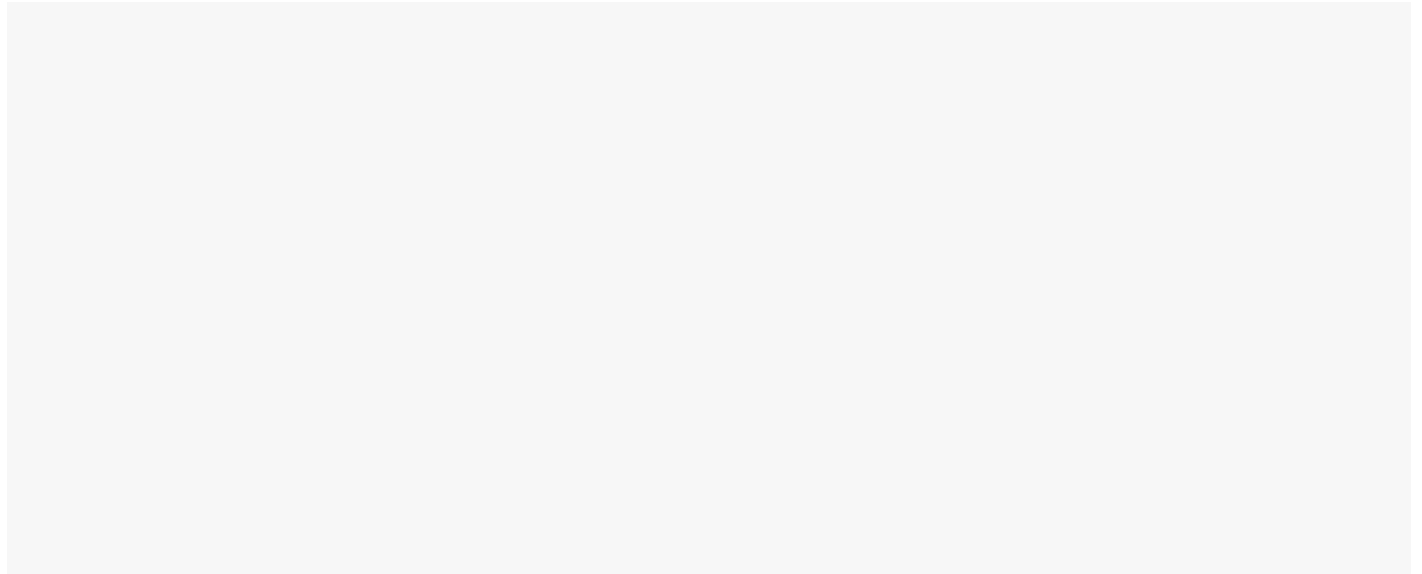


# US special forces storm Nigeria, kill six kidnappers, free abducted American

•Pentagon: Raid conducted with help from Abuja

November 1, 2020



***Okodili Ndidi, Abuja***

THE kidnap of an American citizen in neighbouring Niger Republic on Tuesday went awry on Saturday.

American commandos, with security assistance from Nigeria, stormed the kidnappers' den at an undisclosed locality in the north, killing all but one of the seven-member gang.

The kidnap victim, Philip Walton, 27, was rescued alive in the early morning high-risk raid and returned to Niger immediately.

Moments after the operation, President Donald Trump tweeted out his praise of the rescue mission.

"Big win for our very elite U.S. Special Forces today. Details to follow!" he wrote.

"U.S. forces conducted a hostage rescue operation during the early hours of 31 October in Northern Nigeria to recover an American citizen held hostage by a group of armed men," said Pentagon chief spokesperson Jonathan Hoffman.

"This American citizen is safe and is now in the care of the U.S. Department of State. No U.S. military personnel were injured during the operation.

"We appreciate the support of our international partners in conducting this operation."

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, speaking separately, said: "Thanks to the extraordinary courage and capabilities of our military, the support of our intelligence professionals, and our diplomatic efforts, the hostage will be reunited with his family. We will never abandon any American taken hostage."

ABC News consultant Mick Mulroy, a former deputy assistant secretary of defence and retired CIA officer, said preparations for Walton's rescue likely started immediately he was abducted.

"These types of operations are some of the most difficult to execute," he said.

"Any mistake could easily lead to the death of the hostage. The men and women of JSOC (Joint Special Operations Command) and the CIA should be proud of what they did here. And all Americans should be proud of them."

An official in Washington said: "We had to get him before any potential trade or sale."

Sources in Washington said the operation involved the governments of the U.S., Niger and Nigeria working together to rescue Walton quickly with the CIA providing the intelligence leading to Walton's whereabouts and Marine Special Operations elements in Abuja and Niamey helping to locate him.

Walton was seized from his farm in Massalata in southern Niger at about 1 am on Tuesday by AK-47 assault rifle wielding kidnappers.

He has lived in Massalata for two years, raising camels.

The six gunmen reportedly rode to Walton's residence on three motorcycles. They found him in his backyard and asked him for money.

He dipped his hand into his pocket and brought out \$40 which he offered the men but the sum appeared too small to them.

In a jiffy, they overpowered him and pounced on the rest of the household –his wife, young daughter and brother- all of whom they tied to prevent them from informing the police immediately.

They then left with Walton, moving him to their den in Nigeria, just across the border with Niger Republic.

But about four hours after Walton's abduction, his family members managed to break free from the ropes that had been used to tie them and they alerted the authorities in Niamey.

Meanwhile, the kidnappers called the victim's father who lives a half mile away to demand a ransom, according to the London Mail.

The U.S. government was also alerted and quickly set machinery in motion to rescue him immediately before the kidnapping could become a prolonged hostage-taking or the victim could be taken by or sold to a group of terrorists aligned with either al Qaeda or ISIS.

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The elite SEAL Team Six executed the “precision” hostage rescue mission, according to officials with direct knowledge about the operation.

“They were all dead before they knew what happened,” a counterterrorism source said of the abductors.

Walton’s kidnap occurred two months after IS-linked militants killed six French aid workers and their Niger guide while they were visiting a wildlife park east of the capital.

At least six foreign hostages are being held by Islamist insurgents in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger.

Two of these were taken in Niger, including U.S. aid worker Jeffery Woodke, who has been missing since October 2016, and Joerg Lange, a German aid worker who was taken in April 2018 from a town near the Malian border.

The president of Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou, said in September last year that he had information that Woodke was alive and in good health.

Three Europeans, including 75-year-old French NGO worker Sophie Petronin, were released by their captors in Mali earlier this month under a prisoner swap arranged by the Malian government.

Terror groups have collected millions of dollars in ransom payments as a result of kidnappings in recent years. The U.S. government has frequently criticised other countries for paying.

### How Nigerian troops aided the rescue operation

A military source told The Nation last night that the Multi National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) was instrumental to the rescue of the American.

The MNJTF comprises troops from Republic of Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria and are currently fighting the terror sect Boko Haram around the Lake Chad.

A senior military officer who does not want his name in print because he is not authorised to speak on the issue, said the rescue operation was carried out in collaboration with MNJTF which has its headquarters in N’Djamena, from where it coordinates the war against Boko Haram.

The Coordinator, Defence Media Operations, Major General John Enenche could not be reached on Saturday for his reaction on the development.



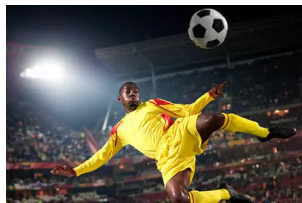
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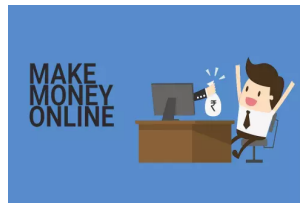
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