

FG Confirms US Got Permission for Hostage Rescue Mission in Sokoto

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By Deji Elumoye

The federal government yesterday formally reacted to the rescue in Sokoto State of a kidnapped United States citizen by the US military, saying the rescue mission was with the consent of the Nigerian government.

The development has confirmed THISDAY's exclusive report that President Muhammadu Buhari approved the US mission.

A senior diplomat had told THISDAY that the Nigeria intelligence community provided the intelligence operation that made the rescue mission of the American, Mr. Philip Walton, successful.

But the federal government accused some foreign nations of deliberate attempt to thwart Nigeria's efforts at fighting insurgency in the North-east of the country.

Minister of Defence, Maj. Gen. Salihu Magashi (rtd), told reporters after his defence of the Defence ministry's 2021 budget estimate before the Senate yesterday that Nigeria granted the United States Special Military Force the permission to rescue the American citizen kidnapped by bandits in Niger Republic but held in Sokoto State.

Magashi rejected insinuation in some quarters that the rescue of the kidnapped American citizen in Nigeria might have violated the territorial integrity of Nigeria.

He explained that Nigeria gave the go-ahead to the United States as a friendly country as soon as it was contacted by the US government, thereby ruling out theories that the United States might have violated Nigeria's sovereignty.

Magashi said: "The United States of America contacted the Nigerian government to undertake that operation. There is nothing wrong with a friendly nation taking permission to conduct an operation which is for the mutual good of the countries. That is why we allowed it to happen."

Asked about government's current efforts to fight insurgency, the minister who declined to comment about the issue, however, stated that the US has been very supportive of Nigeria in fighting the Boko Haram insurgents.

"It is something that can be discussed later. It is not meant for the consumption of the public. To be honest but certainly, we are making efforts and

they have been helping us greatly in areas where we have difficulties and we are still asking for more,” he said.

Magashi further stressed that some countries were trying to block Nigeria from owning some technologies to fight insurgency, saying: “It is natural, they want to sell their equipment so they will try to make it difficult for developing countries to have what they want.”

THISDAY had reported an insider’s account of how the rescue mission was executed.

The senior diplomat had confided in THISDAY that as soon as Walton was abducted in Niger Republic, and the captors called the victim’s father, the Niger’s external security agency chief was said to have called his Nigeria counterpart, informing him that the phone numbers the captors used were Nigeria’s.

The source said: “As soon as we got that information, we quickly tracked the phone numbers and we discovered that the abductors were in a parcel of land owned by one Mallam Abubakar in Illela Local Government Area in Sokoto State.

“Nigeria and Niger were working on this information when on October 28, 2020, the US government wrote the federal government through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, requesting the permission of President Muhammadu Buhari to carry out the rescue mission.”

Security chiefs, including top military officers, were said to have met, reviewed the US’ letter and advised Buhari on the way to go.

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