

# Only Pakistan and Iran can resolve the Afghan imbroglio

by Ramtanu Maitra

The arrival of 30,000 militiamen in Kabul to carry out President Burhanuddin Rabbani's latest exhortation to drive out the Hezb-e-Islami leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar from Afghanistan, ensures that an all-out civil war is in the offing. The militia comes from northern Afghanistan, the traditional stronghold of the Jamaat-e-Islami mujahideen commander, Ahmed Shah Massoud, who is now the all-powerful defense minister in the present setup. Hekmatyar, meanwhile, continues his aggressive posture, demanding the ouster of the Uzbek militia from Kabul and fresh elections.

The war-torn capital of Kabul, whence thousands have begun to migrate to adjacent areas, is experiencing two separate wars, both of which are causing enormous losses in government and private properties and human lives. The more publicized of the two, of course, is the one that pitted Hekmatyar against the Uzbek militia, Gillam Jam, led by renegade Gen. Abdur Rashid Dostum. Dostum is openly backed by the Kabul government, and more precisely, by Defense Minister Massoud. While Hekmatyar's militia, located just outside of the Afghan capital, is pounding all and sundry indiscriminately and has virtually shut off the Kabul airport, Dostum's men, based at the airport, are matching Hekmatyar's aggression shell for shell. As a result, thousands have lost their lives in the last two weeks alone, and the relief is nowhere in sight.

## Pakhtoon versus Tajik-Uzbek combine

The bad blood between Hekmatyar and Dostum has run deep since the days when Afghanistan was under Soviet occupation (December 1979-February 1989). Fighting on behalf of the Soviet-backed Kabul government, Dostum's militia had made the Hezbes, the most powerful of the mujahideen groups, their prime target. Dostum had the tacit support of another leading mujahideen commander, Ahmed Shah Massoud, a fierce Tajik fighter who had kept the Soviet supply line at bay throughout the period of occupation. The cooperation between Dostum and Massoud later blossomed into full-fledged alliance with the fall of the Najibullah government last April, when the Afghan President was arrested by his own security men working under Dostum. There are indications that Massoud had, in fact, joined hands with Dostum in triggering the coup that led to Najibullah's fall.

The feud between Massoud and Hekmatyar stems from

the fact that the latter represents the Pushtoo-speaking Pakhtoon tribe, by far the majority in the country. Massoud, on the other hand, is a Tajik who is justifiably concerned that if Hekmatyar gains control over Kabul, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and other minorities will be shunted out from sharing power. In addition, while Massoud, Dostum and other minority group leaders are agreeable to sharing power with the minority Shias, who had been encamped in Iran during the Soviet occupation, Hekmatyar and at least three other mujahideen leaders are violently opposed to the idea. It is one of the reasons why Hekmatyar has been consistently labeled by the media as an "Islamic fundamentalist," while Massoud is considered a moderate. In fact, all mujahideen leaders agree that Afghanistan should be an Islamic republic following the Holy Koran as its Constitution.

## Who was involved?

It would be naive, however, to assume that either Hekmatyar or Massoud or any other major mujahideen leader has remained independent and uninfluenced by external factors. Hekmatyar, a flamboyant Afghan engineer, has received copious amounts of arms and cash from Washington, Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Saudi Arabia, and even Iran. One possible reason why Hekmatyar became the beneficiary of such largesse is that the Hezbe leader possessed the most competent force to fight the Soviets. The other explanation, and the likelier one, is that the late Pakistani military dictator Zia ul-Haq saw in Hekmatyar a potential ally, as also the late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto thought of him in the mid-1970s, and neither Washington nor Riyadh wanted to cross swords with General Zia on this issue as long as the Soviets were in Afghanistan. In addition, Hekmatyar also controls a major share of the huge narcotics traffic that flows out of Afghanistan, which not only keeps the Hezbes flush with money, but has also allowed Hekmatyar to develop a strong bond with the international drug networks. Other mujahideen leaders are also involved in drug trafficking, but to a lesser extent. Massoud and his men were also beneficiaries of a cash and arms bonanza, and there are unconfirmed reports that a lot of arms to his group are now coming in from China and North Korea.

However, once Washington lost interest in the Afghan war, and the Soviet Union collapsed, it was generally consid-

ered “sensible” to back a moderate leader over a fundamentalist one. The implications were that a moderate leader, firmly in place at Kabul, will keep the newly independent former Soviet Central Asian republics (Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan) away from the virus of Islamic fundamentalism, providing a fair access to Washington and others. As a result, Hekmatyar suddenly became unacceptable, while Massoud’s stocks rose in the West.

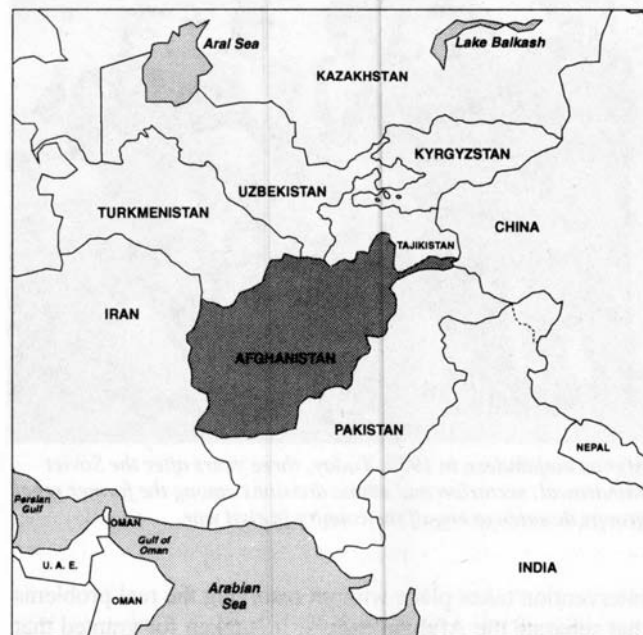
### Selling out Hekmatyar

For Afghanistan, however, it is inconceivable that either Massoud or Hekmatyar could be excluded from the power equation that would control Kabul in the future. But, that is what has happened. When Najibullah was thrown out, Hekmatyar was in Peshawar in Pakistan, and the power fell into the hands of the Massoud-Dostum combine, with the tacit approval of the United Nations mediating team, Washington, Moscow, and possibly, Iran. At that point, Hekmatyar was left with two choices: to negotiate with his rivals for sharing power or to annex Kabul by force. Hekmatyar, drunk with power and feeling bitter over the betrayal, chose the latter course. Pakistan, Hekmatyar’s main backer till then, showed little capability to restrain him.

With the change of government at Kabul in July, whereby President Sibghatullah Mujaddidi, who was relying heavily on Dostum’s men for his own security during his brief stint as President, reluctantly handed over power to the Jamaati leader Burhanuddin Rabbani, there was a flicker of hope that peace would be restored. However, President Rabbani refused to comply with Hekmatyar’s demand that the Uzbek militia be banished from Kabul and continued his alliance with the Uzbek militia leader. Although Hekmatyar’s number-two man, Ustad Abdul Saboor Fareed, was accepted as the prime minister (since fired) of Afghanistan, Hekmatyar continued his aggressive posture against both Dostum and Massoud. Hekmatyar also complains bitterly that the Rabbani government has provided berth to former communists in his cabinet. Although a valid complaint, it cannot be overlooked that Hekmatyar himself is in a coalition with former General Tanai, the renegade Army chief of President Najibullah, who belongs to the Khalq faction of the Communist Party.

On the other hand, if Hekmatyar’s hostility toward the Massoud-Dostum combine is total, the Kabul government’s attitude toward Hekmatyar is no less inimical. When, on Aug. 13, Hekmatyar, setting some preconditions, called for a cease-fire to allow foreigners to leave Kabul, Deputy Defense Minister Haji Dilali, told correspondents that the Kabul government has no desire to negotiate with the Hezb-e-Islami leader. “We will not accept any kind of cease-fire and Mr. Hekmatyar has no option except to die or flee,” said Dilali categorically. A similar statement was issued by President Rabbani the next day, saying, “There will be no more com-

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promises, no more negotiations. Mr. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar must leave Afghanistan.”

### The widening conflict

The second war in progress in Kabul is a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. While Riyadh is bankrolling the Sunni Ittehad-e-Islami group of Abdur Rab Rasool Sayyaf, Teheran is solidly backing the Shia mujahideen group of Hezb-e-Wahadat. The resulting clashes have led to a significant loss of lives and possess the danger of a widening sectarian bloodbath in the Islamic nations.

In addition to these developments, two major mujahideen leaders have left the Afghan Council which runs the Kabul government under the aegis of President Rabbani. These two leaders, Younus Khalis and Pir Sayed Ahmed Shah Gailani, have come to Pakistan and stridently protested over Ahmed Shah Massoud’s total takeover of the Kabul government. Both Khalis and Gailani are Pakhtoon leaders.

It is impossible to comprehend at this juncture how the mujahideen leaders could possibly resolve this crisis and there is every likelihood that an all-out civil war is about to break out. Besides the massive human toll such a fratricidal war will ensure, the country will quickly head toward famine and starvation—a situation which will unfold in a relatively short period of time. At the same time, there is a possibility that such a civil war will not be allowed to take place and external intervention in the form of U.N. Peacekeeping Forces will occur. U.N. Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has already voiced his concerns about the Afghan situation, and on Aug. 15 two members of Kabul’s ruling leadership and General Dostum asked the U.N. to intervene. If such an



*Afghan mujahideen in 1979. Today, three years after the Soviet withdrawal, sectarian and ethnic divisions among the former rebel groups threaten to engulf the country in civil war.*

intervention takes place without resolving the real problems that separate the Afghan leaders, it is taken for granted that Afghanistan will be partitioned.

The dangers such a solution entails are manifold. While the Tajik-Uzbek combine will control Kabul and northern Afghanistan, and possibly western Afghanistan in alliance with the Shia groups, Hekmatyar will control Khost, Kandahar, and Jalalabad, providing him control over almost the entire eastern portion of the country bordering Pakistan's North West Frontier Province and parts of Baluchistan. Besides the threat that Pakistan will face from the betrayed Hekmatyar (since Pakistan's Frontier province consists of the Paktoon tribe, and a Greater Paktoonistan Movement has a long history), the Central Asian republics will be subjected to polarizations on the basis of ethnic and sectarian lines. There, Islamic countries like Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan, which are planning to reap the bonanza in the reconstruction of these Central Asian countries, will find themselves enmired in a chaotic situation where no economic development can be sustained. There are already indications that China and Israel, as well as the United States, have begun to make forays into this area.

It is this danger that should entice Pakistan and Iran to leave aside their vested interests in the Afghan issue and come together to mediate between the warring Afghan factions. Such negotiations should have been carried out when the fissures between the mujahideens began to emerge with the departure of the defeated Soviet Army. However, it is neither too late, nor is there much choice left. The sooner the heads of state in Islamabad and Teheran get together and commit themselves to stop the fratricidal war in Afghanistan, the better it is for the region.

Too many local wars, one should note carefully, often lead to an all-engulfing war involving the region and beyond.

## Iran offers India access to Central Asia

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The visit in early August to Teheran by Indian Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Eduardo Faleiro, has drawn much attention in New Delhi. It has been noted that both Iran and India share many views on the changing world situation. Of particular importance is the Iranian government's willingness to strike a more radical posture at the Sept. 1-6 Jakarta, Indonesia summit of the Non-Aligned Movement and pull NAM out of the abyss that it has been sinking into over the last nine years.

Equally important, from Delhi's viewpoint, is the offer extended by Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani to provide India with access to the newly independent Central Asian republics in order to help these fledgling republics reconstruct their infrastructure. Iran has long recognized India's engineering capabilities for large infrastructure projects.

### Offer to India

From the Indian standpoint, the offer came as a windfall. Strapped with foreign exchange shortages and with an economy which has little export capability, India had been looking wistfully at the reconstruction potentials of the Central Asian republics, while lacking the ability to participate in the building process of these Muslim-dominated countries. President Rafsanjani said countries like India could help the Central Asian countries in their progress in many ways, and Iran is prepared to offer the facility. Although it has not been spelled out yet, it is assumed that Teheran would provide the much-needed seed money to start various programs, in addition to exerting its political influence to bring India onto the scene.

India has also been asked to participate in four major projects in Iran. These projects include the construction of a steel plant, installation of railroads, and electrification of a large township now under construction with all modern facilities. Minister Faleiro has been reportedly assured that it is only the beginning, and much stronger economic ties can be built.

Faleiro also received a clear message that Teheran is aware of the dangers that the post-Cold War era portends, and is considering how to act in developing nations' interests. President Rafsanjani made it clear that the Non-Aligned Movement has to be made more effective and there was