

Beat: Politics

Syrian militants release American journalist after nearly 2 years

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USPA News - American journalist Peter Theo Curtis, who was held hostage by al-Qaeda-linked militants for nearly two years, was released Sunday after the Qatari government managed to secure his release on a humanitarian basis without the payment of money, his family said. Curtis, 45, was handed over to United Nations (UN) peacekeepers in the village of Al Rafid, near the abandoned city of Quneitra in Israel-occupied Golan Heights, at 6:40 p.m. local time on Sunday.

"After receiving a medical check-up, Mr. Curtis was handed over to representatives of his government," a UN spokesman said. Nancy Curtis said the family did not know the exact terms for her son's release, but was told by the Qatari government that the Gulf Arab state had secured the reporter's release without paying a ransom. "While the family is not privy to the exact terms that were negotiated, we were repeatedly told by representatives of the Qatari government that they were mediating for Theo's release on a humanitarian basis without the payment of money," she said. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said the United States had reached out to more than two dozen countries over the past two years to request help to secure Curtis' release, but stopped short of thanking the Qatari government. "We are all relieved and grateful knowing that Theo Curtis is coming home after so much time held in the clutches of Jabhat Al-Nusra," he said. Sunday's release came about a week after the Islamic State beheaded American photojournalist James Foley, who had been held hostage in Syria for nearly two years. A 4-minute video that showed the beheading shocked Western nations and highlighted the situation of about 20 other journalists who are still missing in Syria. "We are so relieved that Theo is healthy and safe and that he is finally headed home after his ordeal, but we are also deeply saddened by the terrible, unjustified killing last week of his fellow journalist, Jim Foley, at the hands of the Islamic State," Nancy Curtis said. "We appeal to the captors of the remaining hostages to release them in the same humanitarian spirit that prompted Theo's release." Susan Rice, U.S. President Barack Obama's National Security Advisor, said Curtis would soon be reunited with his family. "The American people share in the joy and relief that Theo's family feels, and we look forward to his safe return home," she said, adding that the U.S. government will continue to work tirelessly on behalf of other Americans who are still being held captive. "Every waking hour, our thoughts and our faith remain with the Americans still held hostage and with their families, and we continue to use every diplomatic, intelligence, and military tool at our disposal to find them and bring our fellow citizens home," Kerry added. Curtis, an Atlanta-born freelance journalist from Boston, Massachusetts, is believed to have been captured shortly after he crossed the Turkish border into Syria in October 2012. He was since held by the al-Qaeda-linked Al-Nusra Front or by splinter groups allied with the militant group.

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