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FROM KOSOVO TO KABUL: human rights and international intervention
by David Chandler

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Readership: Postgraduates

Rating: *****

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In the conventional wisdom, humanitarian action is rather popular. It is usually seen as an important way to alleviate human pains and sufferings. Nevertheless, some analysts highlight its shortcomings. Thus it is important to put humanitarian action in its global context, without political correctness or other intellectual limitations. *From Kosovo to Kabul* by David Chandler constitutes a very useful tool in this respect. The author, who has previously written on various international relations subjects, has decided to focus on international intervention and its justifications. He takes a rather critical look at what he describes as a new 'human-rights based humanitarianism'. He does not hesitate to deconstruct the (Western) political wave in favour of human rights. He traces the historical developments that have led to this tendency, which produced a shift in the work of humanitarian NGOs and international organizations from 'needs-based' to 'rights-based' aid. The causes and consequences of this shift are widely analysed, in particular the development of an 'ethical' foreign policy, largely promoted by some Western governments. Chandler is not particularly positive about those developments and formulates numerous critiques. To solidify his argument, he focuses mainly on the events of the past decade, taking into account the recent events in Kosovo (1999) and the military intervention in Afghanistan (2001). One can agree or disagree with the author. Nevertheless, the scope, density and intensity of the analysis are real. The ideas are well presented and explained, sometimes in a provocative and challenging way. It is a stimulating book, full of interesting clarifications. The political, legal, ethical and intellectual aspects of the question are treated with clarity, pertinence and coherence. This book is helpful for all readers interested in a critical and solid view of the debates on humanitarian action since the beginning of the 1990s.