



THE POLITICAL DEAL WITH HEZB-E ISLAMI

WHAT IT MEANS FOR TALKS WITH THE
TALIBAN AND PEACE IN AFGHANISTAN

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ABOUT THE REPORT

The September 2016 agreement between Afghanistan's National Unity Government and Hezb-e Islami called for the militant group to renounce violence and accept the Afghan constitution in return for the government freeing Hezb-e Islami prisoners, incorporating cadres into the Afghan National Security Forces, and resettling thousands of Afghan refugees living in camps inside Pakistan. This report examines how the deal was negotiated, how it has been received in the provinces beyond Kabul, what progress has been made on the implementation of specific provisions, and what lessons can be applied to prospective peace talks with the Taliban.

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Cover photo: Former members of Hezb-e Islami's insurgency meet with political counterparts in Asadabad, Kunar, to discuss a unified party strategy during the summer of 2017. (Photo courtesy of The Liaison Office)

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Summary

- General support for the agreement between Hezb-e Islami and Afghanistan's National Unity Government, finalized with the return of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar in May 2017, is due to a widespread perception that, despite its limitations, it is an "Afghan deal."
- Though it remains to be seen if the deal will have a demonstration effect on the Taliban, it has at least demonstrated to the Afghan public that its government is capable of concluding a political agreement with a militant group.
- Rather than engaging in outright opposition to the deal, traditional rivals like Jamiat-e Islami and other entrenched elites are trying to prevent Hezb-e Islami from unifying politically and to slow down the implementation of provisions of the agreement, particularly the incorporation of Hezb-e Islami cadres into various arms of the Afghan National Security Forces.
- At the national level, there is an expectation among Hezb-e Islami partisans that the agreement will translate into electoral success if and when long-delayed parliamentary elections are held. However, leadership remains divided, with one camp surrounding Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal, the head of Hezb-e Islami's post-2001 political party, and another backing Hekmatyar and his son, Habib ur Rahman.
- National-level divisions are less apparent at the provincial level. In the provinces, there is greater agreement among Hezb-e Islami partisans that the party is unified under Hekmatyar's leadership. Support is driven by the belief that Hekmatyar's name recognition in specific provinces will translate into future parliamentary and provincial council seats.
- There is no evidence that Hezb-e Islami commanders have joined the Taliban, the Islamic State, or the Haqqani Network. Instead, many of the commanders opposed to the deal have chosen to remain inside Pakistan. The most significant internal opposition comes from a group of Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin militants based in Shygal district of Kunar. These individuals are talking to, but as of late 2017 had not joined, the Taliban or the Islamic State's "Khorasan" branch.
- The handful of provincial- and district-level Taliban commanders interviewed say the deal has not influenced their view of peace with the Afghan government. Among other things, they cited long-standing ideological and operational differences with Hezb-e Islami, mistrust of the Afghan government, and, above all, the perception that they were winning the insurgency as reasons why the deal mattered little to them.
- The extent to which the Hezb-e Islami deal offers a "blueprint" for future formal talks with the Taliban is limited by differences in scope, complexity, and dynamics. Nevertheless, the experience provides some useful insights, including the benefits of framing the process from the standpoint of a "political agreement" as opposed to reconciliation, using the High Peace Council to support rather than lead negotiations, and allowing militants to retain weapons in return for renouncing violence and ceasing attacks.

Introduction

In May 2017, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar—an engineering school dropout, mujahideen leader, one-time CIA client, former prime minister, and head of the second-largest insurgent group in Afghanistan—returned to Kabul after two decades of exile in Iran and Pakistan. The previous fall, after nearly nine years of back-channel discussions and official negotiations across two Afghan administrations, his militant group, Hezb-e Islami-Gulbuddin (HIG), struck a political deal with President Ashraf Ghani and his National Unity Government.

It was the National Unity Government's first significant achievement after almost two years of existence. Hekmatyar had backed down on his most intractable demand—the departure of all international military forces—and thousands of HIG militants across the country renounced violence. In return for accepting the Afghan constitution and renouncing violence—though not relinquishing their arms—the government agreed to free Hezb-e Islami prisoners, incorporate cadres into the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), and resettle thousands of Afghan refugees living in Hezb-e Islami-affiliated camps inside Pakistan.

The peaceful removal of even a single fighter from the Afghan battlefield is a welcome development. However, given HIG's inability or unwillingness to challenge the government in the years prior to the settlement, its real significance lies in its potential political implications and not immediate security gains. For Hekmatyar, the agreement is a last gasp for political relevance. The first—and to date the only—provision in the agreement to be fully implemented is his removal from a UN terrorist sanctions list. This delisting paved the way for Hekmatyar's return to Kabul, where he is now attempting to unify Hezb-e Islami's political and militant wings under his command, lead the party to a strong showing in upcoming parliamentary elections, and, ultimately, take a seat on the national stage.

For President Ghani and his national security team, the deal was a much-needed success story in advance of the October 2016 NATO conference on future assistance to Afghanistan.¹ It was also a gutsy play by the president to consolidate power within his own multihheaded government. But the deal is a double-edged olive branch: it could lead to greater support from Pashtun old guard mujahideen leaders, particularly in the east and northeast, and possibly spur direct talks with the Taliban, or it could snap back in new rounds of government infighting—this time with one of Afghanistan's slipperiest political brawlers punching from inside the tent.

The purpose of this report is to examine the national and subnational implications of the agreement with HIG. How was the deal negotiated? How has it been received in the provinces beyond Kabul? What progress has been made on the implementation of specific provisions and what challenges remain? And what lessons can be applied to prospective peace talks with the Taliban. The Liaison Office, an Afghan research and peacebuilding organization, conducted over sixty interviews with informants in eight provinces—Baghlan, Farah, Kapisa, Khost, Kunar, Nangarhar, Paktia, and Wardak—from August to October 2017. Interviewees included representatives of Hezb-e Islami's political party, HIG and the Taliban insurgency's provincial peace council members, Afghan security officials, tribal elders, civil society activists, and members of other Afghan political parties. An additional twenty interviews were conducted in Kabul and Washington, DC, with national representatives of Hezb-e Islami and Jamiat-e Islami, principle negotiators of the agreement; as well as officials from the US government, the Afghan government, and the United Nations.

Understanding Hezb-e Islami

On his trip westward from Pakistan to Kabul in the early spring of 2017 to sign the agreement with President Ghani, Hekmatyar stopped in the eastern city of Jalalabad to lead a rally of Hezb-e Islami supporters. Among other things, Hekmatyar's speech sought to answer Taliban critics who said he had sold out his principles and surrendered his jihadist credentials. "I told the Taliban," Hekmatyar recounted to his cheering supporters, "you were not even born when my friends and I were in the trenches... You were infants when we were doing jihad... The number of our martyred is many times more than the number of your supporters."² This statement is a reminder that the conflict in Afghanistan is much older, and the political divides much deeper, than just the ongoing Taliban-led insurgency. As such, it is worth traveling back to the roots of the contemporary conflict in Afghanistan to place the agreement in perspective.

Origins: The Muslim Youth Organization

Hezb-e Islami Afghanistan (the Islamic Party of Afghanistan) traces its ideology, structure, and composition to the Muslim Youth Organization (MYO), a student and faculty group founded at Kabul University in 1969 as an Islamist alternative to the more prolific Marxist and Maoist movements spearheading anti-monarchy activities on campus and around Kabul. Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and its South Asian analog, Jamaat-e Islami, inspired the MYO. However, as one early member of the organization recalls, "The Muslim Youth wasn't a political party so much as it was a way of saying that you weren't a communist."³ Early on, MYO's core support came from students and professors in Kabul University's Islamic law, engineering, and agriculture schools. Though it was predominately Sunni, the organization had no sectarian, ethnic, or tribal agenda. Leaders and members were an even mix of Pashtuns and Tajiks, Afghanistan's two largest ethnic groups.⁴

Following a failed coup against President Daud Khan in 1975, the MYO split into two factions: Hezb-e Islami, led by the Pashtun engineering student Gulbuddin Hekmatyar; and Jamiat-e Islami, led by the Tajik cleric Burhanuddin Rabbani. In time, Jamiat and Hezb would recruit largely from their respective Tajik and Pashtun ethnic constituencies, but their initial split was over strategy and leadership rather than ethnic politics. Hekmatyar favored violent action and the immediate implementation of an Islamist, sharia-based government. This position attracted a younger and more militant constituency. Rabbani, an established cleric and professor with a line of communication to the Daud government, advocated a gradualist and less confrontational approach.⁵

While Hezb and Jamiat bickered over strategy, the communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan seized power after deposing Daud Khan in a bloody coup in the spring of 1978. Subsequent attempts by Pakistan to heal the Hezb-Jamiat rift succeeded only in creating more parties and fragmenting the resistance. Hezb-e Islami continued to assert its primacy among an increasingly crowded field of opposition parties based on its roots in the Muslim Youth Organization, the early arrest and detention of its student partisans, and its position as the first of the *organized* resistance parties—a position that Jamiat-e Islami has long contested. Because of their shared history and ideology, Hezb and Jamiat competed bitterly for preeminence during the anti-Soviet jihad. Today, more than forty years after their founding, Hezb and Jamiat remain the largest and best-organized political parties in Afghanistan. Their rivalry will continue to shape the government of Afghanistan—and, importantly, its response to the Taliban insurgency—in the years to come.

Ideology: Political Islam in Afghanistan

All of the major Sunni and Shia mujahideen groups waging war against the Soviet-backed communist government anchored their ideology in the concept of jihad (in this case a just, and defensive, struggle against an outside aggressor threatening the Islamic community).⁶ Framing and justifying the resistance in these terms elevated religious leaders, both ulema (clerics) and traditionalist pirs (Sufi holy men), to leadership positions. Beyond this core tenet, however, more divided the mujahideen than united them. The dozen or so largest Sunni and Shia mujahideen parties of the 1980s subscribed to three main ideologies: conservative, fundamentalist, and Islamist. Conservative parties were fighting for the status quo ante, including the return of Afghanistan's Pashtun monarchy. Fundamentalists desired a return to the practice and custom of early Islamic history and envisaged a theocracy run by religious leaders and insulated from the outside world. The largest of these parties, Harakat-e Inqilab, eventually formed the core of the Taliban regime that ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, with key Taliban members emerging from the Harakat base in Quetta.

Islamist parties like Jamiat-e Islami and Hezb-e Islami believe that religion provides a reference point and practical means of addressing contemporary social, economic, and political issues; that rationality and science are compatible with Islam; but that capitalism and communism lead to moral decay and godlessness.⁷ Islamists believe that sharia (the Islamic legal system) and *hakimiyya* (securing God's sovereignty in the political system) provide a blueprint for Muslim states to compete on the world stage without losing their moral bearings. Two main thinkers influence Hezb-e Islami's particular brand of Islamism. The first is Abul A'la Maududi, a journalist and religious scholar who founded Jamaat-e Islami in British India in 1941 as the Muslim vanguard of anti-colonialist struggles on the subcontinent.⁸ The second is, Sayed Qutb, an Egyptian Muslim Brother who adapted the immediacy of Maududi's anti-colonialist narrative to argue for the overthrow of (often) authoritarian regimes throughout the Muslim world. For Qutb, the situation in the Muslim world was so dire that shedding Muslim blood in the pursuit of true Islamic states was a necessary price to pay. Hezb-e Islami—and Hekmatyar in particular—more so than any other mujahideen party subscribed to this Qutbist ideology and used it as cover to assassinate jihadist competitors and, more generally, as a justification for refusing to make common cause with other mujahideen groups.⁹ To instill its ideology, Hezb-e Islami spent considerably more effort than other mujahideen parties indoctrinating its partisans, taking an active hand in shaping the curriculum of schools inside the Afghan refugee camps under its control, and demanding that members put the party over tribal or ethnic affiliations.¹⁰

Organization

Hezb-e Islami's organizational approach was an even more radical departure than the party's Islamist ideology. Recruitment and promotion was, at least in theory, a combination of moral, intellectual, and ideological devotion to the party rather than, say, tribal lineage or landholdings.¹¹ All of this represented a potentially disruptive development for Afghan society, given that resource mobilization and the accumulation of power has long been the domain of traditional tribal or religious (Sufi) families. In fact, in its structure and composition, Hezb-e Islami more closely resembled the communist parties it was fighting against than many of its mujahideen allies.

Islamist parties like Jamiat-e Islami and Hezb-e Islami believe that religion provides a reference point and practical means of addressing contemporary social, economic, and political issues.

During the anti-communist jihad, the central leadership of Hezb-e Islami retained more control over ground initiatives than did other mujahideen parties, and Hekmatyar was in a position to make crucial decisions “more or less on his own” on a day-to-day basis.¹² As the war progressed, Hezb-e Islami’s overly centralized structure limited its ability to respond to realities on the ground, tying the hands of front commanders and curbing their ability to strike potentially beneficial alliances on the ground in Afghanistan. Post-2001, Hezb-e Islami’s organizational system—particularly its overcentralization—may have ultimately been too sophisticated and too rigid to wage an effective insurgency, especially when compared to the Taliban’s system of promoting semiautonomous fronts (*mabaz*).¹³ On the other hand, this organizational structure has allowed Hezb-e Islami’s post-2001 political party to establish a wide network among universities and within the government bureaucracy.

Composition

In its early years, Hezb-e Islami’s leadership was recruited primarily among the urban, educated class found at universities, high schools, and government ministries in Kabul and the provincial capitals. These early recruits developed and ran the party’s logistical, administrative, and propaganda apparatus.¹⁴ After 2001, this group constituted the backbone of Hezb-e Islami’s political party, occupied positions throughout the Afghan government bureaucracy, and accounted for a significant share of the faculty on university campuses across the country. The second group was rural jihadi commanders. These individuals joined for different reasons—many were attracted initially to Hezb-e Islami’s ideology, though others joined as a means of securing resources to defend their communities and to differentiate themselves from nearby commanders receiving arms and support from other mujahideen parties.

Hezb-e Islami developed a support base among Pashtuns of the Ghilzai tribal confederation dominant in eastern Afghanistan. Recruitment from this constituency was a by-product of being the first “organized” mujahideen party with a Pashtun leader—Hekmatyar—rather than the result of a concerted strategy or ethnic agenda.¹⁵ In eastern Afghanistan, Hezb-e Islami drew support in Kunar, Laghman, Wardak, Paktika, Paktia, and Logar provinces. However, other mujahideen parties recruited heavily from these areas as well, and no single group was able to consolidate control across provinces. In the north, minority Pashtun communities in Baghlan, Balkh, and Kunduz joined Hezb-e Islami to limit the encroachment of majority ethnic groups as much as to fight against the communist government. In the south, Hezb-e Islami tended to support small groups of Ghilzai Pashtun commanders surrounded by the larger Durrani confederation.¹⁶ The result was that Hezb-e Islami commanders dotted the landscape throughout Afghanistan but were never able to effectively broaden their support base or consolidate control at a regional or even provincial level. After 2001, the HIG insurgency was influential within these same core areas—in some cases, retaining control in single villages with a history of HIG support but mostly failing to expand beyond these historic networks.

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Leadership

In design, Hezb-e Islami allowed for egalitarian advancement and representative decision making through a central *shura*. In practice, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, an engineering student and the only leader of a major mujahideen party without a family or clerical background of note, so thoroughly consolidated control that the party verged on a cult of personality. Hekmatyar was born in 1948 into a family of modest means from a relatively small Pashtun tribe

of the Ghilzai confederation in northern Kunduz Province.¹⁷ As part of its state consolidation strategy, the Pashtun monarchy periodically resettled eastern and southern Pashtuns to areas of the north where other groups—mainly ethnic Uzbeks and Tajiks—were dominant. Forced ethnic fragmentation kept the peripheries from uniting against the state; but in the process, the resettled Pashtuns—known as *naqilin*—were isolated from their larger tribal units.¹⁸ As a *naqilin* in Kunduz from a small Pashtun tribe, Hekmatyar grew up on the margins of the power structure. This position shaped his worldview and the party he eventually led.

Hekmatyar arrived in Kabul in the late 1960s, first attending a military school and then passing an examination for a seat at Kabul University's faculty of engineering.¹⁹ There, Hekmatyar helped found the Muslim Youth Organization and distinguished himself as one of its most militant members, actively involved in violent demonstrations against campus communists.²⁰ In the absence of a strong tribal constituency or powerful family name, Hekmatyar used an aggressive Islamism, strong reasoning and debating skills, and persuasive oratory to gain and consolidate power.²¹

Over the years, Hekmatyar has retained power by attacking putative allies—within and without the party—spotting opportunistic alliances, capturing external resources, and using both Islam and ethnicity opportunistically to dominate the discourse. This knack for self-preservation is partly why the Afghan public remained skeptical that the deal with HIG would be fully executed until the moment Hekmatyar set foot in Kabul in May 2017. It is also why many Afghans, even those in his own party, see him as a greater threat aligned with the government than opposed to it.

External Relations

Pakistan channeled external funds to all seven of the major Sunni mujahideen parties during the jihad, but Hezb-e Islami was its favorite. The Zia ul Haq regime (1978–88) distributed a disproportionate amount of international resources to Hezb-e Islami—probably around 40 percent of all aid its Inter-Services Intelligence doled out.²² While Pakistan saw Hekmatyar as the best-case scenario in a post-Soviet Afghanistan, they still hedged their bet. “Hekmatyar was very much under the influence of Pakistan,” one of his earliest Hezb-e Islami lieutenants recalls. “But the bigger point was not who got the most resources, but the fact that each [mujahideen] group got enough to create disunity and prevent one group from completely taking the lead or uniting all of the parties.”²³ After the death of General Zia in 1988, Pakistan continued to support Hezb-e Islami, as well as other mujahideen groups, until the emergence of the Taliban in the mid-1990s. After 2001, Pakistan's decision to allow Hekmatyar and his commanders to operate once again from its soil was likewise a critical component of HIG's existence.

Though the CIA was more circumspect in its support, it too chose Hezb-e Islami as its favorite. The CIA found Hezb-e Islami to be among the most effective of all the mujahideen parties (as well as the most accountable for the materiel it received). Yet it deeply mistrusted Hekmatyar and his Islamist agenda. As the head of CIA operations in Pakistan and Afghanistan during this period wrote, of all the mujahideen leaders “it would only be Gulbudin Hekmatyar whom I would have to count as my enemy, and a dangerous one....I would never be able to shake the allegations that the CIA had chosen this paranoid radical as its favorite, that we were providing this man...with more than his share of the means to fight the Soviets.”²⁴ Though US support to all mujahideen parties had slowed to a trickle shortly before

the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, the United States had broken publicly with Hezb-e Islami after Hekmatyar sided with Saddam Hussein in the first Gulf War (1990–91).²⁵

Civil War and the Taliban Regime

Hezb-e Islami was never able to turn its external support into a broader coalition inside Afghanistan throughout the 1980s. As the war against the Soviets dragged on, the party increasingly relied on recruits from the refugee camps it controlled inside Pakistan, in addition to Arab fighters, to fill its ranks.²⁶ In the early 1990s, the government of Mohammad Najibullah, still holding Kabul despite the Soviet withdrawal years earlier, launched a process of national reconciliation. Hezb-e Islami confounded compromise efforts largely to maintain access to Pakistani-administered funding.²⁷

When the Najibullah government finally fell in 1992, divisions among the resistance exploded into a civil war that brought the fighting directly to Kabul. Jamiat-e Islami quickly formed an alliance with the Uzbek Junbesh-e Milli militia led by Rashid Dostum and the Hazara coalition party, Hezb-e Wahdat. On the other side, Hezb-e Islami allied with remnants of the recently deposed Khalq faction of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. But these alliances were short-lived, and the period was characterized by constant shuffling and realignment, with weaker parties gravitating towards stronger groups and then spinning off again in search of better deals. When the mujahideen announced a power-sharing agreement and a compromise candidate for prime minister, Hezb-e Islami refused to recognize the new government. Hekmatyar, in particular, was responsible for the inability of the mujahideen government to share power and govern effectively.²⁸ Though few among the mujahideen emerged from the civil war without blood on their hands, Hekmatyar is widely regarded as the bloodiest for leading a bombing campaign on the civilian population of Kabul that killed thousands, including more than 1,800 in the month of August 1992 alone.²⁹

When the Taliban emerged in Kandahar in 1994, they gained public support across the south by sweeping away predatory mujahideen commanders.³⁰ Initially the Taliban received some financial support in this effort from Jamiat-e Islami, eager to use this new group of religious students to erode Hezb-e Islami's support in southern and eastern Afghanistan.³¹ Capitalizing on divisions like these, and leveraging growing public support, the Taliban moved north out of Kandahar. Some local Hezb-e Islami commanders began to defect while others, among them a large component of Arab fighters, clashed with the Taliban in Wardak province in early 1995.³² A final round of defections on the outskirts of Kabul in 1996 allowed the Taliban to take the capital. Hekmatyar made a hasty alliance with his sworn enemies in Jamiat-e Islami, fleeing north through Jamiat territory and into Tajikistan before heading west to Iran. While some prominent members of Hezb-e Islami joined the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance under the command of Ahmed Shah Masood, Hekmatyar remained in Iran throughout the Taliban regime.

Only a very small number of notable Hezb-e Islami commanders joined the Taliban. However, the Taliban were reluctant to be associated with mujahideen commanders who played active roles in the Afghan civil war that followed the fall of the Najibullah government. As such, the few Hezb-e Islami commanders who did join the Taliban were strictly excluded from leadership positions. For their part, many Hezb-e Islami partisans saw the Taliban as a regressive and religiously obtuse force of country mullahs.

In the years since 2001, Hezb-e Islami and the Taliban have often been grouped collectively into the antigovernment "insurgency." This characterization, however, masks significant

differences. Although both envision a society in which legislative authority ultimately rests with God, the Taliban sees little role for democratic institutions and envisions a society run almost entirely by clerics, whereas Hezb-e Islami views popular elections, political parties, and civilian governments as a necessary means of securing individual rights and dealing with all matters confronting modern states on which Islamic law (sharia) is silent.

Understanding these fundamental differences is important to an examination of contemporary negotiations, particularly insofar as HIG had a political agenda that was leveraged in negotiations with the Ghani administration. If the Taliban have such an agenda, it has not been consistently or coherently articulated. Numerous interviewees cited the Taliban's absence of enumerated political goals as a fundamental difference that would limit the application of lessons learned during the Hezb-e Islami negotiations to any future talks with the Taliban.³³ This divide, along with a history of mistrust or open conflict, should similarly temper expectations about the impact that direct outreach from Hezb-e Islami leadership to their Taliban counterparts may have.

After 9/11

Hezb-e Islami was absent from the December 2001 conference in Bonn, Germany, where plans and power-sharing agreements for a post-Taliban Afghanistan were drawn up under the auspices of the United Nations.³⁴ Hamid Karzai, a Pashtun from Kandahar, was named chair of Afghanistan's new interim administration. However, about half of the new cabinet seats—including the ministries of defense, interior, and foreign affairs—went to partisans from the Northern Alliance and Jamiat-e Islami. Months later, Iran expelled Hekmatyar. By the spring of 2002, he was along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, where he claims to have met with al-Qaeda leaders Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri and to have “indirectly” contacted Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar.³⁵ Hekmatyar and Mullah Omar reportedly reached an agreement whereby the Taliban and Hezb-e Islami would maintain distinct leadership structures and refrain from attacking one another. Shortly thereafter, Hekmatyar issued a public statement calling for jihad against foreign military forces in Afghanistan. “Our understanding was that the United States had invaded Afghanistan. That is why we started fighting,” a HIG insurgent commander from Logar province recalled.³⁶

Hekmatyar was thus alone among all major mujahideen leaders in opposing the newly constituted Afghan interim government—a government dominated by members of his long-time rivals in Jamiat-e Islami. Within the insurgency, however, Hezb-e Islami also found itself relegated “to a far distant second place” behind the Taliban.³⁷ This gap only widened as the years went on. While the US military was aggressively pursuing the Taliban, HIG sought to make a name for itself with high-profile attacks on interim government officials, including an assassination attempt on President Karzai in his native Kandahar in September 2002. In time, however, HIG's focus shifted almost exclusively to targeting international military forces. Partly this was a means of justifying their insurgency as anti-foreigner rather than antigovernment, a factor that distinguished them from the Taliban. However, HIG insurgent commanders also describe a constant struggle for resources as a factor in how the insurgency was defined and perpetrated. “Our tactics were hit-and-run because we didn't have enough funds to sustain operations,” one commander from Logar recalled. “The lack of funds was always a problem. I would do a couple of operations against foreign forces in Afghanistan and then go back across the border into Pakistan because we just could not sustain ourselves for very long.”³⁸

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The United States immediately began to hunt its old client. The CIA aimed some of its very first armed drones at Hekmatyar, missing him in early 2002 in the eastern border province of Kunar.³⁹ In 2003, Ghairat Bahir, a son-in-law of Hekmatyar, was arrested in Pakistan, handed over to US authorities, and detained at Bagram Air Base outside Kabul until set free by a presidential decree from Hamid Karzai in 2008. In 2003, Hekmatyar was designated a “Global Terrorist” by the US Department of State and placed on the UN Security Council’s consolidated sanctions list.⁴⁰ In 2006, with seemingly nothing to lose, Hekmatyar pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda leaders Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri.⁴¹ With Hekmatyar safe inside Pakistan and commanders moving freely across the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, international pressure (whether drone strikes or sanctions) had little effect. Though it played a role in detaining Hekmatyar’s son-in-law, Pakistan nevertheless allowed Hekmatyar to remain on its soil and granted him access to the Shamshatoo refugee camp outside Peshawar, which became a logistics and recruiting hub for Hezb-e Islami, just as it had been in the 1980s.⁴² This support was never enough to permit Hekmatyar to seriously challenge the Taliban’s leadership of the insurgency, but it was enough for him to remain independent within it. This allowed the insurgency to remain effective but less cohesive and, arguably, more reliant on Pakistan, a similar dynamic as had existed during the 1980s.

An “Anti-Foreigner” Insurgency

HIG reestablished itself in the eastern provinces of Kunar, Nangarhar, Laghman, Logar, and Wardak, in the central provinces of Kapisa and Baghlan, and to a far lesser extent in Farah and Helmand provinces in the southwest. Influence in these particular provinces was the result of commander networks reaching back to the 1980s. In Kunar, Wardak, and Baghlan, Hezb-e Islami established control over numerous districts, but influence elsewhere often encompassed only a handful of communities. Where government writ did not extend, which was large swaths of the countryside outside provincial and district centers, HIG filled a vacuum that may otherwise have been occupied by the Taliban. In fact, community support was as much about keeping the Taliban—and other criminal groups, or international forces—at arm’s length as it was about opposing the government of Afghanistan. Following the recent political deal, preventing Taliban incursions into their communities is one reason why HIG commanders agreed to lay down, though not relinquish, their arms.

HIG mostly refrained from launching unprovoked attacks on Afghan government forces, protected government schools, and assiduously enforced student and teacher attendance. One of the most conspicuous outward signs that an area was under Hezb-e Islami and not Taliban control was open schools.⁴³ Not only did residents in HIG-controlled areas join the civilian government, they also joined the Afghan National Police and the army. Hezb-e Islami insurgent commanders coordinated with government officials based upon historic personal or tribal relationships between individual commanders and officials rather than as part of a coherent strategy or specific top-down directives. The same was generally true for coordination and communication with Taliban commanders and members of Hezb-e Islami’s political party—that is, previous tribal, communal, or mujahideen relations (rather than explicit strategies or policy directions from above) determined cooperation and the formation of working relationships at the ground level.⁴⁴

The notable exception to the relative comity between HIG and the ANSF was in Baghlan Province. Since 2001, government security forces in Baghlan have been dominated by Jamiat-e Islami. As such, clashes between the government and Hezb-e Islami insurgents amount to

HIG mostly refrained from launching unprovoked attacks on Afghan government forces, protected government schools, and assiduously enforced student and teacher attendance.

a continuation of mujahideen-era resource rivalries playing out between groups that found themselves on opposite sides in post-9/11 Afghanistan. The presence of the Taliban in Baghlan has complicated and fueled this conflict. Though Hezb-e Islami commanders clashed with the Taliban, they also defected to their ranks as a means of securing support that allowed them to continue to fight against their Jamiat rivals within the government security services.⁴⁵

The situation in Baghlan notwithstanding, HIG focused most of its energy on waging war against the international military presence and high-level Afghan targets with sporadic but well-executed attacks.⁴⁶ In 2006, as the Taliban expanded outside their southern strongholds, Hekmatyar reportedly tried to enter into a formal agreement with Mullah Omar and assume a position coordinating the insurgency. He was rebuffed. In early 2007, the first tentative outreach by HIG to the government of Afghanistan began. Later that year HIG and the Taliban clashed in Ghazni and Wardak provinces. The following year both groups began issuing competing claims for attacks on foreign forces. A handful of key commanders defected to the Taliban in Wardak and Baghlan, allowing the Taliban to establish themselves in strategic southern and northern approaches to Kabul from 2010 onward. However, Hezb-e Islami defections to the Taliban outside of Baghlan were limited. Taliban leadership continued to mistrust HIG, and Hekmatyar was never comfortable playing a supporting role to the Quetta Shura. Though both groups were interested in targeting international military forces, the absence of HIG attacks on the government limited its cooperation with the Taliban. One former HIG commander said this also likely limited external support from Pakistan.⁴⁷

By 2012, US-led coalition forces had withdrawn from most provinces, leaving a limited number of targets (mostly in and around Kabul) for Hezb-e Islami to strike. By 2016, Hezb-e Islami forces inside Afghanistan consisted of between two hundred and three hundred armed men in about a dozen eastern, southern, and northern provinces, with perhaps two or three times this number in Kunar and Baghlan provinces.⁴⁸ In the eight provinces surveyed in this report, a combination of National Directorate of Security (NDS), Hezb-e Islami, and provincial peace council officials estimated there were about 2,800 HIG insurgents active at the time the deal was signed by Hekmatyar and Ghani in early 2017.⁴⁹ Hezb-e Islami representatives say as many as three thousand of its members are also currently incarcerated. This figure, as well as the total number of armed fighters at the time of the deal, are difficult to verify. In the first instance, HIG strength was largely a matter of how many fighters it could arm as opposed to how many were considered active full-time insurgents. In the case of jailed cadres, security officials said that there has been a rise in the number of self-proclaimed HIG insurgents in jail following the agreement.

The Other Hezb-e Islami

While Gulbuddin Hekmatyar was relocating from Iran to the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands in early 2002 to organize an insurgency, a collection of Hezb-e Islami commanders and politicians meeting in Shamshatoo refugee camp in Pakistan agreed to send a delegation to meet with the newly installed head of the interim government, Hamid Karzai. Khalid Faruqi, a Hezb-e Islami commander from Paktia Province, led this delegation. While in Kabul, Faruqi met with Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal, a Hezb-e Islami leader who had just returned to Afghanistan after spending the Taliban regime years in the United States. Faruqi and Arghandiwal formed the political party Hezb-e Islami Afghanistan, receiving official government registration in time to participate in parliamentary elections in 2005. Leadership transferred from Faruqi to Arghandiwal in late 2007. Wahidullah Sabawoon, another

leading Hezb-e Islami figure, formed Hezb-e Mutahid Islami Afghanistan, drawing support from the same pool of former Hezb-e Islami members and well-educated Islamists as Arghandiwal's Hezb-e Islami Afghanistan.

Hezb-e Islami Afghanistan (HIA) emerged as one of the strongest political parties in post-Taliban Afghanistan. HIA has a robust youth wing, a solid network among university faculty and students throughout the country, and a strong contingent of its partisans within government ministries, particularly at the subnational level. Within certain provinces, like Nangarhar, affiliation with Hezb-e Islami is a prerequisite for teaching positions, and a ticket for better grades among students, according to several students interviewed.⁵⁰ These networks have proven robust and durable, particularly among the educated classes where the party has traditionally been strongest. HIA claims it held nineteen of 246 parliamentary seats following the 2005 elections.⁵¹ As of mid-2017, a Hezb-e Islami official claimed the party held fifty-three seats in both houses of parliament and fifteen or sixteen provincial governorships. Following the reconciliation of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's insurgent faction, Hezb-e Islami partisans interviewed in over half a dozen provinces across the country said they expected to capture anywhere between sixty-five to a hundred parliamentary seats in upcoming elections.⁵² Under the direction of Arghandiwal, HIA has been more successful than Hezb-e Islami's insurgent party under the command of Hekmatyar, suggesting that Hezb-e Islami's organizational prowess—and its comparatively rigid party system—is better suited to more formal politics than guerrilla war. The relative success of HIA is one reason why Arghandiwal and other leading Hezb-e Islami political elites at the national level have dug in their heels, refusing to simply cede control of Hezb-e Islami to Hekmatyar.

Speculation abounded for years that Hezb-e Islami's political and insurgent wings were different sides of the same coin—essentially a long-term hedging strategy. If this was indeed the case, the presidential elections of 2014 revealed a public split, with Hekmatyar backing Qutbuddin Hilal and Arghandiwal siding with Abdullah Abdullah, a longtime leading figure in Jamiat-e Islami who had chosen Mohammed Khan, a Hezb-e Islami Afghanistan partisan, as his vice presidential running mate. Today, Hekmatyar, Arghandiwal, and Sabawoon are the three most likely contenders to lead a unified Hezb-e Islami. Yet the inability of these three to agree on who will lead Hezb-e Islami following the political deal with HIG continues to undermine the party. This is a major reason why groups like Jamiat-e Islami, initially reluctant to back the deal, appear considerably less worried as internal Hezb-e Islami squabbles continue.

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Inside the Negotiations

Representatives of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar first reached out to the Karzai administration in early 2007. Hezb-e Islami officials maintain this back channel was opened following a realization that the conflict had reached a stalemate.⁵³ This outreach also coincided with Taliban expansion, Hekmatyar's marginalization among the overall insurgent leadership, a decline in external resources, and the first direct clashes between Taliban and HIG cadres in several provinces.⁵⁴ Over the next two years, a small group of Hezb-e Islami members then living in Europe formulated negotiating positions which they set out in letters to Hekmatyar, often waiting months for a reply. "Those of us in Europe asked ourselves a question: 'Are we fighting against the constitution of the government of Afghanistan or not?'" Hezb-e Islami lead negotiator Amin Karim said. "The answer was no. And this was the starting point of our engagement with the government."⁵⁵

Internally, Hekmatyar argued back that to accept the Afghan constitution was to accept the reality under which it was created—what HIG considered an illegal foreign occupation and the justification for what it considered a “defensive jihad.” Though local circumstances created a mix of motives for commanders and communities, foreign occupation served as the primary justification for Hezb-e Islami’s insurgency.⁵⁶ The withdrawal of all foreign troops, and not necessarily constitutional amendment or full regime change, became *the* condition for Hezb-e Islami.

Fighting and Talking during the Karzai Administration

As internal debates continued across continents via snail mail, the Karzai administration attempted to build confidence by releasing Hekmatyar’s son-in-law, Ghairat Bahir, from prison in May 2008. Meanwhile, Hezb-e Islami continued its insurgency. HIG claimed responsibility for an assassination attempt on President Karzai (which the Taliban claimed as well) at a military parade in Kabul in April 2008 and launched sporadic but deadly attacks on foreign military forces in eastern Afghanistan.

The first official talks between Hezb-e Islami and the Karzai administration took place over a month in March 2010.⁵⁷ Hezb-e Islami presented a seventeen-point “National Consensus” plan, which proposed, among other things, an interim government, key government positions to be filled by “neutral individuals,” a ceasefire to be facilitated by both HIG and the Taliban, and the withdrawal of all foreign forces. Though not part of the Karzai administration at the time, former finance minister and future president Ashraf Ghani met informally with HIG representatives to review their plan at this time.⁵⁸

Talks with Karzai went nowhere for a number of reasons. Afghanistan’s security ministries and intelligence directorate were dominated by members of Jamiat-e Islami and old-guard communists—rivals who may have preferred occasionally clashing with HIG in the provinces to sharing power with Hekmatyar in Kabul.⁵⁹ There is also the possibility that Karzai saw Hekmatyar—a mujahideen leader, a fellow Pashtun, and the presumptive head of one of the strongest political parties in the country—as a bigger threat to his power inside the government than he was lobbing rockets at Kabul from a distance.⁶⁰ Beyond these long-standing political issues, the biggest obstacle was timing. In the spring of 2010, the United States was in the middle of the largest troop increase of the war; a deal calling for a ceasefire, much less the withdrawal of international forces, was a nonstarter.

But before the end of 2010 a new window opened. At a November summit meeting in Lisbon, NATO announced that it would begin drawing down troops in advance of a planned 2014 end to combat operations.⁶¹ Though it committed to a training mission past 2014, NATO’s announcement provided a face-saving way for Hezb-e Islami to slightly but significantly modify its most obstinate position. The withdrawal of *all* forces was now the withdrawal of all *combat* forces. By 2012, with the US-led surge over and the coalition struggling to define its exit strategy, US Generals David Petraeus and John Allen and US Ambassador Ryan Crocker met directly with Hekmatyar’s son-in-law and de facto spokesman Ghairat Bahir in Kabul. According to Hezb-e Islami officials, the American trio said they understood how militarily weak Hezb-e Islami’s insurgent wing had become but how comparatively strong its political party was, and expressed a willingness to support a political deal. By this point, however, relations between the United States and President Karzai were reaching new lows on a daily basis. Karzai was furious that the Americans had met directly with Hezb-e Islami, and the overture went nowhere. “This was probably our biggest missed opportunity,” Hezb-e Islami negotiator Amin Karim said.⁶² With Karzai nearing the end of his second term and

presidential elections scheduled for the spring of 2014, any deal would have to wait for the new administration.

Negotiating with the National Unity Government

During Karzai's final days in the palace, while the rest of the country was preoccupied with presidential and provincial council campaigning, Hezb-e Islami negotiators began meeting with Masoom Stanikzai, the head of the Secretariat of the High Peace Council (HPC). By the summer of 2014, as the second round of presidential voting was undergoing a prolonged and contentious recount, Stanikzai and Hezb-e Islami negotiator Amin Karim had quietly drafted a "Fourteen-Point Action Plan for Peace." When the presidential contest could not be decided at the ballot box and Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah had to forge an extra-constitutional unity government, the range of individuals and interest groups accommodated within this new coalition widened and lengthened the consultation process. By one account, the text of the Action Plan went through over sixty drafts in an eight- or nine-month period.⁶³ Though the HPC was routinely criticized by all sides of the ongoing conflict, Hezb-e Islami and Afghan government negotiators have privately admitted that the HPC played a critical and thankless role in building consensus for the Action Plan among a long list of disparate interest groups throughout 2015 and 2016.⁶⁴

The definitive breakthrough came in the spring of 2016 when Hekmatyar began referring to the withdrawal of all foreign troops as a "goal" rather than a "condition." "If Hezb-e Islami had not compromised [on the troop withdrawal issues]," HPC Deputy Chair Habiba Surabi said, "we would never have gotten the agreement."⁶⁵ In one of his first speeches inside Afghanistan the following year, Hekmatyar explained his decision to walk back his long-held position: "[We] decided to stop [the] war at [a] time when the White House announced that at the end of 2016 all foreign troops would leave Afghanistan. We did not start negotiating when there were 150,000 foreign troops in Afghanistan. We started talking peace when the number was 10,000."⁶⁶

From this point forward, HIG began negotiating directly with a government team led by National Security Advisor Hanif Atmar and, often, with President Ghani and CEO Abdullah. Another crucial individual in this process was Akram Khplwak, the young former governor of Farah Province who had succeeded Stanikzai as head of the HPC Secretariat and served as the main daily interlocutor with HIG negotiators and the Afghan government's chief drafter. The US embassy and the State Department's Office for the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan provided feedback on the text of the Action Plan in the spring of 2016. A high-ranking former European diplomat also provided constructive input on wording of several articles of the final agreement. However, US, Afghan, and Hezb-e Islami representatives have all said that feedback from the international community was limited in scope.

The text of the final agreement was fixed the day before the beginning of the Muslim holiday of Eid (which in 2016 fell on September 11). A signing ceremony was being planned for later that day when CEO Abdullah summoned Hezb-e Islami negotiator Amin Karim to his residence and raised a new round of objections before abruptly leaving for vacation to India. "I thought we were going to lose everything we had worked for right at the end," Karim recalled. After a round of inconclusive calls with Abdullah, President Ghani agreed to postpone the signing, and further discussions, until all parties could meet in person the following week. When negotiators from both sides reconvened after the holiday in the office of National

Security Advisor Hanif Atmar, assurances were provided that CEO Abdullah had no further objections and the deal was done.

The text of the agreement was signed by Atmar, Karim, and HPC head Ahmed Gilani in a ceremony broadcast live on September 22, 2016. The following February, the United Nations removed Hekmatyar from its sanctions list, a key condition that paved the way for his return from Pakistan to Kabul.⁶⁷ On May 4, 2017, more than twenty years after he fled in the face of advancing Taliban fighters, Hekmatyar returned to Kabul under an Afghan Army air escort to sign the agreement with President Ghani at the presidential palace.⁶⁸

The Agreement

The 25-article, 1,500-word agreement constitutes a list of commitments by both parties. The government agrees to a series of specific actions—chief among them releasing Hezb-e Islami prisoners, recruiting eligible commanders from Hezb-e Islami into the ANSF, supporting refugee returns, and requesting the UN to remove Hezb-e Islami leaders from its sanctions list. In return, Hezb-e Islami agrees to stop fighting, to end its association with international terrorist organizations, and to adhere to the Afghan constitution. Notably, the agreement does not call for Hezb-e Islami commanders to disarm or to participate in any formal reconciliation process. It also guarantees judicial immunity for Hezb-e Islami leadership under Afghan law.

Under the deal, Hezb-e Islami is allocated no political positions, though the government agrees to officially recognize the party's right to participate in electoral politics and to hold government positions at every level, as well as to participate in Afghanistan's electoral reform process. Though the preamble states that "both parties support the withdrawal of foreign military forces," there is no subsequent commitment to or call for the withdrawal of international military forces, nor any mention at all of international forces in the body of the agreement. Article 11 calls for HIG prisoners to be released "no later than three months," but beyond this one vague timeline ("three months" from when is not exactly clear), the implementation period for all other commitments is open-ended. Implementation and monitoring of the agreement rests with a "joint executive commission" composed of representatives of both the government of Afghanistan and Hezb-e Islami and overseen by the HPC, with a separate commission constituted to determine which detainees are eligible for release.⁶⁹

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Implementation

The agreement outlines no timeline or formal role for third parties to monitor and support implementation. According to Hezb-e Islami chief negotiator Amin Karim, this was a calculated risk. At one point during the talks there was discussion of having the European Union monitor implementation, but neither negotiators for Hezb-e Islami nor the Afghan government saw the international community playing a formal role in this regard. "Of course I was aware of the lack of a guarantee in the deal," Karim said, "but I wanted to show that this could be Afghan-owned and Afghan-led." At the same time, the international community was not exactly fighting for an active role in the process either. Though US officials and others provided comments on the draft agreement and put pressure on potential spoilers once a deal was in sight, one high-ranking US official said the risks associated with formal involvement were too great for what many believed to be a small reward. "This wasn't a deal that was going to bring peace to Afghanistan," this official said.⁷⁰

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As of December 2017, the only significant component of the agreement fulfilled was the removal of Hekmatyar from the UN sanctions list, a condition set out for his return to Kabul in early 2017.⁷¹ Without this step, the deal would very likely have remained on paper only. However, Hekmatyar has not been removed from the US Treasury Department's Specially Designated Nationals List, limiting his ability to travel outside the immediate region. To date, 143 Hezb-e Islami prisoners have been released, in three separate tranches, from Kabul's Pul-e Charki prison.⁷² However, Hezb-e Islami officials claim that another 185 individuals associated with Hezb-e Islami have been detained since the agreement was signed and that three thousand members remain imprisoned throughout the country as of early 2018.⁷³ Afghan security officials say the slow pace of prisoner release is due to the time-consuming process of determining the background and affiliation of individual prisoners. Hezb-e Islami representatives counter that their political enemies are deliberately slowing the process.⁷⁴ More worryingly, among the first cohort of Hezb-e Islami prisoners to be released were several narcotraffickers from southern Afghanistan, who reportedly bribed their way onto the release list according to an Afghan intelligence official interviewed in Kabul.⁷⁵

As of early November 2017, no former Hezb-e Islami commanders had been integrated into any of the Afghan National Security Forces. Afghan security officials say that discussions within and between the Ministries of Defense and Interior Affairs and the NDS were ongoing, that all branches were committed to placing Hezb-e Islami individuals within their ranks, but that numbers and positions within each security entity were a matter of ongoing debate. Hezb-e Islami officials also claim that twenty-five of its commanders have been killed since the agreement was signed. (These figures could not be verified.) Beyond the battlefield, Hekmatyar's secretary was shot dead in Peshawar in May 2017, and there was a failed attempt on one of Hezb-e Islami's founding members and leading ideologues, Qazi Amin, in Kabul in September.⁷⁶

Finally, there has been no progress in providing land and housing for refugees from Hezb-e Islami-affiliated camps in Pakistan, such as Shamshatoo. Though many families in Shamshatoo and other nearby refugee camps long associated with Hezb-e Islami returned to Afghanistan before and after the agreement, most of them have resettled in urban areas, predominately in Jalalabad and Kabul.⁷⁷ At least some of those who have yet to return are now waiting because of the promise of land and housing, according to interviewees from eastern Afghanistan with relatives living in Shamshatoo. Providing land or housing specifically to "Hezb-e Islami refugees" is complicated by the fact that the UN and international humanitarian law does not categorize, recognize, or keep track of the political affiliation of refugee populations.⁷⁸ Beyond these fundamental legal hurdles, basic issues of funding and land allocation had yet to be determined as of early November 2017.⁷⁹ Though there is a possibility of corruption in all aspects of this deal, refugee resettlement and issues related to land allocation and development represent a major avenue for potential graft. International actors, as well as the Afghan government, should tread carefully with this provision.

While the agreement steps carefully around any explicit power-sharing guarantees, the allocation of positions and resources that inclusion within state security services entail—to say nothing of the land and contracting deals and demographic changes associated with the dangerously vague refugee resettlement commitments—are inherently political undertakings. The number of interest groups and power centers within the National Unity Government, as well as the powerlessness of the Joint Executive Committee, will make implementation a slow and contentious process. Implementation may get even slower and more contentious as the strategy of opponents of the deal—from the Junbesh, Jamiat, and Karzai networks—has

shifted from outright opposition to quietly contesting implementation as a means to limit Hezb-e Islami's political gains. Understanding these political dynamics is especially important for any well-meaning international actors seeking either to monitor or otherwise support the agreement. Perhaps most tellingly, neither the government nor Hezb-e Islami negotiators interviewed for this report asked for outside support, despite the fact that both sides were concerned with the pace of implementation.⁸⁰

National Implications

For the deal to succeed, the implementation of specific articles may be less important than Hezb-e Islami's ability to gain power via electoral politics. In the absence of an explicit power-sharing component of the agreement—for example, an article mandating appointments within the civilian government—the Hezb-e Islami partisans we interviewed at both the national and provincial levels were chiefly focused on Afghanistan's 2018 parliamentary elections. Even some reconciled Hezb-e Islami insurgent commanders say their main expectation from the deal was Hezb-e Islami's participation in transparent Wolesi Jirga (lower house) elections in 2018. Commanders and politicians alike believe they are in a good position to translate goodwill and increased visibility into success at the polls. In this regard, Hezb-e Islami partisans will likely object strenuously to another postponement of the already long-delayed parliamentary elections.

The very real potential for further postponement aside, Hezb-e Islami's biggest challenge at the national level is party unity. In October 2017, Hekmatyar pushed for the formation of an approximately thirty-person, internal shura/politburo with a mandate to select party leadership. Arghandiwal and his loyalists boycotted this shura, effectively dooming it from the start. The third significant Hezb-e Islami leader, Wahidullah Sabawoon, has remained neutral, talking to both sides and attempting to position himself favorably regardless of who captures party leadership, according to several Hezb-e Islami members involved in internal deliberations.⁸¹ Arghandiwal's faction argues that, among other things, Hekmatyar's past makes him a liability. This group believes Hekmatyar's goal is to secure control over a unified Hezb-e Islami so that he can then position his son, Habib ur Rahman, to succeed him.⁸² Hekmatyar's faction argues that he has more support among the youth wing of the party and in the provinces—assertions largely supported in interviews with provincial partisans and representatives of Hezb-e Islami's youth wing.⁸³ The youth wing claims that they have been in constant communication with Hekmatyar in the post-9/11 period and consider him to be the “amir” of the Hezb-e Islami movement and not just a political leader. In interviews with multiple youth wing members, it is clear that, at least for a segment of these youth, Hekmatyar is a charismatic and even revered figure.⁸⁴

These internal divisions are perhaps the single greatest reason why initially outspoken critics of the political agreement have toned down their rhetoric and are now focused on ensuring that these internal rifts remain unhealed. For his part, Hekmatyar has continually come to the defense of the National Unity Government, particularly against internal critics like Vice President Rashid Dostum and the now former governor of Balkh province, Mohammed Atta. For instance, when Rashid Dostum and several ethnic Hazara and Tajik strongmen met in Turkey in early July 2017 and declared themselves part of the “coalition for the Salvation of Afghanistan,” a quasi-internal government opposition party, Hekmatyar came out quickly against the group and in support of the Ghani administration—echoing the government's line almost verbatim.⁸⁵ This was not surprising, or in itself worrying. More alarming for many of those we interviewed was what some perceived as anti-Tajik ethnic rhetoric, especially Hekmatyar's public disparagement of Tajik mujahideen leader Ahmed Shah Masood. Even the Jamiat

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partisans we spoke with, who otherwise supported the deal, accused Hekmatyar of stoking ethnic tensions. For its part, however, Jamiat-e Islami is also beset by deep internal divisions. So, far from resulting in increased cohesion within Hezb-e Islami and within Jamiat-e Islami, still Afghanistan's largest political parties, both groups are factionalized and the political landscape remains as fragmented as ever.

The View from the Provinces

Interviews with over sixty government officials, Provincial Peace Council representatives, tribal elders, Taliban commanders, recently reconciled Hezb-e Islami insurgents, and party leaders from Hezb-e Islami and other political groups in eight provinces throughout the country paint a positive, though realistic, picture of the political deal and its potential impact. Outside of dismissive Taliban commanders, almost all of those we interviewed support the deal in principle. Even many provincial Jamiat-e Islami partisans are amenable to the agreement (although they remain skeptical that Hekmatyar's motives extend beyond personal interest). Support is broad in large part because the deal is widely perceived as a rare instance of an Afghan-led and -executed initiative. Other reasons for support—or at least acceptance—among provincial interviewees include the fact that the Afghan constitution was not amended to accommodate the deal. This was cited as a positive insofar as there was no condition for quota-based power sharing. As a provincial peace council member from Kunar explained, “The deal was ultimately successful because Hezb-e Islami wasn't asking [to head] any ministry or directorate.”⁸⁶ Indeed, there was less pushback with the de facto amnesty that Hekmatyar and the militants under his command were granted through the deal than there was a concern that these individuals “not receive any rights which they wouldn't normally have under the Afghan constitution or other stated laws.”⁸⁷

None of those interviewed expect significant near-term security benefits. In fact, a vast majority of those interviewed noted a decline in security (although they attributed this to the seasonal uptick in Taliban violence in the spring rather than as a direct outcome of the deal). A handful of Hezb-e Islami insurgents in Kunar and Baghlan provinces are against the deal, though none of these had joined the Taliban as of early December 2017. Elsewhere in the east, the Hezb-e Islami commanders we interviewed support the deal, even if they expect little from it other than to be left alone and allowed to retain their weapons. Among other things, the absence of a disarmament provision appears to be preventing immediate Taliban expansion into Hezb-e Islami areas, and was consistently cited across all eight provinces as a key reason why the deal had been widely accepted among Hezb-e Islami commanders inhabiting rural areas in close proximity to Taliban forces. Though a handful of national-level Jamiat-e Islami figures insisted that HIG commanders should fully disarm, demands for a complete disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration process were not shared outside of Kabul; Jamiat partisans, however, did point out that they were watching closely to ensure that the government did not provide any “free security services” to Hezb-e Islami.

Like their national counterparts, Hezb-e Islami's provincial political partisans were generally concerned with the government's implementation of specific articles of the agreement. Their primary focus, however, is using the deal to position the party for the prospective 2018 parliamentary elections. In all eight provinces, Hezb-e Islami representatives were hopeful they could translate increased legitimacy, party cohesion, extended reach, and name recognition into electoral success. For these individuals, further delay of parliamentary elections represents a greater setback than the inability of the government to implement specific provisions of

the agreement. Additionally, while elite leaders battle for control of the party in Kabul, their provincial counterparts appear more united in support of Hekmatyar. This is due in part to the belief that his name recognition will bring with it greater electoral benefits at the polls.

About half of those interviewed are optimistic the deal could provide some positive example for future talks with the Taliban. Mostly because the process demonstrated that the Ghani administration was capable of negotiating in good faith, had the capacity and (just enough) internal cohesion to conclude the agreement, and that the international community held up its end of the bargain by removing Hekmatyar from the UN sanctions list.⁸⁸ The other half cited fundamental differences in the structure, leadership, and goals of the Taliban, as well as the external support it continues to receive, as key reasons why lessons learned from the Hezb-e Islami process will be hard to apply to future talks with the Taliban. In many cases these positions were not mutually exclusive.

An Afghan Deal

Though Hezb-e Islami's political rivals are reluctant to speak openly in support of the deal, it has been equally difficult for them to take a strong public stand against the effort. A young political activist from Nangarhar summed up a common sentiment among those not affiliated with Hezb-e Islami: "I don't like Hekmatyar, but I like that he made this deal. This may be the first good thing that he's ever done, in fact—because he did it for the good of the country."⁸⁹ Others are not as willing to give Hekmatyar the benefit of a doubt, believing his presence in Kabul will undermine the government more than his insurgency ever has. However, even among this group of skeptics there remained begrudging support for the agreement. In part this was because many of Hezb-e Islami's most ardent opponents believe it will have little negative impact on power dynamics in the near term due to internal divisions among Hezb-e Islami leaders and the entrenchment of other groups within the state security apparatus, including Jamiat-e Islami, Junbesh-e Milli, and Kandahari Pashtuns tied to former President Hamid Karzai.

Support was also a function of the perception that, despite its flaws and limitations, the agreement was, at its core, an "Afghan deal." In this regard, the most tangible outcome of the agreement is that it demonstrated to the Afghan people that the government of Afghanistan was capable of concluding a political deal with an insurgent force through direct negotiations.⁹⁰ Though the High Peace Council has gained a measure of legitimacy as a facilitator (as opposed to being a leader) of the peace process, the takeaway for those we spoke with was more general: "When Afghans talk directly to Afghans peace is possible."⁹¹ Interviews with those who negotiated the deal, as well as the international diplomats who observed the process, support this perception. The United States applied pressure to reluctant national powerbrokers, but it was limited, calibrated, and done in a timely manner. European diplomats provided important informal input on the language of the final document, but this brought the deal over the finish line rather than helping it out of the blocks.⁹² In short, those in the provinces could feel what the international community has long talked up but rarely delivered: a light footprint.

The perception of a light footprint extended to Pakistan as well. Interviewees believe that Pakistan exerted only limited influence over the Hezb-e Islami deal. There is a range of opinions on why this was the case. Some feel Pakistan is less invested in Hezb-e Islami than in the Taliban. This perception may explain why Hezb-e Islami commanders say that the external resources historically channeled through Pakistan's intelligence service had slowed to a trickle in recent years. One of Afghanistan's lead negotiators believed that Pakistan was caught off

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guard by the deal, not fully believing a deal could be brokered until it was too late to influence events.⁹³ Whatever the case, the absence of a heavy Pakistani hand was commonly cited as a reason why the deal had succeeded and, by extension, the main reason why peace with the Taliban would remain impossible until Pakistan's strategic calculus had shifted and the country began to withhold resources in the same manner it appeared to have done with Hezb-e Islami. Yet at the same time, no one we spoke with believed that peace with the Taliban could be negotiated in the absence of the international community and regional players.⁹⁴ In other words, sincere Afghan-to-Afghan talks are necessary but not sufficient in the case of the Taliban.

Below the national level, the role that provincial actors played in the process varied according to how influential Hezb-e Islami was in the specific province. Not surprisingly, of the eight provinces surveyed, Hezb-e Islami provincial representatives from Kunar and Baghlan played a greater role in national-level negotiations than did Hezb-e Islami representatives from other provinces. For instance, individuals from Baghlan and Kunar traveled regularly to Kabul for meetings with HPC representatives of Hezb-e Islami national leaders or held provincial consultations with Hezb-e Islami insurgents and other community members in 2016 and early 2017.

Political Implications

Since the deal was reached, Hezb-e Islami partisans in the provinces have increased activities—first to raise awareness about the deal among their ranks, then to hold joint meetings between political actors and former insurgents, and finally to plan for potential parliamentary elections. These renewed political activities have in turn energized competing political parties. As one Hezb-e Islami leader in Baghlan stated,

Hezb-e Islami has started a very strong campaign to increase membership and participation in the upcoming parliamentary elections. The goal is to win seats and legitimately gain state power. Jamiat-e Islami has also increased its activities...and is mainly trying to portray Hezb-e Islami as still an armed insurgency to dissuade people from joining.⁹⁵ Another Hezb-e Islami representative from Paktia province stated, "Now we feel free to work more openly for the party at the community level."⁹⁶

In Khost, one former Hezb-e Islami insurgent commander has transitioned directly to lead the provincial political office.⁹⁷ The expectation is that as the association of the party with the armed insurgency decreases, their network within the government and the universities will be able to leverage connections in more rural areas through insurgent commander networks into political power. Part of Hezb-e Islami's assumption is that the merger of the insurgent and political wings of Hezb-e Islami will facilitate voting in areas outside the reach of state security.

There was considerably more political enthusiasm at the provincial level because there was a stronger perception within Hezb-e Islami that the party was now united behind Hekmatyar. Whereas the party's political elites are divided into camps at the national level, provincial partisans are generally united in support of Hekmatyar and report that competing Hezb-e Islami offices associated with Arghandiwal and Sabawoon are merging. "The party is united," one Hezb-e Islami representative from Paktia stated bluntly. It is clear that Hekmatyar's name recognition at the provincial level is stronger and that he retains some cachet for having led what many view as a legitimate insurgency against an external aggressor. This also comes down to political calculation. As one district governor of Baghlan put it, "If Hekmatyar supported a child to run for parliament in the provinces, he would win."⁹⁸ Additionally, the national spokesman for Hezb-e Islami's youth wing, the Students' Islamic Association, with chapters in twenty-eight of the country's thirty-four provinces, said there was clear support for a party led by Hekmatyar, deploying a standard party line: "If Hekmatyar stands for the election of Hezb,

Hekmatyar's name recognition at the provincial level is stronger and that he retains some cachet for having led what many view as a legitimate insurgency against an external aggressor.

we will definitely support him. There is no doubt about it. We all support him and accept him as our leader.”⁹⁹

This renewed political competition also represents an area of potential instability. Many provincial interviewees mentioned Hekmatyar’s recent verbal attacks against the former Jamiat-e Islami commander, Ahmed Shah Masood, as unhelpful and divisive. Even some Hezb-e Islami partisans were alarmed by these attacks on Masood, an ethnic Tajik and national hero. “This is not good for the future of our party, and the situation in the country right now is not prepared to deal with this type of conflict,” a Hezb-e Islami party representative from Farah stated. Indeed, when asked to assess the potential negative consequences of the agreement, the specter of rising Pashtun-Tajik ethnic tension and competition over government security and political resources was seen as a greater threat than, for instance, Hezb-e Islami pulling out of the deal or the Taliban exploiting a reduced Hezb-e Islami footprint to further expand control. A Jamiat partisan from Kapisa Province summed up an opinion shared by a significant minority of those we interviewed: “Mr. Hekmatyar is in Kabul to create a gap between tribes and ethnic groups. He is in Kabul to pave the way for Ghani’s reelection and to strengthen the position of Ghilzai Pashtuns in the country.” This was by no means the position of Jamiat partisans alone. Many of the political analysts and writers that we spoke with both in and outside of Kabul expressed similar opinions. These individuals maintain that Hekmatyar’s long history of divisive maneuvering makes their position more realist than conspiratorial. Finally, in a variation on the glass-is-half-full sentiment, one Jamiat leader from Farah stated: “I think the deal is great. Now all of these militants will try and defeat other parties politically, which is the lawful move. And we [Jamiat] will combat them with merit and ideas and policies. We are happy that we have a powerful party to play politics with them.”¹⁰⁰

Security implications

In provinces where Hezb-e Islami presence was limited to a handful of villages there has been, unsurprisingly, little impact from the deal. In several provinces, interviewees say there has been a decline in security since the deal was struck, but this was not attributed directly to any change in circumstances resulting from the agreement—for example, the Taliban moving into Hezb-e Islami territory—but was instead part of a longer-term trend of Taliban advances and the seasonal spring/summer uptick in insurgent operations.

As of October 2017, the Taliban had not attempted to control Hezb-e Islami territory in any of the eight provinces we surveyed, largely because Hezb-e Islami commanders had not disarmed. There was no evidence that Hezb-e Islami commanders were joining the Taliban, the Islamic State, or the Haqqani Network. Instead, many of the commanders who are opposed to the deal have chosen to remain inside Pakistan where they have been based for years, according to one reconciled Hezb-e Islami commander from Logar Province. This former insurgent said, “I personally will only go back to fighting if a decision is taken collectively by our leadership, though I assume that individually some fighters will eventually go over to the Taliban.”¹⁰¹

The areas where security implications may be felt most acutely are Kunar and Baghlan—the two provinces where HIG has exerted the greatest control since 2001. Hezb-e Islami commanders in Kunar have split over the deal. One group, led by Noor Rahman, the stepbrother of a prominent and recently deceased Hezb-e Islami commander, Kashmir Khan, supports the deal. This group travels regularly to Kabul to consult with Hekmatyar and participates in public gatherings with Hezb-e Islami political leaders in the provincial capital of Asadabad in an effort to build support for the deal. Opposing the deal are a half-dozen commanders, including

Amanullah, based in Shygal district, and Najmuddin, based in the Pech Valley. When Hekmatyar signed the deal upon his return to Kabul in 2017, Amanullah announced his opposition and began meeting with community members, urging them to continue to fight until there was a full international military withdrawal. Amanullah was subsequently injured in a drone attack that killed two of his sub-commanders, according to interviewees.¹⁰² Both Amanullah and Najmuddin have contacted local Taliban and Islamic State operatives, though neither had allied with either of these groups as of November 2017, according to interviews carried out in Kunar.¹⁰³

In Baghlan, the situation is both more complex and more hopeful. At the time of the agreement, NDS officials in Baghlan had estimated that Hezb-e Islami could field about a thousand armed men if called upon to do so. The majority of these were under the command of Mirwais Jihad Yar and a few other commanders. Afghan intelligence believes all of these commanders agree with the deal, that none were discussing defecting to the Taliban, and that the Taliban had not made any attempts to take over Hezb-e Islami-controlled territory primarily because former Hezb-e Islami insurgents have ready access to weapons cached around the province.¹⁰⁴ In September, a Baghlan provincial council member and prominent Hezb-e Islami commander from the 1980s, Alam Gul Mujahid, was shot and killed in Shar-e Jadid district following several meetings in Kabul with Hekmatyar. Locals allege that the Taliban was behind the attack, though the murder remains unsolved. Many interviewees said that the threat of renewed political competition between Jamiat-e Islami and Hezb-e Islami could impact security, but that if Hezb-e Islami held to the deal and began to cooperate with government security forces the ANSF could make considerably more progress rolling back Taliban gains in Baghlan than in other provinces.

Taliban Reaction

Taliban spokesmen quickly denounced the deal, calling Hekmatyar a sellout for agreeing to anything short of a full international troop withdrawal, and saying he had compromised his Islamic credentials.¹⁰⁵ On the ground, a handful of district-level Taliban commanders we interviewed in Kunar, Nangarhar, and Helmand provinces also dismiss the deal in general and Hekmatyar in particular: “He is almost as big of an enemy to the Taliban as the Afghan government,” “He sold his dignity,” “Hekmatyar is not a *mujahid*.”¹⁰⁶ These commanders say the deal has not changed their views on reconciling with the government—and if anything has increased their conviction to continue fighting. Two of the Taliban we spoke with said they had received no guidance from superiors in reference to the deal. “You [the interviewer] are probably the first person I have talked to about this agreement,” one of the two, a district-level commander in Helmand, said. “I heard about it over the radio a couple times, but that is it. I don’t remember discussing it with any of my superiors or [those] below me.”¹⁰⁷ A front commander in Nangarhar claims he was directed to “focus on strengthening our current position in the jihad, nothing else.”¹⁰⁸

None of those we interviewed mentioned the success or failure of implementing certain provisions of the agreement as something they were watching, or that would have any bearing on their individual decision-making process. On the other hand, a recently reconciled Hezb-e Islami commander from Logar claimed that many of the Taliban in his province wanted to join the agreement, a claim we could not confirm.¹⁰⁹ Additionally, when Hekmatyar visited Herat in September, he met with emissaries from a regional Taliban commander. The principle topic of discussion was the implementation of the agreement—prisoner release, refugee

Taliban spokesmen quickly denounced the deal, calling Hekmatyar a sellout for agreeing to anything short of a full international troop withdrawal.

repatriation, and inclusion inside the security services. One HIG official in the meeting recalls that “we basically had to lie and tell them, ‘Don’t go back to the mountains—it’s a slow process but the government is serious.’”¹¹⁰

On a smaller scale, however, there may be opportunities to reconcile specific groups of Taliban. The leader of a Hezb-e Islami fact-finding mission to Baghlan, Kapisa, and Parwan provinces in early 2017 claims his team identified 108 mid- to low-level Taliban commanders willing to reconcile with the government under the aegis of the Hezb-e Islami agreement, including one prominent commander operating just north of Bagram Air Base. Many of these commanders were Hezb-e Islami insurgents prior to joining the Taliban. These individuals expressed a desire to essentially rejoin Hezb-e Islami as a means of taking advantage of the deal struck with the government, allowing them to retain their weapons in the same manner as Hezb-e Islami commanders and avail themselves of potential positions within the Afghan security services.¹¹¹ An NDS official from Baghlan independently confirmed this assessment, claiming that many of the current Taliban commanders in Baghlan with a past affiliation with Hezb-e Islami “were ready and willing to leave the Taliban...and obey their leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.”¹¹²

Conclusion

Over a year since Gulbuddin Hekmatyar returned to Kabul, the political deal with Hezb-e Islami remains intact, though the fulfillment of its provisions has been slow and uneven at best. Going forward, implementing the agreement is important insofar as it demonstrates the Afghan government’s capacity to deliver on commitments while, potentially, signaling to segments of the insurgency that peace is worth it. It also provides a lower stakes trial run for what will be a larger and more complex future deal with the Taliban. However, any demonstration effect on the Taliban should not be overstated; nor should the ability of a figure like Hekmatyar to serve as an effective interlocutor with the Taliban be exaggerated.

While the ongoing Taliban-led insurgency is the most immediate threat to stability, many we spoke with during the course of this research noted increasing ethnic polarization as the more worrying recent development. In this environment, Hekmatyar’s most influential position is not as government peace emissary or political leader of Hezb-e Islami, but in the more nefarious role of informal spokesman for ethnic Pashtun grievances—especially for Pashtuns, like those in the north, who are a minority in their province. Since his return to Kabul, Hekmatyar has vocally supported the Ghani administration on multiple occasions and encouraged the Taliban to seek peace; yet he has also publically attacked his old Tajik rival, Ahmad Shah Masood. Both supporters and opponents of Hezb-e Islami and Hekmatyar admit these verbal attacks are counterproductive and potentially destabilizing.

If this report has found that the impact of the Hezb-e Islami deal on peace and stability in Afghanistan is limited, there are nonetheless a few key lessons from the deal that Afghan, international, and regional stakeholders can learn. Among these:

- **Move beyond the language and mindset of “reconciliation and reintegration” to “political settlement” or “political agreement.”** The Taliban needs the opportunity to transform itself from a militant group into a political entity. This would include an emphasis on promoting the inclusion of Taliban candidates in all future elections—from the October 2018 parliamentary elections forward. As such, the most “demonstrative” aspect of the Hezb-e Islami political deal is not the fulfillment of any single provision but the full and open participation of Hezb-e Islami candidates, especially those formerly associated with the militant wing, in future elections. In official statements and

public communications, the Afghan government and international community should make it clear that it sees the Taliban’s political inclusion—and not just its reconciliation—as integral to peace and stability in Afghanistan moving forward.

- **Remain realistic.** The Hezb-e Islami deal took almost a decade, spanning two Afghan administrations, from the first outreach until the deal was effectively sealed with Hekmatyar’s return to Kabul. This provides some perspective for current efforts to engage with the Taliban. Equally important is to remain realistic about what certain entities can accomplish. The High Peace Council was established in 2010 to lead peace efforts with the Taliban. However, in the negotiations with Hezb-e Islami, the HPC played a supportive or facilitative role, often building consensus behind the scenes, with the Afghan government taking the lead in negotiations. In order to ensure that the HPC remains nonpoliticized during an election year and effective at conducting quiet outreach to the Taliban, it should continue to play the role of facilitator rather than negotiator.
- **Use the agreement to get potential fighters off the battlefield.** There is a small but significant number of commanders in northern Afghanistan who fought initially for Hezb-e Islami and then the Taliban over the last decade. Allowing these commanders to “reconcile” under the aegis of the Hezb-e Islami deal—effectively allowing them to hold onto their weapons and paving the way for their participation fully in political and social life—may have a stronger demonstration effect than the implementation of many points of the deal. Here again the key is to remain realistic—understanding that these fighters represent a small portion of the overall insurgency and may in fact be inactive, but that left alone they may rejoin the Taliban or other groups, including even more malign actors like the Islamic State’s “Khorasan” branch.
- **A commitment to renouncing violence is important, but disarmament in the current environment may be unrealistic.** Hezb-e Islami commanders have put down but not relinquished their small arms, in part to protect against Taliban incursions. Taliban commanders should be provided with a similar option in order to protect against other nonstate militant groups like the Islamic State.

Notes

1. NATO, “NATO Secretary General: We will continue to support Afghan security forces,” October 6, 2016: “Focusing on recent peace efforts, [NATO Secretary General] Mr. [Jens] Stoltenberg said he was greatly encouraged by the agreement between the Afghan Government and Hezb-i-Islami. “This is an important step forward in the peace and reconciliation process and essential for a credible long-term peace deal.”
2. For an unofficial English translation, see *TOLONews*, “Hizb-e-Islami leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar addresses supporters in Nangarhar: Full speech,” YouTube video, April 30, 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=lg5TzI4Uaeg&ct=364s.
3. Interview with Muslim Youth Organization member, Kabul, October 2017.
4. David B. Edwards, *Before Taliban: Genealogies of the Afghan Jihad* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2002), 204, 243.
5. Interview with Muslim Youth Organization member, Kabul, October 2017.
6. The literal translation of jihad is to struggle or strive. The term has broad meaning in a religious sense—from an internal struggle to better oneself to a holy war waged on behalf of the Muslim community (*ummah*).
7. Gilles Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending: Afghanistan, 1979 to the Present* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005), 156–58.
8. Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Boston: Belknap Press, 2002), 98, 100–01. Jamaat later served as the de facto ideological and political arm of Pakistan’s Zia ul Haq regime (1978–88), a key external supporter of Hezb-e Islami during the 1980s.
9. Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending*, 158; Edwards, *Before Taliban*, 204; Shiraz Maher, *Salafi Jihadism: The History of an Idea* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2016), 178–83. According to an early Muslim Youth Organization member and current Jamiat-e Islami parliamentarian, Jamiat-e Islami subscribed more closely to the vision of Hassan al Banna, the Muslim Brotherhood founder who, unlike Qutb, advocated a gradualist approach to the creation of an Islamist state system. (Interview with former MYO member and current Jamiat-e Islami member, Kabul, October 2017.) For a discussion of Sayed Qutb’s ideology, see Maher, *Salafi Jihadism*, 87.
10. Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending*, 154.
11. Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending*, 106.
12. Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending*, 154; interviews with Hezb-e Islami leaders, Kabul, October 2017. Interestingly, while Hezb-e Islami is lauded for its organizational prowess, some of those who have served closely with Hekmatyar say he has never been a particularly strong manager or strategic thinker.
13. Antonio Guistozzi, *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field* (London: Oxford University Press, 2012), 284.
14. Interview with founding member of Hezb-e Islami, Kabul, October 2017.
15. Barnett Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 87. During the 1980s, Pashtuns constituted two-thirds of the leadership of Hezb-e Islami while three-quarters of Jamiat’s upper echelon was Tajik.
16. Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending*, 163, 168–69.
17. Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending*, 74.
18. Beyond weakening other ethnic groups in the north, this consolidation strategy divided Ghilzai Pashtun tribes of the east, rendering them less of a threat to the Durrani Pashtun rulers. For a discussion of state consolidation strategies and tribal relocation in Afghanistan, see Christine Noelle, *State and Tribe in Nineteenth-Century Afghanistan: The Reign of Amir Dost Mohammed Khan (1826-1863)* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
19. Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending*, 75.
20. Edwards, *Before Taliban*, 235–36.
21. Interview with founding member of Hezb-e Islami, Kabul, October 2017.
22. Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending*, 146. (Though Pakistan’s Islamist government shared an ideological affinity with Hezb-e Islami, its underlying motives were territorial and strategic. Before the communist coup of 1978, the Daud Khan government in Kabul was pushing a Pashtun nationalist agenda. Given the large number of Pakistani Pashtuns living along the Durand Line, the disputed Afghanistan-Pakistan border demarcated by the British in 1896, Pakistan saw Daud’s policy as an irredentist threat.)
23. Interview with early member of the Hezb-e Islami, Kabul, October 2017.
24. Milt Bearden and James Risen, *The Main Enemy: The Inside Story of the CIA’s Final Showdown with the KGB* (New York: Random House, 2003), 276.
25. This position put Hezb-e Islami at odds with the rest of the Sunni mujahideen parties that sided with Saudi Arabia in its support of Kuwait but was in line with the Muslim Brotherhood’s stance.
26. Mustafa Hamid and Leah Farrall, *The Arabs at War in Afghanistan* (London: Hurst, 2015), 183. Among this Arab cohort fighting with Hezb-e Islami was future al-Qaeda in Iraq leader Abu Musab al Zarqawi.

27. Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending*, 202.
28. Human Rights Watch, *Blood-Stained Hands: Past Atrocities in Kabul and Afghanistan's Legacy of Impunity* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2005).
29. A UN report from this time describes this as the heaviest rocket attack in fourteen years of war, leading to the displacement of more than a hundred thousand inhabitants. On August 10 alone, as many as two thousand rockets fell on civilian areas of Kabul, six hundred within a 90-minute period. See United Nations General Assembly, "Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan: Note by the Secretary-General," report no. A/47/656, November 17, 1992.
30. Phone interview with Taliban commander from Helmand province, November 2017.
31. Mohammad Osman Tariq Elias, "The Resurgence of the Taliban in Kabul, Logar and Wardak" in *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field*, ed. Antonio Guistozzi (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 45.
32. Hamid and Farrall, *The Arabs at War*, 201.
33. Interviews with provincial peace council members in Kapisa, Kunar, and Paktia provinces, August 2017.
34. Hekmatyar's son-in-law, Humayon Jarir, attended the conference as part of the "Cyprus Group," a collection of Afghan exiles loosely organized by Iran. He appears to have had no mandate from Hezb-e Islami or Hekmatyar.
35. Yaroslav Trofimov, "Afghan Insurgent Outlines Peace Plan," *Wall Street Journal*, January 21, 2010.
36. Interview with former Hezb-e Islami insurgent commander of Logar province, Kabul, October 2017.
37. Thomas Ruttig, "Gulbuddin ante portas—again (Updated)," *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, March 22, 2010.
38. Interview with reconciled Hezb-e Islami insurgent commander, Kabul, October 2017.
39. Candace Rondeaux, "Afghan Rebel Positioned for Key Role," *Washington Post*, November 5, 2008; Michael Crowley, "Our man in Kabul," *The New Republic*, March 9, 2010.
40. US Department of State, "Designation of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar as a Terrorist," press release, February 19, 2003, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2003/17799.htm>.
41. Peter Bergen, "Assessing the Fight Against al Qaeda," written testimony submitted to the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, April 9, 2008, https://fas.org/irp/congress/2008_hr/040908bergen.pdf.
42. Crowley, "Our man in Kabul."
43. Antonio Guistozzi and Claudio Franco, "The Ongoing Battle for the Schools: Uprisings, Negotiations and Taleban Tactics," Briefing Paper 02/2013, *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, June 2013.
44. Multiple interviews with Hezb-e Islami insurgent commanders and Hezb-e Islami provincial political officials from eastern Afghanistan, August 2017.
45. "Afghan Hezb-e Islami militants hold peace talks in Kabul," *BBC News*, March 22, 2010. One of the largest clashes took place in 2010, when as many as sixty Taliban and Hezb-e Islami fighters were killed.
46. Among those believed to have been carried out by HIG was an October 2009 assault on an outpost in Nuristan in which an estimated 150 insurgents killed eight US soldiers and wounded another twenty-four; an August 2009 ambush of an ISAF foot patrol in Surobi, in which ten French soldiers were killed; in September 2012, a HIG female suicide bomber carried out an attack at Kabul international airport killing twelve civilians, including nine internationals; and a May 2013 suicide attack in Kabul against a military convoy that killed nine civilians, two US soldiers, and four civilian contractors.
47. Interview with Afghan intelligence official, Baghlan province, August 2017.
48. Interviews with Hezb-e Islami political and insurgent figures and Afghanistan intelligence officials, August–October 2017.
49. Including two hundred insurgents in Farah, sixty in Kapisa, one thousand in Baghlan, one thousand in Kunar, four hundred in Paktia, and two hundred in Wardak. Interviewees stressed that these figures represent the maximum number of individuals that Hezb-e Islami could arm at any one time rather than the total number of active insurgents. These figures, like all estimates of insurgent strength in Afghanistan, should be read critically.
50. Interviews with Nangarhar University students, Kabul and Nangarhar, spring 2014 and October 2017.
51. Crowley, "Our man in Kabul."
52. Interviews with Hezb-e Islami partisans in eight provinces, August and September 2017.
53. Interview with Hezb-e Islami official, Kabul, October 2017; see also Zarar Khan, "Afghan warlord says he split with the Taliban," *Associated Press*, March 9, 2007.
54. Interviews with multiple Hezb-e Islami insurgent commanders, Kabul, October 2017.
55. Interview with Hezb-e Islami lead negotiator Amin Karim, Kabul, October 2017.
56. Interview with Hezb-e Islami commanders from Nangarhar, Logar, and Paktia provinces, Kabul, October 2017.
57. "Afghan Hezb-e Islami militants hold peace talks in Kabul," *BBC News*.
58. Interview with Hezb-e Islami lead negotiator Amin Karim, Kabul, October 2017.
59. Interviews with Afghan security officials and independent analysts, Kabul, August and October 2017.

60. Ibid.
61. Steven Erlanger and Jackie Calmes, “NATO Sees Long Term Role After Afghan Combat,” *New York Times*, November 20, 2010.
62. Interview with Hezb-e Islami lead negotiator Amin Karim, Kabul, October 2017.
63. Ibid.
64. Interviews with Hezb-e Islami and Afghan government representatives, October and November 2017.
65. Interview with High Peace Council representative Habiba Surabi, Kabul, August 2017; interview with Hezb-e Islami lead negotiator Amin Karim, Kabul, October 2017; Lynne O’Donnell and Karim Sharifi, “Peace Deal Expected with Armed Afghan Group,” *Associated Press*, May 14, 2016.
66. Unofficial translation of Hekmatyar speech to supporters in Jalalabad, May 2017.
67. Habib Khan Totakhail, “U.N. Lifts Sanctions on Afghan Warlord,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 4, 2017.
68. “Afghan Hezb-e Islami militants hold peace talks in Kabul,” *BBC News*.
69. “The Complete Text of the Agreement Between Hezb-e Islami Hekmatyar and the Government of Afghanistan,” unofficial English translation, *Bakhtar News*, September 26, 2016.
70. Interview with US official, Washington, DC, September 2017.
71. United Nations Security Council, “Security Council ISIL (Da’esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee Removes One Entry from Its Sanctions List,” press release, February 3, 2017.
72. “Govt Releases 75 Hezb-e-Islami Prisoners from Kabul Prison,” *TOLOnews*, January 11, 2018. Fifty-five were released in May 2016, thirteen later in the year, and seventy-five in early January 2018.
73. Interview with Hizb-e Islami representative, Kabul, October 2017; “Govt Releases 75 Hizb-e-Islami Prisoners from Kabul Prison,” *TOLOnews*.
74. Interview with Hezb-e Islami representative, Kabul, October 2017; Interview with Afghan intelligence official, Kabul, October 2017.
75. Interview with Afghan intelligence official, Kabul, October 2017.
76. *Al Jazeera*, “Hezb-i-Islami former secretary assassinated in Pakistan,” May 30, 2017; *Khaama Press*, “Key Hezb-e-Islami member escapes assassination attempt in Kabul city,” September 6, 2017.
77. Interviews with residents of Kunar, Nangarhar, Baghlan, and Kapisa, August–October 2017.
78. Email correspondence with Kabul-based UNHCR representative, September 2017.
79. Several Hezb-e Islami representatives referenced a plan to resettle Shamshatoo residents in a spot outside of Kunduz city called Dasht-e Abdan.
80. Interviews with Hezb-e Islami and Government of Afghanistan negotiators, Kabul and Washington, DC, October and November 2017.
81. Interviews with Hezb-e Islami leaders, Kabul and Kunar, August and October 2017.
82. Interviews with Hezb-e Islami leaders, Kabul, October 2017.
83. Interviews with Hezb-e Islami leaders, Hezb-e Islami youth wing representative, and Afghan political analysts, Kabul, October 2017.
84. Interviews with Hezb-e Islami youth wing representative and members, Kabul, October 2017 and February 2018.
85. *Khaama Press*, “Hekmatyar reacts at Noor, Dostum, and Mohaqiq’s coalition,” July 1, 2017.
86. Interview with Provincial Peace Council representative, Kunar, September 2017.
87. Interview, political analyst, Farah, September 2017.
88. Multiple provincial and national interviews, Kabul and the provinces, August–October 2017.
89. Interview with Afghan political activist, Kabul, October 2017.
90. Multiple interviews in eight Afghan provinces, August–October 2017.
91. Interview with reconciled Hezb-e Islami commander from Paktia, October 2017.
92. Interviews with Afghan and Hezb-e Islami negotiators and a high-ranking US diplomat, Kabul and Washington, DC, September–November 2017.
93. Phone interview with Afghan negotiator, Washington, DC, November 2017.
94. Multiple interviews in eight Afghan provinces, August–October 2017.
95. Interview with Hezb-e Islami official, Baghlan, September 2017.
96. Interview with Hezb-e Islami official, Paktia, August 2017.
97. Ibid.
98. Interview with district governor of Baghlan province, Kabul, October 2017.
99. Interview with Students’ Islamic Association spokesman, Kabul, November 2017.
100. Interview with Farah Jamiat-e Islami representative, September 2017.
101. Interview with reconciled Hezb-e Islami commander of Logar province, Kabul, October 2017.
102. Interviews with several residents of Asadabad, Kunar province, August 2017.

103. Ibid.
104. Individual interview with Afghan intelligence official, Baghlan, September 2017.
105. Pamela Constable, "The long-anticipated return of Afghan warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar is here," *Washington Post*, April 29, 2017.
106. Phone interviews with three Taliban commanders in Helmand, Nangarhar, and Kunar, November 2017.
107. Phone interview with Taliban district commander in Helmand, November 2017.
108. Phone interview with Taliban front commander in Nangarhar, November 2017.
109. Interview with recently reconciled HIG commander from Logar province, Kabul, October 2017.
110. Interview with HIG.
111. Interview with Hezb-e Islami official, Kabul, October 2017.
112. Interview with NDS official, Baghlan, August 2017.



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Based on more than sixty interviews conducted in eight Afghan provinces with representatives of Hezb-e Islami and the Taliban, Afghan security officials, tribal elders, civil society activists, and members of other Afghan political parties, this report examines the September 2016 political agreement between Afghanistan's National Unity Government and the insurgent group Hezb-e Islami, which culminated in the May 2017 return of militant leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar after twenty years in exile. The report provides an understanding of how the deal was negotiated, how it has been received in the provinces beyond Kabul, what progress has been made on the implementation of specific provisions, and what challenges remain. Most important, the report discusses what lessons can be learned from the negotiation of the agreement and applied to prospective peace talks with the Taliban.

Other USIP Publications

- *A Negotiated End to the Afghan Conflict: The Taliban's Perspective* by Borhan Osman (Peaceworks, June 2018)
- *Improving Afghanistan's Public Finances in 2017–2019: Raising Revenue and Reforming the Budget* by William Byrd and Shah Zaman Farahi (Special Report, April 2018)
- *Leveraging US-China Cooperation to Build a Regional Consensus on Afghanistan* by David Rank (Special Report, March 2018)
- *USAID in Afghanistan: Challenges and Successes* by William Hammink (Special Report, December 2017)
- *Rule of Law, Governance, and Human Rights in Afghanistan, 2002 to 2016* by Erin Houlihan and William Spencer (Peaceworks, August 2017)

