

Name: Alert ID: TMML2024036792655 KABUL, Afghanistan — One of Afghanistan's most notorious warlords, designated a "global terrorist" by the United States and blacklisted by the United Nations along with Osama bin Laden, wants to come out of the shadows. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, now in his late 60s, says he wants a "real and fair peace" but with conditions the Kabul government is unlikely to even contemplate, such as the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan and new elections in 2016. The remarks reflect Hekmatyar's attempt to assert influence and gain new leverage in Afghan politics, but what role — if any — the once-feared warlord could play is unclear. "Peace can be established and the fighting can end once the occupation is over, foreign forces leave and the people of the Afghan nation are given the right to choose their own destiny and establish their own choice of government and governance," Hekmatyar said. The comments were provided to The Associated Press this week after being videotaped in Hekmatyar's hiding place, presumed to be somewhere in Pakistan, where he moved to after being ejected from Iran following the 2001 U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan that removed the Taliban from power. His associates insist, however, that the warlord is in Afghanistan. Hekmatyar has led an extreme life; his mujahedeen followers have been responsible for the deaths of thousands during the devastating Afghan civil war. In his student days, he was known for throwing acid in the faces of women who did not cover up. He switched allegiances on the battlefields, fighting first the Soviets, for which he received millions in cash and weaponry from Washington, then the Taliban. In politics, he espoused radical Islam, served twice as Afghan prime minister and saw Hezb-i-Islami, the party he founded in 1969, fracture and abandon him. The party's military wing offered bin Laden shelter after the al Qaeda leader fled Sudan in 1996, according to the State Department. But history has relegated Hekmatyar to the sidelines and political analyst Haroun Mir describes him today as a "spent force, frozen in time." The size of any following Hekmatyar could muster is difficult to gauge. The last known attack carried out by his militant group, Hezb-i-Islami Gulbuddin, was in 2013, when at least 15 people, including six American soldiers, were killed in central Kabul. Afghan security analyst Ali Mohammad Ali says Hekmatyar can no longer run a private army because "most of his people have joined the Taliban" or other militant groups, including the emerging ISIS affiliate which has established a presence in Hekmatyar's former strongholds in eastern provinces bordering Pakistan.