

Beat: News

U.S. military reveals failed mission to rescue American hostages in Syria

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USPA News - The United States carried out a secret mission earlier this summer in an attempt to rescue James Foley and other Americans held captive in Syria, but the operation failed because the hostages were not present at the targeted location, the Pentagon confirmed late Wednesday. The secret mission, in which special operations troops were sent to an undisclosed site in Syria, was disclosed on Wednesday evening after the U.S. government became aware that media organizations were preparing to report on it.

The acknowledgement comes just days after American photojournalist James Foley was beheaded by the Islamic State. "This operation involved air and ground components and was focused on a particular captor network within ISIL," said Pentagon Press Secretary Rear Admiral John Kirby, referring to the so-called Islamic State by its former name. "Unfortunately, the mission was not successful because the hostages were not present at the targeted location." U.S. officials said the American special forces were engaged by a number of Islamic State fighters, triggering a firefight in which several jihadists were killed. No American forces were killed in the operation and all were able to depart safely, though one service member suffered minor injuries. "The President authorized action at this time because it was the national security team's assessment that these hostages were in danger with each passing day in ISIL custody," said Lisa Monaco, an assistant to U.S. President Barack Obama on matters of homeland security and counterterrorism. "The U.S. Government had what we believed was sufficient intelligence, and when the opportunity presented itself, the President authorized the Department of Defense to move aggressively to recover our citizens." Monaco said the government would not release specific details about the operation to protect the U.S. military's operational capabilities. "Their effort should serve as another signal to those who would do us harm that the United States will not tolerate the abduction of our people, and will spare no effort to secure the safety of our citizens and to hold their captors accountable," she added. Caitlin Hayden, a spokeswoman for the U.S. National Security Council (NSC), said the government had no choice but to disclose the failed rescue operation after media organizations became aware of it. "We never intended to disclose this operation. An overriding concern for the safety of the hostages and for operational security made it imperative that we preserve as much secrecy as possible," she said. The Syrian government, which is not believed to have known about the operation, did not immediately comment on Wednesday's disclosure. The Islamic State, which was previously known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/ISIS), is an al-Qaeda splinter group which declared itself an Islamic caliphate after seizing much of northeastern Syria and making huge gains in parts of Iraq. Their rule has been marked with brutal violence - such as beheadings and crucifixions - of anyone opposing the "caliphate," including a recent massacre in the Iraqi city of Tikrit in which hundreds were slaughtered. The beheading of photojournalist James Foley shocked Western nations on Tuesday when the Islamic State released a gruesome video, calling it "a message to America" for its involvement in the crisis in northern Iraq by carrying out airstrikes against the jihadists. Foley had been kidnapped in Syria nearly two years ago. The 4-minute video also contained a scene in which a jihadist, speaking with a British accent, threatened to kill another American captive, identified as journalist Steven Joel Sotloff. "The life of this American citizen, Obama, depends on your next decision," the unidentified man said while holding Sotloff.

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