

‘Many Afghans will look at Germany again’

Afghanistan expert and journalist Ahmed Rashid on the future of Western engagement in Central Asia and on regional expectations of Germany



© Thomas Köhler, 2011

AHMED RASHID
Journalist, Author, Pakistan

KÖRBER-STIFTUNG: What does the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan tell us about the Western attempt to export democracy?

RASHID: Democracy, whether we like it or not, is still one of the best systems, and we shouldn't throw it out. As a tribal society, Afghanistan was a particular case. It would have worked better if the West had combined local policy-making with human rights. But such measures were never exploited.

KÖRBER-STIFTUNG: Does the West still have leverage on the Taliban?

RASHID: Oh yes, there is a great deal of leverage. First, the Taliban are very desperate for recognition. The second critical issue is getting off the terrorist list, so they can function as a normal government. If you are on the terrorist list, you can't receive help

from multilateral organizations, even food aid will be restricted. That leverage can be exploited and concessions gained.

KÖRBER-STIFTUNG: Will China and Russia fill the gap left by the West?

RASHID: They are already filling the gap. Russia and China are the real beneficiaries of this very depressing and failed American attempt to withdraw civilians and troops. Biden never had much sympathy with the population of Afghanistan. He wants to be in East Asia dealing with the Chinese and this will only speed up the withdrawal from Central and South Asia.

KÖRBER-STIFTUNG: Germany offered support for Afghanistan's neighbours receiving most refugees, like Pakistan or Iran. What do you expect from Germany's next government in this regard?

RASHID: Germany got such an excellent track record when the Syrians came in 2015. Many people, including Afghans but also Indians or even Pakistani, will look at Germany again. Of course, there is a limit to how much Germans can do. But, by now, Germany should have stimulated a much broader discussion about burden sharing with as many European countries as possible. Germany's next government should take the lead and try to receive Afghan refugees. The country is in a very strong position to do that.

