

David Chandler, *From Kosovo to Kabul: Human Rights and International Intervention* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 268 pp

In *From Kosovo to Kabul*, David Chandler has written an important book on international intervention. Unlike most accounts on the issue so far, Chandler does not tacitly accept the presuppositions of intervention nor limit his analysis to an historical account of how so-called 'humanitarian intervention' has developed 'from Kosovo to Kabul', i.e., between 1993 and 2001. As Chandler states in the Introduction, he merely sets out to look at the political basis for, and the consequences of, 'ethical foreign policy' and the general human rights discourse that constituted the framework of international interventionist policies from the early 1990s onwards.

The analysis that follows convincingly argues that the new prominence of a 'human rights discourse' in international politics transformed and challenged the nature of international law (Chapter 5), modern international warfare (Chapter 6) and interstate relations in the international system (Chapter 7). Chandler's argument is less plausible, however, in presenting developments in transnational NGOs (Chapter 2), the rise of a so-called 'ethical foreign policy' of Western governments (Chapter 3) and the recent emergence of normative human rights theory in Western political science (Chapter 4) as the crucial factors that have led to this new prominence.

Chandler is right to state that developments in NGOs' self images and practices have led to a departure from earlier principles of neutrality and impartiality; NGOs increasingly take sides in conflicts and can be deliberately biased in distributing aid. Chandler is also correct in asserting that a particular human rights discourse, which tells a 'human rights fairy story' (p. 36) and sees victims as ultimately passive and incapable of the 'right' political decisions, has been prominent in Western government circles and political science alike.

However, it remains rather unclear why the human rights discourse now fares prominently in such different sectors as NGOs or Western political science. Chandler states at the outset that his book is not a history of the human rights movement and institutional developments (p. 18), but it also does not seem to be a history of the human rights discourse that takes such a central place in his analysis either. Chandler does account for the fact that human rights did not feature prominently during the Cold War, but does not explain why it was 'human rights' that replaced the old framework of interstate relations. The one reason he gives for the rise of 'ethical foreign policy', the need Western governments felt to create a distinct political identity in times of eroding traditional lines of political affiliation, remains implausible. It rests on the tacit assumption that governments' foreign policies rather than their domestic political agendas decide their success in national elections. Remembering the large public protests against the British military involvement in Iraq in 2003, one suspects that the British government was re-elected despite rather than because of its 'ethical foreign policy'. Chandler himself admits that public opinion about foreign policy goals follows rather traditional considerations, rating the wars against terror and drugs higher than the defence of high ethical values overseas (p. 61).

In contrasting the 'new ethical foreign policy' with strategic considerations during the Cold War, Chandler sets up an artificial binary between 'ethical foreign policy' and 'national interests' that is unlikely to exist in the perception of Western governments. They increasingly see the protection of 'human rights' abroad as following national interests; a sound human rights record guarantees stability and cannot give rise to escalating conflict and transnational terrorism. Security and human rights, therefore, now go perfectly together, and the protection or enforcement of human rights standards abroad is now seen as the pursuit of national interests.

Chandler's argument would have been strengthened if he had not only looked at the rise of a human rights-based approach in particular sections of Western political thought and practice, but also incorporated a broader perspective on developments in Western liberal thought since the end of the Cold War. Chandler's insightful and valid conclusions about the erosion of formal international equality and its challenge to international law, as well as the consequences of a new form of unaccountable interventionist policies, might have rested on a stronger basis if he had explained them not only with domestic Western electoral politics in mind, but also with the new confidence and universalist aspirations of Western liberal thinking after socialism, as the only global alternative sociological model, had dissolved.

*From Kosovo to Kabul* is a crucial contribution to thinking about international intervention. It clearly demonstrates how the new, prominent human rights discourse has only empowered the already powerful and is used to legitimise unaccountable interventionist policies and the erosion of the authority of elected representatives of non-Western countries. Despite its incomplete analysis of the new prominence of the human rights discourse after the Cold War, it is a book that everyone interested in international intervention will have to take into account.

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