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Papers



ANTIQUITIES DESTRUCTION AND ILLICIT
SALES AS SOURCES OF ISIS FUNDING
AND PROPAGANDA

W. Andrew Terrill

Strategic Studies Institute
U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA



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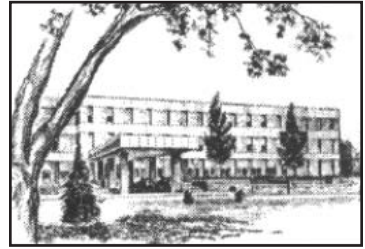


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FOREWORD

The United States is currently a leading player in the military coalition waging war against the Islamic State Organization (often called by its older name of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham or ISIS) in Iraq and Syria. The purpose of this coalition was initially to rollback and degrade ISIS capabilities and then ultimately to destroy the organization. This effort has been made in coordination with the Iraqi government, regional allies, allies from outside of the region, and local anti-ISIS groups including various Kurdish organizations. An important part of this strategy is to disrupt, reduce, and if possible, eliminate major sources of ISIS revenue, thereby hollowing out the organization from the inside while it is under pressure. The most well-known sources of ISIS funding are oil stolen from the areas the group now occupies and “taxes” and fines levied on the populations under their control.

Another important, but less well-known, source of funding is the sale of stolen archeological treasures, which is one of ISIS’s outrages against world heritage (although other groups in both Iraq and Syria are also involved in antiquities looting on a lesser scale). ISIS crimes against important archeological sites and museums in Iraq and Syria include the destruction of cherished world heritage treasures and the illicit sale of many easily transportable objects. The destruction of such sites has emerged as an important ISIS propaganda and recruiting tool, while the unlawful sale of such objects (and some extremely high quality fakes) contributes significantly to ISIS finances. Moreover, allied bombing has destroyed a great deal of the ISIS-controlled infrastructure used to refine and transport oil, harming ISIS profits. Smuggling small, but

extremely valuable items, such as ancient coins, jewelry, glass, statuettes, and other such items, is inherently easier than moving tanker trucks filled with oil across the international borders, and will become particularly important in the effort to keep ISIS alive and relevant as other sources of revenue are eliminated or interdicted. Should ISIS be comprehensively defeated in Syria and Iraq, it must not be allowed to retain access to any source of significant future revenue that may allow it to survive and potentially rebuild at some more opportune time. Hidden relics trafficked along with high quality reproductions marketed as genuine could be the lifeline a defeated ISIS needs to survive.

Under these circumstances, preventing antiquities from falling into ISIS hands or being sold for significant sums of money has become an international security issue as well as a cultural and moral necessity for the world. In this Letort Paper, Dr. W. Andrew Terrill looks at the increasingly shaky basis of ISIS financing and considers the ways in which smuggling antiquities has become more important to ISIS and more efficient and systematized. In doing so, he considers a problem that has often been treated as an afterthought in the struggle with ISIS. It is, however, a problem that U.S. political and military leaders must consider carefully as part of the military planning process in conflicts to which the United States is a party. Providing adequate protection to world heritage sites or interdicting enemy forces besieging these sites is often as important as destroying elements of their battlefield units, since terrorist forces cannot be recruited, trained, equipped, supplied, and paid without a continued flow of resources to their leadership.

The Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) is pleased to offer this Letort Paper as a contribution to the national security debate on how to defeat ISIS, and how to help establish a foundation for a more stable and less radical Middle East. This analysis should be especially useful to U.S. strategic leaders, policy analysts, and intelligence professionals as they seek to address the complicated interplay of factors related to regional security issues, fighting terrorism, and the support of local allies. It is hoped that this work will be of benefit to officers of all services as well as other U.S. Government officials involved in supporting current operations, and that it will be directly relevant to planners working as part of Operation INHERENT RESOLVE. The work may also be useful in considering future conflicts beyond Iraq and Syria where antiquities looting and terrorist financing and propaganda overlap.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Douglas C. Lovelace, Jr." in a cursive script.

DOUGLAS C. LOVELACE, JR.
Director
Strategic Studies Institute and
U.S. Army War College Press

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

W. ANDREW TERRILL is currently a Professor Emeritus at the U.S. Army War College. Dr. Terrill joined the Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) as a Middle East specialist in October 2001 and retired in 2016. Prior to his appointment, he served as a Middle East nonproliferation analyst for the International Assessments Division of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL). From 1998-99, Dr. Terrill also served as a Visiting Professor at the U.S. Air War College on assignment from LLNL. He is a former faculty member at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, and has taught adjunct at a variety of other colleges and universities. He is a retired U.S. Army Reserve Lieutenant Colonel and Foreign Area Officer (Middle East). Dr. Terrill has been published in numerous academic journals on topics including nuclear proliferation, the Iran-Iraq War, Operation DESERT STORM, Middle Eastern chemical weapons and ballistic missile proliferation, terrorism, and commando operations. He is the author of *Global Security Watch – Jordan* (Praeger 2010). From 1994-2012, Dr. Terrill participated in the Middle East Regional Security Track 2 talks, which were then part of the Middle East Peace Process. He has also served as a member of the military and security working group of the Baker/Hamilton Iraq Study Group throughout its existence in 2006. Dr. Terrill holds a B.A. from California State Polytechnic University and an M.A. from the University of California, Riverside, both in political science. He also holds a Ph.D. in international relations from Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, California.

SUMMARY

The crimes of the Islamic State Organization (often called by its older name of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham or ISIS) against important archeological sites and museums in Iraq and Syria are major and ongoing cultural catastrophes. ISIS leaders have stated that they are destroying pre-Islamic artifacts and structures because they are idolatrous, but their motivations and actions are significantly shrewder and more nuanced than this ultra-radical and propagandistic formulation. ISIS seeks spectacular acts of terrorism and defiance to bring in new recruits and to help intimidate opponents on the ground. It also seeks to project strength in order to limit potential resistance in the areas under its control. Beyond these concerns, the organization must generate funds in spite of U.S.-led efforts to bankrupt it. By both destroying and selling antiquities, ISIS is therefore seeking to meet some of its most important goals for organizational survival beyond its current battlefield setbacks.

While ISIS is not the only group looting sites in Syria and Iraq, ISIS actions are significantly more destructive than those of other groups, and in early July 2015, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) warned that ISIS looting was taking place on an “industrial scale.” The funds obtained from the illicit sales of these items have correspondingly been estimated to be quite significant, although they are difficult to calculate with exactitude. ISIS’s ability to loot cultural heritage sights expanded dramatically in 2014. Early in that year, ISIS became the dominant anti-government opposition group in Syria by defeating the al-Nusra Front (now called the Jabhat Fatah al-Sham) throughout north-

ern Syria and bringing the city of Raqqa under their complete control by January 13, 2014. Then, in June 2014, ISIS electrified the world with its northern Iraqi offensive when it captured a large expanse of new territory that included some of Iraq's most important archaeological sites and museums, bringing them under its control. Although attacks on Iraq's ancient heritage were somewhat slow in coming, by January 2015 militants had plundered the Mosul library and burned a number of books in front of the students in a foretaste of future actions.

While ISIS had been involved in opportunistic looting, their policy of destroying ancient sites as a propaganda event had not fully developed until they seized northern Iraq in 2014. This situation changed by late February 2015, when the organization released a short internet video showing the destruction of a number of ancient artifacts with sledgehammers and electric power drills at and around the Mosul Museum. This video was posted for its perceived propaganda value and its potential for impressing prospective recruits with spectacular acts of defiance against more cosmopolitan values. In March 2015, ISIS moved forward with its destructive policies using bulldozers and explosives to destroy the ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud, southeast of Mosul. ISIS then vandalized the ancient city of Hatra 1 or 2 days after bulldozing large portions of Nimrud. ISIS members were seen searching for coins and other small items before the destruction with the bulldozers began. Later, looting was to become much more comprehensive, sophisticated, and well-organized.

Another important site that was vandalized in this time-frame was Nineveh, the oldest of the Assyrian cities. Also in 2015, ISIS vandalized the ancient Assyrian-

ian city of Khorsabad, which is north of Mosul, and also looted and destroyed large numbers of small and less well-known sites. ISIS did not immediately destroy the ancient city of Palmyra in Syria and initially promised not to do so in an apparent effort to gain the loyalty of the nearby citizens of Tadmur, who were known to oppose the Assad regime. This restraint did not last long, and as ISIS consolidated its rule, it began to destroy key structures, including two important temples within the ancient city. They were somewhat disrupted in their capacity for looting, however, since most of the small and transportable objects had been removed from the city before it fell. ISIS fighters in Palmyra also seemed particularly unsophisticated and were excessively concerned with finding gold that was not there. The city was retaken by Syrian government forces in March 2016, but then lost again when ISIS captured it in December while the Syrian government was directing its attention to the fighting in Aleppo.

The ISIS leadership has been exceptionally alert for ways to improve its finances due to its ongoing needs for cash. The importance of black market antiquities sales would correspondingly become magnified as other sources of income produced results that were more limited or had dried up completely. U.S. and Iraqi efforts to weaken and then ultimately destroy ISIS have made clear progress, particularly regarding the interdiction of black market oil. Complicating matters further for ISIS, U.S. Government spokespersons have indicated that ISIS territory has shrunk from its maximum expansion, approximately 40-45 percent in Iraq and 20 percent in Syria, by May 2016. These areas have continued to shrink since then, and by January 2017, Iraqi forces had re-taken all major Iraqi cities and large towns except for the western half of the city of Mosul, which remains in ISIS hands.

As it struggles to remain in control of key areas in Iraq and Syria and to keep its organization alive, ISIS will continue to seek significant infusions of income to finance its operations, propaganda, recruiting, and administration of captured territory. ISIS fighters (and especially non-Iraqi and non-Syrian fighters in those countries) are well paid when the organization is flourishing, and the prospect of acceptable pay is usually among an array of incentives for some Middle East recruits with few options for living outside of poverty other than joining ISIS or another such group. Cutting off this avenue of funding is now especially important because of ISIS setbacks in transporting oil and imposing “taxes” on captive populations. If ISIS can be impoverished, it will be a much easier adversary for friendly forces to defeat in the field. Nevertheless, ISIS resilience and resourcefulness must be carefully monitored as it seeks other ways to expand its revenue base that are just as unlikely as their project of antiquities smuggling once seemed. Additionally, the difference between defeating ISIS and eradicating it is important. A defeated ISIS can still function as a terrorist organization even after suffering significant defeats and sweeping territorial losses. A single important source of funding can at least allow the organization to maintain itself as it waits for opportunities that may once again allow it to expand. Whatever antiquities remain in ISIS hands or can still be stolen by ISIS can therefore be sold as an important part of an ISIS strategy to remain operational and relevant.

ANTIQUITIES DESTRUCTION AND ILLICIT SALES AS SOURCES OF ISIS FUNDING AND PROPAGANDA

INTRODUCTION

The crimes of the Islamic State Organization (often called by its older name of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham or ISIS) against important archeological sites and museums in Iraq and Syria have been major and ongoing cultural catastrophes. ISIS crimes against world culture include deliberately destroying large and sometimes well-preserved ancient structures at numerous archeological sites, including the ruins of important ancient cities such as Nimrud, Palmyra, Hatra, Nineveh, and others. ISIS leaders have stated that they are destroying pre-Islamic artifacts and structures because they are idolatrous, but their motivations and actions are significantly shrewder and more nuanced than this radical and propagandistic formulation. Beyond the high-profile acts of artifact destruction, ISIS is selling large numbers of stolen antiquities in the overseas black market, often in collaboration with professional smugglers.

ISIS crimes against world heritage are sometimes overshadowed by that organization's other high profile forms of criminality, including mass executions of prisoners and civilians, drowning prisoners in metal cages, beheading foreign hostages, executing children, burning prisoners alive, and establishing a sexual slavery system based on the enslavement of non-Muslim women. However, plundering world heritage sites is also considered a war crime by the United Nations (UN), and such actions are an important way that ISIS continues to finance its other crimes. Additionally,

ISIS leaders seek to use such shocking and dramatic acts to help consolidate their control over both the territory they have captured and the leadership of the world jihadist movement. The ISIS leadership further seeks to use such acts to help erase the national identities of entire nations and remove all relics of any historical heritage that conflicts with or even fails to reinforce their favored narrative of re-written history. More broadly, they are seeking to blur or eliminate key chapters in human history by striking publicly at the values of the rest of the world. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and other sources refer to these actions as “cultural cleansing” or “cultural terrorism.”¹ Yet, these goals should not obscure the other major ISIS focus on making significant sums of money through its looting efforts.

Unfortunately, ISIS is not the only insurgent group in Syria and Iraq to engage in antiquities looting. According to archaeologists using commercial satellite imagery, areas under the control of Kurdish forces in Syria and the al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Nusra Front (renamed the Jabhat-Fatah al-Sham after supposedly severing its ties with al-Qaeda) have also experienced widespread looting, while areas under the control of the Assad government have also shown at least some evidence of such activity.² UNESCO Director Irina Bokova has also stated that al-Nusra has issued “documents and letters” authorizing looters to take antiquities from sites located in areas under their control in exchange for fees.³ Conversely, the majority of the damage in the Kurdish area has been classified by most archaeologists as “minor looting,” which has often been widespread but does not seem to involve significant numbers of large excavations, while the dig-

ging itself was carried out with pickaxes and shovels rather than earthmoving equipment.⁴ The looting in these areas by non-jihadi groups has no political, ideological, or propaganda goals. It is strictly an effort to raise illicit funds by selling valuable heritage objects, although any looting is a loss for humanity.

Under current circumstances, ISIS actions are significantly more destructive than those of other groups; and in early July 2015, UNESCO warned that ISIS looting was taking place on an “industrial scale.” The funds obtained from the illicit sales of these items have correspondingly been estimated to be quite significant, although they are difficult to calculate with exactitude.⁵ Adding to the misfortune, the current and previous ISIS-controlled territory in Syria and Iraq includes some of the earliest cities with complex economies, early forms of writing, and magnificent artwork. A number of major ancient civilizations have flourished in this area due to the fertile soil and the availability of water. Additionally, in ancient Syria, the indigenous leadership had important interactions with both Mesopotamia and Eastern civilizations, and with the West, including Greece and the Roman Empire, sometimes creating unique and cosmopolitan societies, heavily involved with a number of trading partners.⁶

THE VULNERABILITIES OF SYRIAN AND IRAQI ANTIQUITIES

The looting of antiquities in the Middle East has occurred for at least hundreds of years, and it is not surprising that many important sites have been damaged or destroyed during the course of wars in Iraq and Syria. Looters and professional smugglers have

been particularly active in Iraq since the end of the 1991 Gulf War following the weakening of the Iraqi state at that time.⁷ In the aftermath of this conflict, the Saddam Hussein regime dealt with a myriad of economic and security difficulties, and protection for Iraqi antiquities became less comprehensive than it had previously been. Thieves also became more skillful and organized as increasingly lucrative opportunities for looting became apparent. With typical ruthlessness, Saddam made the looting of antiquities a death penalty offense, although the profits involved in such undertakings led some criminal enterprises to accept this risk.⁸ The regime itself was also widely suspected of selling some artifacts to gain hard currency while facing post-1990 sanctions.⁹ The chaotic years after the 2003 invasion of Iraq offered even richer opportunities for looting to smugglers already working in Iraq.¹⁰

Syria did not face the same degree of political and economic isolation as Iraq in the 1990s and early 2000s, and black market smuggling in antiquities does not appear to have been a major problem for Damascus at that time. This situation changed with the March 2011 outbreak of the Syrian Civil War, which grew increasingly virulent in the years that followed. Throughout the war, combatant forces usually ignored the protection of antiquities as they grasped for a military advantage. In some cases, hostile forces used world heritage sites for military purposes, such as storing military supplies or placing troops in areas that offered tactical benefits. These actions have often invited intense combat in culturally important areas. The minaret of Aleppo's historic Umayyad Mosque, for example, was destroyed in 2013, after it was used for sniper firing positions. Other sites in Syria that have been badly damaged in battle include the Crusader-era Crac des Che-

valiers castle, the Saint Simeon Church and monastery complex (about 25 miles from Aleppo), and around 60 percent of Aleppo's "old city."¹¹ Throughout the Middle East and elsewhere, historic castles have often been placed on commanding terrain, which continues to offer military advantages up to the present day. In the Syrian countryside, combatant forces have sometimes used ancient mounds covering unexcavated archaeological sites as key terrain for observation posts or areas to set up defensive fortifications.¹²

Between 2011-2013, a great deal of looting occurred in Syria, but it appeared to have been opportunistic, profit-oriented, and without ideological motivations or justifications. Byzantine mosaics from early Byzantine Christian settlements of Serjilla and al-Bara, known as the "dead cities" of northern Syria, were looted along with material from the ancient Roman city of Apamea.¹³ Apamea had a particularly rich cultural heritage and was once the home of Seleucid, Roman, and Byzantine populations. It had been visited by Marc Antony, Cleopatra, and numerous Roman Emperors. In recent years, the ruins had been famous for a 2 kilometer street with over 400 columns (of the original 1,200), which had been restored after a number of earthquakes. Unfortunately, according to UNESCO Director-General Bokova, the site at Apamea had "lost all scientific value" because of 4-5 months of intensive looting by various criminals and rebel groups, including al-Nusra.¹⁴ Additionally, according to some sources, Assad regime soldiers may also have participated in some of the lootings around that time or at least failed to protect the site despite having troops in the area.¹⁵ Elsewhere, more than 1,500 items may have been stolen from museums in Raqqa, the ISIS capital; although it is unclear how many items remained at

these museums by the time that ISIS established full control over the city in January 2014.¹⁶ On the positive side, at least 29 of Syria's 34 museums of ancient art were emptied of most of their treasures by antiquities officials, who shipped them to Damascus to prevent them from falling into ISIS hands. Over 300,000 pieces were brought to the capital in 2014, where they were hidden with their whereabouts reported to be known by only a few specialists.¹⁷

ISIS played no role in the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011 and was not an important player in this conflict until 2013. Rather, ISIS forces arrived in northeastern Syria as a defeated force of al-Qaeda affiliated fighters who had fled the Iraq war. They then attempted to reconstitute themselves outside of Iraqi borders, intending to return to that country after they had regained lost strength with the aid of a strong influx of foreign fighters. This group had named itself the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) in 2006, and it was an important combatant in that country throughout the mid-2000s. Later, ISI was defeated in Iraq after U.S. counterinsurgency tactics improved and, perhaps most importantly, through vigorous action by the U.S.-sponsored Awakening Council militias. After being routed in Iraq, ISI found the opportunity to rebuild in Syria and changed its name to ISIS to reflect its role in both countries.¹⁸ Initially, the Assad regime avoided combat with ISIS, especially while that group was attacking rival rebel forces to seize territory from them, with heavy casualties on all sides.¹⁹ The militants responded to regime restraint by avoiding conflict with the Syrian military, and instead expanded and consolidated their hold over territory previously controlled by rival insurgent militias. Throughout 2013 and into 2014, the Syrian dictator clearly hoped that the West

would be forced to accept or even support the continuation of his regime in power if his most serious enemy and possible replacement was a jihadist terrorist organization such as ISIS. The mutual restraint between the regime and ISIS dramatically ended in the summer of 2014, when an increasingly strong and energized ISIS attacked government forces in an effort to seize territory and military infrastructure controlled by the regime.²⁰

In January 2014, ISIS undertook intensive military operations against the al-Nusra Front in Syria's Raqqa, Idlib, and Aleppo provinces, with significant casualties on both sides despite their relatively compatible ideologies and status at the time as separate but formally-allied affiliates of al-Qaeda. Despite heavy losses, ISIS emerged as the victor in this fighting, and the city of Raqqa came under their complete control by January 13, 2014.²¹ In many of its actions, the ISIS leadership ignored any guidance given to them by the al-Qaeda leadership in Pakistan. On February 2, 2014, the situation reached a crisis point when al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri released a statement disassociating his organization from ISIS, therefore expelling the organization from al-Qaeda. This action was not a significant setback for ISIS, which continued to expand its power by seizing territory from the control of the al-Nusra Front and other rebel groups. Al-Qaeda, by contrast, has progressively faded in importance and is no longer a serious ISIS rival for leadership of the world jihadist movement, except in Yemen.²²

In June 2014, ISIS electrified the world with its northern Iraqi offensive when it captured a large expanse of new territory. All four Iraqi army divisions in the north collapsed almost instantly when faced with the threat of ISIS assaults, and ISIS quickly seized

Iraq's second largest city, Mosul. The ISIS capture of large portions of Iraq's northern regions in the summer of 2014 placed some of Iraq's most important archeological sites and museums under its control. The territory captured by ISIS had around 1,800 of Iraq's 12,000 registered archeological sites, including a number of important Assyrian sites.²³ Although attacks on Iraq's ancient heritage were somewhat slow in coming, by January 2015, militants plundered the Mosul library and burned a number of books (including a number of priceless old manuscripts) in front of the students in a foretaste of future actions.²⁴

The ISIS establishment of a caliphate on June 29, 2014, refuted the existing state structures in the Middle East and presented an alternative to these systems that was supposedly based on the early political structures of the Islamic community. ISIS leaders also declared their caliphate to reaffirm their organization's role as the leading jihadist entity in the world and to express opposition to any form of nationalism that glorifies or even includes a pre-Islamic civilization as part of a country's national heritage.²⁵ Secular Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein had previously exemplified this trend by publicly associating his government with ancient Babylonian kings, maintaining that his regime was the heir of the great civilizations of the Mesopotamian past.²⁶ The ISIS policy of destroying artifacts is correspondingly a repudiation of those who would seek to build a national identity, not exclusively based on their apocalyptic form of Islam. It is also an effort to eradicate any sort of Arab identity in favor of an ISIS-defined Islamic one. In contrast, Syria under Assad has been a secular nationalist regime that has expressed considerable pride in the country's Arab heritage.

As the Syrian and Iraqi fighting continued into 2014, it was not immediately clear that ISIS was a greater danger to these countries' heritage than any other combatant in the war was. While ISIS had been involved in opportunistic looting, their policy of destroying ancient sites as propaganda events had not fully developed when they seized northern Iraq in 2014. This situation clearly changed by late February 2015, when the organization released a short internet video showing the destruction of a number of ancient artifacts with sledgehammers and electric power drills at and around the Mosul Museum.²⁷ This video was posted for its perceived propaganda value and its potential for impressing prospective recruits with spectacular acts of defiance against more cosmopolitan values. Various archaeologists, viewing the video, initially hoped and apparently believed that some of the items destroyed were modern replicas of ancient objects, but they also noted that many such items were also genuine. Later analysis indicated that the destroyed pieces suspected of being replicas were genuine relics that had been partially reconstructed.²⁸ Many of the museum relics destroyed by ISIS were stone relics from ancient Hatra, dating to the Seleucid Empire, which followed the conquests of Alexander the Great. After the Seleucids, Hatra remained important as part of the Parthian empire and withstood sieges ordered by Roman emperors including Trajan and Septimius Severus.²⁹

In March 2015, ISIS moved forward with its destructive policies using bulldozers and explosives to destroy the ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud, about 18 miles southeast of Mosul. Nimrud was founded more than 3,300 years ago by the Assyrian King Shalmaneser I (who died in 825 B.C.) and became one of

the central cities of the Assyrian empire. Prior to the ISIS vandalism, Nimrud's statues and frescos were considered among Iraq's finest relics. ISIS destroyed or defaced many of these objects, including the huge lamassus (mythological winged bulls or winged lions with human heads) which guarded the Nergal Gate entryway to ancient Nineveh. The massive scale of the destruction was confirmed by Iraq's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and by commercial satellite imagery.³⁰ The only bright spot in this tragedy is that many of Nimrud's relics (and other Iraqi antiquities) had previously been placed at the British Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and Iraq's National Museum in Baghdad; and were, therefore, safe from ISIS destruction.³¹ Some of Nimrud's relics were also at the Mosul Museum, where they were subject to destruction by ISIS.

ISIS vandalized ancient Hatra 1 or 2 days after bulldozing Nimrud. Hatra is 68 miles southwest of Mosul and was the home of numerous temples devoted to a variety of gods. Before ISIS destroyed the site, Hatra had a number of elaborate frescos, including some dedicated to the sun god, Shamash, and a number of large temples.³² UNESCO called the destruction of Hatra in July 2015 "cultural cleansing" and a war crime, but such charges were not taken seriously by the militants and might have even amused them. One ISIS member announced on video, "We will destroy your artifacts and idols anywhere, and Islamic State will rule your lands."³³ Video from Hatra showed ISIS personnel using gunfire, sledgehammers, and pickaxes to destroy sites in Hatra, including statues, carvings, and building walls.³⁴ By this time, Islamic leaders throughout the world had condemned ISIS cultural vandalism and destruction of artifacts, but

these protests were ignored by ISIS forces. The clerical leadership of Egypt's al-Azhar University, the world's leading Islamic university, for example, called such actions "a major crime against the entire world," but such statements meant nothing to ISIS.³⁵

Another important site that was vandalized in this time-frame was Nineveh, the oldest of the Assyrian cities. The destruction included the Nergal Gate, which was flanked by two large lamassus and was an especially serious loss. ISIS defaced these statues with power drills, but did not use explosives to level them. Also in 2015, ISIS vandalized the ancient Assyrian city of Khorsabad, which is north of Mosul and was built by Sargon II shortly after he came to power in 721 B.C.; it was partially abandoned upon his death in war in 705 B.C.³⁶ Its huge lamassu was badly damaged. Moreover, ISIS has also looted and destroyed large numbers of small and less well-known sites. When ISIS vandalized Nimrud, Hatra, and related sites, it was not clear that the organization had a fully developed strategy for selling looted artifacts, but ISIS members were seen searching for coins and other small items before the destruction with the bulldozers began.³⁷ Later looting was to become much more comprehensive, sophisticated, and well-organized.

The situation started to improve in Iraq as the government began to re-establish its control over much of the northern part of that country in 2016. The town of modern Nimrud and the adjacent ruins was liberated by Iraqi troops from the Ninth Armored Division in mid-November 2016.³⁸ Ninth Division soldiers also captured the village of Numaniya around a half mile from the ruins. At this point in time, Nineveh, Hatra, and Khorsabad remained under ISIS control. In Nimrud itself, ISIS seems to have made an effort to destroy

any remaining features of the ancient city before they were forced to retreat in the face of the Iraqi offensive. In particular, a great deal of damage was done to Nimrud's 140-foot step pyramid (known as a ziggurat). Iraq's Deputy Culture Minister stated that a special antiquities security team would be stationed at Nimrud to protect the ruins, but this does not seem to have happened. Rather, the Iraqi government's need to focus on the slow and painful offensive against Mosul appears to have reduced protecting antiquities to a minor afterthought. While ISIS did not return to Nimrud, various looters are believed to have searched for valuables there. This was certainly a risky undertaking, since ISIS tends to place traps and mines in the areas that they are forced to evacuate. In December 2016, a heroic Iraqi archeologist was reported to have visited the liberated site several times and persuaded a local militia to provide it some protection.³⁹ In addition, in a rare stroke of luck, Iraqi troops liberating eastern Mosul in January 2017 discovered more than 100 important antiquities in the house of an ISIS leader who either had fled or been killed before he had the opportunity to remove them.⁴⁰

THE DESTRUCTION OF PALMYRA SITES IN SYRIA

The destruction of key sites within the ancient Syrian city of Palmyra constitutes an important case study of how ISIS conducts its war on antiquities. Palmyra oasis is around 130 miles northeast of Damascus and even today is a key strategic site for threatening the city. In antiquity, it was a caravan city at the crossroads of Rome and Persia. The city had become part of the Roman Empire in the early 1st century and is gener-

ally most well-known for Palmyrene Queen Zenobia's revolt against Rome in A.D. 269-271. Zenobia briefly succeeded in holding the Levant and Egypt until her forces were crushed by the Roman Emperor Aurelian, a highly professional former general.⁴¹ According to UNESCO head Bokova, "the art and architecture of Palmyra standing at the crossroads of several civilizations is a symbol of the complexity and wealth of the Syrian identity and history."⁴² Bokova, therefore, makes the point that while Palmyra is often described as a "Roman city," the city's appearance and culture was a hybrid of Roman and non-Roman influences.

ISIS captured Palmyra on May 21, 2015, well after the release of videos showing the destruction in the ancient cities of Iraq and the treasures of the Mosul Museum. It also overran Tadmur, the modern town next to Palmyra, which had been supportive of the opposition to the Assad regime and was, therefore, presumably at least somewhat open to cooperation with ISIS. In 2012, there was even a small anti-Assad insurgency there, which the government crushed.⁴³ The Assad regime had also launched airstrikes against Tadmur and further alienated the population.⁴⁴ Consequently, leading citizens of Tadmur spoke with some anti-regime credibility when they attempted to persuade ISIS not to destroy the ancient city. Historical precedent seemed to be on the side of Tadmur's citizens. Islamic general Khalid ibn al-Walid, a companion of the Prophet Mohammed, captured Palmyra as part of a campaign against Byzantium during the early days of Islam and felt no need to destroy it.

Under these circumstances, ISIS initially did not destroy the most important archeological sites in Palmyra, focusing instead on the execution of captured Syrian soldiers and government officials.⁴⁵ ISIS carried

out executions by firing squad in the ancient theater and also destroyed the important tower tombs on the outskirts of the city.⁴⁶ They further seriously damaged the famous Lion of al-Lat statue that once guarded the al-Lat temple and, in modern times, was placed outside the Palmyra Museum.⁴⁷ Shortly after Palmyra's capture, the ISIS commander there, using the name Abu Laith al-Saudi, stated that, "Concerning the historical city, we will preserve [it] and it will not undergo damages."⁴⁸ However, there were always dangers, and no one could reasonably assume the site was safe under ISIS occupation. Ancient Palmyra worshiped Eastern Gods led by the trinity of Bel (their most powerful god), Yarhibol (the sun) and Aglibol (the moon).⁴⁹ The spectacular Temple of Bel seemed in particular danger since it was associated with a pagan deity, albeit from a dead religion. ISIS also arrested Palmyra's 82-year old chief archaeologist Khaled al-Asaad, who had unwisely chosen to remain near the ancient city, against the advice of the minister of antiquities. ISIS referred to him as the "director of idols" and tortured him in the belief that he could provide information on hidden gold and other valuables. When he failed to give up any such information, he was beheaded.⁵⁰

Despite previous assurances, ISIS began destroying important sites within Palmyra in August 2015 when it used explosives to bring down the Temple of Baal Shamin (a Phoenician storm god). This structure was a beautiful and well-preserved temple, but it was also small. Concern about future ISIS actions, therefore, quickly shifted to the large and important Temple of Bel. This elaborate structure reflected the tradition that temples to especially important gods were often the largest and most elaborate buildings within the ancient urban environment. Consecrated in A.D. 32,

Syrian Antiquities Minister Maamoun Abdulkarim said that the Bel Temple was “the most important temple in Syria and one of the most important in the whole Middle East.”⁵¹ Local civilians, alarmed by the loss of the Baal Shamin Temple, began to suspect the worst and sought to persuade ISIS not to destroy the Bel Temple, arguing that it had at times been used as a place of Muslim worship.⁵² These entreaties failed, and ISIS brought the structure down with explosives later in August 2015. Then, in early October 2015, ISIS destroyed Palmyra’s Arch of Triumph as a part of the ongoing destruction of the city. The arch had no religious significance, and its destruction served no clear ideological purpose. In late October 2015, the vandalism continued when ISIS executed three people by tying them to three of Palmyra’s columns and then blowing up the columns.⁵³ This behavior appears to be some combination of histrionics and a malicious delight in vandalism and unusual forms of execution, rather than an effort to strike at religious “idols” of a competing religion.

The strategic location of Palmyra meant that its recapture remained a serious priority for the regime, which initiated an offensive into the area in late March 2016. Russian and Syrian aircraft began this effort by bombing Tadmur, which had been deserted by most of its civilian populations due to severe shortages of food and other basics, previous regime bombing, and ISIS brutality. Shortly before the offensive, Assad had agreed to a UN-sponsored “cessation of hostilities,” which did not include ISIS or al-Nusra. This cessation – while fragile, subject to frequent violations, and ultimately quite brief – allowed the dictator to shift some Syrian and allied troops to the Palmyra operation. Additionally, Moscow acknowledged that it had

provided a great deal of air support and an undisclosed number of Special Forces troops on the ground helping with the offensive, at least one of whom was killed.⁵⁴ In late March 2016, Syrian forces and their allies defeated ISIS and drove its fighters from Palmyra. After the battle, Russian engineers using specialized equipment and robotics helped to remove mines from Palmyra.⁵⁵ Also, and extremely unfortunately, looting may not have ended with the expulsion of ISIS from the city (which sadly turned out to be temporary). According to a leading German archeologist, government troops may have been involved in stealing antiquities either at the direction of the regime or on their own with officers overlooking the indiscipline. The scale of this activity is not known, and the original sources of this information are unclear, but both UNESCO and the German government have taken the allegations seriously.⁵⁶

Following the March 2016 battle, Syrian military officials described the Tadmur/Palmyra area as a “launchpad” for their planned operations against Raqqa and Deir al-Zor, but the regime also took care to assert that they had recaptured one of the Arab world’s greatest archeological treasures.⁵⁷ At the time, archeologists differed widely over what structures and relics might eventually be restored and which buildings and items were beyond restoration. Syria’s antiquities chief, Maamoun Abdulkarim, stated that the Temple of Bel was not beyond repair.⁵⁸ Unfortunately, the Syrian government was too quick to claim that ISIS had been driven from Palmyra permanently and that restoration could begin. In the aftermath of the Assad regime’s victory, the organization still controlled the town of Arak (21 miles from Palmyra) and maintained a large number of forces in Sukhna (42 miles from Pal-

myra).⁵⁹ ISIS took advantage of this situation to retake Palmyra in December 2016 while large elements of the Syrian military and its allies were focused on the fighting in Aleppo.

The second ISIS occupation of Palmyra has allowed that organization to destroy many of the remaining relics and structures that exist in the ancient city, including significant portions of the Roman amphitheater, which they had previously kept to conduct executions. They also destroyed the city's tetrapylon, which had included four separate columned structures that marked the end of the ancient city's colonnade along its central conduit for foot and cart traffic.⁶⁰ The rapid ISIS strike to re-capture Palmyra further gave that organization a propaganda victory at a time when Assad appeared to be winning the war with its capture of all of Aleppo. Since the war is ongoing, it is not clear how long ISIS will be able to maintain its position in Palmyra or how many more times Palmyra may change hands.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SYSTEMIZED LOOTING IN SYRIA AND IRAQ

As noted earlier, initial ISIS looting in Iraq and Syria was mainly haphazard and opportunistic theft. These efforts became increasingly organized over time, and some Iraqi officials have made the argument that the destruction of high profile treasures was done in part to distract attention from the trafficking of other antiquities by ISIS for their financial gain.⁶¹ Moreover, smuggling antiquities presents fewer logistical challenges than smuggling bulk products such as oil. Small items are especially easy to smuggle and can still be worth considerable sums of money, in some cases

millions of dollars.⁶² Such items include cuneiform tablets, jars, figurines, coins, glass, and cylinder seals and their imprints. One source has stated that in the immediate aftermath of the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, high-quality cylinder seals (which can fit in a pocket) were stolen that could be worth around \$250,000 each on the black market.⁶³ Mosaics can be removed by placing a covering cloth over them with dissolvable glue and then lifting the cover.⁶⁴ Many professional smugglers can also smuggle medium-sized relics without much trouble. For example, when thieves and smugglers encounter a statue or funeral frieze, they sometimes saw it into pieces for easier transportation.⁶⁵ Other times, they can simply cut the statue's head off and sell it separately. Towering statues like some of the lamassus are too large for easy transportation and are correspondingly worthless to smugglers. Sometimes antiquities smugglers and weapons traffickers are the same people, so ISIS would have probably known some of these people before it had seized large tracts of territory.⁶⁶

The total volume of ISIS illicit trade in antiquities is impossible to assess with any precision, although some U.S. officials maintained in 2015 that it might have reached more than \$100 million per year since mid-2014.⁶⁷ Iraq's UN Ambassador Mohammed Ali al-Hakim has quoted the same number, but may have obtained it from U.S. or UN sources.⁶⁸ Recent Russian estimates are even higher.⁶⁹ Whatever the number, ISIS clearly sees a great deal of potential in the sale of illegal antiquities. To facilitate their antiquities trafficking efforts, the organization has established a "ministry of antiquities" to organize looting and make certain that their organization receives a substantial share of the profits from the thousands of small-scale excavation

efforts in both countries.⁷⁰ Some scholars believe that ISIS is carefully managing the flow of antiquities into the black market to prevent a serious glut and keep prices as high as possible.⁷¹ This strategy would also allow the organization to keep a large number of antiquities in reserve to be introduced into the market at a more opportune time. Even so, large numbers of antiquities are entering the market.

ISIS's office overseeing concessions for mining and archeological investigations maintains an "artifacts section," which has imposed a 12.5-20 percent tax on the sale of looted antiquities by professional smugglers working in Iraq and Syria with ISIS permission.⁷² The discrepancy in these numbers may indicate separate criminal groups negotiating with ISIS for the opportunity to loot different sites under a variety of conditions. This tax was initially handled in an informal way, but the entire process of looting and smuggling has become more institutionalized over time. ISIS issues licenses through its archaeological administration offices, which grant permission to look for relics in specific areas and then share in the profits.⁷³ According to a senior U.S. State Department official quoting an analysis based on captured documents, ISIS "devotes considerable administrative and logistical resources" to the efforts in antiquities smuggling.⁷⁴ Once the antiquities are looted, ISIS often works through smugglers and middlemen. Such people have the contacts and the specialized knowledge to sell artifacts to potential collectors and probably get a good price. ISIS has also attempted to sell some looted artifacts online through specialized, clandestine websites, but these efforts seem to be centered on the sale of cheaper pieces that might not have been worth the time of a professional middleman.

Some smugglers working with ISIS in Syria and Iraq are believed to be well connected to Turkish organized crime syndicates, especially in the border cities of Gaziantep and Akcakale.⁷⁵ Turkey has a 565-mile border with Syria, but most of the smuggling is believed to occur in a 70-mile stretch of the border between these countries.⁷⁶ *The Washington Post* reporter David Ignatius has called this area “a superhighway for extremist fighters, cash and supplies.”⁷⁷ Routes used for smuggling antiquities are also known for trafficking people, firearms, and drugs.⁷⁸ In the past, Turkey has sometimes been considered insufficiently vigilant in dealing with ISIS due to strong disagreements with the United States on a variety of issues, particularly Turkish policies toward the Syrian Kurds, which Turkey seemed to treat as a more dangerous threat than ISIS. This outlook now seems to have changed, and Turkey has dramatically cracked down on ISIS as a result of terrorist bombings in Turkey and particularly the dramatic terrorist assault on Istanbul’s Ataturk Airport in late June 2016, which killed 44 people.⁷⁹ Additionally, a 2016 military offensive by the moderate Syrian Democratic Forces against the “Manbij pocket” south of the Syrian-Turkish border helped to disrupt smuggling.⁸⁰

Many antiquities have also been smuggled through Lebanon, and some are known to have been transported through Jordan.⁸¹ Once antiquities are infiltrated out of the war zones, they can then be sold to unscrupulous dealers in a variety of countries. Somewhere during this process, false papers are usually issued for the artifacts indicating a non-Iraqi/Syrian origin. All antiquities from Syria and Iraq are currently subject to suspicion, and some dealers are correspondingly storing this material in the belief that the pressure

from anti-smuggling forces will eventually decrease.⁸² Moreover, after years of warfare and looting, the market for stolen antiquities is not optimal for selling especially valuable pieces. Corrupt dealers continue to buy such antiquities, but they are sometimes storing valuable pieces as a long-term investment for sale in the years to come.⁸³

A window into ISIS sales of looted art was opened in May 2015 when a U.S. Special Forces unit raided the Syrian home of Abu Sayyaf, the organization's top financial official. Abu Sayyaf, who was killed in the raid, was well known for his involvement in illicit oil trafficking, but his role in antiquities trafficking was somewhat hazy until it was revealed in documents seized in the attack. In addition to a variety of documents on ISIS financing and computer equipment, U.S. forces found his house filled with stolen relics, including jewelry, coins, pottery, and an ancient Assyrian Bible.⁸⁴ The raid was conducted quickly, but even under these conditions, U.S. forces seized over 400 small artifacts, worth millions of dollars.⁸⁵ These treasures were later returned to the Iraqi government.⁸⁶ Captured ISIS laptops, cell phones, and flash drives from this raid (and possibly in other instances) have provided important information about the nature and profit of illicit antiquity sales.⁸⁷

Another interesting wrinkle in the ISIS approach to antiquities involves the increased use of fake relics. As the organization began to understand the fundraising potential of illicit antiquities sales, it apparently moved to address any shortfall in such items by sponsoring the manufacture of such replicas to be sold as originals. In late 2016, Syria's director of antiquities estimated that about 70 percent of the "antiquities" trafficked through Lebanon and Turkey were repro-

ductions meant to be passed off as originals.⁸⁸ Several years earlier the number had been closer to 30 percent. Some items were made poorly, but over time, ISIS has employed skilled artisans who can make items such as gold coins that appear indistinguishable from the original items. The use of such artisans to engage in artifacts forgery may indicate how seriously ISIS has planned its efforts to squeeze as much money as possible out of the antiquities market.

Developing countermeasures against antiquities smuggling by ISIS and other groups has been a challenge, but some progress has occurred in various key countries. In Turkey, special police anti-smuggling forces have confiscated thousands of illegal antiquities. From 2011 until early 2016, Turkey seized 6,800 articles looted by ISIS and other groups, the majority of which were coins.⁸⁹ These items have been locked in vaults in Turkish museums and will be returned to their countries of origin when the wars end.⁹⁰ Jordan and Lebanon have also intensified anti-smuggling raids.⁹¹ In one recent operation alone, Lebanese police captured a truck carrying 79 precious objects, including items that had been looted from Palmyra.⁹² Lebanon has impounded such objects in warehouses and has taken responsibility for them as long as they are on Lebanese territory. The Lebanese have also indicated their willingness to return the objects upon receiving a repatriation request from responsible authorities.

The most important countermeasure for this type of illegal action, of course, would be for legitimate institutions and collectors to reduce or stop buying art of questionable origins, but this approach is more controversial than one would expect. Some museum officials and reputable antiquities dealers have argued

in favor of buying trafficked antiquities rather than accept a situation where they might be destroyed.⁹³ While some museum administrators and antiquities dealers have purchased art they believed to have been looted in the past, they have often done so in the fear that the alternative was for the piece to disappear into the world of private collectors, never to be seen publicly again.⁹⁴ Buying from criminals seeking profits is not, however, the same thing as buying artifacts in ways that support terrorism or feed the coffers of an organization that frequently commits war crimes and destroys world heritage objects it cannot sell.⁹⁵ This difference has become more important to law enforcement agencies of a number of countries and may help to discourage some questionable future sales. On the demand side, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has issued a warning that purchasing an object looted from Syria or Iraq could result in prosecution for financial support to a terrorist organization.⁹⁶

ISIS SOURCES OF INCOME AND THE IMPORTANCE OF ANTIQUITIES TRAFFICKING

One of ISIS's greatest strengths has been its often-impressive level of financial self-sufficiency, which has enabled the organization to avoid dependency on external sympathizers (although such funding does occur). Nevertheless, ISIS does need continuing significant infusions of income to finance its operations, propaganda, recruiting, and administration of captured territory. ISIS fighters (and especially non-Iraqi and non-Syrian fighters) are well paid when the organization is flourishing, and the prospect of acceptable pay is usually among an array of incentives for many Middle East recruits with few options for living out-

side of poverty other than joining ISIS or another such group.⁹⁷ High pay and privileges for its fighters also help to prevent desertions that have been an ongoing ISIS problem, despite desertion being punishable by death, but expenses other than salaries exist as well.⁹⁸ While ISIS is most well-known for ruling by fear, it has also attempted to gain the backing of Sunni tribes and individuals in the territory it controls through funding tribal leaders and providing some services in tribal areas.⁹⁹ ISIS has also sought to attract or retain skilled workers and professionals (particularly oil field administrators and technicians) in the territory it controls, sometimes through high salaries and lenient treatment.¹⁰⁰ The financial requirements to address these concerns can be difficult to maintain in periods of setback, but failure to do so can result in serious consequences. The ISIS leadership is aware of these problems, but some fighters' salaries were reduced in late 2015 in response to ISIS budget cutting.¹⁰¹ ISIS also closed some schools and hospitals in territories under its control to save money.¹⁰² While ISIS leaders probably do not care about the education of the young, they use schools for ideological indoctrination, suggesting that the organization may view the school closures as a setback.

The ISIS leadership has been exceptionally alert for ways to improve its finances due to its ongoing needs for cash. The importance of black market antiquities sales would correspondingly become magnified as other sources of income produce more limited results or dry up completely. Since 2014, some analysts have even identified antiquities trafficking as the second most important source of ISIS income, after oil smuggling.¹⁰³ Complicating matters further, oil smuggling has sometimes involved serious difficulties due to the

vulnerabilities of key infrastructure and transportation assets. Some of the oil facilities previously under ISIS control have been recaptured, and numerous large and even smaller facilities and oil tanker trucks have been bombed and correspondingly destroyed or damaged in combat.¹⁰⁴ The Russians also bombed a number of oil-related targets after their military intervention in Syria in September 2014.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, smuggled oil is sold well below the standard rate (or there would be no need for a black market) and is thus especially vulnerable to declining oil prices.¹⁰⁶

By late 2015, ISIS faced additional financial setbacks due to problems with the “tax system” that it had set up for people in the territories it controls. By this time, the Baghdad government had stopped paying the salaries of the Iraqi state and municipal employees serving in the ISIS-occupied territory.¹⁰⁷ While the Iraqi government originally hoped to support citizens under occupation, it was forced to end this policy when ISIS confiscated large portions of the transferred funds. In response to problems with this and other revenue streams, ISIS raised its taxes on civilians in money and property just as they were reeling from the halt of state salaries, previously spent throughout occupied Iraq.¹⁰⁸ These moves helped to provoke a further economic crisis, which spurred many civilians to flee from ISIS as it intensified its merciless drive for revenue and other resources, including confiscated houses, cars, trucks, and livestock.¹⁰⁹ In Mosul, the crisis became so serious that many people risked execution to escape to government-controlled areas.¹¹⁰ In late 2015, the population of Mosul was around 600,000, down from 1.2 million as people continued to escape ISIS-controlled territory.¹¹¹ Complicating matters further for ISIS, U.S. Government spokespersons have

indicated that ISIS territory has shrunk by around 40-45 percent in Iraq and 20 percent in Syria by May 2016 from its maximum expansion in both countries.¹¹² In Iraq, ISIS had been driven out of such cities as Tikrit, Baiji, Ramadi, Fallujah, and Sinjar. Further ISIS withdrawals have occurred since that time, including its ouster from the eastern half of the city of Mosul. While the expulsion of ISIS from these territories represented important progress for the Iraqi government, ISIS continues to exploit the population remaining under its control (perhaps especially in Syria) with progressively more impoverishing taxes.

Many other sources of ISIS funding also appear to be in trouble. ISIS has an estimated \$675 million seized from captured Mosul banks, but this seizure is a one-time prize, and some of ISIS's stored currency has been destroyed in bombing raids.¹¹³ Hostage-taking is also a declining source of ISIS funding, because fewer foreign citizens are placing themselves in harm's way.¹¹⁴ It is also unclear how much help ISIS has received from foreign (particularly Gulf) supporters, but the leaderships of the Gulf states have made a strong effort since 2014 to disprove the occasional charge that they are a "permissive environment" for radical fundraising. This effort has included arrests of radical fundraisers and lengthy prison sentences for those involved in many such activities. Interestingly, the level of fundraising in these instances seems to be relatively modest and not much of a contribution to addressing ISIS economic needs.¹¹⁵ The increasingly high profile of ISIS crimes, including those against Sunni tribes in Syria and Iraq, may further undermine foreign Sunni Arab support of ISIS.

As these other sources of funding face ongoing disruption, the importance of antiquities smuggling may play an increasingly important role in funding

the organization, at least in the short term while other approaches to funding are investigated. In this regard, Palmyra and other sites under their control can be expected to yield many antiquities for some time to come, although ISIS may have to offer more generous profit sharing to smugglers and criminals willing to excavate sites for additional artifacts, should it become more dependent on these people. They also may have to more carefully exploit the considerable museum holdings, which have not always been examined in any methodical way.

CONCLUSIONS

Organizational survival is the highest priority of ISIS leaders, since their crimes are so monumental that they would probably never be able to hide from all their enemies if the organization was eventually crushed. ISIS therefore needs spectacular acts of terrorism and defiance to bring in new recruits and to help intimidate opponents on the ground. It also seeks to project strength to limit potential resistance in the areas under its control. Beyond these concerns, the organization must generate funds despite U.S.-led efforts to bankrupt it. By both destroying and selling antiquities, ISIS is seeking to meet some of its most important goals for organizational survival. It is also possible that the Iraqi officials quoted earlier in this Letort Paper are correct when they suggest that the destruction of large and important antiquities is at least partially meant to serve as a smokescreen for the vast network of illegal antiquities sales. However, for now, both the propaganda and financial aspects of the destruction of antiquities need to be considered and countered. The following recommendations are made with these concerns in mind.

1. Political and military leaders of the anti-ISIS coalition must understand that protecting antiquities is a national security issue and not simply a distraction from other more tactically important aspects of the current fighting in Iraq and Syria. While protecting antiquities and culture must never be prioritized more than saving human lives, this simple binary principle is not useful in situations where an adversary can use looted antiquities to help fund their war effort. In retrospect, the decision not to use coalition aircraft already bombing Syria to strike ISIS forces advancing across the desert toward Palmyra in May 2015 may not have given adequate weight to this linkage. The factors militating against the bombing were also serious, including a desire not to be seen as tacitly supporting Bashar Assad's Syrian army; but the costs of this restraint may have been a stronger and better-funded ISIS.

2. Efforts to curb smuggling and the sale of looted goods must be continued and intensified throughout the world and particularly in the West. The West's insatiable desire for ancient art and relics needs to be refocused away from the blood antiquities of Syria, Iraq, and other looted countries. Simply stated, one cannot protect antiquities by bankrolling the people who destroy them.

3. The United States and the West need to be aware of methods that are not working in the effort to prevent the destruction and looting of precious antiquities. UNESCO and a variety of world leaders have called ISIS actions "war crimes," but ISIS fighters have never shown themselves to be deterred by such

declarations. Moreover, if ISIS leaders were concerned about being tried for war crimes, they would have to change just about everything that they do. The list of ISIS war crimes is now so long that it is difficult to see how additional charges relating to antiquities trafficking could have an impact. In addition, as previously noted, some ISIS members enjoy infuriating the world with these actions. If they are threatened with war crimes charges, this only means that they are irritating the people that they seek to irritate. While there is nothing wrong with a public declaration that these actions are war crimes, it is a mistake to assume that this will have any influence on ISIS actions.

4. U.S. leaders need to continuously assess and seek to counter the resilience and inventiveness of ISIS leaders in their struggle for survival and organizational success. At the time of this writing, ISIS has suffered many serious setbacks both in efforts to fund itself and in the struggle to control territory in both Iraq and Syria. Financial and territorial setbacks are serious, but it is much too early to assume that they will be fatal to the organization or that ISIS will not engage in new and effective counterattacks or morph into a terrorist organization that has suspended efforts to rule as a caliphate. Rather, ISIS has shown a remarkable ability to adapt, and further exploitation of looted material may become an important part of future efforts by the organization to remain viable. Consequently, efforts to limit and then end ISIS looting must be adaptive and evolving as ISIS alters its tactics and adjusts its operations.

5. The role of Turkey as a partner in fighting ISIS may have to be given special consideration, and the United States should consider any Turkish requests for technological support to seal their border to the extent that it can under current circumstances, including ongoing difficulties with President Erdogan. Additionally, it may be possible to expand intelligence cooperation on counterterrorism issues. Although the United States and Turkey have maintained different views of the danger of ISIS in the past, the two nations are now much closer together on how they view that organization. The July 2016 terrorist attack on Ataturk Airport and subsequent incidents have raised Turkish anger with ISIS to a white heat, and Washington needs to be as supportive as possible of Turkish anti-ISIS actions. Additionally, the United States should remain alert to ways that it can help Turkish actions against ISIS outside of the border area, including crackdowns on ISIS recruiting in Turkish slums. Unfortunately, U.S. leaders may not be able to go as far as they wish in counterterrorism cooperation due to ongoing difficulties with Turkey over other issues.

6. The financial pressure on ISIS must remain unrelenting, and the organization's inventiveness and resourcefulness in dealing with setbacks and the ways ISIS might circumvent security measures designed to stem the flow of illicit antiquities must be carefully considered. In this regard, ISIS has remained capable of smuggling limited supplies of black market oil to various interested parties for a considerable period of time after the coalition escalated operations against oil related targets. Likewise, improved smuggling efforts could be discovered by ISIS through trial and error. It is important that ISIS success be quickly

stymied once it occurs—in antiquities smuggling and all other money-making ventures. Future military operations against ISIS will greatly benefit from impoverishing that organization to the greatest extent possible. Hollowing out ISIS by depriving it of funds could be particularly important as the Iraqi Army prepares for the next stage in the effort to liberate all of Mosul.

7. The legacy of the problems with the illicit antiquities trade in Syria and Iraq will have to be remembered when evaluating other insurgencies in countries elsewhere in the world. Now that ISIS has demonstrated the lucrative nature of the antiquities trade for funding insurgent activities and terrorism in Syria and Iraq, other groups or other branches of ISIS have begun either to engage in similar actions or may well do so when the opportunity presents itself. This process has already become a serious issue in Libya. Antiquities looting is also a problem in Egypt, although it is not likely that much of this looting is terrorist related, but is more likely crime related. Yemen, which is currently involved in a major civil war, also has a culturally rich heritage that could at some point be exploited by jihadists operating out of that country. U.S. intelligence officers seeking to support allies such as those with advice and expertise might find it useful to remain aware of the importance of protecting antiquities sites and remaining aware of smuggling activities that involve ancient relics in countries of interest.

8. U.S. leaders must also be aware that jihadist looting and involvement in the illicit antiquities trade in Iraq and especially Syria will almost certainly continue after the defeat of ISIS unless stable and effective governments can assume control. The

large and powerful al-Nusra Front (Jabhat Fatah al-Sham) has, for example, already been involved in the illegal antiquities trade and would clearly expand this involvement if it was able to control more territory. The U.S. Government must correspondingly remain vigilant for terrorist efforts to finance their operations through illegal antiquities sales even after ISIS has been destroyed.

9. U.S. information officials, including U.S. Army public affairs officers in Iraq, should emphasize coalition progress in the struggle to save world heritage. They should also note the FBI and other warnings that the purchase of such objects can lead to criminal prosecution. The purpose of such efforts would not simply be to underscore the positive actions of the coalition military. It is also important to continue to emphasize the costs of dealing with shady antiquities dealers attempting to sell items looted from Iraq and Syria. Moreover, the United States should disseminate any credible information and videos proving the increased ISIS sale of fake antiquities as a way of discrediting ISIS as a source of rare relics.

ENDNOTES

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