



**WEEKLY INCIDENT  
REPORT**

October 2020

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## **INCIDENT REPORT**

**The events surrounding the kidnap and rescue of Philip Walton in October 2020**

### **Background**

Philip Watson is a citizen of the United States. He is 27 years old and has reportedly lived and worked in Niger since he was a teenager. He was a livestock farmer who kept camels, sheep and poultry in Massalata village in Tahoua region. On some occasions he is known to walk his camels in the surrounding bush which is possibly how he was detected by his assailants. On 26 October at around 0145 hours, six armed men aboard motorcycles invaded his home, tied up his wife, daughter and brother before taking him away. Eyewitness reports stated that the assailants spoke English and Hausa Language before they were seen traveling into Nigeria.





## THREATS IN TAHOUA REGION, NIGER and NORTH WEST NIGERIA

Niger and Nigeria are two countries which share borders in the Sahel and are riddled with terrorism and armed group threats. Despite Niger housing a large base for the United States army, it has continued to record cases of insurgency. The threats facing these countries



*Bandits in North West Nigeria*

are split according to the bordering countries. For Niger, Tillaberi and some parts of Tahoua region which borders Mali and Burkina Faso faces threats from Jama'ah Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), Diffa region records threats from Boko Haram while for South of Tahoua region there are threats from armed groups in North West Nigeria which has been recording cases of banditry, livestock rustling, and kidnapping as was the case with Philip. Although, the area which he might have been kept

hostage has recorded a lower of incidents in 2020, it remains a hot bed for bandit activities. The common means of transportation for most of the groups are motorcycles due to the rough terrain as it allows ease in movement. There have also been less reports of insurgency in Niger compared to 2019 and this has been attributed to the muzzling of the media by the government. The only reports that gets publicised are mostly concerning curfews ordered due to insecurity which has been the one of the ways in which existential threats are known. Concerning the kidnap of Philip, it is most likely that the assailants were the usual bandits known to roam the area and rustle cattle or kidnap for ransom. It was nevertheless imperative that he was rescued or he could have either been traded off or sent to either Islamic State of West African Province Sahara (ISWAP) or JNIM if the assailants knew the value of the victim. In recent years, immediately the value of a victim is known, he or she could be moved around and might end up being sold to terrorist groups in the area.

## THE RESCUE

Although several reports stated that he was not an important person or attached to any security operation in the state, the United States government sent a SEAL Team of six men to rescue Philip on the early hours of 31 October. The team moved via multiple C-17A Globemaster III transport aircraft flights and that uses a quartet of both CV-22B Osprey tilt-rotors and MC-130 special operations transports, and passed through Rota, Spain, before continuing to their target location. AC-130 gunships and a large contingent of aerial

refuelling tankers also supported the operation. Although the location for the mission was not stated, there is a possibility it was in the vicinity of Sokoto State, North Western Nigeria. The team did not however state casualty report for the kidnapers.



*Seal Team that rescued Philip*



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