

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind

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## Why Basic Services Matter

Basic social services are the building blocks for human development. Of course, they are now accepted as fundamental human rights. However, there is a widening gap between this consensus and the reality of public spending on basic services in the developing world, including Afghanistan. Considering the discriminatory policies of Afghan governments in the past, basic services usually have been distributed to a specific group, and most of the people have been deprived of them. Even after the Bonn agreement in 2001, basic services have not been distributed equally in the country, though they often have made proud claims about how much they spend on health and education services. By denying citizens access to the basic social services – primary health care, clean water and proper sanitation and basic education Afghan governments have violated the human rights of their citizens.

Unless Afghan government expenditures on social services are equitably shared, the gaps between access to basic social services and social indicators will remain. The regional averages for unmet needs hide huge disparities within Afghanistan. These disparities affect ethnic groups, regions, and different households, as well as individual children, women and men, according to their level of income and wealth. Even the location of households is important, and local areas often lack the basic Social services enjoyed by urban populations.

These differences, however, give only a partial picture of inequity in Afghanistan. Gender is another major issue. While many aspects of gender discrimination cannot be captured in figures, its impact can be seen in the figures on education. In Afghanistan the male literacy rate of 45.42 per cent contrasts with a female literacy rate of only 17.61 per cent – showing a big gap between the sexes.

Ethnicity is another consideration, -a factor considered as the main cause of discriminatory practices in Afghanistan. It is crucial to assess whether different groups in Afghan society receive an equitable share of public spending on social services. While most analysis concentrates on the incidence of the benefits of public spending by income groups, other information is at least as important, as can be seen from disaggregated outcome indicators. Analysis of the gender-based and geographic aspects of the distribution of benefits is valuable and both are linked to efficiency issues. Women play an important structural role in the 'first synergy' – enhancing the impact of spending in one sector by improvements in others, and the impact of basic services is likely to be greater in areas that have been traditionally under-served – rural areas in particular.

Provision of social basic services is one of the main duties of democratic governments. Afghan citizens have been denied equal access to social basic services based on ethnicity, geographical and gender. All Afghan people expect the new government of Afghanistan develop more inclusive policies to distribute equally the social basic services to them. Overall, there must be greater and better-targeted resources for basic social services. Afghan government must place enough emphasis on the provision of services that are essential for the well-being of children and women to ensure the human rights of them to primary health care, basic education, clean water and proper sanitation.



## Will Afghanistan Achieve Sustainable Peace?

By: Moh. Sakhi Rezaie

Political conflicts in any country can only be solved through political dialogue. However, to put an end in long conflicts like the one in Afghanistan, some of the egregious sources of hostility must be successfully resolved. Political talks and agreements rarely hold if they are not strongly backed by different groups involved. Many past peace deals have foundered because deep-seated suspicion and hostility remained, dividing people along ethnic, language and religious lines.

### Taking Afghan Government on Board

Afghan government has not been part of the five rounds of the US and Taliban peace talks. This has created some questions at the national and international levels; though, the US has repeatedly said that the peace talks are held at international and national levels and Afghan government, Afghan politicians and Civil Society Organizations will be involved at the national level peace talks.

As intra-Afghan dialogue should be inclusive with representation from Afghan government, it is necessary for the US to take the Afghan government on board in the peace process. The US envoy for Afghan peace talks Zalmay Khalilzad has acknowledged that, there was consensus that intra-Afghan dialogue should be comprehensive and inclusive with representatives from the Afghan government, women, young people, and civil society. Therefore, the US also shall take all the necessary measures to find how the international community can best support Afghan government in a peace process lead the government and owned by Afghans.

### Comprehensive and Inclusive Intra-Afghan Dialogue

Afghan government must ensure representatives from women, young people, and civil society in the talks. Conflict studies Show that the root of many conflicts across the world can be traced to exclusion. These findings suggest that by working to lessen the distance that can exist between the state and wider society a durable peace can be built, as a result, it is important to ensure that all individuals and groups – particularly those who are frequently marginalized, such as minority religious groups, youth and women – are brought in to the peace build-

ing process.

Experience shows Peace building is a complex process which cannot be monopolized by one single group – there must be inclusivity at all stages, from the top to the very bottom. If peace talks are monopolized, the peace that is constructed will not last, nor will it be just.

Afghan conflict resolution experience show that standing against the trend of exclusion in society requires a concerted effort to ensure inclusivity at all levels of the peace building process, with particular attention to marginalized groups, so that all opinions, interests and needs can be considered.

Based on this, Afghan government is trying to include all sides in the peace talks. As part of a series of initiatives, a conference 'Components of a sustainable peace' was organized on Tuesday and attended by 400 people including representatives of civil society and media outlets from 34 provinces of the country. Speaking in the conference, President Ashraf Ghani said, Afghan government emphasized on ceasefire and conditions made for a comprehensive peace dialogue.

A sustainable peace requires convincing all parties involved in the conflict in Afghanistan to come together and see if there is an agreement to overcome violence in the country. Afghan government must try to convince all the parties, including the Taliban to come together to see if Afghans can find a way to reduce the violence.

However, Afghan citizens also shall stress prevention of deals that could damage the freedom of speech, religion, human rights, civil rights, guarantees from countries engaged in the peace process and the role of inter-governmental organizations in the process.

Political dialogue is the only mechanism to put an end to political conflicts. Political dialogue is a long-term effort. Negotiations will not bear fruit overnight. And they are deemed as essential to the process of building sustainable peace. In the context of Afghan peace talks it is necessary the talks be comprehensive and inclusive to ensure a durable peace. Ultimately, we want a peace deal to respect the totality of the constitution, and respect the freedom of speech, religion, human rights, and civil rights in the country.

## Inside Macron's Russia Initiative

By: Mark Leonard

French President Emmanuel Macron is one of those leaders who wants to bend the arc of history. Having upended French politics, he has secured positions for his preferred candidates at the head of the European Commission and the European Central Bank, and is now trying to improve Europe's relationship with Russia.

French officials are comparing Macron's Russia strategy to US President Richard Nixon's opening of China in 1972. But Macron's diplomatic overture is more like Nixon in reverse. Rather than wooing China in order to contain the Soviets, Macron wants to "ease and clarify [Europe's] relations with Russia" in order to prevent Russia from cozying up to China. In so doing, he hopes to secure Europe's control over its own future.

Macron launched his bid for a new security architecture in a typically grandiose fashion, mirroring the urban planner Georges-Eugène Haussmann's project to redesign Paris in the nineteenth century. His first move was to hold talks with Putin in France's Fort de Brégançon before the August G7 summit in Biarritz. But the French ministers charged with implementing the plan have since turned it on its head.

Now, rather than starting with a top-down agenda, they are trying to build European security from the bottom up, while pursuing improved relations with Russia one brick at a time. The French roadmap focuses on five key areas: disarmament, security dialogue, crisis management, values, and common projects.

In late August, Macron delivered a speech outlining his vision of a system of "concentric circles" comprising varying degrees of European and Eurasian integration. Such an arrangement would have to secure NATO and EU member states' borders, allow for a more productive relationship with the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union, and offer ways to manage regional conflicts, not least the one in Ukraine.

The timing of the initiative makes sense. Like Macron himself, Ukraine's recently elected president, Volodymyr Zelensky, created a political party out of nothing, and came to power on the promise of sweeping away a discredited ancien régime. More to the point, Zelensky has made resolving Ukraine's security situation a top priority. Macron believes that Russia's gravitation toward China is at least partly the result of Western mismanagement. He is not naive about the Kremlin's territorial aggression and election interference. But any country in a position to pose such threats to Europe, he believes, must be engaged face to face. As one French official explained to me, "What is true of Iran and North Korea is also true for Russia. We won't be able to influence it and lead it to more responsible behavior if we just hide behind a wall of sanctions."

Adding further urgency to Macron's efforts is US President Donald Trump, who has confirmed France's Gaullist suspicions about America's unreliability as a guarantor of European security. As the United States escalates its conflict with China, it inevitably will pay less attention to Europe and the surrounding neighborhood (the ex-

Soviet Union, the Middle East, and North Africa). Worse, the French fear that Trump might pursue a grand bargain with Russia, leaving the European Union hemmed in between the US and China.

Macron's biggest concern is Europe itself. The EU will never become a global player in the twenty-first century if it continues to be divided and boxed in by other powers. In Macron's view, recasting Europe's relationship with Russia is the first step toward securing European sovereignty. "If you don't have a seat at the great power table," one French official tells me, "it's because you're on the menu." To be sure, the French understand other Europeans' support for the sanctions imposed on Russia following its annexation of Crimea and incursion into Eastern Ukraine; but they fear the flimsiness of Europe's broader security policy.

Ideally, the EU should pursue a two-pronged approach to Russia, combining sanctions and NATO's deterrence with engagement. The French complaint is that there are no meaningful channels for such engagement, and that sanctions do not address the overall threat that Russia poses. "What would happen to European unity," French officials wonder, "if Moscow made a move on Ukraine or Syria and some member states decided to block sanctions renewal?" Most likely, it would spell the end of the EU's Russia policy.

Still, Macron's initiative raises many questions. Whether Putin has any interest in resolving the Ukraine conflict remains to be seen. And even if Europe is capable of detaching Russia from China, it is unclear whether the Trump administration would stand by and let the European initiative play out.

But the biggest questions are on the European front. Many Central and Eastern European countries worry that they will be second-class citizens within Macron's framework of "concentric circles." Others fear that Macron will sell out Ukraine by forcing it to settle the conflict on Russia's terms. And it doesn't help that Macron launched his initiative without first consulting other Europeans, many of whom are already anxious about America's waning commitment to EU security.

French officials pointed out that Nixon didn't consult US allies before embarking on his mission to China. But Nixon's credibility as a security hawk was unquestioned, whereas France is regarded suspiciously by some in Central and Eastern Europe, who fear that their interests, too, might be sacrificed in a neo-Gaullist attempt to claim a spot on the world stage.

If Macron is to succeed, he will have to prove that he is committed to the sovereignty and security not just of Central and Eastern Europe, but also of ex-Soviet countries such as Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova. He will also have to pursue deeper collaboration with the Nordic and Baltic states, as well as with the relevant EU institutions and the new High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell. Above all, Macron's initiative must create a credible platform for a common approach to security. If it is seen as favoring some countries over others, it and its author will end up on the menu, rather than in the history books.

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