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## [H.R. 1493, Protect and Preserve International Cultural Property Act, as amended](#)

### FLOOR SITUATION

On Monday, June 1, 2015, the House will consider [H.R. 1493](#), the *Protect and Preserve International Cultural Property Act, as amended*, under a suspension of the rules. H.R. 1493 was introduced on March 19, 2015, by Rep. Eliot Engel (D-NY) and was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, and in addition to the Committees on Ways and Means, Armed Services, and the Judiciary. The Committee on Foreign Affairs ordered the bill reported by unanimous consent on April 23, 2015.

### SUMMARY

H.R. 1493 would require the Department of State to designate a department official to serve as the United States Coordinator for International Cultural Property Protection to coordinate the efforts of the Federal government to protect international cultural property. The Coordinator would develop strategies to reduce the illegal trade in such property and to assist countries in protecting their heritage sites and preventing looting and theft of cultural property. H.R. 1493 also directs the President to impose certain emergency import restrictions on archaeological or ethnological material that has been removed from Syria since the start of its civil war, with specified exceptions.

The bill also requires the Coordinator to lead a committee on international cultural property protection comprised of Federal entities, which would be required to submit annual progress reports to the Congress. The bill authorizes Federal agencies to enter into agreements with the Smithsonian Institution for the temporary use of the institution's staff.

According to documents supplied by the Department, most of the bill's requirements are already being met and the bill would codify many current practices.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See [CBO Summary](#)

## BACKGROUND

As the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) forces have expanded their occupied territory in Syria and Iraq, they have destroyed and stolen many ancient artifacts that date back to Mesopotamia. ISIL has posted several videos online showing their forces destroying these artifacts; however, the true nature of their total destruction is unknown. According to the Director of Iraqi Museums, ISIL is selling many of these artifacts on the black market to criminal antique dealers.<sup>2</sup>

On February 12, 2015, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted [Resolution 2199](#), which reaffirms its decision that “all Member States shall take appropriate steps to prevent the trade in Iraqi and Syrian cultural property and other items of archaeological, historical, cultural, rare scientific, and religious importance illegally removed from Iraq since August 6, 1990 and from Syria since March 15, 2011.”

The United States military has historically played a role in preserving and protecting cultural property during wartime. In 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt established a commission to advise the U.S. military on the protection of cultural property. The commission, which was commonly referred to as the “Monuments Men,” was largely credited with securing, cataloguing, and returning thousands of works of art stolen by the Nazis during World War II.<sup>3</sup>

According to Chairman Royce, “this legislation will improve the coordination and oversight of U.S. agencies responsible for protecting cultural property, so that priceless treasures stand a better chance in the face of this despicable campaign.”<sup>4</sup>

## COST

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) [estimates](#) that implementing the bill would cost less than \$500,000 over the 2016 to 2020 period, assuming the availability of appropriated amounts. The bill directs the President to apply import restrictions to certain material from Syria with archaeological or ethnological importance. Under current law, some of that property could be imported into the United States and face customs duties. However, because the amount of such imports is expected to be small, CBO estimates that the revenue loss from the import restrictions would be less than \$500,000 over the 2016 to 2025 period.

## STAFF CONTACT

For questions or further information please contact [John Huston](#) with the House Republican Policy Committee by email or at 6-5539.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cnn.com/2014/10/22/world/meast/iraq-isis-cultural-destruction/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.monumentsmenfoundation.org/about-the-foundation>

<sup>4</sup> <http://engel.house.gov/latest-news1/engel-smith-royce-and-keating-offer-bill-to-protect-cultural-property-abroad/>