

HEZB-E ISLAMI, PEACE, AND INTEGRATION INTO THE AFGHAN SECURITY FORCES

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ABOUT THE REPORT

This report examines the struggle within Afghanistan's National Unity Government over the country's security sector and the related impact on the recruitment of Hezb-e Islami commanders and fighters in the security forces as agreed to under a 2016 peace deal. Drawing from some ninety interviews with Afghan officials, tribal elders, former jihadi commanders, Taliban commanders, and foreign officials and observers, the report is supported by the Asia Center at the United States Institute of Peace.

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Cover photo: The leader of the Hezb-e Islami party holds a press conference in Kabul, Afghanistan on January 4, 2018. (Photo by Haroon Sabawoon/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images)

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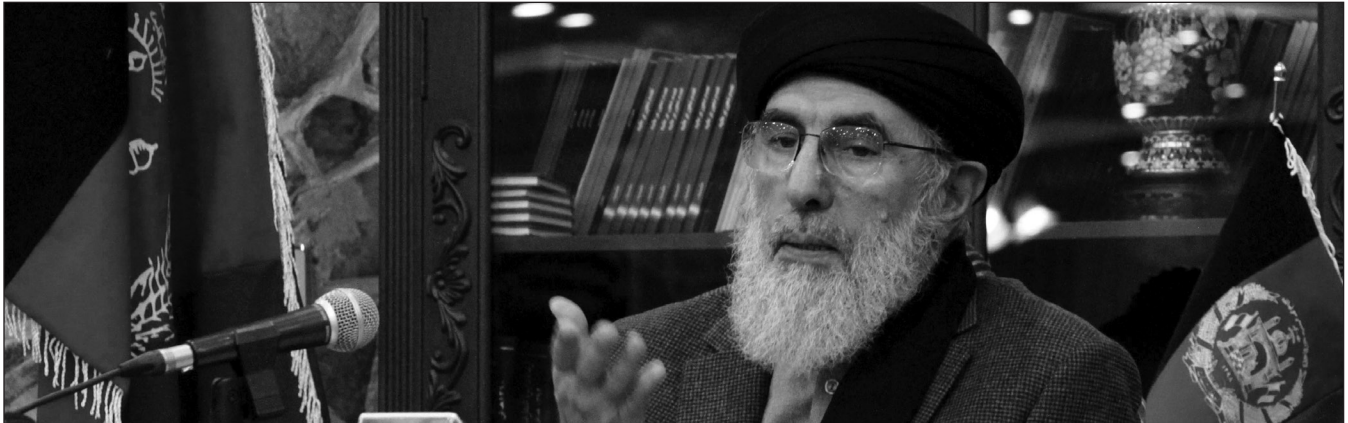
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[The recruitment in the security sector of Hezb-e Islami commanders and fighters as part of the 2016 deal and, potentially, of the much larger Taliban movement as part of an eventual peace deal with that movement, is likely one of the prerequisites for ending the Afghan insurgency.]

Summary

- The 2016 peace deal between Afghanistan's National Unity Government and Hezb-e Islami offered, at least on paper, the opportunity for Hezb commanders and fighters to integrate into the Afghan security sector.
- Those commanders view their recruitment in the security sector as vital—not only to meet their immediate security needs and as a source of income but also to correct what they perceive as the injustice of their exclusion after the 2001 Bonn Agreement.
- So far no concrete plan for military integration has materialized, partly because how the integration would unfold is contested.
- President Ashraf Ghani seeks to depoliticize the security sector. The Jamiat political party of Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah, which once dominated the security ministries, has seen its influence under Ghani, a Pashtun, decline and perceives the 2016 peace agreement as the creation of a Pashtun front against it.
- The 2016 agreement followed on the support of Hezb-e Islami leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's political and armed base for Ghani in the second round of the 2014 elections.
- Senior commanders' integration in pro-government militias after the October 2018 parliamentary elections appears to be the path of least political resistance, but would keep Hezb on the margins of the security sector.
- Hekmatyar's bargaining position is currently too weak to force military integration on his terms, but his leverage could increase if Hezb-e Islami fares well in the elections.
- The current failure of the Afghan government to proceed on Hezb integration is likely to reinforce the Taliban's demand to negotiate first with the United States.
- As its main donor, the United States wields enormous influence in the Afghan security sector and is seemingly in the position to force a new power-sharing deal in it. Such an outcome, however, would hinge on an improved US-Taliban relationship.

Introduction

In September 2016, the Afghan government and Hezb-e Islami, the armed movement led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, signed a peace agreement—one provision of which was the recruitment of Hezb-e Islami commanders and fighters into the Afghan armed forces. If implemented, it would be the first time that a faction not included in the post-2001 political order that chose to fight an insurgency would be integrated into the security sector.

For Hezb-e Islami, military integration is key. In the short term, it would deal with immediate security issues for its commanders and fighters. It would also address a more structural issue: since 2001, Hezb-e Islami has been largely excluded from the formal and the informal security sectors. Instead, its rivals were empowered, partly through links to state and nonstate forces, such as the army, police, and pro-government militias. They then used this influence to exclude weaker rivals, in some cases preying on them by either direct harassment or denouncing them as Taliban, prompting attacks on them by foreign forces. Excluded from the post-2001 political order and without representation in the security sector, many marginalized groups joined the Taliban and Hezb-e Islami insurgencies. The recruitment in the security sector of Hezb-e Islami commanders and fighters as part of the 2016 deal and, potentially, of the much larger Taliban movement as part of an eventual peace deal with that movement, is likely one of the prerequisites for ending the Afghan insurgency.

Ties to state and nonstate armed forces are crucial for political survival in today's Afghanistan. In some cases, powerbrokers threaten violence if the government does not meet their demands or acts against their interests. Mostly, though, their ability to mobilize force simply deters political rivals—even foreign powers—from confronting them. Former Balkh Governor Mohammad Atta Noor, for example, who has held a civilian position for thirteen years, would not have survived as long as he did without military resources at his disposal, and certainly could not have for months resisted efforts by President Ashraf Ghani to remove him.

The security sector is by far the best funded part of the Afghan government and a major source of patronage and income. Top leaders can distribute largesse to keep their men content and loyal. Many positions are also sold. Officials can use their authority to extort local populations and secure income from kidnapping for ransom and smuggling illegal goods. Influence in the security sector is also critical for contesting elections, whether intimidating voters or stuffing ballot boxes.

Political factions have thus sought power in the security sector. Senior appointees often appoint allies from their political faction to positions lower in the hierarchy, leading, in some cases, to entire departments being dominated by particular factions. This introduces challenges related to command and control: in many cases, security officials answer in the first place to their informal patrons rather than to their official superiors. During the political crisis around the dismissal of Mohammad Atta Noor, a prominent Jamiati who refused to leave his gubernatorial post when he was dismissed in December 2017, for example, two senior security-sector officials in the north—the deputy police chief of Balkh Province, General Abdul Razaq Qaderi, and the head of the civil order police, General Haseebullah Quraishi—openly said they supported him. When Atta claimed that the government might also dismiss powerful Kandahar police chief Abdul Raziq, Raziq said, “the current government has neither appointed me, nor it can remove me.”¹ In the provinces, semilegal and illegal militias, largely free from institutional oversight, also play an important role in determining a faction's or powerbroker's influence.

Clearly this runs contrary to the notion of state control: political factions control parts of the state. Were they to turn against the state, the security forces would fragment. From a

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state-building perspective, reforming the security sector—by breaking up patronage networks and strengthening institutional control—would be critical. At the same time, any hope of ending the insurgency will hinge on giving former combatants a stake in the security sector—because this will almost certainly be a key Taliban demand—while avoiding alienating other factions that themselves could become spoilers. To further complicate the scene, neither the institution-ization of the security forces nor the integration of insurgents necessarily serves the immediate interests of the Afghan president, who needs his own loyalists in the security sector to survive.

In this light, the struggles within the current Afghan National Unity Government—the power-sharing arrangement headed by President Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah that was established after the disputed 2014 elections—over the security sector are unsurprising. They pit a president seeking change in the security sector against Jamiat-i Islami (Jamiat), Abdullah’s party, which is most entrenched in that sector. Hekmatyar’s return to Kabul and his expectation and that of his supporters for a stake in the army and police throws the competition over the security sector into even sharper relief. It generates dilemmas for all concerned.

This report examines these dilemmas and their impact on the recruitment of Hezb-e Islami in the Afghan security forces, as agreed under the 2016 peace agreement. It seeks to shed light on the potential challenges that might be involved in the military integration of the much larger Taliban insurgency in the event of a peace deal with that movement.

The report draws from some ninety interviews conducted by the author and Afghan researchers in the United States, Europe, Kabul, and several Afghan provinces—Baghlan, Balkh, Laghman, Logar, Jowzjan, and Wardak. Interviewees included Afghan officials and former officials, parliamentarians, tribal elders, former jihadi commanders and other members of former jihadi political parties, Hezb commanders, Taliban commanders, militia commanders, and foreign officials and observers. Some two hundred others were also interviewed on the background and political affiliations of commanders in the Afghan National Police (ANP) and Afghan Local Police (ALP), an auxiliary force under the control of the Interior Ministry. Last, the research followed social media accounts and media reports and examined in-depth reports from think tanks and other sources as well as official documentation.²

The Post-2001 Security Sector

The 2001 American-led intervention facilitated a strong Jamiat influence in Afghanistan’s post-2001 security sector, notably in provinces with a strong Tajik presence and, critically, in the security ministries in Kabul. This assured Jamiat influence in a nominally centralized presidential system, headed by Hamid Karzai, a Pashtun, who enjoyed a monopoly on appointments.³ Parties who had in the 1980s fought in the jihad against the Soviet-backed government dominated provincial security sectors, as warlords and strongmen established personal fiefdoms in the early years after the 2001 US invasion. In southern Afghanistan, President Karzai established relationships with powerbrokers in the provinces whose private militias, many of them also former jihadis, exerted degrees of local control. US Special Operations Forces and the CIA were strong alternative patrons in this region and in eastern Afghanistan.

Hezb-e Islami’s Exclusion

Important actors from the Pashtun south and east—including Taliban leaders, the Haqqani network, and Hezb-e Islami—were excluded from the post-2001 order.⁴ Many fled to Pakistan with their followers. Their exclusion resulted from a mixture of American aversion to

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accommodating those who had sheltered al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden; in some cases the hostility of the leaders, including Hekmatyar, against the foreign presence in Afghanistan; and newly empowered anti-Taliban factions using their ties to the Americans to repress and exclude rivals. In April 2002, for example, several Hezb figures who returned to Kabul were incarcerated on false allegations that they would be involved in a coup plot.⁵ After 2005, an insurgency gathered pace that was driven less by ideological resistance to the Western occupation—though that played a role—and more by the exclusion of many, particularly across the Pashtun heartlands, from the new order. Many suffered abuses at the hands of new powerbrokers and saw new opportunities in the insurgency for profit, protection, and prestige. Clearly, the safe haven insurgents enjoyed in Pakistan was also an important factor.

The first internationally funded disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration program ran from 2003 through 2005 and largely involved the most powerful warlords, strongmen, and commanders—those with strong ties to new elites in Kabul—entering civilian politics. Examples include the current vice president and Junbesh-e Milli founder General Abdul Rashid Dostum, Jamiat powerbroker Ismail Khan, and Atta. Lower-level commanders entered the police and new army. Among them were Ghor police chief Mustafa Mohseni, Jowzjan police chief General Mohammad Faqir Jawzjani, and former Jowzjan police chief Rahmatullah Turkestani. For the most part, these men retained their ties to loyal fighters: some entered the security forces under the command of their leaders; others remained armed but operated partially underground. Commanders without good connections self-demobilized or operated in the shadows as either illegal militias or insurgents, often switching back and forth.⁶

The impact of the second attempt to demobilize militias—the Disarmament of Illegal Armed Groups program, which targeted illegal militias and tried to prohibit politicians with ties to such groups from contesting elections—was also limited. Powerful factions, and in some cases US military leaders, resisted disarming pro-government strongmen as it became clear that the insurgency was gathering pace. Instead, starting in 2006, US-backed and other militias were regularized through militia programs and private security companies. The most recent incarnation of the militia programs is the Afghan Local Police, established in 2010, which currently comprises twenty-nine thousand fighters.

Overall, security-sector reforms may have helped check the overt use of force by anti-Taliban factions against rivals in the early years after 2001. But those reforms did little to reverse the dominance of the Afghan security forces by only a few factions. Many of those excluded—and often harassed by those in power—resorted to armed insurgency.⁷

Hezb-e Islami's Slow Return

Despite President Karzai's frequent rhetoric about "Taliban brothers," the post-2001 political settlement did not fundamentally change during his tenure; those initially excluded remained so. The partial exception was Hezb-e Islami. Karzai did not reach a formal peace deal with the party, despite some outreach and attempts by Hekmatyar from 2007 onward. In 2003, the US Treasury had designated Hekmatyar as a global terrorist; the same year, the UN Security Council had followed by including him on the sanctions list of individuals and entities associated with the Taliban and al-Qaeda.⁸ In 2010, Hekmatyar published a fifteen-point peace plan. His resistance against the foreign troops on Afghan soil was one of the sticking points. But Hezb followers also suspected that Karzai did not want to bring in a strong Pashtun competitor.

Karzai did, however, co-opt parts of the party. By the end of his tenure as president in 2014, at least six Hezb-e Islami factions operated in Kabul. The most prominent had registered with

the Ministry of Justice as the Hezb-e Islami Afghanistan political party and had been led since 2008 by Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal, who served as minister of economy between 2010 and 2014. A sizable Hezb-e Islami camp in government included ministers, provincial governors, a large group in the parliament's lower house, several presidential advisers, and the president's chief of staff Abdul Karim Khuram (2011–14). In the security ministries, their numbers remained few, and most who were employed seemed to have joined independently, not under the Hezb-e Islami flag, which made Hezb-e Islami appointments in the sector at the provincial level less likely.

Karzai also supported Hezb-e Islami in the provinces. In some, they served as Pashtun allies against non-Pashtun factions. In Laghman, Logar, and Wardak, for example, Hezb-e Islami gained influence in the local administrations under the patronage of Arghandiwal and one of the president's tribal advisers, Wahidullah Sabawoon, both of whom enjoyed good relations with the president. Indeed, the Laghman provincial administration became a bastion of Hezb-e Islami, and this influence allowed the party to gain positions in the local security sector. In general, however, sources inside Hezb-e Islami indicate that Arghandiwal was more interested in inserting allies into civilian positions than into the security forces (an assertion supported by the pattern of Hezb appointments under Karzai). This may have been the only way to operate as a party that had one faction inside the government even as another fought as part of the insurgency. Had Arghandiwal lobbied for the integration of Hezb members into the security forces, he would have risked pitting them against Hezb insurgents.

In the north, President Karzai's main Hezb-e Islami ally was Juma Khan Hamdard, who portrayed himself as patron and representative of the politically marginalized Pashtuns in the region. In northern provinces, however, other factions were too strong after 2001 to permit Hezb-e Islami to assume much power; any appointments were also mostly in the civilian administration, not the security sector. Karzai's appointment of Hamdard as governor of first Baghlan and then Jowzjan seems to have been motivated by the president's desire to check the power of men like Atta and Dostum (a former warlord from the northwest), and the Panjshiris (the powerful faction of Jamiat from the Panjshir valley just north of Kabul) rather than actually reverse it.⁹

Ironically, it was Hamdard's province of origin, Balkh, where Hezb-e Islami struggled most to reestablish itself during the Karzai era. Former Governor Atta—who benefited from a fiercely loyal local security sector—successfully blocked Hezb-e Islami from opening a political office for years (the office appears to only have opened around four years ago). As the insurgency spread north during the late 2000s and the Taliban returned to Balkh, several important former Hezb commanders joined or rejoined the movement.¹⁰

The provinces of Laghman and Balkh offer two examples of extremes of Hezb-e Islami's fate under Karzai. In general, though, the meager presence of Hezb in the security ministries and the provincial security sectors (with the exception of some like Laghman) meant that the interests of an important part of the Hezb constituency in Afghanistan were not protected by the Karzai administration. Numerous high-ranking commanders who had not gone to Pakistan had joined the civilian administration. But many of the mid- and low-ranking commanders with only military skills and weak political connections had fewer options to join the government.

The evolution of mid- and low-ranking commanders' career paths show that they have tended to shift loyalties between groups based on their need to seek an income and protection. Hezb-e Islami's well-funded heydays were the 1980s, when the movement benefited from US and Saudi funding during the anti-Soviet jihad. As the Taliban assumed control in the mid-

1990s, many commanders joined Taliban ranks; those unable to do so were disarmed by the Taliban. In 2001, after the Taliban's ouster, those with ties to Jamiat joined anti-Taliban militias. They were, however, the first to be demobilized during the first disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration program because they lacked a strong patron in Kabul. Some returned home, particularly older fighters; others joined the Hezb-e Islami or the Taliban insurgencies—two organizationally and ideologically distinct groups that sometimes cooperated and sometimes competed on the battlefield.¹¹

Around the 2009 presidential elections, however, the Karzai administration (with Hanif Atmar as minister of interior) started reaching out to Hezb-e Islami commanders, apparently with an eye to winning them over and dividing the insurgency. In several provinces (including Baghlan, Wardak, Nangrahar, Kapisa, and Logar), fights broke out between Hezb-e Islami and the Taliban around 2010. Precise reasons for the violence are likely to have varied from place to place, but Taliban commanders often claimed they were fighting their erstwhile Hezb allies because the latter was receiving government support. In several provinces, Hezb-e Islami commanders—facing diminished resources, an increasingly strong Taliban movement encroaching on Hezb heartland, and a US military surge—were subsequently integrated into the ALP or other militias.

US Special Operations Forces appear to have played a major role in luring Hezb commanders away from the insurgency. One US officer was quoted at the time as saying, “Hekmatyar is a son of a bitch. But we can make him our son of a bitch.”¹² Exact numbers of Hezb commanders and fighters that moved from the insurgency into government-allied militias is unclear, particularly because many tended to shift back and forth from and to the insurgency. Joining formal militias like the ALP obviously did not guarantee Hezb-e Islami commanders that had abandoned the insurgency a stable job in the formal security sector. Without patrons in the security ministries, their position remained vulnerable.

In sum, although Karzai struck no peace deal with Hezb-e Islami, his rule saw parts of the movement integrated in the civilian administration. By 2014, Hezb could boast having representatives in the highest levels of a government against which its armed wing was fighting an insurgency. But it did not win influence in the security sector, which always meant that its influence was limited.

President Ghani's Reforms

The factional struggles that had always surrounded appointments in the security sector took on a new intensity under President Ghani. The early years of the National Unity Government, which gave Jamiat a power-sharing role through the new position of chief executive held by Abdullah, were marked by friction between Abdullah and Ghani. Abdullah expressed increasing frustration at being sidelined by Ghani while being pressured by Jamiati powerbrokers to secure more senior appointments. Parliamentarians, many of whom were disappointed at not having been rewarded for their support during the elections by either side, often refused to ratify appointments, leaving many ministers in acting capacity. In the security ministries, ministers and acting ministers followed each other in quick succession. Since the summer of 2017, however, all the security ministries have been headed by the same ministers.

President Ghani's reform should be seen partly as part of his campaign promise to clean up the notoriously corrupt and factionalized security sector (also a long-standing US concern) and partly in the light of this struggle. The Unity Government has appointed more professional security-sector officials. A government-led review of contracts for fuel, uniforms, and

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other services led to the dismissal of numerous security officials, many investigated for embezzlement, theft, bribery, usurpation of public land, and illegal mining. The retirement age of high-ranking officials has been lowered, potentially weaning Afghan forces of top officials with close links to political factions. Ghani also issued a decree prohibiting security officials from engaging in political activities. Young officers have moved up through the ranks, including through the provision of international training.¹³ In principle, all these measures serve to professionalize the Afghan security forces.

These reforms have hit Jamiat hardest. In part, the party's entrenchment in the security services meant that it had the most to lose. Jamiat ranks also were filled with poorly trained, barely literate, or otherwise unqualified individuals. Adopting stricter recruitment criteria, as Ghani did, naturally disadvantaged Jamiat.

One former high-ranking security-sector official from Jamiat said in an interview,

The weakening of Jamiat or Tajiks in the security sectors of Afghanistan started during the Karzai years but Ghani sped up the process. Now Jamiat is not in a good position in the security sector. Before the ministries of interior and defense and the NDS [National Directorate of Security] belonged to Jamiat but now the Ministry of Defense and the NDS has been given to Pashtuns. We have only the ministry of interior, but the interior minister [Wais Barmak] does not have a jihadi background.

The sense that Ghani was moving against Jamiat was strengthened by the president's efforts to shift and centralize authority in the security sector. He centralized the Afghan security forces' operational decision making and procedures in the office of the armed forces commander in chief (in other words, the office of President Ghani). The National Security Council under Atmar grew in size and more fiercely enforced its mandate. Moreover, important parts of the Interior Ministry (whose minister according to the 2014 power-sharing agreement is appointed by Jamiat) were planned to be moved to the Defense Ministry (headed by a Ghani appointee). These include the Afghan National Civil Order Police, a constabulary force, and the Afghan National Border Police (in the winter of 2017–18 the border police had indeed largely been transferred, but not yet the civil order police). A new militia initiative, the Afghan National Army Territorial Forces, falls under the authority of the Palace-dominated Defense Ministry, unlike the ALP, which is under the Jamiat-dominated Ministry of Interior.¹⁴

Internal divisions have hindered Jamiat's ability to fight back. With the demise of both Burhanuddin Rabbani and Mohammad Qasim Fahim in 2011 and 2013, Jamiat has lost its political leader (Rabbani) and an aggressive operator in the security sector in the north (Fahim). Although Jamiat has always comprised diverse factions and has never been a tightly organized party, the sense is widespread among its members that it is drifting leaderless. Abdullah, unable to win strong Jamiat appointments, has lost credibility. Rabbani's son, currently the foreign affairs minister, lacks his father's authority. Atta's ambitions to become the Jamiat leader and contest the presidency faces strong internal resistance.¹⁵

Jamiat, however, still has more followers in the ANP than other political factions. Research for this report revealed that of the thirty-four provincial police commanders, about one-third are affiliated with one of the Jamiat factions, as are a similar proportion of regional police commanders (though affiliations are by no means fixed, and one person can have multiple affiliations). Among provincial chiefs of the ALP, the Jamiat share is about one-sixth. Unsurprisingly, most are deployed in northern Afghanistan; most are also Tajik. In reality, Jamiat's share of police commanders corresponds to the estimated size of the Tajik population in Afghanistan; its share of ALP chiefs is considerably smaller. Its real power becomes clear only when its share is compared with that of other factions.

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The other main affiliations are to President Ghani or his allies, the Karzai faction, and Mahaz-e Milli-ye Islami-ye Afghanistan, or National Islamic Front of Afghanistan (a primarily Pashtun party previously led by the late Pir Sayed Ahmed Gailani, the former head of the High Peace Council (HPC), the government body tasked with negotiating an end to the war). Neither of these Pashtun-dominated factions has as many of the all-important provincial police chiefs as Jamiat. Other factions, including the Hezb-e Wahdat-e Islami Afghanistan (Islamic Unity Party of Afghanistan), whose support base is mainly among the ethnic Hazara, Junbesh, and Hezb, are also represented in the ANP and ALP, but in lower numbers, and not at all among regional police commanders. As with Jamiat, ethnicities usually correspond to the faction's dominant ethnicity (though factions include a mix of ethnicities). In general, therefore, one could argue that although Tajiks have a strong representation in the security sector through Jamiat (even though Tajiks are also allied with other factions, and many are against Jamiat), the Pashtuns do not because their main leaders are divided over many factions, each with less influence. Fragmented political representation in Kabul has been a problem for Afghanistan's largest ethnic group since the fall of the Taliban in 2001.¹⁶

Ghani's reform agenda, where it is being implemented, works as a double-edged sword, both professionalizing the security sector and eroding Jamiat's vast influence. Certainly the reforms flow naturally from the president's long-held and well-documented views on improving governance. At the same time, according to many observers, he and his allies appear to be succumbing to the patrimonial politics—appointing allies from the same ethnic group, mostly eastern Pashtuns, while co-opting powerbrokers with an armed base from other parties—of his predecessor, even if with a different flavor. Whereas Karzai used the traditional tactics of accommodation and divide and rule, Ghani has relied on the apparently selective application of reform initiatives to target rivals and boost allies.¹⁷

Those political factions opposed to Ghani believe that the president is promoting Pashtuns at the expense of other ethnic groups. The Jamiat former security-sector official quoted earlier said,

Ghani's plan is to create a Pashtun security sector. Ghani sees Jamiat as his big enemy; he does not compromise with other ethnicities. That is the reason that he started to get rid of Tajiks from the security sector. Many Tajiks now realize that a Pashtun president will never help them and they should try to have a Tajik president.

In this context, Jamiat was particularly suspicious of the government's 2016 peace deal with Hekmatyar, which, if implemented, would mean the integration in the security forces of thousands of (mostly Pashtun) Hezb-e Islami commanders and fighters, many of whom had fought Jamiat over the past decades.

In sum, while President Karzai had adopted a relatively accommodating approach toward rivals (while also trying to divide and weaken them), President Ghani's emphasis on reform set him on a collision course with his government partner Jamiat, who had most to lose from it. Jamiat's sense that it was losing influence was compounded by the government's promise of the integration in the security forces of the Hezb-e Islami faction of Hekmatyar, an old rival that Jamiat (and other factions) had until then mostly excluded from the army and police.

Hekmatyar's Return

The 2016 peace agreement had its roots in the 2014 election, which presented Hekmatyar a new opportunity to seek a return to Kabul after the failed negotiations with President Karzai. Contacts between Hekmatyar representatives and the Ghani team appear to have started in 2013, but did not lead to a deal before the first round of the presidential vote.

The 2014 Presidential Election

During the first round, Hezb-e Islami's executive council, led by Hekmatyar, supported Qutbuddin Helal, a Hezb-e Islami leader who officially ran as an independent. Not all the movement followed Hekmatyar's lead, however. A group around Arghandiwal and several independent Hezb politicians supported Abdullah. Another faction, led by Hamdard and his Union of Councils (a group of Hezb-e Islami commanders in Afghanistan not under Arghandiwal's leadership), and several other Hezb powerbrokers supported Zalmi Rasoul, a candidate who enjoyed support, albeit lukewarm, from then President Karzai. Hezb support, in other words, was split.

The run-off vote, which pitted Ghani against Abdullah, raised the stakes for both Ghani and Hekmatyar and provided incentives for both camps to move toward a deal. For his part, Hekmatyar realized that were Abdullah to win, a peace agreement with a Jamiati president would be impossible. Ghani, meanwhile, faced an opposing ticket that included Arghandiwal's faction (Hezb politician Engineer Mohammad Khan was one of Abdullah's running mates). Arghandiwal had much Hezb support in Afghanistan in the absence of Hekmatyar, albeit more among civilians than commanders. Much of that support would, however, shift to Hekmatyar—a much stronger figure—in the event of a promise of his return; support that came on top of that of his commanders fighting in the insurgency, and his broader political base, which included Qutbuddin Helal and several Hezb factions and powerbrokers who had been supporting Zalmi Rasoul in the first round. Moreover, Hezb-e Islami could offer the Ghani camp religious credentials in the conservative areas, and the Ghani team reasoned that it was the only party that could challenge Jamiat nationwide.

The deal Hekmatyar's and Ghani's camps reached ahead of the second round of the 2014 election, and in which Hanif Atmar played a major role on Ghani's side and Juma Khan Hamdard on Hekmatyar's, reportedly did not include military integration. Instead it included a provision that the government would support Hezb-e Islami fighters to help them defend themselves against possible attacks from the Taliban. At the time, Ghani's team hoped for a peace deal with the Taliban before the end of his first term, which meant that power sharing in the security sector would have to be renegotiated in any case. Hekmatyar reportedly promised to secure votes for Ghani, provide logistics and other support to his campaign, and vest the campaign with religious credibility.

In provinces with a strong Hezb presence, the promise of Hekmatyar's return created, according to Hezb sources, a groundswell of local support among his followers, including armed commanders and civilians such as local government officials, tribal leaders, and village elders. Many also rooted for the "Pashtun" team. A Hezb-e Islami commander in Logar's Mohammad Agha district, who in 2014 was still fighting in the insurgency, said this:

In the second round our amir and leader [Hekmatyar] told us you should support and help Mr. Ghani, so we did our best to help him. We threatened elders in our area and stuffed ballot boxes. When we saw commanders in the district filling boxes for Abdullah, we fought with them, took the boxes, and filled them instead for Mr. Ghani.

A Hezb-e Islami commander in Nerkh district in Wardak explained it this way:

We told villagers to vote for Ghani, because if he would win he would make a respectful peace with Hekmatyar Saheb. Villagers were happy to hear this and most of them voted for Ghani. We knew the numbers of voters in every village and checked how many had voted for Ghani. In most villages many votes went to Ghani.

Commanders in the Hezb-e Islami insurgency also reached out to their former comrades who had at some point joined the Taliban. These discussions led Taliban factions dominated by former Hezb-e Islami commanders or their relatives to also support Ghani's campaign in

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several places, including Laghman, Logar, and Wardak. A Laghmani Taliban commander who previously had fought for Hezb-e Islami said in an interview,

There were informal talks between commanders of Hezb with the Taliban and Hezb commanders and officials. We agreed to let the government make voting centers and also to allow villages to vote. This happened for example in some areas in Alishing district and Dawlat Shah district. We only talked with Hekmatyar's sympathizers, not with people from Arghandiwal's office.¹⁸

A Hezb-e Islami commander from Wardak said much the same:

Commanders loyal to Hekmatyar, like me, spoke with some Hezb who were with the Taliban to ask them to help villagers get out the vote for Ghani. This did not happen only in Wardak Province but all over Afghanistan; we were all told [by high-ranking Hezb-e Islami figures] that we should reach out to Hezb with the Taliban.

How widespread such deals were, and their impact, is unclear. In addition, numerous pro-government commanders with a Hezb-e Islami affiliation, especially those in the ALP, helped out. The Logar Hezb-e Islami commander said, "ALP commander X [name withheld] brought fourteen voting boxes to his house and filled those for Mr. Ghani; he also threatened to burn the houses of villagers if they did not vote for him."

In short, Hezb-e Islami support for Ghani in the 2014 elections came not only from Hekmatyar's insurgent faction. His campaign also benefited from mobilization by some Hezb in pro-government forces, especially the ALP and "uprising" militias (informal local militias paid by the National Directorate of Security, or NDS), from Taliban factions dominated by former Hezb, and from Hezb followers working in the civilian administration.

The mobilization of Hekmatyar's followers on behalf of Ghani ahead of the presidential run-off illustrates how Hezb members, who had been scattered since Hekmatyar's departure from Kabul in 1996, maintained ties even across factions and could work together toward a common goal. Collaboration around the elections was an extension of their dealings during day-to-day life during the war, commanders on different sides pulling together when it served their interests to do so. Relationships were based on family ties, business interests, sometimes the need to hedge bets by keeping a foot on all sides amid constant insecurity, plus a latent loyalty to Hekmatyar. Prospects of his return to Kabul reinforced this loyalty and raised expectations among Hekmatyar's loyalists on different sides that he could deliver them a better future.

In sum, Hekmatyar's support for Ghani in the second round meant that the future president would benefit from the mobilization of many who had previously been largely excluded from the post-2001 political order, but who now seemed open to cooperating with the government. Many Hezb commanders who had either returned home or had been fighting an uphill battle in the insurgency saw the potential return of Hekmatyar as a rare opportunity to win a share of the post-2001 bounties, especially in the security sector, usually the only one where they could use their skills. Much the same was true for some Taliban commanders with Hezb backgrounds.

The 2016 Peace Deal

The National Unity Government's rocky start and subsequent struggles between Ghani and Abdullah over appointments and other issues delayed the start of peace talks. When they eventually started, both sides appeared ill prepared, internally divided, and in some cases confused over who was leading negotiations (although inside sources noted how politically savvy Hezb-e Islami negotiators were).

Peace talks ended up being largely an extension of the negotiations during the elections. Other factions, including Jamiat, then formally part of the government, made sure not to op-

pose talks publicly once it became clear—according to sources involved in the peace process—that those talks enjoyed international backing. But they largely kept their distance, reportedly because, first, they did not want to appear to be too closely involved and thus be seen by their followers as too accommodating to Hekmatyar, and, second, because the Ghani team wanted to involve them only as much as absolutely necessary.

For its part, Hekmatyar's faction did its best to exclude Arghandiwal's Hezb faction from negotiations when it became clear that the latter was leaking information to Jamiat and lobbying for the deal to be presented as one struck between Hezb-e Islami (with the official party headed by Arghandiwal) and the Afghan government rather than between President Ghani and Hekmatyar. The HPC was mostly involved as a facilitator, building consensus and debriefing parties on developments. Whether a peace agreement could have been reached through a more inclusive process is unclear. But keeping other factions at arm's length reinforced the widespread perception that the deal was struck between the Ghani team and Hekmatyar, especially coming as it did on the back of their collaboration in the 2014 elections.¹⁹

The final agreement was signed in a ceremony broadcast live on September 29, 2016. Hekmatyar's faction committed to observing the constitution, ceasing military activities, observing a permanent ceasefire, severing ties to terrorist organizations, and disbanding its military structures. In turn, the government pledged to request the delisting of Hezb-e Islami leaders and members from the United Nations' and other organizations' and countries' lists of terrorists and thus lift sanctions against them. Hekmatyar would receive "honorary status" and the government would help him settle in Kabul. He and his followers would benefit from an amnesty for their past "political and military acts" (Article 11). The government would release Hezb prisoners (Article 11) and help twenty thousand refugee families from Pakistan and Iran resettle in Afghanistan. The government committed itself "to recruit lawfully eligible members and commanders of Hezb-e Islami of Afghanistan, who are interested in serving, into the defense and security forces" (Article 14). Moreover, "government officials and officers of Hezb-e Islami of Afghanistan who have previously served in government institutions and were separated from duty will be reinstated, promoted or considered for retirement pension" (Article 15).

The peace deal brought a tangible result for Ghani, whose diplomatic efforts to improve relations with Pakistan and bring the Taliban to the negotiating table had gone nowhere. The Unity Government had been experiencing an internal crisis, with escalating friction between the president and both Abdullah and Vice President Dostum. The government also faced pressure from outside, notably from a faction loyal to former President Karzai and by the expanding insurgency. By late fall, the internal crisis had calmed, Karzai's call for a *loya jirga* (gathering of elders) to discuss the future of the government (seen as an attempt to get himself back into power) had petered out, the United States had reaffirmed its support for Afghanistan and once again brokered peace between Ghani and Abdullah. The peace deal with Hekmatyar thus reinforced other dynamics that worked to strengthen Ghani's position. It heralded a potentially significant change in the balance of power in Kabul, some factions standing to benefit but others—notably Jamiat—to lose.²⁰

Enter Hekmatyar

The first visible manifestation of the peace deal was Hekmatyar's return to Kabul in May 2017—made possible by the peace deal's amnesty provision and a UN Security Council decision to delist him two months earlier. His return was a major political event and included a welcoming ceremony in the presidential palace—Karzai, Abdullah, former jihadi leader Abdul

Rab Rasul Sayyaf, and Ghani walking beside him. Jamiat and other factions made sure to appear welcoming or at least neutral. There was some open opposition. Hezb-e Islami victims from the civil war era protested in front of Hekmatyar's new residence in western Kabul. Human rights groups and some politicians expressed public skepticism that Hekmatyar would adapt to twenty-first-century Kabul and leave behind the armed politics, ethnic hatred, and deeply conservative views on the role of women. His entry into Kabul flanked by hundreds of heavily armed men did little to alleviate such concerns.²¹

The strength of Hekmatyar's appeal among Hezb-e Islami followers, even after more than twenty years away, was evident, bearing out the adage "Once a Hezbi, always a Hezbi." Thousands of followers gathered, waving the Hezb-e Islami green flag and shouting "Long Live Islam!" and "Allahu Akbar!" at a rally at which Hekmatyar appeared in the Kabul Ghazi stadium. Many officials who had tended previously to downplay their Hezb-e Islami backgrounds publicly declared allegiance to Hekmatyar. Like him, many hoped to reunify the party under his leadership and contest parliamentary and presidential elections united and from a position of strength.²²

Hekmatyar's return resonated far beyond the capital. Delegations of current and former Hezb commanders and other members from provinces with a strong Hezb presence traveled to Kabul to meet him and discuss their futures.²³ Political offices, set up by Arghandiwal in preceding years, were inundated with membership requests. According to the Hezb-e Islami office in Laghman, membership requests on some days numbered as many as two hundred; by October, local Hezb members claimed that six thousand party cards had been handed out and that the office had grown from five to thirty-five people.²⁴ In Balkh, according to the Hezb-e Islami political office, Hezb membership increased from two thousand to seven thousand. The head of office in Balkh—as in Laghman and Baghlan—was replaced by a former commander loyal to Hekmatyar.

Hekmatyar's armed base, which had waned considerably over the years, appeared to expand overnight. Commanders who had been sitting at home reaffirmed their loyalty. Those working in pro-government forces, especially in the ALP and uprising militias, also declared themselves Hekmatyar supporters. Some commanders and fighters with a Hezb background within the Taliban's ranks expressed interest in exploring options with Hekmatyar. This was the extended network that Hekmatyar and his allies in Afghanistan had mobilized to help Ghani win the 2014 vote, which—except for the Taliban commanders—expressed their affiliation and demands more publicly and assertively.

The peace deal clearly raised the hopes of many of these men for a better future. During repeated interviews, Hezb commanders identified electoral politics as the way forward for Hezb-e Islami, unified under Hekmatyar's leadership. But their recruitment into the security forces was also vital, both to meet their immediate security but also in a broader sense, to correct what many of Hekmatyar's followers—and other Hezb factions—perceived as the injustice of their original exclusion. If Arghandiwal had integrated Hezb in civilian politics, Hekmatyar would unify Hezb's political and military wing under his leadership and integrate his supporters into all spheres of government, including the military sector. According to one Hezb politician, "Unfortunately, Afghanistan's security sector is divided among political factions; Jamiat has its own people there, Junbesh has its people, and Wahdat. Hezb-e Islami also wants to have its share in the armed forces."

Another, from an armed base in one of the southern provinces, said, "It was always a complaint from our party that we don't have high-ranking positions in the security sector. There

Hekmatyar's armed base, which had waned considerably over the years, appeared to expand overnight.

may be some low-ranking officers and fighters, but they have joined individually, not under the name of Hezb-e Islami Hekmatyar. We have not introduced any people into Afghanistan's security sector."

Such expectations came from different corners of Hezb-e Islami. Across several provinces, Hekmatyar's insurgent commanders drew up wish lists. Commander Mirwais, for example, a former businessman from Baghlan-e Jadid district in Baghlan Province, who had still been fighting under Hekmatyar's flag with around three hundred men, could openly visit Pul-e Khumri (Baghlan's provincial capital) and Kabul, profiting from the amnesty. In September 2017 he said, "It is almost sixteen years that Jamiat has the full control of the Baghlan local administration. Now, we want a share."

If the deal raised expectations among Hezb-e Islami followers in the ALP, it also appears to have led Jamiat powerbrokers to preempt the anticipated recruitment of Hezb commanders in the security forces by pushing against Hezb's influence in the force, particularly in provinces where Jamiat influence was strong. In the Dand-e Ghor area of Baghlan's Pul-e Khumri district, for example, tribal elder Mullah Alam, a former Hezb-e Islami commander, until recently oversaw three hundred local police. Lobbying by local Jamiatis, including Deputy Police Chief Amir Gul, led to decreases in his unit first to one hundred men, then to fifty; by September 2017, only forty remained. Mullah Alam in an interview claimed that Jamiat forces have been recruited in their stead. From the 1,200 ALP in the entire Baghlan Province, he estimated that now "only 150 to 200 are Hezb-e Islami." Mullah Alam's claims were largely borne out by a local Jamiat commander, who confirmed that Hezb were disarmed and their places given to Jamiat. He claimed it was because "they were not fighting much against the Taliban because most of the Taliban in Baghlan Province are former Hezb-e Islami commanders or fighters." This is an often-heard argument among Hezb rivals.

Hopeful Hezb-e Islami commanders also included many of those who had joined the Taliban (in some provinces, especially in the north, former Hezb commanders are well represented in the movement). This seems particularly the case for mid- to low-level commanders. Many had originally joined the Taliban for want of other options for remaining armed. Prospects of integrating in the security sector under the Hezb flag shifted their calculations. One Laghman commander said,

I am happy with the peace deal and ready to leave the Taliban frontline and come and join the government through the Hezb-e Islami mediation. I have contact with the Hezb-e Islami office in Laghman. I told him that lots of Hezb with Taliban are ready to come and join back with Hezb, if the peace deal is implemented.

In some cases, the insecurity that ex-Hezb-e Islami commanders in the Taliban faced after the peace deal now provides further incentive for their interest in positions in the security sector. Interviews suggest that some Taliban commanders harbor doubts about their ex-Hezb-e Islami comrades after the peace deal. In Baghlan, one said that he had dismissed subordinates with a Hezb-e Islami background since the deal and had encouraged his peers to do the same. In Logar, a former Hezb-e Islami Taliban commander said that his non-Hezb Taliban commanders were now demoting people like him:

Since the peace deal, the Taliban has changed their ways with us. Before the deal our commanders had high positions, like district governor, group leader, and head of the *nazami masoul* [military commission], and in the financial, logistics, and military commissions. Now they have us working as fighters or *delgai* commanders [group commander of ten to twenty fighters]. We have become their slaves.

Anecdotal evidence suggests a generational divide among former Hezb commanders and fighters within the Taliban's ranks. Older commanders, who had fought together with Hekma-

tyar longer than with the Taliban, tended to be more interested in abandoning the insurgency and joining the government under his leadership than their sons or nephews, who had grown up Hezb-e Islami but spent most of their fighting years with the Taliban. Many families hedge bets. A former Hezb commander with the Taliban in Laghman said,

There are families who play a double game between the government and Taliban. The son is with Taliban and the father was a commander of Hezb before; now the father openly supports Hekmatyar again, while the son stays with Taliban. They pretend they are enemies now, with the son calling the father and insulting him. But in reality, they are monitoring the current situation. If the father gets something through Hekmatyar, then the son will leave the Taliban; and if the father gets nothing, the son stays with the insurgency.

Higher-level Taliban commanders with Hezb backgrounds, despite their age, appear disinclined to leave the insurgency until either it is clear how the implementation of the peace deal evolves or until the government strikes a separate deal with the Taliban itself.

Hekmatyar himself offered to President Ghani to act as mediator to the Taliban leadership. But the Taliban's Quetta Shura reportedly rejected his playing such a role. A January 2018 meeting in Turkey with a small dissident Taliban faction in which Hekmatyar's son-in-law Homayoun Jarir participated could possibly be interpreted as Hezb-e Islami trying to start a peace process another way. The faction is, however, too small for the meeting to be of any significance.²⁵

Integration of Hezb-e Islami in the Security Forces

The government established the Joint Implementation Commission within the High Peace Council to implement the peace deal. It has six to eight subcommissions (the number varies), including one on military integration, which is led by the NDS and includes representatives from the NDS and the Interior and Defense ministries. Two international civil society groups—the European Institute of Peace and Swiss Peace—and the European Union have started a joint project, the Afghanistan Peace Support Initiative, to advise Afghans on the deal's implementation and outreach to the wider population.²⁶

A government plan for the reintegration of Hezb-e Islami commanders and fighters from January 2017 more or less replicated the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program, established in 2010 to reintegrate Taliban commanders and fighters.²⁷ The new plan proposed that the NDS vet and register demobilized fighters and offer them psychosocial counseling and skills training to help them find jobs. Yet, in contrast to 2010, resources for such activities are scant. The HPC is running on emergency funding; its local infrastructure has almost been dismantled.

Also, before recruitment of Hezb commanders and fighters in the security forces can start, the government and other factions need to determine precisely who will integrate into which institution, a controversial question of great political significance, which, as described, was omitted from the peace deal itself and remains unresolved. In the spring of 2018, no clarity even existed on the number or names of Hezb-e Islami commanders and fighters to be integrated. Estimates of actual numbers of Hezb forces varied wildly, from forty thousand by some prominent Hekmatyar followers to a few thousand at most by informed observers, some of whom say no more than five hundred.

The three main factions involved—the Palace, Hezb-e Islami, and Jamiat—have contrasting ideas on how to move forward. The Jamiat faction in government, while trying to slow the process through emphasizing a long and thorough vetting process, claims to favor integrating Hezb-e Islami members in the army and police through regular procedures. Given that Jamiat loyalists occupy many senior positions, Hezb-e Islami members would then fall under their

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command, making them easier to control. In turn, Hezb-e Islami would accept integration into the military and police force, but this would need to include senior appointments that would then lead to appointments of Hezb-e Islami members in the same departments or units on more junior levels, in essence surrendering sections of the army or police to the movement.

Not only Jamiat opposes such a model. The Palace, and Ghani in particular, reportedly believes it would endanger the recent reforms. Many top Hezb-e Islami commanders claim high ranks because of their years in the anti-Soviet jihad, which counted as years of service under President Karzai but no longer do so after Ghani's reforms. The lowered retirement age also reduces possibilities for Hezb-e Islami leaders to enter the security forces. The Palace has suggested to Hezb-e Islami to identify those already in the security agencies and promote them, but Hezb-e Islami refuses because doing so would reduce the number of remaining members to be integrated and thus the number of Hezb loyalists in the security forces overall. Another option acceptable to Ghani's team is to integrate young and educated Hezb members into the ANP.

The alternatives to joining the regular army and police would be integration into the NDS or the militia programs—the ALP or the Territorial Forces. Both Jamiat and President Ghani's team oppose Hezb integrating in the NDS, which leaves the militia programs as the last remaining option. Ghani's team proposes that in addition to integrating younger Hezb members into the ANP, their older comrades will join the ALP or the Territorial Forces. They would join mostly in the eastern and southeastern provinces. Reportedly, Ghani's team believes that, in the ALP and Territorial Forces, Hezb fighters would be easier both to control (given that Hekmatyar probably would want to appoint Hezb ALP across regions and to award various followers, leaving them dispersed over different regions) and, potentially, to eventually demobilize. Jamiat, however, also regards this option warily; some Jamiati leaders reportedly want more of their own members integrated in the ALP in the north in return.

Hekmatyar's Refusal to Demobilize

Without a clear path toward integration in the security sector, Hekmatyar has refused to demobilize his men in Afghanistan. In principle, the Ministry of Defense has called on Hezb-e Islami to lay down its arms. Jamiat, too, insists that Hezb-e Islami should be disbanded and disarmed. The Ghani team seems more sympathetic to Hekmatyar's argument that his commanders and fighters operate in volatile areas where the government cannot guarantee their security and are endangered by both the Taliban and rival factions. Some Hekmatyar loyalists argue that their disbandment would be "unfair so long as men had not been offered jobs in the security sector" and that "thousands would become jobless." In the provinces, most active Hezb commanders appear to have stood down and respected the ceasefire but are not disarming or demobilizing and are reluctant to do so without jobs in the security sector that could guarantee enough protection to fully disband.²⁸

The Taliban has threatened former Hezb insurgents. As a Hezb commander formerly with the Taliban in Laghman explained,

The leadership of the Taliban in Laghman Province oppose the peace deal and believe that Hekmatyar has sold himself to the Americans. The military commission of the Taliban in Laghman ordered all Taliban commanders and fighters in Laghman to kill everyone who has the membership card of Hezb-e Islami. This is the reason why Hezb-e Islami commanders have now disappeared.

In Baghlan, a Taliban commander remarked,

Before the peace deal I had much respect for Hekmatyar, when he stayed in the mountains and fought against the corrupt government and the foreign forces. Now he has sold

himself out for some dollars and positions, it is very shameful for him. We have got order to kill the Hezb fighters and members when they come under our arrest.

Several sources inside Hezb-e Islami in Kabul argue that the Taliban has killed Hezb commanders in Ghazni, Kunduz, Laghman, Paktia, Takhar, and Wardak since the peace agreement. Yet research in the provinces revealed more evidence of threats than actual attacks. This may reflect, as a former Hezb-e Islami commander with the Taliban in Laghman claimed, that Hezb commanders are lying low. But they were not lying low everywhere; many have become more assertive since the peace deal.

Other sources inside Hezb-e Islami and the Taliban gave another explanation. They claimed that after initial clashes in provinces—including Herat, Farah, Kunar, Paktika, Paktiya, and Zabul—between the Taliban and Hezb-e Islami during the negotiations and around the peace deal's signing, both movements' leaders instructed commanders on the ground not to fight each other (though Taliban commanders reportedly also received instructions to encourage Hezb commanders to join them). The order to not clash was reportedly the outcome of earlier talks between Hekmatyar and Taliban leaders. After the Taliban opened its office in Qatar in 2013, the Hezb leader reportedly sought an understanding with the movement's leadership. The Taliban are said to have agreed that if Hezb-e Islami did not disclose what it knew about the Taliban to the government, and did not turn against the insurgents, they in turn would not confront Hekmatyar's movement except those members that had already joined the ALP and fought against the Taliban. This agreement, if it existed, was reportedly not communicated to field commanders until the 2016 clashes.

Hezb-e Islami members faced an arguably still graver threat from pro-government rivals. The arrest of several Hezb commanders since the peace deal by the NDS, within some of whose departments Jamiat still exercises strong influence despite the NDS's pro-Ghani chief, illustrates this danger. Several senior Hezb commanders remain in Shamshatu refugee camp (officially called Nasrat Mena)—the headquarters of Hezb-e Islami since the 1980s near Peshawar in Pakistan—partially because they fear also being arrested.²⁹

One of Hezb's most influential remaining commanders, Mirwais in Baghlan Province, claimed to have been attacked twice by security forces under Jamiat command in the fall of 2017:

My fighters are respecting the ceasefire, waiting for the order of Hekmatyar Saheb. They are at their checkpoints or in their areas, they are armed and until Hekmatyar gives me the order I will not give up my weapons. I will hand over my weapons when all the local political figures also hand over their weapons. In Baghlan Province there are lots of illegal armed groups belonging to political parties; their weapons should also be collected.

Other clashes may have been provoked by Hezb affiliates becoming more aggressive after the peace deal. An arrest warrant was issued for Hezb commander Bashir Qanet from Takhar's Chah Ab district after an attack on a gathering in a local mosque on August 11, 2017, which resulted in four killed and nearly thirty injured. Local media reports suggest the attack had been presaged and was followed by other lethal clashes with Jamiat affiliates. A well-informed source from Takhar claimed that Qanet had become more assertive in a long-running conflict that included family disputes with relatives that had joined different parties, wider tensions between Jamiat and Hezb-e Islami, and a fight for control of drug smuggling routes. Notably, Hekmatyar did not denounce violence allegedly committed by Qanet.³⁰

In Balkh, tension between Jamiat and Hezb-e Islami rose in August 2017 over a video posted on Facebook in which a provincial councillor with close ties to Hezb's Juma Khan Hamard appeared to insult Governor Atta. The councillor fled Balkh but subsequently attempted to return to the province. He only reached the airport, where armed men from Ham-

dard clashed with those of Atta, leaving two dead and seventeen wounded. The politician, who was apprehended by Atta's men, accused them of torturing him—accusations the governor denies.³¹ In an interview, the provincial councillor, who has since been convicted for corruption, also accused the government of using the investigation into his case to pressure Atta. Research for this report did not uncover evidence to substantiate this allegation, though well-informed Afghan and international sources claim that Ghani-affiliated officials encouraged the councillor's return to Balkh.

In sum, without a clear path toward integration into the security sector, Hezb commanders and fighters, under orders from Hekmatyar, did not demobilize, though they did respect a ceasefire. Hekmatyar's faction emphasized the threat they faced from the Taliban, though tensions with other pro-government factions were arguably perhaps still more dangerous. Hezb followers behaving more assertively appears to have played a role in some clashes.

Without a clear path toward integration into the security sector, Hezb commanders and fighters did not demobilize.

Hezb Remains Divided

The problems between Hezb-e Islami and Jamiat were clearly connected to the tensions between Ghani's camp and others in the National Unity Government. The Palace's support for Hekmatyar's return to Kabul reinforced the sense among its coalition partners that Ghani was pursuing an ethnic, pro-Pashtun, agenda. This reinforced friction between Ghani and Jamiat: by early 2017, a potential deal between the president and Atta had fallen through; that April, Ghani had dismissed Ahmad Zia Massoud, another Jamiat leader, and his special representative on reforms and good governance; and in June the state minister for security reforms and former NDS chief Amrullah Saleh (a former Jamiat member who is still close to the party) resigned. Hekmatyar's return to Kabul also almost coincided with the departure of Junbesh leader Dostum. The Hezb-e Islami leader's inflammatory speeches—in one he accused Dostum, Deputy Chief Executive Mohammad Mohaqeq, and Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani of ethnic politics; asserted that six hundred Afghan generals came from Jamiat-dominated Panjshir; and claimed that the late Jamiat leader Ahmad Shah Massoud had close ties with Pakistani intelligence—hardly helped. This was especially incendiary given that Hekmatyar himself arguably had been Islamabad's greatest beneficiary in the 1980s.³²

According to one Jamiati politician, "Ethnic ideology brought these two Pashtun leaders together. Ghani brought Hekmatyar back to weaken the power of the northern leaders. But if Ghani thinks that Hekmatyar will bring votes for him in the coming election, he is wrong because this alliance will result in all non-Pashtuns standing against him."

Although Hekmatyar's return was only one element in a complex political dynamic, one foreign official remarked that it appeared to "kick loose a stone." The perception of some former Northern Alliance factions of his return as part of a ploy by the Palace to create a strong Pashtun front was arguably one factor in the formation of the Ankara coalition—officially, the Coalition for the Salvation of Afghanistan—in July 2017. This coalition united powerbrokers such as Dostum, Atta, and Mohaqeq who had been on competing sides in the 2014 elections in opposition to Ghani. The Palace's maneuvers in the security sector were a source of particular anger among Jamiat leaders. The May 31 bombing in Kabul that killed more than 150 people only weeks after Hekmatyar's return and the suicide attack on the subsequent Jamiat funeral had provoked widespread protests. Jamiat politicians demanded the resignation of the heads of security ministries—two of whom were Pashtun and the third (the interior minister) was perceived as increasingly weak and as having been co-opted by the Palace.³³

In this context, the notion of integrating Hezb commanders and fighters in the security sector, while Jamiat felt it was losing influence in it, was especially threatening. Jamiati leaders' resistance to Hezb-e Islami's integration in the security forces, their insistence that its members should disband, and the armed clashes between commanders from both sides should be seen in this light.

Hekmatyar's friction with Jamiat and his refusal to demobilize until after recruitment of his men in the security forces also had implications for Hezb-e Islami, rattling factions that had forged relatively good ties with Jamiat over the years. By mid-September, several Hezb power-brokers, including those from Parwan, Kapisa, and Panjshir—three of the provinces where Hezb and Jamiat cohabited—reportedly cut off relations with Hekmatyar over his confrontational attitude toward Jamiat. Hezb's internal problems, though not talked about publicly, were on full display when important Hezb-e Islami figures, including Arghandiwal, did not attend a major Hezb-e Islami conference held in Kabul in mid-November. The conference had been convened to select Hezb-e Islami's new governing body. Already over the summer, disagreements had surrounded the selection of a temporary executive commission that would examine how to unify Hezb-e Islami's factions. Now the selection of the council that would select the new executive commission took place without the main other faction present, indicating continued divisions.

In March 2018, Hekmatyar publicly broke with Arghandiwal, Engineer Mohammad Khan, and Dr. Basir Anwar, claiming to have dismissed them from Hezb-e Islami. Arghandiwal in a statement said he had registered the party with the government and that “no one can dismiss him and others from the party.” Hekmatyar is reportedly lobbying the Palace to be able to use the name Hezb-e Islami for his own faction. For the moment, however, the name remains with Arghandiwal, who is backed by Basir Anwar, who as justice minister officially oversees political party registration.³⁴

No Easy Way Forward

The main implications of the difficulties around the recruitment of Hezb-e Islami commanders and fighters in the security forces as agreed in the 2016 peace agreement are threefold. First, integrating senior Hezb-e Islami commanders and fighters into militia programs would keep them on the margins of the security sector, making a return to the insurgency more likely than were they integrated into the regular police and army. Second, it increases suspicions among the Taliban that the government is not capable or willing to fulfill its promises. Last, it suggests that other political factions could be alienated in the process.

Integration into Militia Programs: The Risk of a Return to Insurgency

More than a year and a half has passed since the peace deal was signed between the Afghan government and Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami faction. Thus far, its implementation has been limited mostly to Hekmatyar himself: his name has been taken off the UN sanctions list; he was welcomed back into Kabul by the president and other leaders; and he has moved into new digs in the capital. Although the release of prisoners is progressing, albeit more slowly than anticipated, other elements of the deal have stalled, including the demobilization and integration into the security forces of commanders and fighters.³⁵

The final document of the peace deal itself was short, leaving much to be negotiated later. But subsequent talks as yet have not advanced enough to yield a concrete and formal plan on

integration, namely, the force into which commanders and fighters would be integrated, how that would happen, and which of them would be eligible.

The idea for now seems to be to integrate—eventually—the senior and older Hezb members into irregular security forces, such as the ALP or the new Territorial Army, and younger members into the ANP. Integration in militias would provide a way for former Hezb-e Islami to receive government support, including weapons. But oversight, though it has improved for the ALP, would still be limited. Afghanistan's history with militias also raises a red flag. Across those areas where the Taliban and Islamic State are present, some or even many within their ranks probably have at some point operated as pro-government militias.³⁶ For a group that has just left the insurgency, the step back into its fold would be smaller than for most others. Another downside of integrating Hezb commanders and fighters into the ALP would be that it would formalize the factionalism of a force in which factions already exercise influence, but only informally. Other factions might then demand “their” share, as Jamiat is already doing.

Integration of Hezb-e Islami commanders and fighters into the regular security forces would offer a more sustainable path out of the insurgency. But doing so through regular procedures would be complicated. Not only would Hezb-e Islami resist integrating in a way that would break ties between commanders and fighters, and thus would not translate into factional influence, but President Ghani's reforms also work against such integration. Depending on who Hezb-e Islami would put forward for integration, many could be older than the new retirement age, and their ranks as cited by Hezb negotiators might not coincide with their years in service (to which rank is tied). If so, many Hezb commanders and fighters could be left jobless. The commanders' and fighters' general lack of training and education would also make integration into regular forces a long process, and would heighten the risk of their ending up in junior positions. Although young Hezb members could be integrated into the ANP as Ghani suggests, the obstacles for more senior members would limit the number of senior positions and thus not enable the structural redistribution of power they expect.

For Hezb-e Islami commanders to integrate into the security sector in a way that guarantees factional influence—through appointments to senior ranks and the subsequent integration of fighters within their chain of command—would also be complicated. Only if President Ghani were to change his mind on doing so and push back against Jamiat's resistance could it happen. Such integration would, however, strengthen the perception among other factions that the Palace is using reforms selectively: bending rules for fellow Ghilzai Pashtuns while using them to rid the forces of factions dominated by other ethnic groups. Indeed, several rules (new and old) would probably need to be circumvented if significant Hezb integration in top security-sector positions is to be achieved.

The Palace appears unlikely to reverse course on this issue. Current and former security-sector officials assert that the Ghani team's reform efforts tend to focus on the lower ranks, while appointing loyalists or co-opting officials from rival factions at senior levels. It is reportedly fulfilling two objectives: trying to ensure its survival yet still leave behind a security sector that is less factionalized than before. If so, appointing Hezb-e Islami members—seen as allies of the Ghani team—in top positions would shine an unwelcome light on this strategy. Moreover, President Ghani himself may be genuinely hesitant of giving a figure such as Hekmatyar significant influence in the security sector. Although relations between the two men seem friendly enough now, and Hekmatyar has at numerous times showed his support for the government, Ghani may be reluctant to cede too much power to the former insurgent and jihadi leader with a reputation for being untrustworthy.

For his part, although factional integration into the security sector appears to be Hekmatyar's preferred option, his position does not appear to be strong enough to lobby hard for it. His insurgent group was severely weakened by the time he struck the deal with the government. What happens to his remaining commanders and fighters will not be a central concern of the government, which has to deal with a much stronger Taliban insurgency challenging its control over vast swaths of territory.

The path of least resistance—albeit one that inspires little enthusiasm—thus seems to be integration into militias. This would provide commanders and fighters with jobs and protection, on the one hand, and on the other give Hezb some influence in local security and allow it to mobilize votes. Although Ghani's position is stronger in the security sector than it was during the 2014 elections, Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami faction could still function as a back-up if it joined Ghani's ticket. Hekmatyar is known to not want to share the limelight, but some sources in Hezb-e Islami suggest that many within the party recognize (at least for now—things could of course change as polls approach) that he could be too controversial a figure to stand for president. For Jamiat, Hezb in the ALP would remain a threat, but less so than were it integrated into the regular forces, which would provide Hezb with lasting factional influence.

Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami faction is the first faction excluded from the 2001 political settlement—and the power-sharing deal in the security sector underpinning it—to officially attempt to come back in. It is too small to force a full redistribution of power in the security sector. Such a change could probably only be achieved through a peace process with the much larger and more powerful Taliban movement; a change that the United States as the main funder of the sector would likely have enormous influence on. Were such a peace process on the horizon, it would provide another reason to “park” Hezb-e Islami commanders and fighters temporarily in militias until a more profound restructuring of the security sector takes place.

Hezb Commanders in Limbo: Bad Precedent for Taliban Talks

Hezb-e Islami now has one foot in the post-2001 political settlement, partly through the political reintegration of some factions during the Karzai era and partly through Hekmatyar's return to Kabul with support from Ghani, providing a new source of informal patronage for Hezb-e Islami members. So far, however, the military side of Hezb-e Islami, which has been scattered across factions but whose latent loyalty to Hekmatyar has been rekindled by his re-entry into Kabul, remains in limbo. Without integration into the formal security sector, its immediate future would likely involve serving as an armed base of Hekmatyar in the forthcoming parliamentary and presidential elections, either as illegal militias or as part of militia programs.

Depending on the outcome of the forthcoming electoral cycle, fresh opportunities for Hezb to integrate into the regular security sector may emerge. Hekmatyar promises his men just that: at a gathering of Hezb-e Islami on January 4 he called on them to be patient and to focus on elections. Just ahead of elections, it makes more sense for Hekmatyar and his men to keep old structures intact than to demobilize and integrate into regular security forces, which possibly—depending on the way it is done—would erode commanders' control over their men.

Hekmatyar's reluctance to demobilize his men without a deal on their integration into the security sector has led other Hezb-e Islami factions to distance themselves from him, endangering the unification of the party that would also benefit its electoral success. In this sense, the lack of military integration also complicates Hezb-e Islami's further political reintegration.

In the meantime, Hezb and former Hezb commanders that hoped for security-sector positions show signs of increasing disillusionment, which has led some within Hekmatyar's closest

circle to accuse him of not looking after his men. Interviews in the provinces with a strong Hezb presence revealed anger within Hezb's ranks at the government but also at Hekmatyar himself.

I am happy with the peace deal of Hekmatyar Saheb with the government but sad at the implementation of its provisions. All the followers of Hekmatyar Saheb in Afghanistan are watching how the government will implement the peace promises but it seems that the government is not interested in implementation of the peace demands.

—Commander Mirwait, Baghlan

I am in contact with the Hezb-e Islami office in Laghman, and have told them that many Hezb with the Taliban are ready to come over, but only if the government is serious about implementing the peace deal. Right now we don't trust the government will guarantee our security or treat us well if we join the peace process through Hezb mediation.

—former Hezb-e Islami Taliban commander, Laghman

We want Hekmatyar to talk to the government and do something for his commanders. He should properly integrate us in the security sector, like Jamiat did for their people. We fought for him, our family members were killed for him, now we want something. My son sometimes tells me: why did you not join Jamiat? Their followers have everything now, their sons have good jobs through their fathers. He is right. I now want to do something for my son.

—former ALP chief removed from his position after the peace deal, Baghlan

The implementation of the peace deal is very slow and every Hezb commander is getting unhappy. This also has a bad effect on the relations between the Hezb offices and Hezb commanders in the Taliban.

—Hezb commander, Laghman

Failure to implement the Hezb-e Islami peace deal would send a negative signal to Taliban leaders on the prospect of seeking their own deal.

Failure to implement the Hezb-e Islami peace deal would send a negative signal to Taliban leaders on the prospect of seeking their own deal. Military integration would be critical for the Taliban for the same reasons it is for Hezb-e Islami: first, for the physical security of its leaders, commanders, and fighters; second, and more importantly, because only a share—presumably much larger, given the Taliban's strength—of the security forces would allow the movement to protect its interests. As the military integration of Hezb commanders stalls, the Taliban leadership is likely to draw the conclusion that the government cannot or will not live up to its promises. This would reinforce the importance of US guarantees for the Taliban and of negotiating directly with the United States, which it already insists on.³⁷

Alienating Other Factions: New Insurgency?

The anger of opposition factions at President Ghani's simultaneous pursuit of reform politics that his opponents perceive as patrimonial and the Hekmatyar peace deal all pose a challenge to that deal's implementation. That Ghani's opponents were largely excluded from the negotiations and that those talks were in essence an extension of Ghani's election campaign hardly help. Other factions tend to see the deal as a way for Ghani's team, which is mostly made up of educated and westernized Afghans without a fighting past, to establish an armed base with religious and jihadi credentials that can tip the balance in the next elections, especially in conservative, insecure areas.

Alienating these factions is a big gamble. Already, some of the inroads the Taliban has made in the provinces since 2014, including in Kunduz in 2015 and 2016 and in Uruzgan in 2016, appear to involve marginalized and nominally pro-government powerbrokers preferring not to fight Taliban advances in order to send a message to Kabul.³⁸ Worse still, when such powerbrokers—whether in Kabul or the provinces—lose their ability to dispense patronage, they risk their men joining the insurgency.

This has already happened to some of Dostum's men in Faryab Province. When the first vice president was still in Afghanistan, he remobilized Junbesh commanders (as uprising militias) to fight the Taliban in Faryab. Now that he is in exile, the mostly Uzbek commanders are not being paid and many have joined the insurgency. In next door Jowzjan, unemployed former Junbesh commanders are joining the Islamic State in Darzab district, as have former Hezb-e Islami commanders in Qosh Tepa district.³⁹

Alienating the generation of powerbrokers who fought in the anti-Soviet jihad may in the short term only incur consequences in places remote from Kabul such as Faryab, Kunduz, and Uruzgan. Taken together, however, the trend is dangerous in that it risks fortifying an insurgency that might be largely rural but nonetheless already would challenge the state's survival were international forces to withdraw. Attempting to sideline Jamiat, even in its weakened state, could prove especially risky. As Balkh Governor Atta said when he heard about the reported plans from President Ghani's team to militarily intervene to oust him, "I was sure if that happened the military of Afghanistan would get divided. You all know that most of the soldiers and officers of the Afghan military or Afghan forces are somehow connected to Jamiat." Yet, that Jamiat is at the center of power in Afghanistan also cuts the other way: it has much to lose from a government collapse, which would compromise the flow of foreign funds. The extended negotiations between Jamiat and the Palace over Atta's future—which was finally resolved in March—shows this. At the same time, no one knows exactly what might tip the government into collapsing. Extended crises keep everyone on edge. In the meantime, the Taliban continues to gain ground.

Attempts to rid the government of warlords, professionalize the security sector, and bring in the armed opposition are valuable, even if they generate short-term tensions. But President Ghani should manage carefully his relations with his government partners. The perception, in the current context of government crisis, that reforms and peace negotiations only serve the Palace's interests, generates resistance that stands in the way of success in these areas, and potentially risks further instability.

Hezb's Political Future

For Hekmatyar's faction of Hezb-e Islami, parliamentary and provincial council elections—currently scheduled for October 20, 2018—will be key. Its performance will not only determine how many legislative and local seats it will gain, but also show its influence to potential allies ahead of the 2019 presidential elections, perhaps including President Ghani himself. These two factors combined (parliamentary and provincial council seats coupled with Hezb's power ahead of presidential elections) could make Hekmatyar's bargaining position much stronger after the October elections if his party performs well.

It would also strengthen his position to influence the military integration of his men. If Hekmatyar-linked Hezb powerbrokers win seats, they can make another push for expanding factional influence in the regular security sector, such as through senior appointments. In principle, their demands might meet a more receptive Palace, particularly if President Ghani views Hekmatyar as a potential ally for 2019. At the same time, even with Ghani's support, obstacles to Hezb's integration in the formal security sector will remain. The entrenched interests of other political factions are unlikely to change with the elections, for example. Overall, therefore, the integration of Hezb-e Islami in militia programs still seems the most likely outcome of the peace agreement.

The wildcard, however, would be political talks with the Taliban, whose leaders would likely demand a large share in the security sector. Granting that would probably require the United States to wield its enormous influence to force a new power-sharing deal within the security sector. That could provide fresh opportunities for Hezb-e Islami to integrate in the slipstream of their former Taliban allies. But it could also mean that Hezb's demands are obliterated by those of the much stronger insurgent movement.

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Many militant Afghan groups excluded from the post-2001 political order and subsequently marginalized joined Hezb-e Islami and Taliban insurgent forces. The integration of insurgent commanders and fighters into the security forces as part of deals with insurgent groups is almost certainly a prerequisite for ending the Afghan war. This report examines the current political struggle over the integration of commanders and fighters from Hezb-e Islami as agreed to in the 2016 peace deal. Drawing from nearly one hundred interviews with Afghan officials, tribal elders, former jihadi commanders, Taliban commanders, and foreign officials and observers, it seeks to shed light on the potential challenges that might be involved in a similar integration of the far larger Taliban insurgency in the event of a peace deal with that movement.

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