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News Transcript

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Briefing on the Investigation of Antiquity Loss from the Baghdad Museum

(Briefing slides used in this briefing are available at: <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Sep2003/g030910-D-6570C.html>. A photo from today's briefing is located at <http://www.defenselink.mil/photos/Sep2003/030910-D-2987S-025.html>.)

Staff: Well, good morning. It's a light crowd. I trust that some of your colleagues are listening from their booths, and we may have some that join us in progress here.

But today we have kind of a special treat, and he's not a stranger to this room, although this is the first time that we've had him in person, I think, in here. Colonel Matthew Bogdanos is the person that has been leading the U.S. government's investigation into the theft and looting of the Iraqi museum in Baghdad. It is a duty that he is uniquely qualified to do. Before being called to active duty after the September 11th attacks, he was a homicide prosecutor for the New York City District Attorney's Office, and he has a graduate degree in classical studies from Columbia University. And I think you'll agree that -- we're here for his interim report, and you'll see today that he is very much expert in this area.

In May -- it was in May that he presented the team's preliminary findings, and his final report is -- he is nearing completion of his final report; it's in its final review. But he has been gracious enough to offer his time today to come and talk about it.

As I read the report, I was taken back by the complexity of the challenges, and I was impressed with the progress and the results and the accomplishments that the team was able to achieve, recovering nearly 3,500 artifacts in four different countries during the last five months.

He'll talk a bit about the ongoing effort, and I'll stop now. But this part of the investigative work and his work is coming to a close. But there is an ongoing international effort that will continue as we work to return all of these priceless treasures to the Iraqi people.

So, with that, let me turn it over to the real expert here and welcome Colonel Matthew Bogdanos.

Bogdanos: Good morning, all. What I'd like to do this morning, if I could, is start by going through the report. I have a series of slides, photographs mostly, from the museum and from Baghdad, illustrating certain aspects of the investigation. Once I'm done, then I'd like to take any questions you may have.

As we all recall, in mid-April of this year, it was widely reported that over 170,000 artifacts had been stolen or looted from the museum in Baghdad. After fierce fighting, U.S. forces finally secured the area surrounding the museum, and on the 16th of April, a tank platoon was positioned on the museum compound to prevent any further damage.

The U.S. government then dispatched a 13-member team from U.S. Central Command, the Joint Interagency Task Force, made up of 10 different federal agencies. They were 13 members altogether. They were four military and nine Customs or Immigrations and Customs Enforcement agents that were sent to begin the investigation and to begin the recovery of the items.

From the outset, the primary goal of this investigation has been the recovery of the items, the missing and stolen antiquities, and not necessarily criminal prosecution. The methodology was tailored accordingly, and it comprised four components. First was to determine precisely what was missing. Second was to disseminate photographs of those missing items to the international law enforcement and art communities to aid in interdiction and confiscation. Third was to initiate community outreach with religious and community leaders and enlist your aid as well as theirs in promoting an amnesty or no-questions-asked policy. And finally, to develop leads in the Baghdad community and then conduct raids based on that information on targeted locations.

Each of these separate four components has had its challenges, and each has had its successes. Foremost among the challenges, as you are all intimately aware, has been to determine precisely what is missing. In part, this is because of the sheer size of the museum's collection. In part, it is also because the museum has not only cataloged items, but items from excavation sites throughout the country that have not yet been cataloged. And finally, it was because of the museum's antiquated manual and incomplete inventory system prior to the war.

The reality is that after five months into the investigation, we still do not have a complete inventory of precisely what is missing. We can, however, make some findings based on what we know about the inventory today. The inventory, of course, is being completed on a daily basis, with the help of American, British and Italian archeologists and museum specialists.

The second component to that investigation -- to the investigation so far has been the dissemination of photographs of the missing items. That, too, has proven problematic, largely because many of the items simply didn't have photographs, or if they were photographs, they were of poor quality; or, if they were photographs, they were frequently destroyed during the looting. We have, however, disseminated photographs to the international law enforcement and art communities, and where a photograph did not exist, we provided photographs of virtually identical or similar items. The goal here was simply to make the stolen items as recognizable as possible throughout the world.

The third component and really the heart of the investigation so far has been the amnesty, or "no questions asked," policy. Towards this end, the team has met with local Imams and community leaders, who have assisted this investigation tremendously by communicating the policy of amnesty throughout the -- Baghdad and throughout Iraq so that individuals can return items without any fear of retribution or criminal prosecution.

While it has proven enormously successful -- to date over 1,700 items have been returned pursuant to the amnesty program -- there have been problems here, as well. Specifically, the problems were the perception among the Iraqi people of the museum staff's identification and association with the former regime and the Ba'ath Party. Time and time again when individuals would turn property over, they would make it clear that they were turning the property over to the U.S. forces for safekeeping until a lawful Iraqi government could be elected.

The fourth and final component of this investigation involves raids and seizures. They have also borne fruit. The raids on targeted locations in Iraq based on information given to us by Iraqis have resulted in the recovery of over 900 separate artifacts. This simply would not have been possible without the overwhelming support received from and the mutual sense of trust developed with the Iraqi people in and around Baghdad.

Seizures at checkpoints, airports and international border crossings have proven equally successful, largely as a result of the dissemination of the photographs of the items. So far, over 750 artifacts have been recovered in four different countries.

Turning now to the chronology of events. Years before Iraqi freedom, most of the gold and jewelry that was kept at the museum was removed to the Central Bank of Iraq. It was moved in 21 separate boxes. Sixteen of those boxes contained the royal family collection of gold and jewelry, approximately 6,744 pieces, placed in one of the underground vaults of the central bank. A second set of five boxes contained the fabled Treasure of Nimrud and the original golden bull's head from the Golden Harp of Ur.

The vaults themselves were flooded prior to the team's arrival in Baghdad, but with the assistance of Mr. Jason Williams and his National Geographic crew, we pumped out the water -- took three weeks to pump out the water from the underground vaults -- and ultimately were able to gain entry into the vaults. And in a moment that can only be characterized as sheer joy, we opened each of those boxes and found the treasure of Nimrud completely there, intact. And ultimately it was able to be displayed at the one-day opening we had on the 3rd of July.

Months before the war, the staff moved all of the manuscripts from the museum in 337 boxes, totalling 39,453 manuscripts, parchment, vellum and the like. They moved it to a bomb shelter in western Baghdad. On the 26th of April, we located that bomb shelter and began to arrange for the return of those items to the museum.

The members of the community, when we went there, grew concerned about returning those items of the museum, again, because of the identification with the Ba'ath Party. And they asked us to allow them, as a matter of honor, to keep those items in the bomb shelter, with their promise that they would provide a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week neighborhood community watch. To this day, they do that, and to this day, those items are safely kept in that bomb shelter, under the watchful protection of that community watch.

Weeks before the war, the staff moved 179 boxes containing 8,366 of the more priceless artifacts from the display cases in the museum itself. They moved those items to a secret place, and you will recall that on May 16th, when I last spoke to you, we had not learned the location of this secret place, because the senior museum -- five senior museum staff members had sworn on the Koran not to reveal the location of the secret place.

After weeks and months of developing and building a trust with the museum staff, we were able to gain access to the secret place on the 4th of June. And when we did, we found that all 179 boxes were present and all of their contents accounted for. Those items have been returned to that secret place and will be placed on display in the museum once the security is sufficient.

As for the looting period itself, the evidence shows the following:

On the 8th of April, the last of the museum staff left the museum. U.S. forces then became engaged in intense combat with Iraqi forces that fought from the museum grounds and from a nearby Special Republican Guard compound across the street. It was during this period that the looting took place, between the 9th of April and the 12th of April. It ended on the 12th of April when several museum staff returned to the museum. The keys to the museum, that had previously been locked away in the director's safe in the administrative offices, were gone and they've never been found since.

U.S. forces entered the compound, as I said, on the 16th of April, and we began the investigation on the 22nd of April.

Turning now to the losses. I stress, as I have for the last five months, that the loss of a single piece of our shared heritage is an absolute tragedy. But it is abundantly clear that the original number of 170,000 missing artifacts was simply wrong. But again I stress, numbers simply cannot tell the whole story, nor should they be the sole determinant used to assess the extent of the damage or of the recovery itself.

For example, it is simply impossible to quantify the loss of the world's first known Samarian mask of a female deity. That's one number; you cannot possibly quantify it, and it is irreplaceable. On the other hand, a single clay pot recovered at an archeological site in 25 separate pieces, depending on the circumstances under which it is

recovered, counts as 25 separate pieces -- each bead, each pin, each amulet, each pendant counts as a separate piece. So numbers simply cannot tell the whole story. They do, however, offer, used appropriately, a metric with which we can assess what indeed has been done, and what so far is being recovered.

And this is what we found. In the administrative area, all of the offices were ransacked. All of the equipment was stolen or destroyed. All of the safes were emptied or destroyed. Fires were lit throughout the museum. We saw the same level of destruction in the administrative offices that we saw in presidential palaces and buildings identified with the former regime throughout Iraq.

Turning to the public galleries, however, you don't see anywhere near that level of destruction. The staff, as I mentioned, had previously emptied all of the display cases. So, of the 451 display cases, only 28 of them were damaged. All of them had been emptied. Those items that were too large to be moved by the museum staff were covered with foam padding and laid on their sides in order to prevent any damage.

From the galleries themselves, 40 pieces or 40 exhibits were stolen, most notably among those, the famous Bassetki Statue from approximately 2300 B.C., and the Roman heads of Poseidon, Apollo, Nike and Eros.

Of the original 40 missing items, 10 have been recovered, including the Sacred Vase of Warka, an exquisite white limestone votive vase dating from approximately 3200 B.C., and arguably the most significant piece possessed by the museum. While it was damaged during the looting and during its theft, it should be noted that the vase was returned on 11 June, pursuant to the amnesty program. It was in exactly the same condition it was when it was found by German archeologists at Al Samawa in 1940. In other words, there's no additional damage, and this item, the sacred vase, can and will be restored by the museum staff.

Also recovered during the investigation is one of the oldest known bronze relief bulls, and my favorite, two pottery jars from the 6th millennium B.C. from **Tell Hassuna**.

Unfortunately, 30 exhibits from the main gallery, 30 display-quality, irreplaceable pieces, are still missing from the museum. Another 16 pieces were damaged, most notably, the Golden Harp of Ur, although its golden bull's head, as I mentioned, had previously been removed. And you can see the harp on the left there in three pieces, and then you can see the golden bull's head. That photograph was taken when we uncovered the Treasure of Nimrud in the underground vaults of the Central Bank of Iraq. The Golden Harp itself can also be restored.

In turning to the Heritage Room, consisting of more recent scrolls and Islamic antique furniture and fine porcelain, 236 pieces were originally stolen. We've recovered 164, which leaves 72 still missing.

Turning then to the restoration and registration rooms, which were temporary storage areas -- (to staff) next side please Senior -- temporary storage areas, we found 199 pieces originally missing, of which we've recovered 118, leaving 81 still missing. It was in this room that the Golden Harp of Ur and several delicate ivories were kept and subsequently damaged during the looting.

The museum also, in addition to the public galleries themselves, had eight storage rooms. Of the eight, only five were entered, and only three had anything missing. Because these rooms contain tens of thousands of clay pots, pottery shards, copper and bronze weapons, tools, statuettes and pieces, as you're looking at now, the inventory is simply not complete. It contains items both from museum-sponsored excavations as well as from internationally sponsored excavations. The inventory in these rooms will take months to complete.

However, we can make several findings, based on what we know now. The first- and second-level storage rooms were looted but show no signs of entry on their -- forced -- on their shared exterior doors. And you see those doors before you. Either the door -- neither the door leading from the museum floor to the storage area nor the door leading from the storage area to the back alleyway were forced or showed any signs of forced opening. The keys to these doors were last seen in the director's safe and are now missing.

Some shelves were disturbed in the storage rooms. Boxes were turned upside down. Contents were emptied on the floor.

In the two storage rooms that I've just described, 2,703 excavation site pieces -- jars, vessels, pottery shards, statuettes and the like -- were stolen, of which 2,449 have been recovered, and -- (to staff) -- next please -- 254 remain missing.

It was in the second-floor storage room that the investigation discovered evidence of its use as a firing or sniper position. The team found a window slit broken open from the inside, with boxes pressed up against the wall, placing the window opening at shooter's height. This particular window is one of only two windows in the entire museum that offers a clear field of fire onto the street that runs along the western side of the museum and down which U.S. and coalition forces passed.

Found near this window were RPG parts, an ammunition box, an AK-47 magazine, grenade pouch and a dud -- a grenade that turned out to be a dud.

This finding -- and you see in the far -- the photo -- of the position from the inside and then, in this next photo, the position from the outside -- this finding of a sniper position within the museum is consistent with the discovery of a box of RPGs on the roof of the museum library and another box of RPGs on the roof of the children's museum. This latter building, the children's museum, a separate building in the compound, was the building from which RPGs were fired at U.S. forces during the looting period. These findings are also supported by the team's discovery of more than 15 Iraqi Army uniforms and additional RPGs in the museum's garage.

I point out that the investigation has uncovered no evidence that any fighters entered the museum before the staff left on the 8th of April and no evidence that any member of the staff assisted Iraqi forces in entering the museum or in building the various fighting positions found inside and surrounding the museum. There are actually four additional fighting positions, two in front of the museum and two in the back.

Turning to the basement-level storage room, on the other hand, the evidence here strongly suggests not random looters, as in the other magazines, but rather the evidence here suggests thieves with an intimate knowledge of the museum and its storage procedures. I have a diagram of the basement up here for you.

It is here, in the basement magazine, that they attempted to steal the most traffickable and easily transportable items stored in the most remote corner of the most remote room in the basement of the museum. The front door of this basement room was intact and unforced, but its bricked rear doorway, accessed only through a remote, narrow and hidden stairwell, was broken and entered. This storage area actually has four rooms, three of which -- (talking to himself) that doesn't work, you can see the L-shaped rooms. (Showing slides.) On the far side, if you start from the far side and you count one, two, three, four, the L-shaped, it's the second room that was entered. The other three rooms, containing tens of thousands of priceless pieces, were simply not touched.

However, the fourth room was also virtually untouched, except for one remote corner where 103 small plastic boxes originally containing cylinder seals, loose beads, amulets, small glass bottles and jewelry had been emptied, while hundreds and hundreds of surrounding larger, but empty, cardboard boxes -- (to staff) next, please -- as you see there, were completely untouched. The thieves here had keys that had previously been hidden elsewhere in the museum, not the keys that were in the museum director's safe; a separate set of keys that was established by the museum as a safety procedure to have a second set of keys for these cabinets. They were hidden elsewhere in the museum. That hiding place was known to only several people in the museum. Whoever did this had those keys.

These keys were to 30 storage cabinets that lined that particular corner of the room. It's the brown storage cabinets that you see before you. Those cabinets contained arguably the world's finest collection of absolutely exquisite cylinder seals and the world's finest collection of Greek, Roman, Islamic and Arabic gold and silver coins.

Ironically, the thieves here appeared to have lost the keys to those cabinets by dropping them in one of the plastic boxes that lined the floor. There was no electricity at the time in the museum during this period, so the thieves lit the foam padding for light. After frantically and unsuccessfully searching for the keys in the fire-lit room, breathing in the noxious fumes from the foam and throwing those boxes in every direction, they were unable to gain access to the storage cabinets.

We ultimately found the keys under the debris after a methodically, fully lit and hours-long search. Upon inspecting those cabinets, and opening each one with absolutely bated breath, we learned that not a single cabinet had been entered and a catastrophic loss narrowly averted.

However, the contents of the plastic boxes were taken by the thieves. Those boxes, while -- the contents, while not of the same caliber as the items in the storage cabinets, were nonetheless valuable in their own right. All together from those boxes, there were 4,997 pins, beads, amulets and pendants, and 4,795 cylinder seals. An additional 500 smaller pottery pieces and bronze weapons from the shelves were also taken. So, from this room alone, 10,337 pieces were stolen, of which, 667 have been recovered.

It is from this room we also recovered a set of readable fingerprints. Those fingerprints were sent to the FBI lab for comparison against all known databases, to include all U.S. military forces. There are no matches in the U.S. databases for those fingerprints. Members of the staff who had immediate access to that storage room were also fingerprinted and compared against those prints, and there are also no matches. Those prints remain on file for future use.

Thus, in viewing the evidence as a whole, the antiquities stolen from the museum appear to fall into three broad categories, strongly suggesting three different dynamics at work in the theft.

First are the 40 exhibits stolen from the public galleries. Here the thieves were clearly selective and discriminate in their choice of artifacts, stealing the most valuable items, while bypassing copies and less valuable items.

Second are the 3,138 pieces stolen from the storage rooms on the first and second floors. The pattern here was indiscriminate and random. Entire shelves were emptied, while adjacent shelves were untouched. Entire shelves that had priceless antiquities were untouched, while an adjacent shelf that had nothing but fakes were taken and emptied. We found entire shelves or partial shelves with arm sweeps through the dust on the shelf, as if they were sweeping the items into a bag, and then we would find that very bag at the end of the storage room, and the shelf next to that bag emptied, as if they had seen something they liked better.

Virtually all of the items returned under the amnesty program -- by the way, further indicating the random, indiscriminate nature of this looting in these two storage rooms, virtually all of the items returned under the amnesty program come from these rooms, come from neighborhood residents.

The third category, the third dynamic at play here are the over 10,000 pieces from the basement storage room. It is simply inconceivable that this area was found, breached and entered, or that the unmarked keys were found by anyone who did not have an intimate, insider's knowledge of the museum and its storage practices in general, and of that corner of the basement and the contents of those specific, unmarked, nondescript cabinets in particular.

None of this, this separation into different dynamics, is intended to suggest that there is not some overlap among the categories. Surely, some of the -- it's called an insiders, could have taken more valuable items from the display floor, as well as random looters may have fortuitously taken items from the floor. It is also not to suggest that there is or is not a connection among the various dynamics at play. For example, the professional thieves, that is those who knew what they were looking for in the public galleries and took the display quality pieces, may very well

have left the doors open to the museum in the hope or expectation that individuals would come in, engage in looting, thereby covering up any evidentiary trails.

Rather, the differentiation among the different dynamics at play here offers an analytical basis upon which to fashion a methodology to recover the items. Those items stolen by looters, for example, are most likely to be recovered locally, in and around Baghdad and throughout Iraq, through the amnesty program and other community outreach programs, as well as through developing local informants and conducting targeted raids. As I said, 99 percent of all of the items that we've recovered in Iraq have come from this random or indiscriminate looting of the two storage rooms.

The higher value, more recognizable exhibits, on the other hand, demand a different approach. Because they have a far more limited market, one of the primary ways to recover these items would be through identifying and monitoring the buyers, and by continuing to develop confidential sources within the art smuggling community, just like we would in the drug smuggling community, in order to track, recover and return these pieces. Thorough border inspections and searches also play a crucial role in interdicting these higher value items.

Turning to the 10,000 smaller cylinder seals and pieces of jewelry stolen from the basement, this requires a different approach. Because these items are not necessarily and immediately recognizable as contraband or evidence of criminality, the first goal must be the education of the international, national and local law enforcement authorities in the identification of these artifacts. Toward this end, we have gone to London to brief Scotland Yard or the London Metropolitan Police, we have briefed Interpol, we have briefed the U.S. Attorneys for New York and New Jersey. We have briefed FBI, Customs and State Department, in order to educate and disseminate all of this information, again, to make these items as easily recognizable as possible.

The goal here is simple. I want a Chilean border official, a Lithuanian customs official or an Okinawan police officer to see an item, recognize it as a cylinder seal, say very simply, "You shouldn't have that. It's stolen from the Iraq museum in Baghdad, and you are under arrest." And toward this end, we have been sharing all of our findings with the international law enforcement community.

We have also used other available tools, such as Web sites. This is the FBI website. We've chosen the most influential websites in the world -- the FBI, Customs, State Department, Interpol and the Art Loss Registry -- and they have all been tremendously cooperative in updating their Web sites to show what items are missing, what items are recovered. Next Web site is the Interpol Web site.

To further assist law enforcement by making these items so recognizable, we have also prepared a poster -- you see in front of you here -- of the 30 most significant missing artifacts from the public galleries. These will be disseminated not only to the law enforcement community but to the art community as well.

A second goal must be a greater level of cooperation between the law enforcement and art communities. The reality is that in order for these items to be sold profitably, they must be authenticated by an acknowledged expert within the art community.

In order, therefore, to enlist the effective assistance of the art world, we recently and at the invitation of the British Museum presented the findings of this investigation to more than 300 of the world's leading ancient Near Eastern archaeologist professors and dealers, toward that very -- and provided them photographs of all items, toward that very end: to ensure greater cooperation between the art and law enforcement communities.

Indeed, I must commend the efforts of the staff of the British Museum and Professors Al-Radi; Bahrani, from New York; Henry Wright, from Michigan; and McGuire Gibson, from Chicago. They have afforded us the -- their assistance, through their expertise, and also showed the courage to go to Iraq, to go to Baghdad, to conduct assessments, to assess the museum, to assess various archaeological sites over the course of the last four and a half to five months. Very simply, we get paid to be shot at. They do not, but they went nonetheless, and they should be

commended.

The remaining 1,679 items recovered -- (pauses) -- I'm sorry. Turning -- now let me turn to the recovery efforts and just sum it up for you. Several factors bear noting.

Three thousand, four hundred eleven items have been recovered. Of those, about half, 1,731, have come from Iraqi citizens pursuant to the amnesty or "no questions asked" policy. Again, most stress their desire to turn these over as part of Iraqis' culture.

It is not just Iraqis, however, who have responded to the call. On a recent trip home on leave in Manhattan, I was contacted by an individual who had learned of the investigation, through your efforts, and told me he had something to turn over. A meeting was arranged, package was turned over, and a 4,000-year-old Akhadian tablet is now in the hands of the Iraqi museum, where it belongs.

The remaining 1,679 items have been recovered as the result of sound law enforcement techniques, from raids in Baghdad, to random car stops at checkpoints throughout Iraq, to increased vigilance at international borders. For example, over 400 pieces were returned by Dr. Ahmed Chalabi after Iraqi National Congress forces stopped a car at a checkpoint near Kut in southern Iraq. Altogether, 911 pieces have been recovered in Iraq, while another 768 have come from numerous seizures in Jordan, Italy, the U.K. and the U.S. Most recently and publicly, on the 12th of August a journalist was arrested for smuggling into the U.S., at JFK, three cylinder seals stolen from the museum.

In total, the number of artifacts now known to be missing from the museum stands at slightly over 10,000. As it has for over the last five months, this number will change on a daily basis. What is accurate today will not be accurate tomorrow. More items will be found. The inventory will be completed, and more items will be found to be missing or will be found in other parts of the museum. So I stress, the numbers will always change.

The team's mission was to conduct a preliminary investigation into the theft and to begin the process of restoring Iraq's past, preserving her heritage for future generations. This phase of the investigation is substantially complete. The evidentiary findings will be turned over to Iraqi authorities for criminal prosecution if they deem it appropriate.

Justice is also about process, and the team's other goal was to cut through the unproductive rhetoric that surrounded this in the beginning and bring objective truth to the story of the museum's looting. We have not acted alone. In addition to the superb efforts of supervisory special agent Steve Mocsary and his customs agents, I commend the staff of the Iraq Museum, and the residents of Baghdad, who gave us their time, their trust and their hospitality.

The majority of the work remaining, that of tracking down the missing pieces, will likely take years. It will require the cooperative efforts of all nations, to include legislatures, law enforcement officers and art communities. The missing artifacts are indeed the property of the Iraqi people, but in a very real sense, they are the property, the shared property of mankind. I speak for all when I say we are honored to have served.

And now, if there are any questions, I'd be happy to take them.

Yes, sir?

Q: Could you mention just a couple -- what you consider the most important missing items? Also, did you guys ever actually get access to this secret place?

Bogdanos: Sure.

Q: Or did you ever enter the bomb shelter? Either of those places, did you get in there and look and see what

stuff it was?

Bogdanos: Sure. First, with regard to telling you the most significant pieces, that really is like asking a parent to pick your favorite child. Having said that, the pieces you see before you, these 30 pieces, are clearly among the most significant in the world. If you had to choose among those, the Bassetki statue, an Akhadian statue from 2300 B.C., as well as the Sumerian mask, the first two items on the poster. And we have extras to hand out. The first-known Sumerian mask of a female deity. Those would be two of the more significant.

Access to the secret place. Yes. (Chuckles) After weeks of trust-building and more tea than I can count -- (chuckles) -- yes, we were granted access to the secret place, entered the secret place, saw the items, saw that they were complete, saw that they were there, and then sealed the secret place back up. And it will be opened once the museum -- once the Iraqis provide sufficient security to protect the museum. And then, it will be opened and those items will be placed back on display.

Finally, turning to the bomb shelter, same answer. Yes. (Chuckling.) More tea, more trust-building. And yes, we entered the bomb shelter, examined the contents, found that they were there -- found that the members of the community have really taken this on as a point of pride and honor to protect these items. So, seal the boxes up, seal the bomb shelter up, and that's where it remains. Again, it will be returned to the museum at the appropriate time.

Q: Are both of those locations in the Baghdad area? Can you say that much?

Bogdanos: Both are in the Baghdad area. And that's all I can say. I've also promised not to reveal the location of the secret place.

Yes, sir?

Q: Yeah, is there an indication of when security might be such that the museum could be reopened? And secondly, these antiquities are no surprise to the U.S. invading forces. Were there -- was there any awareness in Central Command during the invasion or before it to make attempts to preserve these kinds of artifacts?

Bogdanos: Now I know why Mr. Rumsfeld -- or, I'm reminded why Mr. Rumsfeld needs one question at a time. What was the first question?

Q: Okay. First question was when do you think that the -- when does the museum feel that the security situation will be such that they can be reopened to the public?

Bogdanos: They are cautiously optimistic, is a fair way to put it. But security is the number one concern.

Remember also, the inventory isn't complete, and many of these items were stored for a decade in less than ideal conditions, particularly the ivories. The ivories having been stored for the last 10 years in the Central Bank of Iraq in a very damp location, they need to be restored. So that's all going in -- factoring in to when they think they can open the museum. I suspect it will be next year before you see anything.

And your second -- the second part of your question; it was clearly known that there were -- these items were present in Iraq, that Iraq is one of the cradles of civilization. Understand -- and was planning taken to assure their security? Yes. But understand two variables here. The first is, Iraqi forces chose to violate international law by fighting from otherwise protected cultural sites, rendering it impossible for U.S. forces, during the combat period, to actually enter the museum. You can't predict that they're going to violate international law like that.

The second component, second aspect to that is the level of looting. It's the same, you can't -- although you saw the same kind of destruction in the museum that you saw in the presidential palaces, it's the looting in these storage rooms by local residents, which was another variable.

So, those two things together really did dramatically make things worse.

I would point out that it's the basement storage room that is most troubling, because this was clearly -- if you want to use the word insider, it was clearly an insider job.

Q: You said that you had a fingerprint; you have access to all the museum staff. Yet it doesn't sound like you're very close to finding that suspect.

Bogdanos: Access to all the museum staff. We have access to all the museum staff that are still at the museum or returned to the museum after the 16th of April. That's not all the museum staff. Many of the former museum staff are simply gone, and we've not been able to find them, is the first thing.

Q: Could you give me a sense of the numbers there?

Bogdanos: You're assuming a record-keeping system that simply doesn't exist. Also, many of the people are volunteers. Also, many of the people are from the international community. It is a daunting, Herculean task to even -- as a prosecutor, the first thing I'm going to want is, you give me a list of everyone who had access to this particular room. I suspect at the Met or at the British Museum you could get that list. In the Iraqi Museum, you can't get that list. And it's been one of our struggles.

So, this is a very long answer to a short question. We have compared fingerprints of those individuals whom we know had access to the storage room. None of those fingerprints match.

But, let me be a prosecutor again. If we get a match with someone who had access to a museum -- you can never date a fingerprint, right? A fingerprint lasts forever, until it's cleaned. A fingerprint won't tell you if that fingerprint was made in the regular course of business six months earlier, or during the looting period. Fingerprints are just another investigative tool.

The important thing here to note on the fingerprints is, when I was given lead of this investigation by General Franks, I was specifically told: Do your thing; that thing you do in New York as a prosecutor, you do that in Baghdad. You find out what happened. Do it. Let the chips fall where they may. And if that means U.S. forces, than that means U.S. forces, and they will be prosecuted.

There is simply no evidence whatsoever that any U.S. forces had anything to do with any of the looting, and none of those fingerprints that we found match any U.S. forces.

Okay. Yes, sir?

Q: Just to clarify, when you say "items" and "pieces," you said that it could be one bead, one piece of a pot, one -- I mean, so these thousands of items could be just little things?

Bogdanos: Let me give you -- that's a great point. Yes. When I say items and pieces, I use them interchangeably. All of the items and pieces taken from the basement storage room downstairs could fit in a large backpack -- all 10,000. Does that give you a sense?

Now, the Bassetki statue is 150 kilos, and it's enormous, and that required several people to carry it out, and indeed, they damaged the floor as they were dragging it out. So, it varies, which is why these higher value pieces, I put the dimensions on the poster for that very reason.

Thank you, sir.

Yes, sir?

Q: Could you explain the cylinder seals, what's the significance of them? Several thousand of those got stolen, and how much are they worth?

Bogdanos: Certainly. Cylinder seals are small -- they vary in size, but ordinarily, the size of your thumb; some smaller, some larger. Think of them as signatures, stamps. They're round. They're small cylinders; hence the name. And they're used to -- on clay or on pottery to -- you roll that, and that, in effect, is your signature on that piece, on that pottery vessel, clay, et cetera, stamp.

They vary in quality. Some are remarkable. Some of them you look at, and you can't believe that anything that small is that exquisite. And some of them are rudimentary, very workmanlike. So it's impossible to give you an average.

However, I'm told by several of the archaeologists that we've worked with, particularly Professors Wright, Gibson, Al-Radi and Bahrani, that cylinder seals can go from anywhere from \$80,000 to \$125,000 for one. And when I'm talking about that price, I'm talking about the ones in the storage cabinets themselves, not the ones in -- that were in fact taken from those plastic boxes.

That should not be confused with what the items get on the black market. We have time and again found evidence that cylinder seals were sold at -- stolen from a museum were sold at marketplaces for \$30, three for 200 (dollars), \$50. It's what the buyer will pay.

And was that only -- did I answer all of your question?

Q: Have you been getting some that people are buying off? Are you getting some that way? Are you trying to buy them back or --

Bogdanos: No. We have money at our disposal, both from Customs and from DoD sources, and we can use it.

As a law enforcement technique, however, I can tell you, money is always a last resort, because sometimes what you're doing is you're actually promoting the black market in that.

There's a second component here, and again, this reminds me of my days as a prosecutor in New York. Sometimes using money and entering money into the bargaining or negotiation process is insulting. We found that particularly true in Iraq.

Frequently when I say "amnesty program," don't think of someone walking up to the gate and saying, "Here, I have a bag." That did happen, but that's not the standard paradigm. The standard paradigm is someone walking up to the gate, coming in and saying, "If I know a friend who knows a friend who might have a piece, what would happen?"

"Well, why don't we meet the friend? Let's have some tea. Let's talk about it."

So there's a negotiation, and sometimes those meetings would take three or four meetings before you finally got the item. Warka -- the sacred vase of Warka came in like that. It was not on the first meeting; it was, in fact, the third.

But when I say "negotiation," don't think I mean money. Money is rarely used -- at least in our experience in this investigation in and around Baghdad, money was not the issue. It was a sense of pride, the sense of culture, the assurance that these items would be kept safe and would not be returned to the Ba'ath Party or the former regime.

Yes, sir?

Q: You mentioned your strong suspicion of an inside job on at least one component of this. Can you also talk about the professional thieves who were involved here? Any idea who they were? I mean, are these people from the international black market on antiquities? I mean, when you say "professional thieves," who are they and how could they have just materialized in Baghdad at this particular time in history?

Bogdanos: Two things. One, if I said that I have a suspicion of it being an inside job, I misspoke. It is inconceivable that the basement magazines could have been broken into without it being an inside job.

Turning to --

Q: So it was an inside job?

Bogdanos: It required inside information. That's clear. Intimate inside information as to where those items were. You couldn't find it. It would take you months to find that storage room.

Q: So, a member of the staff had to have been involved?

Bogdanos: Had to have at least passed information. That, the evidence is clear. More than that, I'm simply not -- the evidence doesn't show. It's not me speaking, it's the evidence speaking through me.

Turning to the professional thieves, I'm uncomfortable with the word "professional," simply because you're giving to these thieves a certain aura that they don't deserve.

The black market in Iraq has existed, we know, for decades. This is not new and not just in Iraq. There have been buyers throughout the world, and it's in the areas that I've mentioned -- it's London, it's New York, it's Syria, Jordan, Japan, Russia, Italy -- these countries have a thriving black market in antiquities. It has been well-known that individuals -- individuals have said publicly that they want Iraqi antiquities. So, it's the market that has always existed.

Clearly, at this point during the looting period, it was an opportunity seized upon by individuals either in Iraq already or who entered Iraq, either connected to the regime or not. The evidence is simply -- I'm not prepared, based on the evidence, to comment more than that. But this was very selective and very carefully done, these particular items.

Q: Are these items showing up on the international black market already?

Bogdanos: What I can't do -- and I'm sorry this is not an answer that's going to satisfy you -- what I can't do is go into the details of the investigations, but I can tell you that there are active, ongoing investigations in at least four countries. I'm not going to tell you the names of the countries, because if I were the head of the -- (chuckles) -- investigation in that country, and someone else talked about my investigation and risked compromising my investigation, I would be angry.

But understand what I mean by "investigation". You have -- if you intercept an item in transit, in shipment, it is frequently better, as you do with drugs, to allow the shipment to be completed. Right? You do a controlled delivery, and then you follow the shipment. Well, what -- the key here is that no one in the chain know that the shipment has been compromised. So, that's as -- as far as I can go on that.

Q: Can I just clarify one thing? You had mentioned items had been seized in four countries outside of Iraq. Are those four countries that you mentioned, the four, Jordan, Italy, the U.K., and the United States, is that the four?

Bogdanos: Yes.

Q: Okay. So that's a separate four from the four that you're now talking about.

Bogdanos: I can't -- I'm sorry. I can't answer. I won't -- I can't comment on that.

Q: Could you -- you said that the one item that was returned in the United States under the amnesty program, can you shed any more light on the circumstance, give the conditions for the amnesty?

Bogdanos: The circumstance was through your efforts in publicizing this, and I'd love to tell you which, you know, which one of you it was, but he didn't mention -- saw that there was an investigation, it was ongoing -- saw that I was the head of the investigation, contacted individuals -- I mean, it's easy to -- you know, through the DA's office or through the Marine Corps it's easy to get me.

Q: Was it a service member, a journalist, somebody -- you know, international worker --

Bogdanos: If I violate the trust of that individual, who else is going to turn anything in to me? Right? You know, I shouldn't have even told you it was a male. That was my bad --

Q: Can I just ask one -- the status of the final report, is it -- I mean, can we view this as you unveiling the results of the final report? I mean, it seems pretty comprehensive here.

Bogdanos: As mentioned earlier, it is simply in review now. So I think you're talking days rather than, you know --

Q: But this is -- this is your findings for the final report.

Bogdanos: This is the findings. I don't like the word "final report" simply because it indicates that the investigation is over; it is clearly not. It is -- this phase of the investigation is over. But there is still so much more to be done. So don't falsely -- and don't stop reporting on this, because they need you. They need your help.

Q: When was the final report -- was this report given?

Bogdanos: I'm sorry?

Q: To whom was this report given, who's -- who's this report to?

Bogdanos: Any -- the world. The press, the international law enforcement community, the international art community. I mean, the goal -- no secrets here. The goal is for this to be released to everyone so we bring -- so everyone understands precisely what has happened in this investigation.

Q: So this is your report to the Department of Defense on the matter?

Bogdanos: My report to U.S. Central Command, General Abizaid, and through General Abizaid to the Department of Defense; yes, sir.

Q: How many pages are you talking about?

Bogdanos: Nine, 10, single-spaced.

Q: Oh, okay. So it's not a -- like an extensive catalogue or --

Bogdanos: No, sir. No, sir.

Q: Okay.

Staff: All right, I think that's it.

Q: Thank you very much.

Bogdanos: Thank you.

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