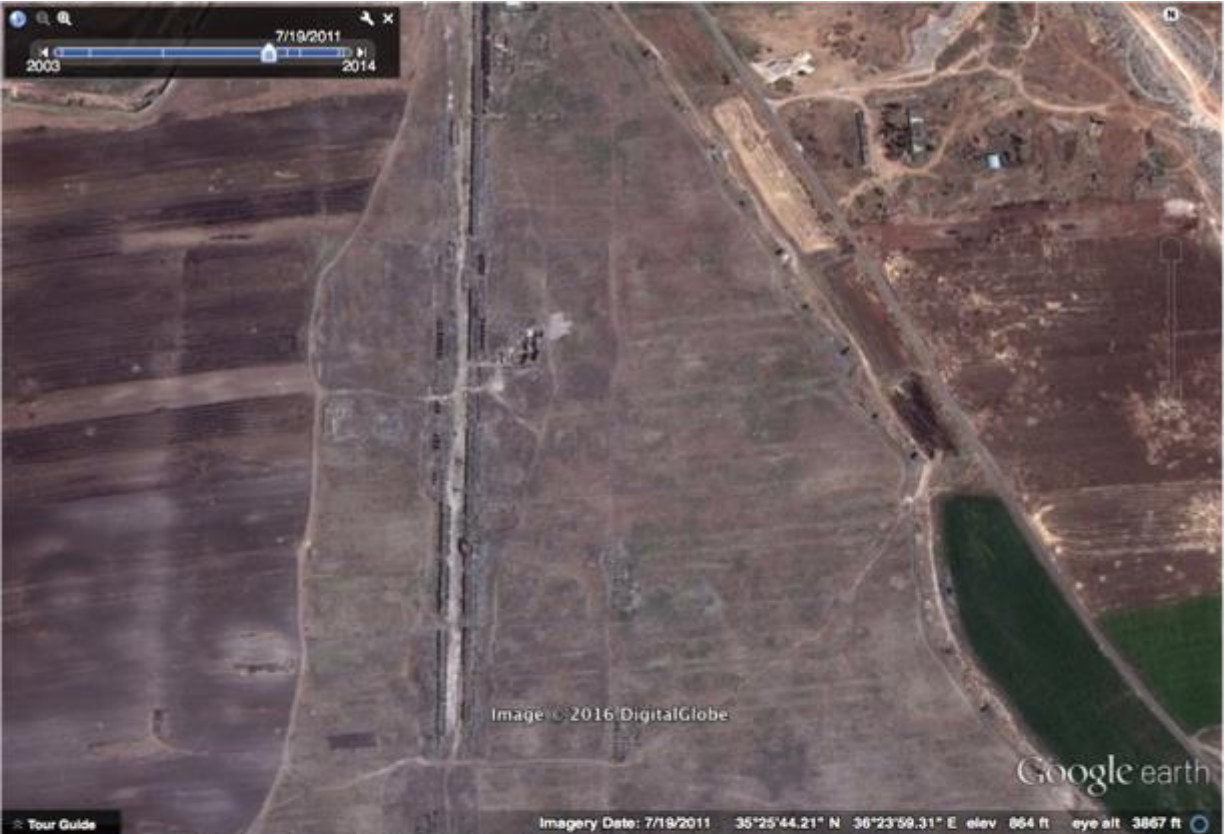
Daesh gives looters 3-5 weeks to find a buyer from the time valuable artifacts are uncovered.

80% of sale goes to looter
20% of sale goes to Daesh

REMEMBER:
NEVER BUY
BLOOD
ANTIQUITIES



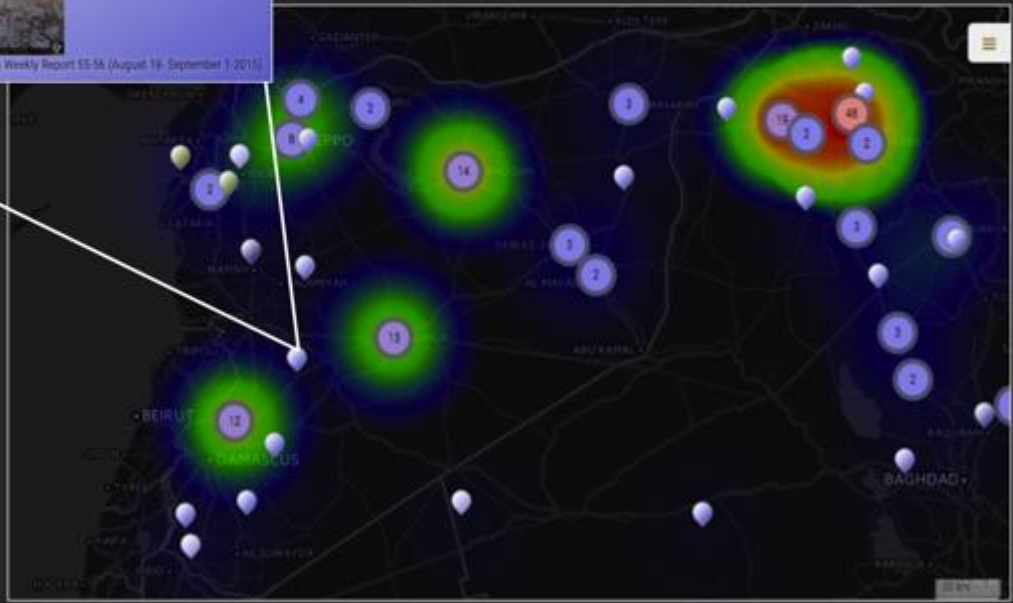
The images in this infographic were taken in Syria between 2015-2016 and illustrate the various stages of the looting process under Daesh (also known as ISIS, ISIL or IS).



NAME: Islamic Graves in Village of Akash outside of Hama
Country: Syria
Date: 06/2015
Short Description: Cultural Cleansing by Sledgehammer
Incident Type: Cultural Cleansing
Long Description: Islamic graves destroyed by Daesh militants in Akash on August 11-2015.
Suspected Group: Daesh



Photo Credit: ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives Weekly Report 55-56 (August 18- September 1, 2015)



Heritage Sites Attacked, Targeted or Destroyed through Cultural Cleansing

ID: 8th Century Statue in Tel Ajaja
Country: Syria
Incident: Cultural Cleansing by Sledgehammer
Suspected Group: Daesh
Date:
Description: A 3,000 year old Neo-Assyrian statue from Tel Ajaja was seized, smashed, and destroyed by Daesh in May 2014.
Photo Credit: APFA 2011
<http://combatforheritage.maps.arcgis.com/sharing/rest/content/items/3bde08dc36418be53318e768088bb/date>

