

## U.S. sent finger of ex-UF student

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The finger of a former University of Florida student who was taken hostage in Iraq more than a year ago has been sent to U.S. authorities, the student's father has confirmed.



Jon Cote

McClatchy News Service reported Wednesday that U.S. authorities in Baghdad have received five fingers belonging to four Americans, including former UF student Jonathon Cote, 25, and an Austrian, who were taken hostage in Iraq more than a year ago.

Jonathon Cote's father, Francis Cote, who lives near Buffalo, N.Y., said he learned about the incident from the Austrian government. He said U.S. officials visited him in February to ask about DNA and fingerprints for his son, and told him they were analyzing evidence.

"I'm disappointed that our government knew about this and did not give us the full story," Francis Cote said. "We had to learn from the Austrian government."

Cote, originally from the Buffalo, N.Y. area, attended UF in 2005 and 2006 and was a member of Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity. He had served four years in the U.S. Army, including deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, and friends said he decided to return to Iraq as a defense contractor for the Kuwait-based Crescent Security Group after a year at UF, in part to make money for school.

Cote and the four other contractors were taken hostage on Nov. 16, 2006, after a convoy of trucks they were escorting was hijacked on a highway near Safwan, a city on the border with Kuwait.

Francis Cote said he sees the latest development in his son's case as a sign that the U.S. government is applying pressure to the people holding Jonathon hostage.

"I'm taking this as proof that he's still alive," Francis Cote said. "He might have a severed finger, but this doesn't mean anything other than that. I suspect what happened is that our government pressed for proof of life, and they responded in a vindictive way. But hopefully, this means our government is doing something."

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