

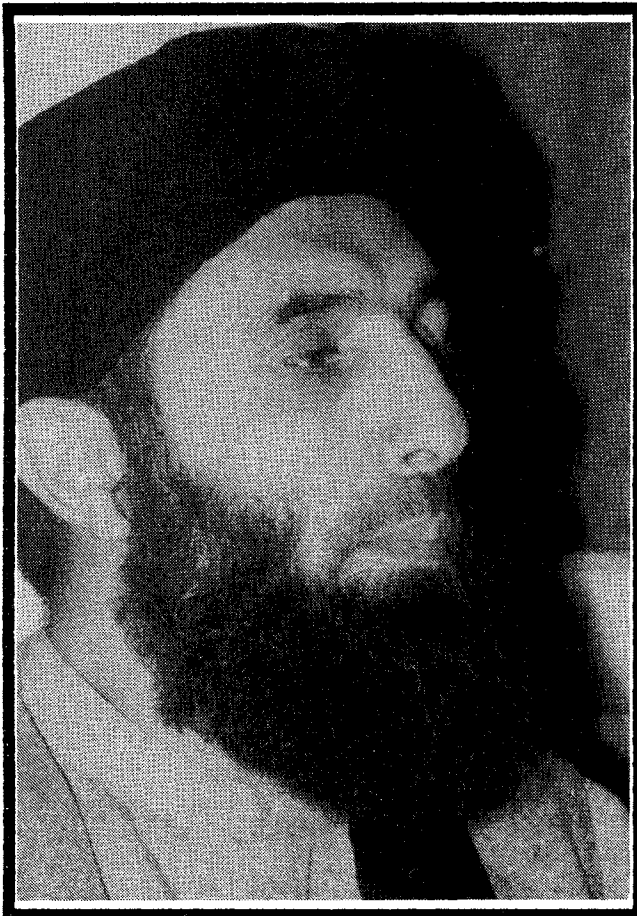
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INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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Gulbadeen Hekmatyar
In Person

by Carol Rose



It was with a fair amount of trepidation -- and prodding from Institute board member Warren Unna -- that I set out to secure an interview with Gulbadeen Hekmatyar.

The son of a farmer from northern Afghanistan, Hekmatyar is the leader of the largest Mujahideen party of the Afghan resistance, Hezb-i-Islami, which he says represents over one-third of the three million Afghans in exile in Pakistan.

What concerned me in terms of meeting Hekmatyar were reports about his allegedly violent past. In the December 29, 1991, issue of The New York Times Magazine, reporter Rob Schultheis wrote that "Before the war, as a student activist at Kabul University, [Hekmatyar] threw acid in the faces of

unveiled female students. His resistance party is violently anti-Western, fights incessantly with other guerrilla groups and has been accused of killing scores, perhaps hundreds, of moderate Afghan exiles and commanders from rival parties, and at least one Western journalist..."

Other news reports have detailed Hekmatyar's links with Libya and with Islamist groups in the Sudan, Algeria and Egypt. His support for Saddam Hussein in the gulf war and opposition to the United Nations efforts to negotiate a political settlement in

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Afghanistan has been widely reported in the local newspapers.

My paranoia was heightened by discussions I had with Westernized Afghans prior to the meeting, including one who said, "I hope you come back from the interview alive."

I was nervous as I drove to Peshawar for the meeting. All week there had been reports that the Afghan leader, Najib, had offered to step down, that the northern Afghan city of Mazar-i-Sharif had fallen to the Mujahideen and mutinous government militia forces, who had struck an uneasy truce in preparation for the final assault on Kabul. Two days after arriving in Peshawar, I was still waiting to meet with Hekmatyar, and beginning to suspect I wasn't going to get the interview after all.

A telephone call from one of Hekmatyar's assistants at 7 o'clock on the third morning told me to come to the heavily fortified Hezb-i-Islami headquarters in Peshawar. A group of armed guards eyed me suspiciously as I drove up. Once I told them my name, however, they welcomed me and ushered me to a small room furnished with a sofa and three chairs. I was greeted by Hekmatyar's interpreter, Nawab Saleem.

After about ten minutes, Hekmatyar entered from an inner room and sat across from me. He was of average height and wore a light grey pajama-style shalwar kameez with a matching vest. His black turban was neatly tied, his beard was well-groomed. Instead of the raging fanatic that various news reports had led me to expect, I found a man who was exceedingly calm -- even contained. He listened to my questions in English (which he speaks) and then answered in his native Pashtu, in a soft but steady voice. He gestured little, keeping his hands folded in his lap, and yet was cordial, often charming, throughout the interview.

He insisted first on speaking about political events in Afghanistan, after which he agreed to discuss his personal life and philosophy.

I left feeling as though I had barely scratched the surface of one of the most impenetrable and fascinating figures to emerge from the Afghan war:

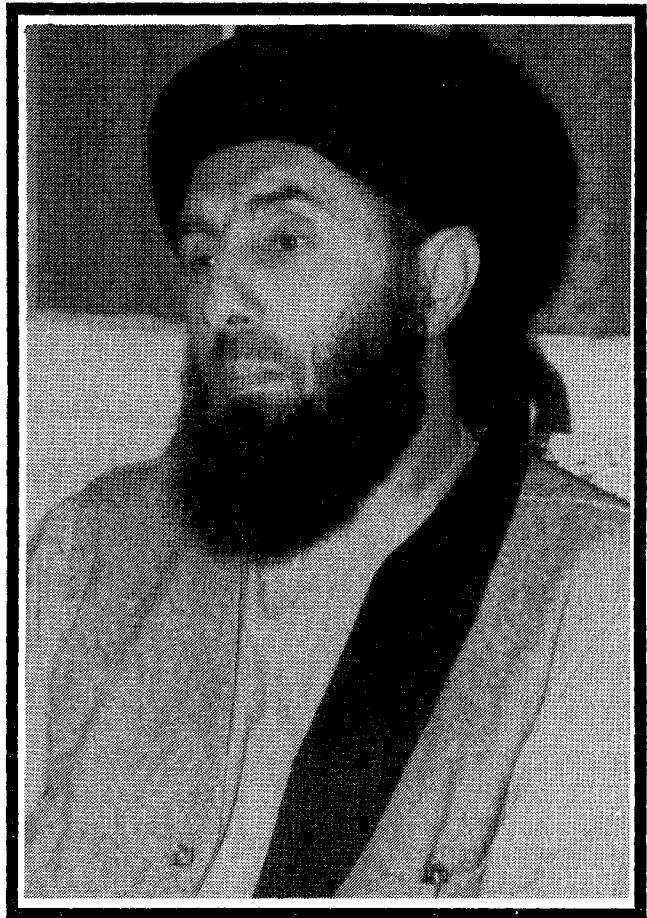
CR: Since it is Afghan New Years day, I want to begin by asking what you are feeling these days. Are you satisfied with how events are proceeding in Afghanistan?

GH: Yes, today begins our New Year, with the hopes and aspirations that this year heralds the end of the hardships and suffering of the Afghan people, with the hope that we are at the final victory of the Mujahideen, the end of war and the

restoration of peace and security in our country and also the harbinger of an elected Islamic government.

CR: Please comment on the recent offer by Kabul regime president Najib to resign once an interim government has taken power.

GH: Najib has no other option but to resign because he is quickly losing control over the situation. He should immediately resign and transfer power to such an interim government of good Muslims acceptable to all sides. Any member of the Communist power will be treated as per Najib. No Communist party members will be acceptable to the Mujahideen. We wish an immediate transfer of power to an interim government, followed by a cease-fire and holding of an election.



CR: What is the latest news from Mazar-i-Sharif and what is your opinion of the events of the last few days?

GH: Events in the North of Afghanistan could be divided into two categories. The first category are the events involving the activities of the Mujahideen as a result of which they obtained spectacular achievements and successes. The second part of it concerns internal differences and rifts among the armed personnel of the regime which have several times resulted in armed clashes among themselves. Some part of those militia and armed personnel have preferred to join the Mujahideen.

CR: What are the implications of the divisions within the militia along ethnic lines. I understand that the Pashtun militia have joined with Hezb-i-Islami, while the Tajik and Usbek militia have joined with [Tajik Mujahideen leader] Ahmad Shah Mahsood. Is there is a possibility that fighting could break out along ethnic lines?

GH: Jumma Khan is one of the most famous commanders of Hezb-i-Islami, who has with him 3,000 armed Mujahideen and sufficient

number of tanks with him. A great number of militia men have joined his ranks, but not on the basis of language or ethnic basis. In Mazar-i-Sharif we have a lot of Uzbek, Turkman and Tajik Mujahideen. Our most famous commanders there are Uzbek. Hezb-i-Islami has more Tajik, Uzbek and Turkman than any other party in that area. The reason is that our party has been formed on the basis of ideology and faith.

To say that there are some divisions on ethnic lines is very unlikely. The trend toward ethnicity is very much clear in the enemy forces because their ideological base has been destroyed -- the only thing they can refer back to is ethnicity and tribalism.

A Life in Profile

Hekmatyar, 42, is a Pashtun of the Kharrut tribe and a native of Baghlan, probably from a Pashtun community that moved to north Afghanistan in the last century. He was a student of engineering at the University of Kabul in the late 1960s, but did not have time to take his diploma. Instead, he spent most of his time from the years 1965 to 1972 leading pro-Islamic student demonstrations against the Afghan monarchy as well as the rising tide of Communism in Afghanistan. In 1974, Hekmatyar and other Islamists first gathered at Peshawar, Pakistan, and reportedly received training from the Pakistan army to carry out clandestine missions in Afghanistan.

During this time, inter-party feuds weakened the Islamists and many new parties were created. In 1978, Hekmatyar created Hezb-i-Islami -- the "Islamic party." With the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, his and other Islamist parties became the focal point of the Afghan resistance to the Soviet Union and the communist government in Kabul.

It has been reported that Hekmatyar received the lion's share of United States covert assistance in the Afghan war, although Hekmatyar has never acknowledged this to be true. Indeed, he refused to meet with then-President Ronald Reagan during a tour of the United States in the mid-1980s. Last year, Hekmatyar backed Saddam Hussein and Iraq in the gulf war, reportedly so enraging president Bush with his "disobedience" that he was declared ineligible for future U.S. assistance. Since then, Hekmatyar has rejected the United Nations peace effort in Afghanistan as "foreign interference" and has publicly broken his ties with Pakistan.

But upon their joining the Mujahideen, since they assume an ideological base again, they dissolve that tendency into ideology and faith. There is no Uzbek party. All parties are Islamic.

If Rashid Dustam [a powerful Uzbek militia commander] with sincerity joins any party we would have no objection to that. He wanted to join us, but we had some conditions [that he do something first against the Kabul regime]. Now when he joins any party we will have no objection to that. We have told all Mujahideen that when anybody comes to their side they should be given protection.

We never try to make a fuss over the militiamen joining any party, as a fuss was created by some parties with General Shah Nawaz Tanai joined Hezb-i-Islami.

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We will have only objection when Mujahideen go to join Rashid Dustam. Even if [Kabul regime president] Najib joined any other party we would not have any objection to that, but we try to caution other parties to be very careful in not letting their Mujahideen to join the militia forces of Najib's government to be used by them.

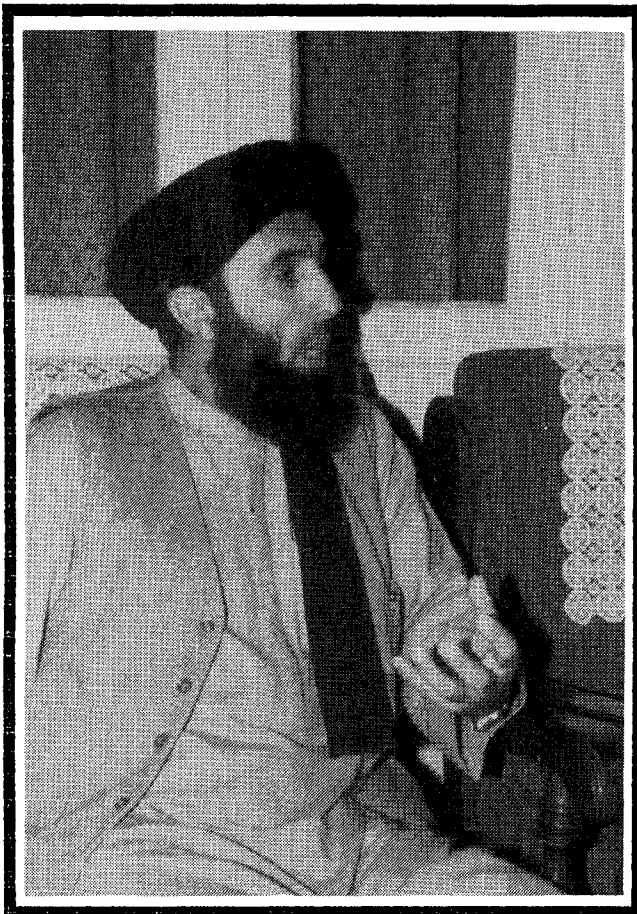
CR: If Mazar-i-Sharif falls to the Mujahideen, what should you do about Kabul: Bomb it? Cut off supplies? Keep the road open?

GH: I cannot tell you anything at the moment because the elected central council of Hezb-i-Islami is in session and this week they will try to determine the political policies of Hezb-i-Islami and will draft the parameters of our military and political strategy.

CR: What are the implications of recent events [fighting in the North, Najib's offer to resign] for the United Nations peace plan?

GH: The so-called U.N. peace plan even before these events was an impracticable, long, ambiguous procedure unacceptable to most Mujahideen forces. But now when the situation has drastically changed, the minimum utility this plan might have had is over now. Now I would suggest that the very short-cut way is adopted for the solution of the Afghan problem. The series of these gatherings that the UN wanted to convene one after the other would have no use.

Now the chance of a major event taking place has dramatically increased. Any event that might take place in Kabul would further complicate the whole situation.



CR: What is the basic difference between your plan and the United Nations plan?

GH: The UN plan is that first there will be an Afghan gathering or assembly. There are a lot of ambiguities concerning this process. The major one is that the parties of the Afghan conflict have not been ascertained or determined, which is a prerequisite. The UN representative Benon Sevan entitles himself to collect the people of his own choice. Then in this process he demands parties to give the list of names to him and then he entitles himself to choose names from among the lists he has collected from all Afghans. He tries to make such an assembly from the belligerent forces and only those people who are acceptable to the UN representative are going to

be part of this assembly.

The second ambiguity is that there is no exact procedure for the selection of names from the given list for the formation of the interim government. He tries to -- after calling this working committee for the interim government -- then to call another 500-member *Jirga* [assembly] after that. We believe that this is a very long, lengthy and tiresome process that is not compatible with the present-day situation in Afghanistan.

What we have proposed is that first and foremost the main parties to the conflict are ascertained. They should decide on the following points: First, that the Najib government should be removed, which has been met to some extent in that Najib has accepted that. Secondly, that interim government is formed. This interim government is not a coalition from the fighting forces but it is formed from non-controversial people out of the parties concerned. Thirdly, a cease-fire is observed and fourth, elections are held for an elected government.

Once all conflicted sides agree on these points, then

instead of calling *Jirgas* and assemblies, direct lists of names be demanded from the parties in the conflict. Then, those people who are acceptable to all of the majority should form an interim government. The conditions in this should be that the people who are forming the interim government should not be members of the parties concerned but should be outside of the parties who are in the conflict. We believe it is a practical and the shortest way to achieve a solution.

CR: I am interested in power, and you are a powerful man. From where does your power come?

GH: I think the question should be asked to the people, not to me. I don't think it is for me to answer. The people should be asked what qualities there are in Hekmatyar that make him appealing to them, that make him a leader.

When I got involved in politics, I was merely 20 years old. The urge to serve my nation made me work and in this regard that I should not spare any sacrifices for the attainment of my goals and my mission. I had decided early that I should not be knuckling down to any pressure, that my stance and positions should be based on facts and realities, that I should be explicit in my views and that I should serve the people of my country rather than my own self or my family.

I had decided that Afghans, like people in many countries, should have a government of their own choice. And I thought that would finally come about through the formation of an organized, disciplined party -- where there is organization, discipline, a consultative system and a way of election for the coming government. I perceive that these could be qualities that Afghans like in their leader.

"I prayed to Allah to give this responsibility of mine to another person who can lead this struggle and allow me a chance to be a teacher."

CR: Do you have any heroes?

GH: Yes, I do have a lot of heroes in my life. They are finding a place in the history of Afghanistan and Islam, people who have impressed me a lot. Islam does not believe in personality cult. It only allows admiration and respect to personalities and not a cult of them. Islam believes in ideology.

To me, the first and foremost role model would be that of the prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him). Apart from him there are a lot of other great personalities who have had a heroic life as Muslims in the history of Islam. They are all heroes and role

models to the Muslims. But I have been impressed the most by those personalities who have been trained and educated at the hands of the Prophet (peace be upon him.)

CR: As you know, a lot has been written about you in the Western press -- not all of it flattering. For example, a recent New York Times Sunday Magazine ^{article} ^{said} that you "threw acid into the face of unveiled female students, that your resistance party is violently anti-western, fights incessantly with other guerrilla groups and has been accused of killing scores, if not hundreds, of moderate Afghan exiles and commanders from rival parties, and at least one Western journalist, a British television cameraman."

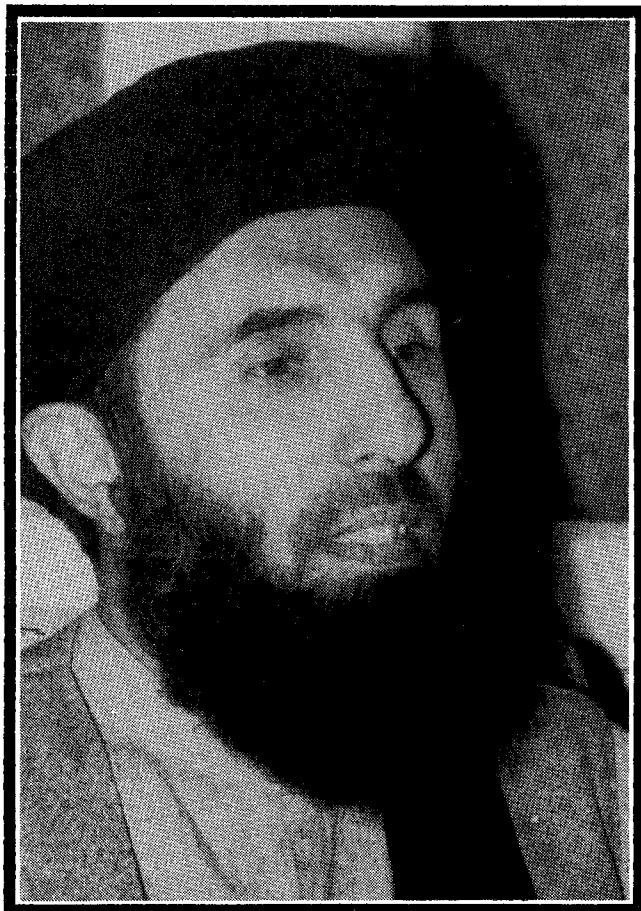
Please comment on these accusations.

GH: If I did see or believe in any judicial source in the West, I would have definitely gone and had made a law suit against all these wanton charges. I would have asked one thing: that they should have come up with a single proof of what they have said against me. By and large this propaganda has been going on against me for a very long time on the part of all those circles

who have heart-felt animosity, indignation and resentment against Islam. The reason they are waging such a propaganda against me -- and it intensifies in very special times -- is that we want a free and independent Afghanistan. And that we are against foreign domination of our country. This is what I think makes them come up with such charges.

The second reason could be that I am the leader of the largest and strongest Mujahideen party, having all the potential and chance of being an alternative to the present regime. If my party was small, insignificant, I can tell you that you would never have read any such rubbish in The New York Times.

CR: If there had been no war in Afghanistan, what would you be doing today?



GH: I would have been an engineer or a doctor. I wanted to be an engineer in the first place, if that was not available I wanted to become a doctor. But my motivation by choosing these two professions was that first I thought I could serve my nation best in these two professions and secondly, I wanted to go into such professions in order not to become a functionary in an office. But communism and their tyranny have brought us to this path. I am a Mujahid now.

Even today, my latest wish would be that I am divested of my political and military responsibilities and instead be allowed to be engaged in education. If it is not the urgency and my sense for serving my nation, I would have preferred being a teacher over being a president.

You know the most sacred thing for a Muslim would be to make rounds around the Kaba [in Mecca]. While I was doing that as a religious duty I prayed to Allah to give this responsibility of mine to another person who can lead this struggle and allow me a chance to be a teacher. In case I am forced to do this leadership thing, then give me all the qualities and qualifications for leading the struggle.

The qualifications which I think are very necessary for leadership I see them rare in my own self. It could be that I might be considered with respect by many people, but I don't see that I have the necessary qualities.

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I have decided that I would not like to govern Afghanistan unless the absolute majority of the Afghans gave me a vote for that. If in my party I secured less than 70 percent of votes, I would resign from my post. I would give my 70 to a person who has secured 30 percent so that he makes it 100 percent.

CR: When was the party election?

GH: They were recently held.

CR: How did you do?

GH: It was 99.05 percent. There was no candidate -- all organs of the party would be candidates. People could vote for anyone. One million people participated in these elections: for Amir, the chairman of the party and also the central council.

CR: You recently took a trip to Libya. According to the Frontier Post newspaper, you are in touch with leaders of the Islamic Front in Algeria, militants in Sudan and Tunisia, as well as Libya. What are your links to these countries and the Muslim brotherhood?

GH: It was not recently. I just attended a conference in Sudan, that was all, it was the beginning of last year. And then afterwards I went for two months for consultations in Libya. That is all.

CR: What are your links with those leaders?

GH: We have relations with many many political leaders and parties of the Islamic movement in the world. It is around the world, with governments and parties, and we never make a secret of this. Even in Europe, we have relations somewhere with governments and opposition -- even in Europe.

CR: If you were to become leader of Afghanistan, what would be your policies toward the Central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union -- many of which continue to embrace communism?

GH: We intend to have fraternal relations with our neighbors. So that we can share in the restoration of peace and security in the region. We would be preferring to have an atmosphere where there is no fear from each other, no interference in the internal affairs of each other, and that we have a conducive atmosphere for progress and development in the region.

CR: Zia ul-Haq once said: "Gulbadeen must be clearly warned that it was Pakistan who made him and it is Pakistan who can equally destroy him." Now you have broken relations with Pakistan. Please comment on your relations with Pakistan.

GH: Only Allah has created me. Any phase in my life would be determined by Allah. We had started this whole struggle and movement when no one could imagine it -- could even think of the

"The efforts made by the Superpowers to eliminate me have not been mobilized against anyone else in the world."

events that would follow. Nobody in Pakistan could imagine that the Soviet Union would be challenged. Our struggle in the first place and its success not only convinced Pakistan, but the rest of the world, that it was possible to challenge the greatest empire in the world.

If it was the case that any human power could destroy us, the Soviet Union would have finished us. Even the United States government has not spared a single effort to eliminate me, at

least politically, they have even not stopped to the extent of [trying] to physically eliminate me, but still with the grace of Allah, I am living, living vigorously, and I enjoy the support of the vast majority of my people and I have a great respect among them.

Even now the Americans are trying to put about such propoganda that Mr. Hekmatyar is going to be eliminated by his party men very soon. Even it has come in the newspapers. Clearly, they sacrifice their intentions about me. But in spite of all of those intentions, I am living with the grace of Allah.

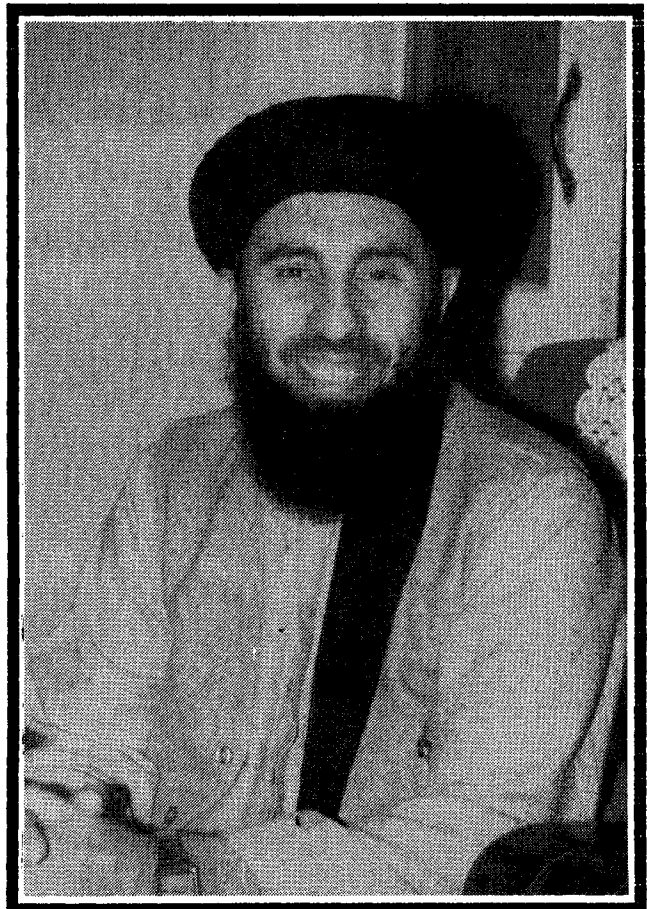
The efforts made by the Superpowers, particularly to eliminate me, have not been mobilized against anyone else in the world. I imagine so much efforts have not been launched against anyone else in the world.

CR: If you were president of Afghanistan, how would you solve the country's severe economic problems? Will you need foreign assistance to do so?

GH: It is premature for me to answer this questions, but I can tell you that we have priorities. First, insuring security. Second, the resettlement of refugees. Third, promotion and development of agriculture, fourth, education, and fifth, health of the people. We would prefer to first bank on our own indigenous resources. And then, in case there was great need for assistance, we would prefer foreign investment rather than asking for foreign aid.

CR: Already there are some refugees going back to Afghanistan, and reports that there will be many more going back after Eid [April 4-5]. Do you support people going back to Afghanistan before an Islamic government is established in Kabul?

GH: We see no harm in their going back to liberated



areas. Particularly for those families who can solve their problems inside Afghanistan. But going back to government-controlled areas would not be favored. This will not be even good for these people who are going back because there is insecurity and anything can happen that would put their lives at stake.