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## Mister Bad News

By Nick Mills

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Gulbuddin is on the comeback trail, and that is very bad news for Afghanistan.

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the most vicious, bloodthirsty, egomaniacal and amoral of all the Afghan troublemakers of the past four decades, is negotiating with Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai for a role in Karzai's government. In the Byzantine and sometimes bizarre world of Afghan politics, this would be one of the strangest, not to say most unwelcome, developments since the ouster of the Taliban. According to a New York Times report by Alissa J. Rubin and Sangar Rahimi, a high-ranking delegation from Hekmatyar's Hezb-i-Islami faction met with Karzai at the Arg Palace in Kabul on March 21.

Hekmatyar's long and bloody career as an Islamist fanatic began in the 1970s when he earned notoriety for throwing acid into the faces of unveiled women at Kabul University. During the jihad against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, Hekmatyar was the favorite attack dog of Pakistan's notorious ISI, the Inter-Services Intelligence agency. Though Hekmatyar headed the most virulently and openly anti-Western faction among the major resistance groups, he got more U.S. aid than the others. Why? Remember, we were providing "clandestine" support to the mujaheddin, which meant that Pakistan, through the ISI, decided who got the money. Hekmatyar devoted more of those resources to attacking other Afghan resistance groups than to attacking the Red Army, and killed journalists who might expose his tactics.

A demonstration of Hekmatyar's ego-driven showmanship came during a massive rally of the seven major mujaheddin resistance groups near Peshawar in 1986. In the middle of a sea of

thousands of gun-toting fighters, a stage had been erected to seat the leaders of the factions. There was Rabbani, and Sayyaf, and Yunis Khalis, and Gilani and Mojadeddi and Mohammedi - and an empty chair. The program could not begin until all seven chairs were filled. The six leaders sat on the stage, looking uncomfortable, for many minutes. Then a cheer erupted somewhere on the edge of the crowd, and the sea of fighters parted, and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar strode through the opening trailed by a phalanx of his gunmen. He mounted the platform with his best impression of a monarch ascending, took his seat and the rally began. Hekmatyar's jihad has never been about Afghanistan; it's always been all about Gulbuddin.

After the Soviet withdrawal Hekmatyar fought any and all of his countrymen in an effort to seize control of the country, most notably against the northern commander Ahmad Shah Massoud. Between them they nearly leveled Kabul. Finally in the mid 1990s Pakistan tired of Hekmatyar. The ISI forged a new hammer, called the Taliban, and Hekmatyar had to tuck his tail between his legs and run for it. Like the Saudi Osama bin Laden, Hekmatyar has remained hidden outside of Afghanistan, shielded by his closest supporters. But his movement, such as it is, has persisted and his fighters have repeatedly attacked U.S. and NATO forces in addition to skirmishing with Taliban fighters, despite forming an alliance with the Taliban in 2001 - typical Hekmatyar duplicity. Furthermore, Hekmatyar has reportedly come back into fashion with the Pakistanis, who have rolled up a few high-ranking Taliban leaders recently. Thomas Ruttig reports on the Afghanistan Analysts Network that Hekmatyar has plunked down a 15-point "peace plan" for Afghanistan which resembles a spider's web with himself at the center. And for all Gulbuddin's evil deeds, Karzai is inviting him to come home.

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar should not be in the government of Afghanistan. He should be in a small, uncomfortable cage aboard a military transport headed for Guantanamo.