CHALLENGES TO THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF DOHA PEACE AGREEMENT (2020)

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ABSTRACT

The US and the Afghan Taliban signed an agreement for bringing peace to Afghanistan in Doha on February 29, 2020, to end the long war in Afghanistan, which Afghans have suffered for more than two decades. This study aimed to identify the challenges to the implementation of the Doha peace agreement 2020. This qualitative study used the exploratory method. For data collection, primary and secondary sources were used. Primary data was collected through key informant interviews. The respondents were from three different groups, such as journalists, politicians, and academics, and also used secondary sources from books, journal articles, reports, and online blogs. The result suggests that there are certain challenges and obstacles of a different nature. These hindrances are categorized into several themes, including the interests and interventions of international players in Afghanistan, the involvement of local actors often aligned with major international players to the detriment of Afghanistan's interests and the hindrance of agreement implementation, and the Taliban policies towards women and their (alleged) human rights violations. In contravention of international laws, human rights charters, and norms, these violations underscore the discriminatory treatment faced by women. Additionally, the suspension of intra-Afghan talks exacerbates the situation, particularly concerning the denial of rights to minority religious sects in Afghanistan. In conclusion, the findings reveal multifaceted challenges to the implementation of Doha agreement progress, encompassing the interventions of international players, the complicity of local actors, and Taliban policies regarding women's rights. These obstacles, coupled with the suspension of intra-Afghan talks, underscore the complexity of achieving sustainable peace and human rights in Afghanistan.

Keywords: Doha, Peace Agreement, Taliban, the United States, Afghanistan.

INTRODUCTION

The United States of America and the Afghan Taliban after years of contention and negotiations, they were ultimately reached a historic peace agreement (Khadam, 2021). The negotiators signed the peace agreement in February 2020 in Doha, aiming to terminate the protracted war in Afghanistan. This agreement encompasses four primary components. Firstly, it stipulates that Afghanistan's territory shall not be utilized against America and its allies, as well as the implementation mechanisms will be a parts of the agreement (Maizland, 2020). Secondly, the agreement ensures the complete withdrawal of foreign armies from Afghanistan and outlines mechanisms for its implementation. Thirdly, it stipulates that the Taliban will participate in discussions with the Afghan government under the close scrutiny of international observers and nations. Notably, the United States of America does not accord recognition to the Taliban as a legitimate state entity; instead, it refers to the group as the Taliban. A scheduled meeting between the Taliban and the Afghan government is set for March 10, with the exact timing subject to negotiation. Fourthly, the

agreement prioritizes a comprehensive and enduring ceasefire as the primary focus of intra-Afghan dialogues, with both sides deliberating on mechanisms for the implementation process of the Doha peace agreement (Dozier, 2020).

The implementation process of the Doha peace agreement faces numerous challenges on both sides. One significant challenge pertains to the presence of Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Despite differing reports, there are ongoing concerns regarding Al Qaeda's existence in the region, with allegations of Taliban support (Mutmaeen, 2020). If the Taliban-led government maintains a lenient stance towards Al Oaeda, it could lead to future complications. The inability of the Taliban to prevent these groups from utilizing Afghan territory against the US and its allies may exacerbate tensions (Thomas, 2020). Another substantial hurdle is the intra-Afghan Dialogue. Initially mandated by the agreement, this dialogue aimed to foster communication between the Taliban and the Afghan government. However, the fall of Kabul to the Taliban has drastically altered the landscape, making such talks increasingly improbable. Presently, the Taliban's widespread presence across Afghanistan effectively represents both Taliban factions and the Afghan government, complicating the prospects for meaningful dialogue and reconciliation. The lack of progress in these negotiations is widely recognized as a significant impediment to the successful implementation of the agreement (Farr, 2020).

Regarding cooperation, the agreement stipulates that the US is obligated to assist the Afghanistan government in the reconstruction and rebuilding efforts. However, as of now, the US has yet to fulfill these commitments. Overseas assets belonging to Afghanistan remain frozen, and the names of Taliban members have not been removed from the blacklist. Additionally, there has been reluctance on the part of the US to engage with the new governing structure in Afghanistan. These unresolved issues contribute to a sense of Afghanistan being ensnared in another crisis. The potential for a peaceful administration hinges heavily on the effective implementation of the agreement between the two sides. If the terms of the agreement are successfully executed, the prospect of a stable and tranquil governance framework becomes attainable. Conversely, failure to implement the agreement poses significant challenges for the future trajectory of Afghanistan (Samim, 2023).

Research Objective

• To explore challenges to the implementation process in the Doha Peace agreement 2020.

Literature Review

To comprehend the prevailing challenges in implementing the Doha Peace Agreement, it is imperative to delve into the academic literature concerning peace and peace agreements across various nations, specifically emphasizing the Doha Peace Agreement.

To resolve its longest-standing conflict, the United States took a monumental step by signing the historic Peace Accord with the Taliban in 2020, in Oatar's capital. Notably, the United States engaged in direct negotiations with Taliban leaders, sidelining the Afghan government. This move garnered global acclaim as a significant milestone in Afghanistan's history, with international and regional stakeholders endorsing it as a pivotal moment. Optimism among Afghans for the restoration of peace is widespread, with neighboring countries like Pakistan, India, Iran, China, and Russia actively supporting the peace process. While there is widespread encouragement for these peace efforts, stakeholders also pursue their individual objectives amidst the collective goal of achieving peace in Afghanistan (Junaid, 2021).

Several agreements, including those in Geneva, Bonn, and Peshawar, have been orchestrated in the past to instigate temporary peace and resolve conflicts among various Afghan government factions. However, notable parties such as the Taliban, the Northern Alliance, or the Mujahedeen have often been sidelined from agreements like those in Geneva and Bonn. The failure of these agreements can be attributed to the lack of positive engagement by any party in their implementation. The exclusion of the Taliban posed additional challenges in fulfilling the requirements of these agreements. While the Geneva Accord played a significant diplomatic role during the Cold War era, its failure, alongside other peace attempts over the past three decades, may stem from the exclusion of crucial Afghan factions. These agreements were part of a comprehensive global process involving superpowers, regional actors, and UN mediation. Nevertheless, they failed to address the necessity of securing a peaceful transition due to the inadequate inclusion of strong Afghan stakeholders in the agreements (Bokhari, 1995).

Discussions surrounding the intra-Afghan peace process underscore its paramount importance. To ensure its effectiveness, it is emphasized that all involved parties must participate actively. However, despite these efforts, challenges persist in implementing the agreement. Regional players such as Pakistan, Russia, and China are considered pivotal in the peace talks and have the potential to contribute significantly to ending the chaos in Afghanistan. Given their influence in Afghanistan and the broader region, the involvement of these regional actors holds considerable significance (Muhammad, Rehman, & Naazer, 2019).

A distinguished scholar at Portland State University recognized for his substantial contributions to Afghan studies, has highlighted a notable deficiency within the Afghan peace process. Professor Farr's comprehensive analysis underscores the limited engagement of the Afghan government, emphasizing its crucial role in comprehending the challenges embedded in the peace initiative. He contends that the United States' failure to prioritize the interests of the Afghan government inadvertently strengthens the perception of a US-backed regime (Grant, 2020).

The peace process in Afghanistan has been criticized for its lack of inclusivity, which has rendered military strategies ineffective in eradicating insurgent elements from the country. In response to the limitations of military aggression, the United States initiated discussions with the Taliban to negotiate a peace agreement. This diplomatic effort signifies a significant step towards achieving peace in the aftermath of a prolonged conflict. However, the agreement's potential for success is tempered by inherent uncertainties surrounding various factors, underscoring the need for caution. Of particular intra-Afghan importance are negotiations, recognizing that resolving the conflict ultimately depends on addressing the diverse perspectives and interests within Afghanistan itself (Noor, 2020).

Methodology

This qualitative study used an exploratory method to understand the complexity and investigate the causes that hindered the implementation of the Doha Peace Agreement. The primary data was collected through key informant interviews (KIIs). The respondents were from three different backgrounds: journalists, politicians, and academics. The data was collected from three members from each category through purposive sampling. A semi-structured questionnaire was developed to understand the complexity of the question under investigation. The researcher conducted KIIs through online platforms such as Google Meet and meeting in person with the respondents. The secondary data was collected from books, journal Articles, reports, and online blogs.

Challenges to the implementation of Doha peace agreement

After analyze of the interviews the fundamental challenges to the implementation of the Doha Peace Agreement are the obstacles to resolving the decades-long conflict. We describe it as follows:

- Violation of Human Rights
- Delay in Intra-Afghan Talks
- External Actors

Violation of Human Rights

The omission of any reference to Afghan human rights in the Doha Agreement has had a profound impact on women's rights in Afghanistan. Throughout the previous Taliban rule, Afghan women endured significant adversity and hardship. They were systematically denied access to education and prohibited from leaving their residences unaccompanied by a male guardian. Moreover, under the Taliban regime, women were unable to pursue opportunities, career advancement further exacerbating their marginalization and restricting their participation in society. In the years preceding the Taliban's rise to power in Afghanistan, there was a notable expansion of women's social and legal rights. Dating back to the 1920s, Afghan women were granted the right to vote, marking a significant step towards gender equality. By the 1960s, constitutional reforms solidified their rights, ensuring parity with males under the law (Amin, 2021). As Afghanistan embarked on its journey towards democracy, a more compassionate and inclusive society began to emerge. Women became active participants in the nation's development, contributing to various sectors of society. By 1977, over 15 percent of Afghan females held seats in the national Parliament, reflecting a growing recognition of women's roles in governance and decisionmaking processes. At the onset of the 1990s, key indicators underscored the significant strides made by Afghan women in education and professional fields. In Kabul, for instance, women constituted 70% of educators, highlighting their pivotal role in shaping the minds of future generations.

Additionally, women represented 50% of the workforce and college graduates, as well as 40% of medical professionals, further exemplifying their contributions to diverse sectors of society (Amin, 2021).

These achievements underscored the progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment in Afghanistan before the Taliban's ascent to power. However, these gains faced significant challenges and setbacks with the Taliban's restrictive policies, which rolled back many of the hard-won rights and freedoms enjoyed by Afghan women.

"The peace agreement suffered from a notable deficiency in addressing critical human rights concerns. Of the twelve members comprising the government's negotiating team, merely three are women, highlighting a significant gender disparity. Moreover, there remains a conspicuous absence of information regarding the potential prosecution of war criminals or the prospects of victims receiving reparations. Furthermore; the ambiguity surrounding the Afghan government's participation in the forthcoming talks represents a second aspect undermining its position within the peace agreement. While the agreement stipulates the involvement of the Afghan side in peace discussions with the Afghan Taliban, it is essential to note that the US does not recognize the current Taliban government as legitimate. Instead, they defer to their members, complicating the prospects for inclusive and sustainable peace negotiations" (Personal Interviews, N. Hamderd, 2023).

The issue of women's rights is a significant topic in the ongoing discussions between the United States and the Taliban regarding the implementation of the Doha peace agreement. However, the United States has not clearly articulated its stance on this matter. Following the establishment of the interim government, Washington has rejected the notion that it would actively safeguard the rights of Afghan women. The current status of women in Afghan society is attributed to the efforts of the United States and other The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries. Their contributions have played a crucial role in advancing women's rights and promoting gender equality in Afghanistan.

"The agreement between the US and the Taliban is often viewed more as a neutral arrangement rather than a comprehensive "peace" agreement. This perspective arises from concerns that the agreement has not adequately addressed human rights considerations. Washington is contemplating withdrawal from Afghanistan due to the strategic costs in terms of both human lives and financial resources. As domestic pressure on the American administration mounts, there has been a shift in war plans, leading to the decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan" (Personal Interviews, S. Ullah, 2023).

"Since 9/11, Washington has continued to provide funding to the same organization that was once its most prominent antagonist the Taliban. Trust in the Taliban remains questionable due to their inconsistent actions and behaviors. As President Biden contemplates the United States' departure from Afghanistan, the subsequent actions will shape whether the agreement culminates in enduring peace or echoes another US defeat akin to Saigon" (Personal Interviews, B. Baidar, 2023).

The issue of violation for human rights is one of the most difficult issues in the implementation of the Doha Agreement. Various internal and external factors have created obstacles to the implementation of the Doha Peace Agreement.

Delay Intra-Afghan Talks

It is stated in the Doha agreement that after the release of all the prisoners, talks between the Kabul administration and the Afghan Taliban will begin in 2020, but the Afghan administration has not discussed this with the United States and has not supported this plan (Azam, 2021). As a confidencebuilding measure, the United States agreed to cooperate with all parties involved in developing a plan for the rapid release of prisoners of war and political prisoners (Khan, 2020).

Due to the increasing complexity of prisoner exchanges, discussions have broken down. Despite the exchange of prisoners and frequent attacks by the Taliban on Afghan forces, both sides tried to hold an intra-Afghan meeting. The Afghan government appointed a 21-member delegation to hold talks in March 2020, which included five women, members of the House of Representatives, important government officials, and civil society members (Mutmain, 2020).

"Afghan President Ashraf Ghani issued an order asking the government to release 1,500 prisoners in return for signing non-combat agreements. If they do not follow these criteria, the decree will be invalid. Taliban spokesman Sohail Shaheen unexpectedly admitted that the organization rejected the agreement

and demanded the release of 5,000 Taliban prisoners. National Security Council spokesman Javed Faisal says that the peace agreement between the US and the Taliban is in jeopardy because President Ghani delayed the release of Taliban prisoners, A group of three Taliban arrived in Kabul on their first visit to the capital since 2001. The subject of the meeting was a possible prisoner exchange" (Personal Interviews, S. Ihsas, 2023).

"Abdullah Abdullah assumed the role of the new chairman of the Supreme Council of National Reconciliation, where any transaction in motion necessitated the panel's approval. By August 2020, Kabul authorities had released approximately 5,000 prisoners, a stark contrast to the 1,000 released by the Taliban. The Afghan Taliban put forth a request for the release of 400 of their prisoners; however, the Kabul government rebuffed their plea, citing the gravity of the charges against them, in response to the impasse, Ashraf Ghani convened a large assembly to address the issue, asserting his lack of authority to unilaterally release the prisoners. The Jirga's decision regarding the release of the remaining 400 prisoners could potentially pave the way for peace talks among Afghans, garnering international recognition for Afghanistan's efforts towards reconciliation" (Personal Interviews, N. Hamdard, 2023).

"The most challenging aspect has consistently been fostering dialogue within Afghanistan, given the deep-rooted differences and historical issues dating back to the Mujahideen era. Since the downfall of the Daood administration in 1978 and the subsequent introduction of communist regimes until the present day, intra-Afghan discussions have been particularly arduous. This difficulty stems largely from the Taliban's influence during various periods of governance, which has complicated efforts to engage in meaningful dialogue and reconciliation processes within the country" (Personal Interviews, T. Murad, 2023).

"Unlike the Taliban and the Ghani government, which hold polar opposite ideologies, dialogues typically thrive when parties are relatively balanced in terms of power or authority. The divergent ideologies and historical animosities between these factions make it challenging to achieve positive outcomes from intra-Afghan conversations. The intricate history and diverse nature of Afghan society further complicate efforts to foster meaningful dialogue and reconciliation among conflicting parties" (Personal Interviews, S. Allah, 2023).

It was anticipated that if the US was genuinely committed to ending its longest war and desired to exhibit urgency in the peace process, it would actively endorse Afghan-led, Afghan-owned talks. Such talks would be more adept at resolving internal conflicts, deterring terrorist organizations from launching attacks, and facilitating a peaceful political transition. However, developments in Afghanistan suggest that the Joe Biden administration intends to adhere to the September 11 deadline stipulated in the Doha Peace Agreement. Nevertheless, once US soldiers departed Afghanistan, the President seemed to distance himself from the country and its crisis (Azam, 2021).

"Moving forward, it seems that the Afghan Taliban holds sway over the entire Afghan region, supported by a formidable military presence. Their primary challenge lies in their lack of recognition on the international stage, which could potentially prompt them to reconsider their stance at the negotiating table in pursuit of temporary recognition. Engaging the Taliban in dialogue could commence if the Afghan government seizes the opportunity to assist them in obtaining international recognition. However, persuading the Taliban proves challenging at present, given their significant power and control" (Personal Interviews, M. Sarwari, 2023).

"While a power-sharing formula may seem beneficial, the current situation is unlikely to improve given the significant disparity in power equilibrium between opposing sides. The Taliban's unwavering goal is to seize control of every province and city in Afghanistan, as they perceive themselves as the sole rightful owners and rulers of the country. They adamantly reject the notion of sharing authority and aim to consolidate more power for them. Even if they entertain the idea of power-sharing, it would likely be with factions that align closely with their beliefs, rather than with a liberal government" (Personal Interviews, B. Baidar, 2023).

The topic of delayed intra-Afghan dialogue poses a significant challenge to the implementation of the Doha agreement. Various internal and external factors have contributed to hurdles in realizing the objectives outlined in the Doha peace agreement.

External Actors

Afghanistan has been a focal point for geopolitical rivalries, notably between major powers like the United States and Russia. These powers have historically pursued divergent and at times antagonistic policies within Afghanistan. Regrettably, there has been a lack of concerted efforts aimed at fostering unity and stability within the country. Instead, the interests of external powers have often taken precedence over Afghanistan's long-term stability and prosperity (Charlie, 2020).

"Undoubtedly, a significant challenge encountered by the Doha agreement pertains to the involvement of external stakeholders. While the agreement primarily involves the United States and the Taliban, foreign actors wield considerable influence within its framework. The varying interests among these external players, often driven by distinct geopolitical agendas. significantly complicate the implementation process of the agreement. Notably, the role of China merits particular attention. As a prominent international rival in today's global landscape, China seeks to capitalize on the vacuum created by the United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan. Thus, its strategic maneuvers and interests have the potential to shape the dynamics and outcomes of the Doha agreement" (M. Musa, Personal interview, 2023).

"Historically, several neighboring countries have provided support to various groups within Afghanistan. Unfortunately, this support has occasionally undermined the unity and stability that Afghanistan endeavors to achieve. Moreover, the involvement of international powers further complicates matters, as their strategic interests may not necessarily align with Afghan priorities. This dynamic introduces additional layers of complexity to the already intricate geopolitical landscape of Afghanistan, making the pursuit of unity and stability a formidable challenge" (Personal interview, S. Allah, 2023).

As international actors have historically maintained involvement in Afghanistan, regional players have also sought to assert their influence in the country, often prioritizing their interests over those of Afghanistan. This assertion contends that regional players are impeding the smooth implementation of the Doha Peace Agreement. With the departure of US military forces from Afghanistan, local actors are navigating the uncertainty surrounding their future roles. Countries like Pakistan, which hosts a significant number of Afghan refugees, perceive this situation as an opportunity to advance their own interests.

Another respondent Qadeem Afghan said, "Pakistan and India possess distinct interests in Afghanistan, driven by their geopolitical objectives. However, their deep-rooted mutual hostility obstructs any potential for collaboration. This animosity, compounded by their differing perspectives on Afghanistan's future political framework, intensifies the challenge. While both countries seek to promote stability in the region through their involvement in Afghanistan, their ongoing enmity undermines cooperative endeavors and complicates the political dynamics of Afghanistan" (Personal interview, Q. Afghan, 2023).

Pakistan's security apparatus maintains close ties with the Taliban, particularly the Haqqani network. India possesses significant strategic and economic interests in Afghanistan and seeks to benefit from the country's long-term political stability. India's Afghanistan strategy consistently aims to preserve a balance between Afghanistan and Pakistan while preventing the dominance of armed organizations within Afghanistan (Personal interview, N. Sial, 2023).

"While India views Islamabad as a disruptor of peace in Afghanistan, it should recognize Pakistan's involvement in the Afghan reconciliation process. Washington acknowledges Islamabad's efforts in persuading the Afghan Taliban to participate in negotiations. Despite sharing mutual policy priorities regarding conflict resolution in Afghanistan, tensions between India and Pakistan hinder their ability to negotiate a unified commitment to Afghan peace talks" (Personal interview, Q. Afghan & N. Sial, 2023).

Furthermore, the situation in Afghanistan will stabilize when Afghans are granted the autonomy to determine their destiny, free from the interference of regional actors engaging in proxy wars on Afghan soil. Afghans should have the opportunity to decide their political system through fair elections or a Loya Jirga, with the Taliban playing a leading role in convening such processes. The outcome will benefit all parties involved if regional actors wholeheartedly accept this approach and actively support Afghanistan's political and economic stability. Afghanistan will gain recognition on the international stage, paving the way for a more

prosperous and peaceful future (Personal interview, A. Sarwari, 2023).

"While the Doha agreement represents a pathway to peace in Afghanistan, regional countries harbor reservations about the prospect of the Afghan Taliban assuming power. They fear that such an outcome would exacerbate violence and militancy in the region. Consequently, regional players exhibit reluctance towards endorsing the Afghan Taliban's ascendancy to power, recognizing the potential destabilizing effects it could have on the broader geopolitical landscape All nations, particularly neighboring countries, should emulate America's example and promptly refrain from interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs and policies, mirroring the United States' withdrawal from the region. However, the international community must also extend support to the war-torn nation and its beleaguered citizens without deploying troops onto Afghan soil" (Personal interview, S. Ihsas & M. Sarwari, 2023).

"The United States repeated a historical error reminiscent of its actions in 1973 by forsaking South Vietnamese negotiations with the administration in favor of striking an agreement with the North Vietnamese government. Henry Kissinger, serving as the national security advisor to President. Nixon and the primary negotiator representing the interests of North Vietnam, finalized a nonpermanent agreement. However, in 1975, when North Vietnam launched its invasion of South Vietnam, the agreement unraveled disastrously, compelling the United States to evacuate its embassy from the region" (Personal interview, H. Danish, 2023).

Conclusion

The implementation of the Doha Peace Agreement faces numerous challenges and obstacles, these obstacles are segmented into various categories, encompassing the interests and interferences of international actors in Afghanistan, the engagement of local stakeholders often aligned with significant international players to the detriment of Afghanistan's interests, and the impediments to agreement implementation. Additionally, these challenges reflect attitudes towards women through the lens of human rights violations, contravening international laws, charters, and norms. These violations underscore the discriminatory treatment experienced by women. Furthermore, the suspension of intra-Afghan talks exacerbates the situation, particularly concerning the denial of rights to minority religious sects and ethnic groups, such as Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, Pashtuns, and various gender groups. Such discrimination perpetuates societal divisions and undermines the prospects for meaningful peace and reconciliation efforts in Afghanistan.

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