

President Signs Casey Anti-ISIS Financing Bill Into Law

Monday, May 9, 2016



Washington, DC – Today, U.S. Senator Bob Casey (D-PA) released a statement following the President's signing of H.R. 1493, the "Protect and Preserve International Cultural Property Act," which directs the President to exercise his authority to impose import restrictions with respect to archeological or ethnological material of Syria. Casey first introduced the legislation in July of 2015. Companion legislation was also introduced in the House of Representatives.

"I'm pleased that President Obama has signed legislation I put forth with members of Congress in both parties to restrict ISIS' ability to profit from black market antiquities. This law will aid the Administration's efforts to put a stranglehold on ISIS' finances. ISIS cannot be allowed to finance its terrorist operations on the back of our world's cultural heritage. I'll continue to press for measures that constrain ISIS' financing operations."

ISIS Antiquities Smuggling

A series of reports have indicated that ISIS and criminal opportunists in Iraq and Syria have sought to profit from looting antiquities and selling them illegally on the black market. According to the State Department, on May 15, 2015, U.S. Special Operations Forces recovered a cache of hundreds of archaeological and historical objects and fragments during a raid in al-Amr (eastern Syria) to capture ISIS leader Abu Sayyaf.

As a recent [report](#) from the #CultureUnderThreat Task Force states, "[ISIS's] cultural racketeering is industrial, methodical, and strictly controlled from the highest levels of the organization's leadership... While [ISIS] was destroying artifacts on camera, as part of their propaganda and recruitment efforts, behind the scenes they were plundering and trafficking them for profit."

It has been reported that ISIS collects a tax on antiquities excavated and smuggled out of its territory. Artifacts are sold to ISIS-approved dealers, who complete the transaction in U.S. dollars, and are then granted safe passage through ISIS territory.

Some U.S. estimates have placed the total volume of illicit trade at more than \$100 million a year. While government officials say that the majority of the trade is run by the Islamic State, reports suggest that many groups, including portions of the Syrian government, other combatants, criminal networks also smuggle or trade in antiquities.

Why Was this legislation necessary?

The U.S. is a party to a 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. In 1982, Congress passed the Convention on Cultural Property Implementation Act (CPIA), which enabled the U.S. government to implement the UNESCO convention.

The United States is a market for antiquities. One provision of CPIA gives the State Department authority to enter into memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with foreign countries to help protect their antiquities by restricting the import of certain items to the United States. Since the U.S. doesn't have diplomatic relations with the Assad regime, a traditional MOU cannot be entered into. Section 8 of the legislation gives the Administration the authority to impose import restrictions on Syrian antiquities, waiving the provisions of current law that require a request from the country of origin.