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## **US CONTRACTOR KIDNAPPED IN EASTERN AFGHANISTAN: OFFICIAL**

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Al Jazeera (6 February 2020)

An Afghan security official says the former US navy member was abducted last week in eastern Khost.

A United States security contractor has been kidnapped in eastern Afghanistan, an Afghan official confirmed.

An Afghan security official with knowledge of the incident told AFP news agency on Thursday the former US navy member had been working in Afghanistan as a contractor when he was abducted last week in eastern Khost province, near the Pakistani border.

There was no indication whether an armed group or a criminal organisation was behind the kidnapping. The Taliban said it did not have information on the incident.

Afghanistan's former intelligence chief Amrullah Saleh was quick to blame the Taliban, saying on Twitter the abduction had been orchestrated by "the Taliban & their Pakistani backers. Kidnapping must end & end without ransom".

Pakistan has long been accused of backing the Taliban but has repeatedly denied supporting the group.

The US State Department said it was aware of reports of the kidnapping, but declined to comment further.

The incident comes after the Taliban in November handed two Western hostages over to US forces in southern Afghanistan, three years after they were abducted, in a swap for three high-ranking prisoners.

The exchange of American Kevin King and Australian Timothy Weeks for the fighters - including Anas Haqqani, brother of the Taliban's deputy leader - was widely believed to be instrumental in kick-starting stalled talks between the two sides.

The Taliban later described the exchange as "a step forward in goodwill and confidence-building measures that can aid the peace process".

The kidnapping of Afghans and foreigners for ransom is common across Afghanistan where swathes of the country are infested with armed groups or criminal gangs.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/02/contractor-kidnapped-eastern-afghanistan-official-200206124804711.html>

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