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 Tuesday, 28 January, 2003, 11:34 GMT

## Profile: Gulbuddin Hekmatyar



Hekmatyar was an embarrassment to his Iranian hosts

**The latest fighting in Afghanistan has again thrown the spotlight on the warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, reported to be allied to the men battling against US forces.**

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Mujahideen faction, the Hezb-e-Islami, was one of the groups which helped end the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

But in the free-for-all that followed in the early 1990s, his group of fundamentalist Sunni Muslim Pashtuns clashed violently with other Mujahideen factions in the struggle for control of the capital, Kabul.

The Hezb-e-Islami was blamed for much of the terrible death and destruction of that period, which led many ordinary Afghans to welcome the emergence of the Taliban.

**“ Hezb-e-Islami will fight our jihad until foreign troops are gone from Afghanistan and Afghans have set up an Islamic government ”**

Message from Gulbuddin Hekmatyar

For some time, Mr Hekmatyar himself enjoyed considerable support from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. But eventually Islamabad turned against him, preferring to give full support to the Taliban instead.

So like the other Mujahideen factions, Mr Hekmatyar and his men were forced to flee Kabul when the Taliban swept into power



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### Wild card

He ended up being given refuge in Tehran, where he lived a quiet life, waiting for his fortunes to change.

The Iranians may have regarded him as a potentially useful Pashtun card to have up their sleeve, but he turned out to be too much of a wild card for them.

His vocal opposition both to the Americans and to the new regime of President Hamid Karzai was an embarrassment to the Iranian Government, which threw its official weight behind Mr Karzai.

In February last year, the Iranian authorities expelled Mr Hekmatyar and closed down the offices of his Hezb-e-Islami in Tehran.

They accused him of abusing Iranian hospitality with his comments vowing to fight the Karzai administration.

He returned to an undisclosed location in Afghanistan following threats by the Afghan Government to arrest him and try him for war crimes.

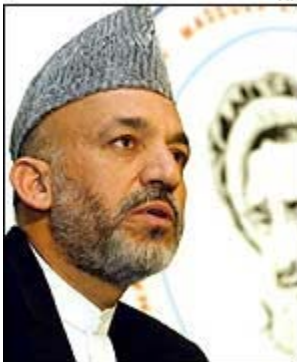
In March last year he offered an olive branch to Mr Karzai.

A spokesman for Hezb-e-Islami in Pakistan said Mr Hekmatyar was now giving full support to the Karzai administration, although the warlord's whereabouts remained a mystery.

### Missile attack

Soon after, however, the Afghan administration arrested 160 people in Kabul in a suspected anti-government plot.

The government said \_\_\_\_\_ AP



Mr Karzai wants to try Mr Hekmatyar for war crimes

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the detainees had been conspiring to plant bombs in Kabul and that most were members of Hezb-e-Islami.

Mr Hekmatyar remained elusive. Last May, the CIA reportedly spotted him in the Shegal Gorge, near Kabul, and tried to kill him with a missile from an unmanned spy plane. It missed.

The US continued to tighten the screw and was reportedly behind the arrest in Islamabad in October of Mr Hekmatyar's son Ghairat Baheer.

Mr Hekmatyar's response was defiance. In December, he warned that a holy war would be stepped up against international troops in Afghanistan.

His message was distributed along the Afghan-Pakistan border to drum up recruits.

The message read: "Hezb-e-Islami will fight our jihad until foreign troops are gone from Afghanistan and Afghans have set up an Islamic government."

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