

## Interview with Ahmed Rashid The West Should 'Change Its Approach to Failing States'

Der Spiegel, 31/12/2012

December 31 - Ahmed Rashid, one of the world's foremost experts on Afghanistan, once welcomed US intervention in the failed state. But in a SPIEGEL interview, the Pakistani journalist says the West's model for development is fundamentally flawed and must be changed. (Der Spiegel)

**SPIEGEL: Mr. Rashid, in 2014 the West will withdraw from Afghanistan. To what extent have they failed?**

**Rashid:** In my view, the Western model of influencing the development of third world countries is doomed to failure. The West does not understand how to deal with states that no longer have any authority and are threatened by dissolution. Their efforts failed in Iraq as well as Afghanistan. They are simply not capable of promoting the indigenous economy. Neither USAID nor Germany's international technical cooperation agency, the GIZ, are able to get a grip on it. They provide temporary assistance, no more than that. Many billions of dollars flooded into Afghanistan, but without any significant effect.

**SPIEGEL: There is rarely a lack of monetary aid in such countries. So why does the Western model fail in building up a country such as Afghanistan?**

**Rashid:** It would be better if the private sector would participate to a larger extent. Dysfunctional states like Afghanistan need business people who are deeply rooted in their country and invest in it. They can add stability. But all development programs of the United States and the European countries unfortunately exclude the private sector, which could make investments based on profitability.

**SPIEGEL: Presumably it would also be quite difficult to persuade companies to invest in countries like Afghanistan or Somalia.**

**Rashid:** Yes, I am aware of the challenges. But I am confident that there are hedge funds, banks or investment companies that could allocate five percent of their portfolios for risky investments. In any event, for countries like Afghanistan the formation of an entrepreneurial class is of vital importance.

**SPIEGEL: The United States is trying to establish a more peaceful environment prior to the withdrawal of their troops and to initiate talks with the Taliban -- also with limited success.**

**Rashid:** Evidently, the US also isn't capable of mediation. This lesson can be drawn from the failure of the talks with the Taliban in Qatar. Here too it would be better to involve the private sector, such as with respectable organizations that are preferably trusted by both sides. States should limit themselves to facilitating mediation. For example, the International Red Cross has the best contact to the Taliban. The Swedish Committee for Afghanistan has for the past fifteen years managed three hundred schools in an area of Afghanistan that is under Taliban control. The Swedes have to deal with the Taliban on an almost daily basis so the schools can be kept open for boys and girls. This remarkable local initiative could be transformed into a nationwide initiative for dialogue and mediation.

**SPIEGEL: What you are proposing is a paradigm shift.**

**Rashid:** Exactly, the West would be well advised to change its approach towards failing states. At present, no major power can find the correct ways and means --and the numbers of failing states are increasing, almost as if there were a race going on. This year we watched the collapse of Mali, a consequence of the Libyan civil war. The south of Libya and Mali, and Niger too, are well on the way to becoming a no-man's land. After 9/11, George W. Bush and Tony Blair made the promise that they would not tolerate failed states because they could become a haven for terrorists. And today? The number increases. Last year it was Yemen, this year it is the southern Sahara.

**SPIEGEL: What do you suggest? A military intervention surely can no longer be an alternative.**

**Rashid:** It would have been better if the United Nations had sent a team to Mali right away to mediate between the government and the rebels. But where is the political initiative? The Americans make their usual recommendations. They want to train the army for the fight with the rebels. US special forces are already in Mali.

**SPIEGEL: The promise that Bush and Blair made can hardly be kept after the experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan. In the near future, the United States can probably not be persuaded to launch military interventions.**

**Rashid:** The United States only knows one form of intervention and that is the military one. Everything depends on drawn weapons. We should, however, develop a wider scope of action. And we should learn to be patient.

**SPIEGEL: But did you not welcome the military intervention in Afghanistan in 2001?**

**Rashid:** At that time, I assumed that the Afghans were incapable of dealing with the Taliban. They were exhausted from the civil war, they had suffered defeats, they were economically destitute, the unrest in the country was enormous. They had a famine. India, Pakistan and Iran waged a proxy war in Afghanistan. Al-Qaida supported the Taliban financially, which provided a basis for them. There was no alternative to America's military intervention. Therefore I welcomed it, yes.

**SPIEGEL: You have always complained that the United States neglected Afghanistan because of the war in Iraq. What should have been the second step after the occupation?**

**Rashid:** Very simple, economic development. The civil war was over and the Taliban was no longer there. Troops were necessary to guarantee security. To that end, back then the United States stationed 20,000 soldiers in Afghanistan, but that was not enough. And so they left the security to the Afghan warlords. The CIA consulted with them and by doing so destroyed the morale of the Afghans. They hated the warlords.

**SPIEGEL: But quite a few billion dollars also went into building up the country. What happened with that money?**

**Rashid:** In 2001 USAID, the American governmental organization for international development that was founded during the Cold War, invited me and several others to give them suggestions on how development should be carried out after 9/11. We told them that in the next 10 years the United States should make \$5 billion available for Afghanistan every year -- enough to revitalize the economy, invest in infrastructure and rebuild education and health. A third-world country like Afghanistan could not possibly absorb more than these five billion. Five billion was peanuts back then. Much money came in but it went to the wrong things, such as making payoffs to the warlords. There was insufficient investment in infrastructure until much later, and the same went for building a self-sustaining economy and agriculture. We suggested major investments in agriculture, as Afghanistan happens to be a land of farmers. Until 2010 nothing was allocated. Richard Holbrooke, whom Obama appointed special envoy of the region, was the first who saw

the necessity of investing in agriculture.

**SPIEGEL:** Obama changed quite a few things in his Afghanistan policy. He increased the number of troops and at the same time set the US withdrawal date to 2014. That was America's next mistake.

**Rashid:** That was the biggest mistake Obama could have made. Now the United States has to ensure that Afghanistan does not immediately collapse after being left to itself in 2014.

**SPIEGEL:** In your lifetime, you have witnessed the interventions of two super powers. What did the Soviet Union leave behind?

**Rashid:** The Soviets held to the tradition of colonialism. They raped the country and killed many people. But they also built dams, electrical power plants, streets, and technical schools. They were communists and had the same vision for Afghanistan that Stalin and Lenin had for the Soviet Union: Progress is communism plus electrification. And today? Today Kabul gets its electrical power from Uzbekistan, Herat from Iran and Jalalabad from Pakistan.

**SPIEGEL:** And what is the West's legacy in Afghanistan?

**Rashid:** America does not hold to the colonial tradition. America came, liberated Afghanistan from the Taliban and al-Qaida, came to an arrangement with Hamid Karzai, wanted to organize elections as soon as possible and then withdraw. The Bush administration had an obsession with democracy building. They thought that once there is a democracy, everything else will fall into place. If today you speak to the architects of the 2001 Afghanistan Conference in Bonn, they will tell you that instead of being fixated on elections, we should have built a state with an army and a police force first.

**SPIEGEL:** Even after the withdrawal, some US troops will remain in Afghanistan. How many should stay?

**Rashid:** The Americans estimate that 15,000 to 20,000 soldiers will fight terrorists from their various bases. That makes me think of Iraq, where the US also wanted to station 20,000 soldiers. The Iraqis encouraged them to leave.

**SPIEGEL:** Do you think that something similar will happen in Afghanistan?

**Rashid:** If Afghan soldiers continue to kill American soldiers as is happening these days, it can hardly be assumed that they will stay in Afghanistan in the long term. And what role are they to play? There will not be enough soldiers to ensure the security of the country. But will the US still be permitted to kill terrorists in Afghanistan and Pakistan with un-manned drones? That could worsen the situation in the neighboring states and they could view Afghanistan as a threat.

**SPIEGEL:** After 2014, will the Taliban again play a role in Afghanistan, whether the West likes it or not? Is Mullah Omar still the same stone-age Islamist he was 11 years ago?

**Rashid:** I believe that the Taliban are just as worn out from war as all of the other parties are. Perhaps they realize that they cannot win another civil war, particularly since Iran and India are boosting and protecting their own allies against the Taliban. Therefore, the Taliban cannot defeat the North. Should they aim to conquer the whole country, the world would turn its back on Afghanistan, including the United Nations. Then there would be no more money for Afghanistan, and that also goes for the \$4 billion the West promised in Tokyo for the economic build-up. The Taliban would be well advised to come to an agreement with the government in Kabul, because they have the access to the money from the West.

**SPIEGEL:** But then the Taliban of today would no longer be the Taliban of yesterday.

**Rashid:** I think they are ready to compromise.

**SPIEGEL: You have known Hamid Karzai for decades. What do you think of him today?**

**Rashid:** He is a survivalist. But he has also deepened the ethnic divide in the country. He has neither fought against corruption nor against crime. He has not reformed the justice system. He has personalized his leadership, and in that respect he is similar to his father. During his father's lifetime there was the king, and he negotiated matters with the tribal leaders. Fifty years ago this form of rule was pretty normal, but today that is no longer the case.

**SPIEGEL: In 2014 the new president of Afghanistan will be elected. Karzai cannot run again after two terms. Who will be his successor?**

**Rashid:** Someone from his cabinet, someone whom he trusts. In any event it will be a Pashtun. If, however, the fighting in the country still continues in 2014, matters will be difficult. In 2008, Karzai rigged the election in part because a large number of Pashtuns in areas with a lot of fighting going on could not cast their vote. If that dilemma is repeated in 2014, a candidate from the North could win the majority. But Afghanistan is not yet ready for a president who is not a Pashtun. For that reason too, an armed truce in 2014 is important.

**SPIEGEL: The emerging world powers India and China border on Afghanistan and Pakistan. What are the opportunities this neighborhood offers to the smaller countries?**

**Rashid:** The neighbors have for many decades been accustomed to exerting control in Afghanistan. But Pakistan, with its fundamentalism, with its multitude of terrorist groups, with its declining economy can hardly be curtailed. The key for any change to this permanent and ever-increasing calamity is the relationship to India. India will not trust Pakistan as long as its secret service and army allow tens of thousands of militants to fight in Kashmir, and as long as it has to anticipate another assassination plot like that in Mumbai in 2008.

**SPIEGEL: The next intervention will likely not be military, but economic, and one initiated by China and India. Why not to the advantage of Pakistan?**

**Rashid:** Our elites are spoiled by permanent foreign aid and therefore find it difficult to change course. Pakistan needs someone who stands up and says: Fundamentalism is bad, capitalism is good. This region harbors enormous potential. Pakistan could become the hub for the energy that is transported from Central Asia to South Asia. That could change the whole region. Or, India could invest in Pakistan, build factories and pipelines. Pakistan could provide engineers, drivers, workers, and forge alliances with the neighboring states. Twice the world powers have intervened and Pakistan has tried to play games with them. The third intervention will be economic, and we should participate.

**SPIEGEL: Mr. Rashid, thank you for this conversation.**