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Parallel Paths to Peace: A Comparative Study of the UN-led Doha Process and the Vienna Process on Afghanistan

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ABSTRACT

After the Taliban returned to power in 2021, the United Nations launched a process called the “UN-led Doha Process” to improve the human rights situation and resolve Afghanistan’s problems. This process, which included three international meetings in Qatar attended by 25 countries and five international organizations, did not yield positive results despite the Taliban’s efforts and invitation to the third meeting, and even the human rights situation, especially the rights of women and girls, worsened. In contrast, the Taliban’s political and military opponents launched another process called the “Vienna Process” in Austria, which has held five meetings so far and has succeeded in creating relative cohesion among these groups. However, the United Nations and countries involved in Afghan affairs have not supported this process. This study examines and compares the UN-led Doha Process and the Vienna Process initiated by the Austrian Institute for International Affairs and analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of both processes. The results of this study can help to better understand the reasons for the failure of the Doha Process and the lack of support for the Vienna Process, and provide suggestions for improving international efforts to resolve the Afghan crisis.

INTRODUCTION

Why did the UN-led Doha Process not yield effective results and why did the UN and prominent countries not support the Vienna Process?

After the Taliban returned to power in 2021, the human rights situation, especially the rights of women and girls, deteriorated. To solve these problems, they started two processes simultaneously. The first process was initiated by the UN and prominent countries of the world under the title (Doha Process), and the second process was initiated by the political and military opponents of the Taliban under the title (Vienna Process). The Doha Process, which was initiated by the UN in May 2023 and has so far held three meetings, the most recent of which was attended by the Taliban’s special representative, in addition to not producing positive results, the human rights situation and the rights of women and girls have also regressed and are deteriorating.

The Vienna Process, which began in late 2022 and has held four meetings so far and lacks global support and legitimacy, has also not yielded any tangible results, and both processes are heading towards absolute failure.

After the Taliban returned to power in 2021, the United Nations, based on numerous UNAMA reports, decided to resolve Afghanistan’s problems through dialogue and by holding meetings between countries involved in Afghanistan, international organizations, the Taliban, and representatives of Afghan civil society and women. The series of meetings began at the initiative of the United Nations in Doha, the capital of Qatar, with the first meeting held on May 1-2, 2023, without the presence of representatives from any Afghan side, for two days. 23 countries and 2 international organizations participated

in this meeting and the discussions were held behind closed doors.

The second meeting was held on February 18-19, 2024 in Doha with the participation of representatives of interested countries and international organizations for a day behind closed doors. Representatives of the Taliban, civil society and women were invited to this meeting, but the Taliban boycotted the meeting due to the failure to meet their conditions by the United Nations, but representatives of Afghan civil society and women participated on the second day of the meeting. The third Doha meeting was held in Qatar on June 30 and July 1 of this year for two days with the participation of 25 countries and 5 international organizations. In this meeting, Taliban representatives were invited only as representatives of Afghanistan.

A notable point in all three meetings is that in none of these meetings were the political and military opponents of the Taliban even mentioned, the political opponents and the Taliban regime have organized other processes and meetings known as the Vienna Process. The Vienna Process has been held four times so far and has managed to create a significant unity between the political and military opponents of the Taliban, but what the people expect from this meeting has not yet been achieved.

This study examines the Doha Process under the leadership of the United Nations, the Vienna Process initiated by the Austrian Institute of International Affairs and with the participation of the political and military opponents of the Taliban, and the strengths and weaknesses of both processes. It tries to clarify the reasons for the failure of both processes and make suggestions for merging the two processes, because the Afghan people have high

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expectations from these two processes.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research utilizes a qualitative approach, relying on a diverse range of sources to analyze the subject matter. Primary data includes news articles, broadcasts, and interviews from local Afghan newspapers, television, and radio channels in Persian and Pashto, providing ground-level perspectives. Secondary data consists of journals and books, predominantly authored by Afghan scholars, to contextualize the research within local frameworks. This methodology emphasizes authentic Afghan narratives while integrating global analytical perspectives, ensuring a comprehensive and balanced analysis of the research topic.

Significance of study

This study considerably focus and has value on current humanitarian and political crisis in Afghanistan. Since returning of Taliban to power on 2021, multiple local and international efforts have been attempted to address and solve the problem of deteriorating situation of human rights, specially the suppression of women rights and civil liberties. UN-led Doha process and Taliban opposition-driven Vienna process are a good examples of these efforts that have been created a remarkable expectations among Afghan people, but none of these processes could made a meaningful outcome, in spite of several launching meeting by both processes, still they are failed and there is no change in Afghanistan. By comparatively analyzing the both processes, this research offers important insights into the why they have failed to meet the created expectations and reasons of not making any meaningful outcomes.

Significance of this study lies in its attempt to bridge a critical gap in the current discourse. It's the first paper, which evaluate comparatively these two parallel diplomatic processes, while multiple analyzes focus on Taliban's policies vis-à-vis international reactions or studying both processes separately without considering of merging their potential to make changes. This research not only highlights the internal weaknesses of both processes, like lack of inclusivity, international support or strategic vision. But also explain, how their separation has weakened the collective efforts for democratic transition and human rights in Afghanistan. This research reflect the local narratives and resources giving voice to afghan perspectives that are often overlooked in global policy making.

It aims to provide constructive suggestions and recommendations to merge the strengths of both Doha and Vienna processes for creating a unified and effective platform for dialogue and policy making. The findings of this study can serve as a guide for policymakers, international organizations, and Afghan stakeholders seeking more inclusive, practical, and locally supported solutions to Afghanistan's crisis.

UN-led Doha meetings

After the re-establishment of the Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan and the severance of diplomatic relations between Afghanistan and various countries, the international community took measures to address Afghanistan's humanitarian and economic conditions, as well as to develop frameworks for engagement with the Emirate. One of these mechanisms has been a series of conferences known as the Doha Talks, held in Doha, Qatar, and coordinated by the United Nations. The first round of the Doha Talks took place on May 1–2, 2023, bringing together 21 representatives from countries such as the United States, Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Turkey, Japan, India, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Norway, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Indonesia, the United Arab Emirates, along with representatives from the European Union and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. The second round, with a similar composition, was held in February 2024, followed by a third round on June 30 and July 1, 2024.

First Doha meeting (May 1-2, 2023)

In January 2023, following the Taliban's ban on women working with non-governmental organizations and the closure of universities to female students, while in the past twenty years, women have been working in most fields and have been able to influence decision-making in the family, society, and government (Rashidi, 2022). A United Nations delegation, led by Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, and visited Afghanistan. During this visit, Ms. Mohammed traveled to Kandahar, where she met Yusuf Wafa, the provincial governor, alongside other Taliban-linked figures. Reflecting on her trip, Ms. Mohammed remarked that “a more political approach is needed in dealing with the Taliban. Subsequently, in May 2023, as Taliban restrictions on women intensified, the United Nations announced that Secretary-General António Guterres would travel to Doha for a high-level meeting focused on Afghanistan. This UN-led initiative aimed to address the ongoing crisis and explore pathways for renewed international engagement with Afghanistan. Accordingly, the United Nations hosted a two-day summit on Afghanistan on May 1-2, 2023 (Shinwari, 2024).

A closed-door summit was convened with representatives from 21 nations, including the United States, China, Russia, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Turkey, Japan, India, Indonesia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Norway. Additionally, representatives from the European Union and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation were present. This diplomatic assembly included a number of countries that have seemingly supported the Taliban and recognized their diplomats, a factor that, according to experts, contributes to the complexity and prolonged nature of the Doha talks (Amu, 2024)

The United Nations had previously announced that the Taliban were not invited to the first Doha meeting. During a press conference, the UN Secretary-General stated that “now is not the appropriate time to engage directly with the Taliban.” Notably, opposition groups and anti-Taliban factions, including political party representatives, civil society activists, and protesting women, were also excluded from the meeting. As a result, no Afghan representatives were present at the inaugural Doha summit. However, based on information released by the United Nations, the Secretary-General and the representatives from participating countries, organizations, and international institutions held four sessions over the course of the two-day summit. The discussions primarily focused on human rights, particularly the rights of women and girls, inclusive governance, counterterrorism efforts, and combating drug trafficking. The United Nations emphasized that the objective of this summit, and the dialogue between the Secretary-General and country representatives, was to achieve a unified stance and develop a coordinated international strategy regarding Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the Secretary-General reiterated that the purpose of the Doha talks was not to extend formal recognition to the Taliban. At the conclusion of the two-day summit, UN Secretary-General António Guterres reaffirmed in a press briefing that the organization would not remain silent in the face of the Taliban’s systematic and unprecedented assault on the rights of women and girls. He stressed that “this meeting was about establishing a common international approach, not about recognizing the Taliban.” In response to the Doha summit, the Taliban maintained that the issue of women and girls is an internal matter for Afghanistan and does not concern external actors. After the Doha meeting, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres held a press conference to outline key points of the discussions. The participants expressed a unified, coordinated approach toward Afghanistan, voicing concerns over the country’s instability, the proliferation of terrorist groups, the lack of a comprehensive and inclusive government, drug trafficking, and the deteriorating status of women’s rights. Notably, Secretary-General Guterres emphasized the recent prohibitions imposed on women’s work in Afghanistan, adding that approximately 90% of the Afghan population lives in poverty, with nearly six million people facing severe hunger and in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. In response to a journalist’s question about discussions with the Taliban during this conference, Guterres did not rule out the possibility of dialogue with the Taliban. However, he noted that the timing for such discussions had not *yet* aligned (Euronews, 2023).

Second Doha meeting (FEB 18—19, 2024)

The second United Nations meeting on Afghanistan highlighted the stark divides between regional powers and Western nations regarding their approach to the Taliban and Afghanistan’s governance. United Nations

Secretary-General António Guterres convened special representatives from 25 countries, along with regional and international organizations, in Doha, Qatar, for a two-day summit aimed at bridging these strategic differences.

In this meeting, the United Nations has invited representatives of civil society, women and representatives of the Afghan government for the first time to participate in this meeting with the participation of both sides and with the presence of world countries and international organizations to present their views on solutions to the challenges and problems existing regarding the future of Afghanistan. However, this invitation was accepted by representatives of civil society and women, but the Taliban put forward two basic conditions before the United Nations in order to send their representative to this meeting. Their first demand was a bilateral meeting between the Taliban delegation and the UN Secretary-General. The second condition was that the Taliban be recognized as the principal and sole representative of Afghanistan at the summit. Ultimately, the United Nations did not concede to these conditions, leading the Taliban to boycott the meeting (Shapour Roxanna, 2024). Topics which were discussed in Doha II: Consultations on Afghanistan, Enhancing international engagement in a coherent and structured manner, Appointment of a Special Representative of the United Nations for Afghanistan, Identifying fundamental principles for constructive and principled engagement, Global concerns regarding the policies of the Islamic Emirate (Shinwari, 2024).

Third Doha Meeting (June 30, July 1, 2024)

The third Doha meeting, involving representatives from 25 countries and five international organizations, took place on June 30 and July 1 in Qatar’s capital. For the first time, Taliban representatives joined the meeting; however, representatives from Afghan civil society, women’s groups, and Taliban opposition factions were notably absent. This absence marked a stark departure from previous dialogues.

Prior to the meeting, there was considerable anticipation that the UN’s initiative would bring Taliban leaders together with civil society activists, human rights advocates, and political opposition to discuss crucial issues facing Afghanistan. Topics on the agenda were expected to include the ban on girls’ education, restrictions on women’s employment, human rights abuses, and the establishment of an inclusive government. However, at the last moment, civil society and women’s representatives were excluded, leading to widespread protests and criticisms. Activists argued that sidelining these key voices undermined the dialogue’s legitimacy and failed to address Afghanistan’s core socio-political challenges in an inclusive manner (BBC, 2024)

Topics discussed at the third Doha meeting: Regarding the topic, the third Doha meeting was divided into two main segments. The first segment focused on the issue of recognizing the Taliban government as a legitimate

member of the international community, while the second addressed the economic challenges facing Afghanistan. In the first segment, which primarily reflected the international community's demands from the Taliban government, the discussion centered on Afghanistan's compliance with international conventions, including those it had already ratified as a United Nations member. These demands broadly encompassed critical issues such as upholding human rights, ensuring women's rights to education and employment, and aligning governance with global norms. In response, the Taliban representatives outlined two preconditions: first, that the Taliban government must be officially recognized under the United Nations framework before adhering to these conventions; second, that such conventions must not contradict Islamic Sharia principles. The second segment of the meeting addressed Afghanistan's pressing economic concerns. Key topics included combating narcotics production and trafficking, lifting international banking sanctions, unfreezing Afghanistan's foreign exchange reserves, and strengthening the country's private sector. In this context, the Taliban representative emphasized that for Afghanistan to achieve stability and avoid persistent crises, the international community must prioritize support and investment in Afghanistan's economic infrastructure (Amin, 2024).

Vienna Process

The Vienna Process meetings, hosted by the Austrian Institute for International Affairs Studies and attended by political, civil and military figures opposed to the Taliban, began in September 2022 and have so far held four three-day meetings. The main goal of the Vienna Process is, first, to create unity and solidarity between elites, political figures and trends opposed to the Taliban, and, secondly, to obtain a roadmap for the future of Afghanistan. The Vienna Process has so far held four three-day meetings and has been somewhat successful in creating unity and solidarity between political elites and anti-Taliban figures. However, the figures present in this process do not enjoy high credibility with the people because these people have shared in power for the past twenty years and have failed to prevent the rapid fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban. However, the most prominent figure in the Vienna Process is Ahmad Massoud, the leader of the Afghan national resistance, the son of the national hero Ahmad Shah Massoud, who was assassinated by Al-Qaeda in 2001. This resistance has taken up an armed struggle against the Taliban, and it is said that Ahmad Massoud is particularly popular among the Taliban and the people. According to Ahmad Massoud, the Vienna Process has managed to come close to the roadmap for the future of a democratic Afghanistan to some extent. However, it has not yet achieved an acceptable achievement among the people and has not been able to meet the expectations of the members of this process. The usual procedure for this process is to hold a three-day meeting, and they mostly discuss various issues, and at the end, they read

out a declaration approved by the members.

The first Vienna meeting (September 15–17, 2022). It was held on September 15, 16 and 17, 2022 at the Austrian Institute for International Affairs with the presence of 30 political and civil figures opposed to the Taliban, including women. This meeting, which brought together political and military figures opposed to the Taliban for the first time after the fall of the government of the Republic of Afghanistan, emphasized several issues after three days of discussions. First, an intra-Afghan dialogue was considered the most desirable option for the future of Afghanistan, and comprehensive support was given to the protesting women inside Afghanistan who are demonstrating for their rights and demanding justice in the streets. In addition, the people's armed resistance against the Taliban was also praised (DID Press, 2022).

Second Vienna Meeting (April 24–26, 2023). The second Vienna Meeting was held on April 24, 25, and 26, 2023 in Vienna, Austria, with the combination of the first meeting. In this meeting, the intra-Afghan dialogue was once again emphasized as the desirable option and any armed resistance against the Taliban was strongly supported. In addition, it was asked to the heads of states and countries of the world to recognize the deprivation of women from work and education as gender apartheid (bbc team, 2023)

Third Vienna Meeting (December 3–5, 2023): The first day of the third Vienna Meeting under the name "Democratic Future of Afghanistan" was held yesterday with the presence of political figures, officials of the previous government, the leader of the National Resistance Front, human rights activists, members of civil society organizations, journalists, and some diplomats of the previous government. A number of jihadi leaders have given virtual speeches. It is said that more than 40 political opponents of the Taliban are participating in the three-day meeting. The meeting was organized by the Austrian Institute of International Affairs and the country's political forces are discussing the democratic future of Afghanistan. Some speakers on the first day of the meeting described the Taliban regime as "mono-ethnic, mono-religious and mono-gender" and that they are seeking to eliminate the languages and cultural assets of other ethnic groups. The Vienna meeting was held for the third time by the Austrian Institute of International Affairs from December 3 to 5 with the participation of more than 40 political forces opposing the Taliban. The meeting was attended by Ahmad Massoud, leader of the National Resistance Front, Dr. Rangin Dadfar Spanta, National Security Advisor and Foreign Minister of the former government, some cabinet ministers and ambassadors of the former government, political figures, journalists and members of civil society organizations, including women (Kawa Amin, 2024).

Fourth Vienna Meeting (June 25-27, 2024): The Austrian Institute of International Affairs hosted a three-day meeting of political, military, civil, and cultural figures opposed to the Taliban for the fourth time. 80 political and

civil figures from 40 social organizations, political groups, and media participated in the meeting and discussed “a democratic future for Afghanistan (Kawa Amin, 2024).

Strengths of the UN-led Doha Process

The greatest feature and strength of the UN-led Doha Process is its international legitimacy and global support. In the three meetings held by the UN in Doha, 25 to 30 countries and international organizations were invited, and all the countries present actively participated in the meetings. This international legitimacy provides the basis for providing humanitarian aid and diplomatic engagement for Afghanistan and the ruling government, both of which are in the interest of the Afghans in the short term (Watkins, 2024).

The second feature of the UN-led Doha Process is its direct focus on women’s rights, human rights, and freedom of expression. Since the Taliban came to power, human rights, women’s rights, and freedom of expression have been on a downward trend, and the living space for women has become narrower day by day and freedom of expression is being restricted. This process targets these initial problems with international pressure and puts international pressure on the ruling government, which perhaps hoped for a significant result (Timory, 2023)

Another strength that the Doha process can demonstrate is that the Doha process is based on dialogue and engagement, which itself has reduced the likelihood of another war and established a framework for dialogue and engagement. If this process can bring the Taliban and their political and military opponents around the table for dialogue, it will provide the greatest basis for a relatively lasting peace (Theros, 2023).

Weaknesses of UN-led Doha process

The Doha Process under the leadership of the United Nations has had many weaknesses, and its three most prominent weaknesses can be pointed out. The Doha Process, initiated by the United Nations and regional and global countries involved in Afghanistan, has held three three-day meetings behind closed doors since its inception. Unfortunately, we have not witnessed any significant results inside Afghanistan resulting from the Doha meeting. This means that the biggest weakness of the Doha Process, despite having international and global legitimacy, is the failure to achieve a tangible result. Unfortunately, the Doha Process under the leadership of the United Nations has not had a positive result, but on the contrary, it has had many negative results because the countries participating in the Doha Process do not have a single strategy and consensus on their behavior and interaction with the Taliban government, and the Taliban has been very good at taking advantage of the differences between countries to achieve a desired result. Recently, according to resolution, the UN Secretary-General must appoint a special representative for Afghan issues, which has faced strong opposition from the Taliban, and in this opposition, countries such as China and Russia are

on the side of the Taliban (Watkins, 2024).

The second weakness of the UN-led Doha Process stems from the fact that this process has not been able to reduce the Taliban’s resistance to human rights, the rights of women and girls to work and education, and freedom of expression. In fact, this resistance is increasing day by day. Recently, on August 21, 2024, the Law on Encouraging Righteousness and Forbidding Evil was signed by the Taliban leader Mullah Haibatullah Ward and entered into the official gazette. This is a pretense of greater Taliban resistance to human rights, the rights of women and girls, and freedom of expression. Despite the fact that the Taliban’s special representative met with 30 countries and international organizations at the third Doha meeting, this group does not accept the slightest flexibility in their policy towards the requests of countries and the UN and does not care about this meeting (Timory, 2023).

Finally, the Doha process and dialogue were specific to the Taliban, and a few limited representatives of women and civil society participated in the second Doha meeting, which Russia refused to meet with this representative, meaning that the Doha process has completely sidelined the Taliban’s political and military opponents, which itself is arguably the biggest weakness of this process. By including the Taliban alone and excluding the Taliban’s political and military opponents in this process, the UN is repeating the mistake of the Bonn Conference in 2001. In 2001, the UN and the United States held a conference in Bonn, Germany, to decide on the future of Afghanistan after the Taliban. All the Taliban’s political and military opponents participated in it, but the Taliban were not invited to this meeting, which later led to insecurity and the fall of the Taliban at the hands of the Taliban. This time too, if the decision about Afghanistan is made by the UN and countries without the presence of the Taliban’s opponents, it will create insecurity in the not-so-distant future (Watkins, 2024).

The strengths and weaknesses of the Vienna Process

The strengths of the Vienna Process can be summarized in three points. In the first step, the Vienna Process has been active for more than 2 years and has held four three-day meetings during this period. About 30 figures from the political and military opponents of the Taliban were present at the first Vienna meeting, and about 80 figures and political elites opposed to the Taliban in the political and military arena were present at the fourth Vienna meeting, which means that this process has been able to put the political and military opponents of the Taliban under a single umbrella and create a consensus among the opponents of the ruling group. It is worth mentioning that the presence of women and civil society in the Vienna meetings was very prominent, and civil society also had prominent representatives in this process. In general, it can be said that the first strength of the Vienna meeting was the creation of an alliance between the military and political opponents of the Taliban, and it has been almost successful in this regard, although it has a long way to go

in this regard (Haidari, 2024).

Another discussion that seems to be very prominent in the Vienna process is that in this process, a roadmap for the democratic future of Afghanistan is discussed, unlike Doha, where there is no mention of a roadmap for the future of Afghanistan. And in the Doha meeting, it seems that the Taliban government (the Islamic Ayatollah of Afghanistan) has been accepted as the most desirable option, which in no way can be a lasting and sustainable solution for the future of Afghanistan. At the third Vienna meeting, Maysam Nazari, spokesman for the National Resistance Front, said that the participants of the third Vienna meeting have come very close to the roadmap for the future of a democratic Afghanistan, and after the fourth Vienna meeting, Ahmad Massoud, leader of the National Resistance Front, said that the participants agreed on a roadmap for the future of a democratic Afghanistan. This feature of the Vienna meeting itself indicates a good promise for the Afghan people that all the ethnic groups of Afghanistan can live together peacefully in a common political system (Faramarz, 2024).

The Taliban did not react after the first Vienna meeting, but after the subsequent meetings of the Vienna process, the Taliban became afraid and came under pressure, including Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesman for the Taliban government, saying that these meetings were not in the interest of Afghanistan and condemned the meeting. After that, the Taliban Deputy Foreign Minister for Politics, Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, declared these meetings illegal and did not consider them to be in the interest of Afghanistan and said that these meetings were negative propaganda against the Taliban. The third strength of the Vienna meeting stems from this, because the Vienna process has put more pressure on the Taliban than the Doha process, which not only condemns it, but also seeks to divide this gathering of opponents under one umbrella, including the fact that Sirajuddin Haqqani, the leader of the Haqqani network and the Minister of Interior of the Taliban government, requested Mohammad Mohaqiq, one of the prominent figures of the Taliban, to come to Afghanistan.

The weaknesses of the Vienna process are no less than those of Doha, and here we will suffice with mentioning three of its prominent ones.

The first weakness of the Vienna Process is that it does not enjoy global and international support because the countries of the region and the United Nations have entered into interaction with the Taliban since the beginning of the Doha Process and have withdrawn themselves from the Doha Process. The second weakness of the Vienna Process is that there is no strong unity and cohesion among the members of this process, which is why this process has not yet yielded a desired result. And the third weakness of the Vienna Process is that this process considers the dialogue option to be the most desirable option for Afghanistan and their interaction with the Taliban, but on the other hand, the Taliban has

never been willing to talk to this process, which itself calls into question the tangible result of this process (Negah, 2023)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the Doha negotiations with the United States in 2020 and unfinished intra-Afghan negotiations, the Taliban had mentioned several changes that their mentality and performance had changed and they do not think like before, including respecting human rights and the rights of women and girls and not preventing women from studying and working. Establishing an inclusive government based on the people's choice, fighting terrorist groups active inside Afghanistan, completely cutting ties with Al-Qaeda, and not allowing anyone to use Afghan soil against another country. But after the Taliban came to power, all promises were forgotten and their actions proved to be the opposite of their words and promises. What caused the Taliban to act contrary to what they said and no change in their approach has occurred in twenty years. There are two very strong reasons, first, that the Taliban is divided into two groups, the moderate Taliban who were responsible for negotiations with the United States and intra-Afghan negotiations, after the Taliban came to power, they had no authority in the government and were completely away from making major decisions. But the hardline Taliban, who have rarely or never appeared in the media, are responsible for policy-making and decision-making in the current Taliban government, including the leader of the Islamic Emirate, Haibatullah Akhundzada, Nida Mohammad Nadeem, the Taliban Minister of Higher Education, and a group of 30 advisors to Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada in Kandahar, all of whom were responsible for teaching Islamic sciences in Islamic Madrasa in Pakistan and remote areas of Afghanistan before the Taliban came to power. The hardline Taliban demand the full implementation of Islamic law, the monopoly of power in Kandahar, unquestioning obedience to the leader or caliph (Haibatullah Akhundzada), and a single-ethnic government (Pashtunism). The Taliban are based at the top of the Islamic Emirate (Islamic Emirate) and no one can speak or act against them. The moderate Taliban have repeatedly criticized the Taliban leadership's performance in keeping educational centers closed, isolating Afghanistan from the international community, and not inviting political and military opponents to the country. They have faced serious warnings and have even been prosecuted and have been issued an arrest warrant by Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada. Among them, we can mention Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai, the Taliban's deputy foreign minister and the Taliban's chief negotiator with the US and the Afghans. After several criticisms, he first faced serious warnings and after an arrest warrant was issued, he managed to escape from Afghanistan with the help of some other moderate Taliban and is currently living in the United Arab Emirates, from where he harshly criticizes the Taliban leadership. The second reason is

that the Taliban have been using a policy of lying to the international community and Afghan negotiator and by coming in to power this policy is still ongoing. From time to time, the question of forming an inclusive government is raised. This group is deceiving the international community by claiming that their government (the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan) is inclusive, while in the Taliban cabinet there are only 13 ministers from one province (Kandahar) and 95% of the cabinet is from one tribe (Pashtun). Taking into consideration all above mentioned points, serious attention should be paid to several suggestions.

1. Paying attention to the depth of the crisis that has arisen due to the ambiguity of the Taliban political system (the Islamic Emirate). It has been about four years since the Taliban came to power, and the political structure of the Islamic Emirate system is still a mystery even to high-ranking Taliban members. Since coming to power, the Taliban have introduced a caretaker government, the expiration date is not known in any official documents. This system has been developed without the existence of laws, even no constitution, and no laws have been worked on in any area. The questions that arise here are: from which Islamic Sharia law is this system derived? What are the laws on the basis of which the government is developed? How long will the caretaker government last? Will the constitution be ratified or not? If the constitution is ratified, who will be the approving authority? In most departments, the laws of the previous government (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan) have been implemented and how long will these laws continue? This is the biggest question that the people of Afghanistan face and from time to time, high-ranking officials are asked about the ratification of the constitution, the education law and the caretaker government, which is often answered with the answer “I don’t know” or “It may take time.” The UN-led Doha process should pay attention to it and ask the Taliban leadership to clear the government structure and upcoming election. The people need to know under which roadmap current government is running and what will be the next step to form a new government because it’s a caretaker government.

2. The policy of lenient against the Taliban is ineffective and always makes them bolder in implementing their extremist and radical policies. From 2001 to 2021, previous government of Afghanistan (Islamic republic of Afghanistan) has always extended a hand of friendship to the Taliban and wanted to negotiate with the Taliban. Even a council was formed by the previous government in this regard, called the High Peace Council, which was responsible for negotiating with the Taliban to end the war. However, the Taliban’s request for negotiations was always rejected and they demanded the complete seizure of power and the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan. The reason for the presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan after 2008 was the existence of the war in Afghanistan and the reason for the war was the Taliban. If negotiations had been held with the previous

government and the war had completely stopped, there would have been no need for the NATO long-term presence, and Afghanistan would not be in the current crisis today. Against the Taliban, soft and hard policies should be used simultaneously. As the Taliban themselves used during the negotiations with the Americans and then with the Afghans, negotiations were launched on the one hand and war operations on the other. A soft policy will be effective if supported by active fronts against the Taliban. Afghanistan’s geopolitical struggles have historically hindered its development and stability, indicating that any viable peace initiative must address underlying power dynamics through regional cooperation and realistic engagement” (Akhtar & Niazi, 2024).

3. After the Taliban came to power, some regional countries and the international community accepted the Taliban as the reality of Afghanistan, and it seems that the Taliban have been able to reflect all the realities of Afghanistan. This assumption is wrong, and the Taliban cannot represent the entire reality of Afghanistan. Rather, the Taliban is a part of the reality of Afghanistan, not all of it. The Vienna Process also claims to represent the reality of Afghanistan, which is also wrong, and this process is also a part of the reality of Afghanistan. So we can say that the Vienna and Doha processes complement each other, and if we combine both processes and solve the Afghan issue, we will reach two desirable results. The first result is that the Taliban will be put under pressure and will be ready for intra-Afghan negotiations and the international community sooner, and this can be called a kind of force policy against the Taliban. The second and very good result is that if the international community and the countries present in the Doha process take this issue seriously and can create an understanding between the two processes and hold a comprehensive discussion on the next system, constitution, human rights, and women and girls, the problem of instability in Afghanistan will almost disappear. And if the focus is on one process and the other is overlooked, the historical mistake of 2001 will be repeated, when the Bonn Conference and the formation of a new government excluded the Taliban from the process, which led to the current crisis. If the Vienna Process does not gain global support and the international community relies solely on the UN-led Doha Process and enters into formal relations with the Taliban, it will not be outside these scenarios and implications.

4. In case of success: The UN-led Doha process is unlikely to succeed and cannot revive the hopes it initially created. The Taliban’s resistance to the demands of the UN, the factionalism of the countries of the region in the Doha process in favor of the Taliban, including China and Russia, and the lack of follow-up and seriousness of the Doha process by the UN all together testify that this process has not and cannot have positive results. If this process finally comes to fruition, the results will not be tangible because the Taliban are aware of the lack of seriousness of the United Nations and have the support of countries in the region, including China and

Russia, and the slightest shortcomings that the Taliban will show in relation to the rights of women and girls will be temporary because of the recognition of their government by countries. The result will be fragile and temporary and after recognition of Taliban government by global communities, they will follow back their own way of governing.

In case of Failure: If the Doha process fails and the Vienna process does not find international support, the Taliban government will continue its current policies and push Afghanistan towards a humanitarian and legal crisis. That would not be out of these three scenarios.

1. The intensification of the economic and legal crisis will cause the Taliban to lose even the slightest public support it has, and the people will revolt and rebel, and in that case, the Taliban will resort to mass killings to suppress this rebellion, and in the end, they will try to make the war ethnic and a full-fledged civil war will occur, which will be the worst possible situation. Because the possibility of an uprising from the north and west of Afghanistan is high, and the Taliban can turn this rebellion into a civil and ethnic war.

2. Internal disputes within the Taliban began in early 2023 and intensified in late 2024, which caused senior Taliban officials to flee due to criticism of the Taliban leadership's monopoly on power. Recently, Masoom Stanekzai, the Taliban's deputy foreign minister for politics and the head of the Taliban's negotiating team with the United States, managed to flee Afghanistan after the Taliban Intelligence Department issued an arrest warrant for him based on his harsh criticism on Mullah Haibatullah for keeping schools and universities closed to girls. Another dispute that will soon turn into a change in the power structure or a war between the Taliban, is the dispute between the Haqqani network leadership (Sirajuddin Haqqani) himself with the decisions of the Taliban leader Mullah Haibatullah, which has been in the news several times since early 2025 and rumors of a war between the Taliban leadership are heard. Sirajuddin Haqqani is deeply concerned about the decisions of Haibatullah Akhundzada in two cases and knows that with the continuation of the current policy of the Taliban leader, the fall of the Taliban is inevitable and he wants to prevent this fall. The lack of attention of Mullah Haibatullah and his advisors to international legitimacy and the second policy is the monopoly of power in Kandahar, which has automatically stripped Sirajuddin Haqqani of his powers and authority as the leader of the Haqqani network and the Taliban's Minister of Interior. Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada has stripped the distribution of weapons and appointments of the Ministry of Interior and Defense from these two ministries and transferred them to Kandahar, and in an extraordinary order he has said that appointments at the macro and medium levels and the distribution of even a single mile of weapons from these two ministries cannot be made without his order. Sirajuddin Haqqani's recent visit to the United Arab Emirates and the removal of Sirajuddin Haqqani's name

from the US wanted list, which had previously offered a \$10 million reward for information leading to his arrest, made all the rumors of establishing relations between Sirajuddin Haqqani and the US, and there was talk of a change in Taliban leadership from Mullah Haibatullah to Sirajuddin Haqqani. These disputes are still very much intact, and if the Doha process does not yield results, it will soon turn into an inter-Taliban war, with casualties and consequences no less than a civil war.

3. The strengthening of the war fronts that are currently launching military operations against the Taliban. This means repeating history 20 years ago in another language. In 2001, after the fall of the Taliban and the presence of international coalition forces for 7 years, Afghanistan had good security and terrorist groups or the Taliban did not exist at all or were not capable of military operations. However, over time, the Taliban and other terrorist groups came to life and were able to succeed in overthrowing the previous government after 12 years of struggle (2008-2020). It is not unlikely that this scenario will be repeated against the Taliban once again, leading to a civil war and a humanitarian disaster in Afghanistan. If such a scenario occurs, this situation will also be costly for the region.

CONCLUSION

Considering the humanitarian and human rights crisis in Afghanistan after the Taliban took over in 2021, two important processes have been launched to resolve the crises and help the Afghan people. These two processes are the Vienna Process and the Doha Process. The Vienna Process, which began in late 2022, was initiated by the Institute for International Relations Studies. The process includes human rights activists, anti-Taliban politicians, and military fronts working to build a democratic future for Afghanistan. Five meetings have been held so far, and the number of participants has increased from 30 to 90. The process continues in the hope of creating a united and unified front to fight the Taliban, but it continues to face challenges such as a lack of international support.

On the other hand, the Doha Process, which began in 2023 under the leadership of the United Nations and with the participation of 25 countries and international organizations, is trying to solve the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. Taliban participated in the third meeting, emphasizing that Afghanistan's internal issues, especially human rights and women's rights, should be an internal matter of this country. These soft policies against the Taliban not only failed to achieve any results, but the Taliban used it to continue their extremist and misogynistic policies.

Overall, both processes have not been successful in solving the human rights and humanitarian crises in Afghanistan, and a comprehensive and integrated approach is needed to solve Afghanistan's problems. Combining these two processes and paying attention to all aspects of the crisis can lead to tangible and promising changes in this country.

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