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Kidnapped Contractor's Finger Sent, Father of Jonthan Cote Interviewed

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The father of Getzville native, Jonathon Cote says a fingerprint and D.N.A belonging to his son and four other men being held hostage in Iraq, have been sent to the U.S. government.

Francis Cote says a representative from the F.B.I. told his family about the development, two weeks ago.

Kristin Donnelly asks, "Did they say that it was Jonathon?"

Francis Cote, "They confirmed one of the prints was Jonathon's, yes."

Donnelly asks, "But they didn't say anything further about the possibility this was a finger?"

Cote answers, "That's correct."

Cote and four other private security workers were kidnapped in Iraq in November 2006. A hostage tape of the men was released a few weeks later but they have not been seen or heard from since.

On Wednesday, Reuters news agency published an internet article about the development after an Austrian magazine reported that fingers from the five hostages had been sent to U.S. officials.

Francis Cote says he has not received confirmation from the U.S. government but he did read the on-line article.

He told 2 On Your Side Wednesday afternoon he and his family have hope that this means Jonathon is still alive and they are praying for his safe return.

The family has a weekly conference call with the State Department and his son's finger was not mentioned in that call this week.

Kristin Donnelly asks, "Do you think this means Jonathon's alive?"

Francis Cote, "Yes, I'm still... my whole family we're still hopeful, we believe he's still alive."

Later he adds, "I continue to go to church and pray to God that he's in good hands and they're taking care of him. Obviously I would have rather had a video as proof of life."

(article excerpts)Relatives of the American hostages said they received phone calls from U.S. authorities early Wednesday, though initially they were told only that fingerprints or DNA had been obtained. Later, at least one father said he'd been notified that his son's finger had been delivered by the hostage-takers, but there still was confusion among the relatives about the development.

"All we have right now is prayers," said Mark Munns, the father of former Marine Joshua Munns, 25, who has spent his past two birthdays in captivity. "I don't know how to make head or tails of what's going on. Are they still alive? A whole bunch of stuff goes through your head."

"It pushes you to where I've got one foot in the loony bin. He's our only child," Munns said.

Several of the relatives expressed frustration at the lack of information. They said that State Department representatives check in with them in a telephone conference call every Monday, but still several relatives have complained that they're being kept in the dark about the investigation. The FBI has told them that the information is classified to preserve the integrity of the investigation — little solace for families who've gone 18 months with scant news.

"I know we're in a war on terror, but to not tell the families anything and let us sit out here for 18 months just isn't right," Mark Munns said.

Jonathon Cote's father, Francis Cote, said he received a call Wednesday morning from Crescent Security, but that the FBI hadn't contacted him, despite assurances from the State Department that it would.

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/homepage/story/30163.html>

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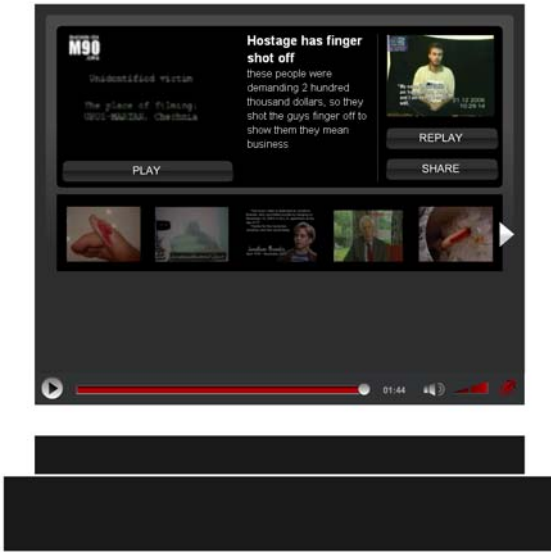
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