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Severed fingers of hostages delivered to U.S. authorities in Baghdad

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BAGHDAD | U.S. authorities in Baghdad have received five severed fingers belonging to four Americans and an Austrian taken hostage in Iraq, U.S. officials said Wednesday.

The FBI is investigating the grisly development, and the families of the five kidnapped contractors have been notified, American officials said on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss the case publicly.

Authorities confirmed that the fingers belonged to hostages Jonathan Cote of Gainesville, Fla.; Joshua Munns of Redding, Calif.; Paul Johnson Reuben of Buffalo, Minn.; Bert Nussbaumer of Vienna, Austria; and Ronald J. Withrow, an American who was kidnapped separately from the others.

There was no word on a fifth contractor who was seized with them, John Young of Kansas City. Contrary to Austrian news reports, none of the fingers belonged to him, authorities said.

"The government is in touch with us, but they said nothing has been verified yet," said Sharon DeBrabander, Young's mother. "I certainly don't understand why my son's wasn't found. What does that mean?"

The first four men were security contractors with Kuwait-based Crescent Security and were captured in an ambush of their 43-truck supply convoy in the southern Iraqi town of Safwan, near the Kuwaiti border, on Nov. 16, 2006.

Withrow, a computer specialist who worked for JPI Worldwide, was kidnapped Jan. 5, 2007 near Basra.

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