



Unnecessary Evil:

The Necessary Exclusion of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar

by Adam E. MacAllister

The policy of reconciliation and reintegration in Afghanistan is not a new concept, but in 2010 it has received renewed emphasis. This, in large part, is due to NATO's acceptance of President Hamid Karzai's withdrawal timeline – a timeline that advocates 2014 as the final year of Coalition occupation. Focusing on Afghanistan's future takes the casual observer in many directions that includes an analysis of economic matters, geo-political alliances, and the daunting potential of a reinvigorated extremist presence inside of the country.¹ Additionally, given the importance of cultural geography, it can be argued that another significant factor is being purposefully overlooked. The critical factor in question is the close examination of the key players associated with the current Afghan reconciliation and reintegration program. And yet, it is believed that “absent a viable, broad-based reintegration and reconciliation plan, the Afghan conflict will not end within a politically acceptable timeframe.”²

Well articulated by Dr. Amin Tarzi, director of Middle East Studies at the Marine Corps University, the current reconciliation and reintegration program, originally articulated in the Bonn Agreement of 2001, has suffered continuous ambiguity, an absence of clear objectives, and competing, if not contradictory, efforts by ISAF and Afghan Government officials.³ This point is made even more salient by the recent imposter who posed as the number two Taliban leader, Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour, who received an audience with the Afghan President and intelligence officials.⁴ Consequences of events such as these could precipitate the undesired movement towards personalities for which we are historically familiar. Specifically, a reliance on the personality of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar could be a particularly fateful decision by Afghan and ISAF leaders.⁵

¹ Foreign investment concerns have been significant since President Karzai expressed his intent to ban all private foreign security contracts potentially signaling the abandonment of millions of dollars worth of existing development projects. India and Pakistan both have a vested interest in the security of Afghanistan, Pakistan has expressed concern over a growing relationship between New Delhi and Kabul which threatens the influence that the Pakistani ISI currently maintains over existing militant groups that operate from within Pakistan or are financed through them. The return of extreme Islamic militants into the mainstream political sphere suggests a possible repeat of the Post Soviet collapse of Muhammad Najibullah (last Communist President of Afghanistan who was forced to step down in 1992 by the Mujahideen). Washington Post articles feature many of the specifics and can be obtained through their archives. Comments concerning the Post Soviet collapse is cited in the detailed work of Shaista Wahab in the book A Brief History of Afghanistan (see further citations).

² Amin Tarzi, “Recalibrating the Afghan reconciliation Program”[article online], NDU Press Archive, accessed 24 November 2010; available from <http://www.ndu.edu/press/recalibrating-the-afghan-reconciliation-program.html>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Joshua Partlow and Karen DeYoung, “Taliban imposter reveals perils of negotiation: too good to be true,” Washington Post, 24 November 2010, A6.

⁵ Having served in both Afghanistan and Iraq, I have seen an arguable parallel between the perceived need to accept, and in some cases endorse, figures like Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (HiG, Afghanistan) and Muqtada al Sadr (JAM, Iraq) who are both outspoken anti-American militants. I have not found an in depth comparison of these two individuals but both figures are widely touted as religious/political/militant leaders of major factions within the existing construct of the War on Terror. It is argued that both

The reintegration and reconciliation process is a critical element in the long-term success of Afghanistan. The process relies upon prudent decision making, which potentially runs counter to a socio-political environment that is seeking immediate successes to bolster its strength and legitimacy. The purpose of this paper is to inform the reader of the historical role that Gulbuddin Hekmatyar has played in the history of Afghanistan and demonstrate why his exclusion from the current reconciliation and reintegration efforts is absolutely critical to the long-term objectives of Afghanistan and the region. This is a matter of pragmatism and not one of social relativism or mirror imaging.

There are many who believe that as a foreigner it is our obligation to appreciate and accept the cultural norms in Afghanistan that cater to survival and the attainment of power. In 1857, Joseph Ferrier described this pension for reinvention best when he said, “they will change their protectors as often as it suits them; for fear and the greed of gain are the only motives which influence their conduct, but they rarely pay their tribute to whichever suzerain they attach themselves for the time.”⁶ He then continued, saying that this trait “has existed from the earliest times, and will certainly be the same a thousand years hence.”^{7,8}

Know Your Enemy

Few people know Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s name outside of the defense industry. Those who do tend to remember his early claim to fame as the perpetrator of the many attacks against young women attending Kabul University who failed to wear “Islamic” veils and consequently had acid thrown in their faces.⁹ Amongst Afghan’s, he is often remembered for the atrocities committed in Kabul from 1992 to 1996, where as many as 50,000 Kabul civilians were killed as a result of Hekmatyar’s indiscriminant artillery barrages during his fight for control.¹⁰ Even fewer know of him as the champion of United States support during the anti-soviet era of the 1980s. However, it is reported that he received over 600 million dollars worth of U.S. aid during that time period.¹¹

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar was born in 1947 (or 1950 depending on the source), as a Ghilzai Pashtun from Kunduz province. Prior to the murder of a Maoist student,¹² he was expelled from a military school and attended two years at the College of Engineering in Kabul University, earning him the nickname “the engineer.”^{13,14} Hekmatyar was a member of the “Muslim Youth”

figures require reconciliation prior to the creation of a truly stable environment. A basic overview of Muqtada al Sadr can be found at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/al-sadr.htm>.

⁶ Joseph Ferrier, *Caravan Journeys and Wanderings in Persia, Afghanistan, Turkistan, and Belochistan* (London: John Murray, 1857), 204.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ My experiences in Afghanistan attests to the truth of this statement, without disrespect or even apprehension, the Afghan leaders ability to cater to all sides was rooted in survival and the desired attainment of power. Members of the same family would fight for both the government and for the anti government forces (AAF) in order to preserve the balance which could be shifted one way or the other depending on the needs of the situation. Though frustrating, it was a critical understanding that often led to mutual success so long as all parties managed their expectations and definitions of success.

⁹ Michael Crowley, “Our Man in Kabul? The sadistic Afghan warlord who wants to be our friend.” [March 9, 2010 article online], The New Republic Archives, accessed 26 November 2010; available from <http://www.tnr.com/article/politics/our-man-kabul?page=0,0>.

¹⁰ Shaista Wahab and Barry Youngerman, *A Brief History Of Afghanistan*, 2d ed. (New York: Checkmark Books, 2010), 241.

¹¹ Crowley, “Our Man in Kabul? The sadistic Afghan warlord who wants to be our friend.”

¹² Hekmatyar was imprisoned from 1972 to 1973 but fled to Pakistan during the Daud Coup of 1973.

¹³ Biographical data is from a compilation of sources including Wahab’s book, Crowley’s article, and the Historical Dictionary of Afghanistan (see further citations for the specific location of the information).

¹⁴ Ludwig Adamec, *Historical Dictionary of Afghanistan*, 2d ed. (London: The Scarecrow Press: 1997), 142.

and was an active advocate of a revolutionary uprising that supported a radical Islamist republic as early as 1970 (which was during the time of King Zahir).¹⁵ There is an important distinction between Islamist and nationalist movements; Hekmatyar and his Hesb-i-Islami, a militant group established in 1975, were of the former. This distinction offered Hekmatyar “considerable support from like-minded groups in Pakistan and the Gulf.”¹⁶ He and his organization were heavily influenced by the teachings and methodology of the highly-politicized “Muslim Brotherhood.” This group, among other things, advocated a centralized command structure, formation of cells, secrecy among members, infiltration of social and government structures (a concept reminiscent of Antonio Gramsci), and most importantly the heralding of the organization as an Islamist vanguard in Afghanistan.¹⁷

Much of Afghanistan’s history is categorized and understood by the unique forms of conflict that follow each other in close succession. That perpetual state of chaos allows individual leaders to distinguish themselves and develop a relative level of prominence based on the extent of their participation. In an effort to work within that framework and develop an appreciation for Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, an oversimplification of Afghanistan’s contemporary timeline is necessary. Hekmatyar’s influence will be viewed from the monumental paradigm shift of pre versus post soviet withdrawal.

Pre Soviet Withdrawal: The Development of a Warlord

Important to understanding Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and his influence is a basic comprehension of his actions after the 27 April 1978 Saur Revolution, which was the fateful precursor to the Soviet occupation in December 1979.¹⁸ The Soviets supported the 1978 coup against Daud and likely accepted his murder along with the murder of 30 members of his family on the 28th of April of that year.¹⁹ However, the Soviets quickly realized that they had opened the door to an uncontrollable radical Islamist regime that could destabilize the entire Muslim region which prompted their invasion on 27 December 1979. On that same date the Soviets were successful in killing President Hafizullah Amin, the formidable counterweight to the Soviet preference of Nur Muhammad Taraki, who became the first president of the Communist regime.²⁰

After the 1978 revolution there was an influx of over 80,000 Afghan refugees into Pakistan, which swelled the population with willing militants.²¹ The President of Pakistan at the time was Zia ul-Haq and he demonstrated a willingness to accept them and bolster their cause with “financial aid and encouragement.”²² Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who had been developing his militant force in Pakistan since 1975, benefited greatly and was authorized in January of 1979 by Zia to take 5,000 rebels “to cross into Afghanistan’s Konar Province and attack its capital.”²³

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 143.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Wahab and Youngerman, A Brief History Of Afghanistan, 138.

¹⁹ Ibid., 139.

²⁰ Ibid., 153-156.

²¹ Ibid., 150.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 152.

In 1978 the United States was providing support in the form of propaganda and nonlethal equipment in the sum of roughly \$500,000.²⁴ Due to the Soviet Invasion and coupled with the developing situation in Iran, a change policy was directed under President Carter. By 1979 there was a large consortium of nations providing Soviet style arms to the anti-Soviet forces.²⁵ In 1980 the Pakistani government, based partially on a need to control the distribution of such aid, formally recognized 7 major political parties – all of which, coincidentally, had military style militias subordinate to them.^{26,27} To receive aid all refugees and organizations had to register with one of the seven dominate groups. “Most of the military and financial aid from Pakistan, the United States, Saudi Arabia, and other interested foreign parties was funneled through these seven groups.”²⁸

Led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Hezbi-i-Islami, in short HiG, was “the most radical of the Islamist groups.” Hekmatyar was favored by Pakistani leaders who were impressed by his Pashtun affiliation, fierce determination, and organizational skills.²⁹ It is said that a third of all U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) assistance, to include a significant quantity of Stinger missiles, went to HiG.³⁰ Stated clearly by Michael Crowley, there was “no other Afghan leader [who] had received more money from the United States than Hekmatyar, yet he showed his Western patrons precious little gratitude” as he “claimed to despise the United States as much as the Soviet Union.”³¹ It is estimated that 30,000 rebels fought under Hekmatyar primarily in the North, East, and South but differed from other organizations as he did not have a geographical center in any region.³² With that said, Hekmatyar enjoyed during the soviet era a reputation amongst the varying groups as the “most ruthless and uncompromising of them all,” and to the soviets he was a fabled “bogyman behind the most unspeakable torture of their captured soldiers.”³³

Post Soviet Withdrawal: The Making of a Terrorist

In February of 1989 the Russians withdrew their occupation force from Afghanistan with President Najibullah’s communist regime maintaining control for a further three years before falling to the warring Mujahedeen. During the early 1990’s the Pakistani government sanctioned an Afghan Interim Government in exile, which was composed of familiar figures from the 7 political parties recognized ten years earlier. However, little unity existed as the Soviet withdrawal allowed traditionalists, in particular, to return to their homeland and pursue local interests. This was not opposed by Najibullah and his government. At the time, the Soviets were still providing 3 to 4 billion dollars a year to the communist Afghan government, who had purchased weapons and most importantly “put a large number of tribal leaders and even

²⁴ Ibid., 157.

²⁵ Ibid., 164.

²⁶ Of the 7 political parties, 3 were regarded as traditionalists while four were considered radical Islamists; political ends were the primary differentiating factor as the traditionalists tended to prefer a return to a monarchical system while the Islamists required a government/society “reorganized around Muslim principles and values.”

²⁷ Wahab and Youngerman, *A Brief History Of Afghanistan*, 176.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 177.

³⁰ Ibid., 177-178.

³¹ Crowley, “Our Man in Kabul? The sadistic Afghan warlord who wants to be our friend.”

³² Wahab and Youngerman, *A Brief History Of Afghanistan*, 178.

³³ George Crile, *Charlie Wilson’s War: The Extraordinary Story of How the wildest Man in Congress and a Rogue CIA Agent Changed the History of Our Times*(New York: Grove Press: 2003), 222.

mujahedeen commanders on the payroll, a time honored Afghan tool to build support.”³⁴ Hekmatyar, for his part, did two things in the early 1990’s to assure disunity amongst the rebels. The first was when “he surprised friends and foes alike when he allied himself with General Shahnawaz Tanai, a radical Khalqi, in a coup against the Kabul government of Dr. Najibullah.”³⁵ The second was in 1991, when he murdered seven commanders and twenty-three soldiers of Massoud’s Jamiat and subsequently withdrew from his position in the exiled interim government.³⁶ This only further clarified his singular quest for power.

1992 to 1996 was deemed an era of Mujahedeen rule, but is better described as a prolonged siege of Kabul. At the time varying tribal factions violently fought for control of the government and a continued shift of alliances muddied any semblance of unity. Hekmatyar was regarded as the most horrific of the protagonists. He constantly refused power sharing agreements that would have made him the Prime Minister, as they would have placed him as a subservient to first President Mujadidi and then Rabbani. By decree he was in fact the prime minister from 1992 to 1994, but he never entered the office. After 50,000 civilians were killed and a further 100,000 wounded by his hand he did, in fact, concede to being the Prime Minister for a brief time period in 1996. The end result of this era with regard to Hekmatyar was well articulated by Shaista Wahab when he said:

The attacks [referring to the indiscriminant rocket and artillery attacks], as well as the failure to take Kabul, finally discredited Hekmatyar among most of his Pashtun allies and, more important, persuaded Pakistan’s ISI to begin searching for a more effective and popular protégé.³⁷

After four years of subtle development under the direction of Mullah Omar, who was now connected with the Pakistani government and ISI, the Taliban movement fought to develop the stability that the country’s impoverished and abused population so desperately desired. Of interest, the remaining HiG forces reportedly succumbed to the Taliban not through fighting, but because the senior commander under Hekmatyar was bribed with 2 million dollars, effectively reducing all militia resistance outside of Kabul.³⁸ In September of 1996, the Taliban succeeded in expelling Rabbani and Hekmatyar from both Kabul and Afghanistan. Both figures sought refuge in Iran as they were no longer favored by the Pakistanis. During this time another faction began to weigh in, Osama Bin Laden fully backed the Taliban reportedly providing 3 million dollars in support of their cause.³⁹ In 1991, Osama Bin Laden and Hekmatyar were connected as outspoken opponents to the U.S.-led coalition in the Gulf War. Additionally, Hekmatyar also claimed to have helped Osama Bin Laden escape from Tora Bora in 2001.⁴⁰

The Enemy Of My Enemy Is Still The Enemy

After Al Qaeda’s September 11, 2001 attack on U.S. soil and the subsequent coalition ousting of the Taliban and Al Qaeda from Afghanistan, three primary threats have remained persistent throughout the current insurgency fight. Those three threats have been identified as

³⁴ Wahab and Youngerman, *A Brief History Of Afghanistan*, 195.

³⁵ Ludwig Adamec, *Historical Dictionary of Afghanistan*, 143. This alliance demonstrated a willingness to compromise beliefs, overlook atrocities, and ally with the enemy all for the pursuit of power.

³⁶ Wahab and Youngerman, *A Brief History Of Afghanistan*, 195.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 209.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 216.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁴⁰ Crowley, “Our Man in Kabul? The sadistic Afghan warlord who wants to be our friend.”

the Quetta Shurra (Taliban), the Jalaluddin Haqqani Network, and the Hezbi-i-Islami. Al Qaeda is connected to all three and all three are once again enjoying a base of operations in Pakistan. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and his forces have been responsible for a series of high-profile attacks within recent years. The most notable being his involvement in a complex attack against a combined Afghan and Coalition outpost in the Kamdesh region of north eastern Afghanistan in October of 2009.⁴¹ Then in September of 2008 he claimed responsibility for the death and mutilation of 10 French soldiers – another attack that reportedly massed over one hundred HiG fighters.⁴²

More applicable to the question of reconciliation and reintegration are the reported attacks that Hekmatyar has claimed were directly aimed at President Karzai. Notable among those attacks are the assassination attempt of 2002, and more recently the 2008 bombing of a military parade that nearly took Karzai's life.⁴³ Regardless, President Karzai has offered a broad-based reconciliation and reintegration concept that targets all levels of the opposition, in order to provide an opportunity to anyone who can be swayed by financial and political gain.

Appeasement has long been regarded by Western powers as a failed concept that often leads to greater problems. As Winston Churchill said, "an appeaser is one who feeds a crocodile, hoping it will eat him last."⁴⁴ This simple allusion does not suggest that this effort could be the prelude to the next Adolf Hitler, but certain realities must be acknowledged. Una Moore, writing about Hekmatyar in the United Nations Dispatch, said, "in the eyes of ordinary Afghans, he's a war criminal unfit to live amongst his victims, let alone govern them."⁴⁵ Concerning the notion of reconciliation, she goes on to write that "granting him any position of influence – and he wouldn't likely settle for a symbolic post – would have a chilling effect on Afghanistan's beleaguered democrats."⁴⁶ This is made more salient by Michael Crowley's assertion that "cutting a deal with Hekmatyar that grants him legitimized power could amount to a horrendous moral compromise."⁴⁷

Conclusion

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar has cast himself as "a lifelong deal-maker, he cares most about one thing: power."⁴⁸ He has proven that his allegiances are based entirely on benefit. He has also proven himself to be a brutal terrorist whose interests do not include the needs or protection of the people or Afghanistan. The only apparent constant throughout his turbulent life is his staunch anti-American opinions. That said, his condemnation is reactionary and generally

⁴¹ The author was assigned to the task force involved in the attack that left 8 Soldiers killed but was not directly involved in the battle. Simply stated, the anti-Afghan government forces (AAF) of varying affiliations attempted to exploit the ongoing strategic consolidation of coalition and government forces towards more populated areas. The losses suffered by the enemy were significant; the heroic efforts of the individuals in that battle prompted a persistent disunity amongst the AAF for an extended period of time and allowed the successful and unimpeded closure of several distant outposts in the region. This attack is attributed to in HiG in an open source document by Michael Crowley (see previous citations).

⁴² "Warlord claims French ambush" [anonymous article online, 29 SEP 2008], RFI Archives, accessed 27 November 2010; available from http://www.rfi.fr/actuen/articles/105/article_1719.asp.

⁴³ Crowley, "Our Man in Kabul? The sadistic Afghan warlord who wants to be our friend."

⁴⁴ Winston Churchill, "Winston Churchill Quotes" [quote online], Brainy Quote, accessed 28 November 2010; available from <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/w/winstonchu100130.html>.

⁴⁵ Uma Moore, "The Bloody Hands of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar" [article online, 26 March 2010], UN Dispatch Archives, accessed 27 November 2010; available from <http://www.undispatch.com/the-bloody-hands-of-gulbuddin-hekmatyar>.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Crowley, "Our Man in Kabul? The sadistic Afghan warlord who wants to be our friend."

⁴⁸ Ibid.

extends to all those who challenge his power and fail to adhere to his unique interpretation of Islam. Despite his known affiliations with them, he bears more resemblance to Al Qaeda than many seem to recognize, the only differentiating factor is the scope of each organization's influence. However, the relationship must be acknowledged as our nation's objective, as clarified in March 2009 by President Obama, is to "disrupt, dismantle and defeat al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return in either country in the future."⁴⁹

Currently, Hezb-I-Islami is the most radical right wing entity of the Afghan parliament and enjoys 9 seats within the legitimate government structure.⁵⁰ Their current efforts to reconcile with the Afghan government ahead of the Taliban, and prior to the desired national elections of 2011, does not constitute pacification as much as an act of subversion. In response to the Taliban imposter into the reconciliation process, Mohammad Umer Daudzai (Chief of Staff for President Karzai) is paraphrased as saying that "foreigners should stay out of delicate negotiations with the Afghan Insurgent group."⁵¹ This statement was made even in light of the 150 million dollars of international pledges that were offered in support of the reconciliation and reintegration process announced at the 2010 London conference, and in view of the fact that in 2009 a new organization was formed within ISAF known as the Force Reintegration Cell (F-RIC).⁵² This disparity simply highlights the need for the United States to be extremely cautious in their approach to the process of reconciliation and reintegration when it comes to negotiating with the key militant leaders – leaders who are driving this conflict at the expense of the Afghan people.

Hekmatyar and his organization represent an opportunity for the uninformed or willfully blind. Hekmatyar's overtures since 2008 have painted him as a high-level and willing participant in the reconciliation and reintegration process and could be the window dressing that offers the illusion of success both for President Karzai and President Obama. The most notable historic example of creating an alliance of necessity that ended in failure was the Allied acceptance of Stalin. This alliance led to the Soviet occupation and atrocities committed in Poland and Germany (just to name a few) and the prolonged nature of the Cold War; given a reasonable simplification it also represents the precursor to the contemporary Afghanistan conflict.

Even more applicable is our own alliance of necessity with Hekmatyar during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, which was the fateful decision that has manifested itself in our current fight against extremist Islamist organizations. To assert that such alliances are necessary evils is likely to be the logic that dooms the future of Afghanistan to a repeat of 1992 through 1996.

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⁴⁹ President Barack Obama as cited by Amin Tarzi, "Recalibrating the Afghan reconciliation Program." The web address to the primary source was not provided in Amin Tarzi's footnote and could not be independently verified.

⁵⁰ Crowley, "Our Man in Kabul? The sadistic Afghan warlord who wants to be our friend."

⁵¹ Joshua Partlow, "British faulted for Taliban imposter: Afghan Official Casts Blame, Karzai aide says foreigners should stay out of talks." *The Washington Post*, 26 November 2010, A1.

⁵² Amin Tarzi, "Recalibrating the Afghan reconciliation Program."

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