

BOOK REVIEW

From Kosovo to Kabul: Human Rights and International Intervention. *David Chandler*, Pub. Pluto Press, 2002 £14.99

The UN was founded to prevent war. Article 2(4) of the UN Charter states: 'All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state ...' Thus, traditionally, the UN has a role to play if one country invades another, but it is not concerned with conflicts within the boundaries of a sovereign state; every state has the right to regulate its own internal affairs. However, within the last decade there has been a shift towards armed intervention intended to put a stop to the most serious infringements of human rights, even within national boundaries. It has been argued that the international community is not merely entitled, but is morally bound to intervene - to go to war - to prevent, for example, genocide or ethnic cleansing.

David Chandler's book analyses that shift, from regarding human rights and humanitarian assistance as being essentially non-political, impartial and charitable, towards military intervention in the name of morality. It is not an easy read. The sentences are often unbearably long, and unfamiliar verbs such as "privileging" and "advantaging" will not be to everyone's taste, but it is carefully researched, and presents both sides of the argument. On the one hand, the old-fashioned notion that negotiation is preferable to "peace intervention"; on the other, the "new humanitarianism" of "right is might".

Chandler comes down firmly in favour of the traditional view. He sees this recent trend as more of a PR exercise than addressing long term needs. "The morality is taking action rather than the final outcome or consistency." Much of what he documents relates to the positions, policies and opinions of governments, NGOs and academic theorists. The UN is on the back burner, which is precisely why he is wary, because peace "enforcement" will be increasingly shifted from UN control to that of NATO or other "coalitions of the willing." The militarisation of peacekeeping not only runs counter to the traditional role of the UN but also introduces a fundamental change, either transforming UN Peacekeeping into greater military preparedness, or for western states to undertake peacekeeping tasks independently of the UN.

What are the real motives behind armed intervention? Is it really to protect the human rights of an oppressed minority or it is prompted by selfish commercial, strategic or political concerns? For Chandler, the intervention is by "Western" powers, into the affairs of the "non-Western" world, and the motives are always suspect.

This is a thought-provoking book, which fairly states an important question. It is for the reader to decide whether it gives the right answer.

Tina Micklethwait