



PRIO | 60 1959
2019



Home > Journal of Peace Research > Book Notes > Carsten Wieland (2021) *Syria and the Neutrality Trap: The Dilemmas of Delivering Humanitarian Aid through Violent Regimes*, by Jørgen Jensehaugen

Journal of Peace Research

Wieland, Carsten (2021) *Syria and the Neutrality Trap: The Dilemmas of Delivering Humanitarian Aid through Violent Regimes*. London: IB Tauris. 182 pp.

ISBN: 978-0-7556-4139-0

Jørgen Jensehaugen

Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)

Read more about this book: www.bloomsbury.com

Neutrality, the obligation to not take sides in a conflict, is a core tenet of humanitarianism. This ideal is heavily challenged as humanitarian actors engage in brutal and complex situations where tough real-life challenges do not match the normative drawing board. As Carsten Wieland shows, the Syrian conflict acutely demonstrates this. Humanitarian actors fall into the 'neutrality trap' as they are forced to engage with a plethora of unsavory actors. In terms of scale nobody is worse than the Syrian government: It systematically engages in large-scale breaches of human rights using torture, indiscriminate bombing, chemical warfare, and depriving civilian populations of access to food, to mention only some such atrocities. The regime is also the state sovereign so international humanitarian actors, especially the various UN branches, must do business with the government to deliver aid to Syria at all. The Syrian regime has taken advantage of this, using humanitarian aid to enrich its supporters and strengthen the regime's hand vis-à-vis its opponents. By adhering strictly to norms of international relations, including the sanctity of state sovereignty humanitarian actors inadvertently strengthen the very



regime that is most responsible for the suffering they are there to alleviate. Wieland strongly, and convincingly, argues that serious reconsiderations are needed for how to engage in such difficult situations. Highlighting how there is no simple answer, he makes clear that if humanitarian actors had pressed the Assad regime too hard then it might very well have declined all aid, which also would have been detrimental to the Syrian population. Wieland's book is an excellent and depressing contribution to studies of humanitarianism.

Independent – International – Interdisciplinary

The Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) conducts research on the conditions for peaceful relations between states, groups and people.

PRIO.org

- News
- Events
- Research
- Publications
- People
- Data
- Education
- Blogs

About PRIO

- About PRIO
- How to Find
- Vacancies
- Library
- Contact
- Intranet
- FAQ
- Privacy Policy

