**Hekmatyar in Pakistan**

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Gulbuddin Hekmatyar returned back to tumultuous Kabul after a three-day visit to Pakistan meeting with high officials including President, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister in Islamabad. While he lands back to Kabul, at least 12 people including children were killed after Afghan Military airstrike targeting Taliban fighters hit a religious school in the northeastern province of Takhar. This was a deadly error and investigation are on the way to investigate the cause of such deadly attack. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar offered to broker the deal with Taliban especially during the time when crucial intra Afghan dialogue is ongoing in the country. After meeting the officials here in Pakistan, Hekmatyar, who has a history of political bargaining and opportunist’s tactics in the power game within Afghan quagmire, has deep discussion with all the top brass. While talking at a local think tank event, Hekmatyar made a statement that all the foreign forces must leave Afghanistan and there should be an independent and powerful unbiased Afghan government to hold the Centre in Kabul. He was in Islamabad after the visit of another important political leader Dr. Abdullah Abdullah who is currently heading the Afghan Reconciliation Commission providing assistance in the peace process.At the regional level, Hekmatyar push his party’s trust on Pakistan and China as important regional players and the ones having strong and common coordinated position on Afghanistan. He once said that peace in Afghanistan is not only in the interest of Pakistan but also that of China as well. Twice Prime Minister of Afghanistan said that India is supporting the local militias to as spoilers of the peace process. Having a key eye at the national and regional level political struggles, Hekmatyar has an important presence in the entire solution of the Afghan conflict.

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar was one of the front line warriors against the former Soviet Union and US troops in Afghanistan. After signing a peace deal with the Afghanistan government in 2016 he became an active political icon in Afghanistan political sphere. Afghanistan is a multi-linguistic, multi ‘cultural & multi-ethnic country, the role of a religious party in their past experience has given a broader space to people like Hekmatyar. Afghanistan peace process is in a critical phase where all major power’s, regional, and non- regional actors want to maximize their own influence in Afghanistan. Historical linkage with the past government of Pakistan Hekmatyar himself is trying to find a safe room in future Afghan politics. In this visit, Hekmatyar said that there should be an independent government in Afghanistan especially with the strong presence to have stakes in the next and upcoming Afghan government and set up. The ideas that Hekmatyar has shared with the Pakistani government about independent government and his own motivation to be and have stakes in the upcoming government set up is still a question to be answered by the stakeholders. These visits from Afghan political leaders to Pakistan are in continuation of their own desires to have their place in the next government set up and political bargaining within the Afghan peace process. This is the second-highest Afghan dignitary visit to Pakistan in the last few weeks.

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Pakistan is an important stakeholder in the Afghanistan with not only sharing the border regions with the country but also hosting the largest Afghan refugees in the region. According to the UNHCR report, as a result of the in the Afghan peace process, with shared political, cultural, religious linkage with Afghanistan both countries officials, Taliban fighters knew that without Pakistani diplomatic support Afghanistan will not be able to get out of internal instability. Hekmatyar visit is also important for the lingering political turmoil in Afghanistan after complete US withdrawal. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar has a similar stance against the Kabul government, Hezb-e-Islami leader considers them as a puppet regime installed by the occupiers of Afghanistan. Power-sharing and legitimacy in Afghanistan will be the most notable reason for another possible Civil war in Afghanistan. Any align government in Afghanistan either from Pakistan, China, Russia, India, or the US will hamper the long-lasting peace goals in Afghanistan. This is high time for all the stakeholders in Afghanistan to find common political settlement of Afghanistan. Hekmatyar political wisdom is more favorable towards Pakistan. For factions like Hekmatyar Pakistan would be the best option in making peace in Afghanistan rather than another regional player. Gulbuddin and his faction, like many others including Taliban, believe that the key to Afghan’s imbroglio is complete and comprehensive withdrawal of Foreign troops for Afghan soil. To him, the people of Afghanistan are rational arbiters to decide the future political and security discourse of Afghanistan. Variety of external and internal actors, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar striving hard to make its political presence with the help of their well-wishers. For him, Pakistan is the reliable partner in this regard to get support for the political struggle in Afghanistan. However, it all depends that how the government and stakeholders view Hekmatyar and his ideas and expectations in this entire milieu.

Here we need also to closely evaluate the role that China is playing in creating headways in the peace, not only in the region but also in Afghanistan as well. After the advent of the Belt and Road Initiative, China has actively promoted and supported the cause of peace, reconciliation and convergence in the region that is its neighborhood. It is important for China and also for the region to have sustainable development and shared prosperity. For this matter, we have a regional alliance of SCO where there is an active Afghan Contact Group made in order to resolve the issues through the regional peace processes. As a friend and neighbor of Afghanistan, China respect the will of the people of Afghanistan and how they view development. China is also supporting Pakistan-Afghanistan relations to develop mutual trust and improve the bond. Recently after the signing of the peace deal between Afghan Taliban and US in February this year, however China is skeptical about US brokered deals as China believes that these deals will eventually lead to further instability. Chinese President Xi Jinping’s modern Silk Road project of BRI and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that has all the potential to expand in Afghanistan as a concept of shared future and destiny. As a result of the US presence in Afghanistan, the involvement of China is not that visible however there has been always a desire to support Afghanistan in the peace building. Even then, Chinese companies have won bidding procedures in Afghanistan to work on the natural resources of the country and help in economic development. China has also offered political good offices to Taliban in 2019 and invited them to talk and resolve disputes for peaceful coexistence and lasting prosperity.

Afghanistan peace process is in crucial phase and requires wisdom and patience at the same time especially from those who are brokering the power sharing relations amongst the Afghan stakeholders. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and others need to carefully understand that Afghanistan will remain unstable unless and until people of the country will not place their national interests above their self-interests. For lasting peace and stability of the country, afghan people need to take the destiny in their own hands.

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