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Exploiting Cultural Property is an "Important Revenue Stream" for ISIS

“ISIS has developed an organized and systematic approach for exploiting portable cultural property as an important revenue stream, especially ancient antiquities.” That is the assessment Dr. Michael Danti gave to members of the congressional Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade this afternoon.

Dr. Danti is part of the American Schools of Oriental Research Cultural Heritage Initiatives (ASOR CHI). In partnership with the U.S. State Department, the ASOR CHI project has been investigating cultural property crimes in Syria and northern Iraq.

Rep. Ted Poe (R-TX) chaired today's hearing, titled Terrorist Financing: Kidnapping, Antiquities Trafficking, and Private Donations.

Dr. Danti pointedly remarked that “all major belligerents operating in the conflict zone engage in cultural property crimes; however, all lines of evidence indicate ISIS ranks as the most egregious and brazen offender.”

When asked what we learned from the Abu Sayyaf raid that we did not know before, Danti said that antiquities “were the functional equivalent to other resources.” The military raid at a compound in eastern Syria in May killed the ISIS commander, and U.S. Special Operations Forces seized 700 cultural objects as well as documents showing that the terror group engages in antiquities trafficking.

CHL suggests that the best way to steer clear of purchasing conflict antiquities from Syria and Iraq right now is to avoid buying it.

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