

competing elites, Medani's volume should be obligatory reading for anyone trying to understand how and why deep underlying tensions often erupt in popular protest as well as more violent forms of political expression. As the volume is now available freely online, there is simply no excuse for scholars of African politics and the politics of the Islamic world, international political economists and students of conflict not to make themselves fully acquainted with this magnum opus.

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doi: [10.1017/S0001972023000682](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972023000682)

Sarah G. Phillips, *When There Was No Aid: War and Peace in Somaliland*. Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press (hb US\$36.95 – 978 1 5017 4715 1). 2020, 256 pp.

Having unilaterally declared independence in 1991, Somaliland has functioned as a de facto state for the past three decades. What makes Somaliland an interesting case is that its peace- and state-building trajectory is characterized by a lack of external involvement in the political process. In *When There Was No Aid*, Sarah G. Phillips takes a constructivist approach to explain Somaliland's success in self-led peace and state building. She begins by asking 'why did the large-scale violence end in Somaliland while continuing elsewhere in Somalia' (p. 6). Phillips points to the fact that the former was not targeted by external intervention during its formative years (1991–96), while the latter experienced a massive influx of foreign aid. She rightly notes that the lack of external intervention afforded Somaliland multiple advantages, including the opportunity to establish locally legitimate governance institutions without externally defined deadlines and institutional endpoints.

However, that Somaliland was at no time isolated against its will, making its isolation self-imposed, hardly receives attention by Phillips. A united Somaliland issued a communiqué to the UN in 1993, stressing that the latter should keep its forces out of Somaliland and that Somaliland did not need external assistance in terms of peace-building and reconciliation. Yet, the international community, under the guise of the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM), did virtually everything possible to disrupt and sabotage Somaliland's self-led peace- and state-building efforts. The tensions between Somaliland and the UN culminated in 1994 when the leader of UNOSOM visited the country. He let President Egal know that UNOSOM had competence to deploy troops even without Egal's consent. If they did so, Egal replied, 'Hargeysa would become the United Nation's Dien Bien Phu,' giving him twenty-four hours to leave Somaliland. Hence, the advantages stemming from Somaliland's isolation are the result of a successful strategy on the part of the country's communities. This point is not explicitly raised in the book. Nor does Phillips advance a discussion linking successful large-scale collective action among communities that had fought on opposing sides of a bitter and long civil war to the larger question of what lessons Somaliland's peace- and state-building trajectory holds for other post-conflict societies, a point she raises in the concluding chapter (pp. 172–4).

Phillips proceeds by launching a fierce but well-justified critique of the logic underpinning institutional state building. Asserting that Somaliland's isolation 'is so unusual that it offers as close as we may come to a counterfactual case for the internationalized model of peace/state-building that is the norm' (p. 11), she questions the following assumptions: (1) external assistance is necessary to end conflicts; (2) it is necessary to predefine an institutional endpoint; and (3) Weberian governance institutions are a prerequisite for maintaining peace. She also admirably makes the case that international aid organizations produce arguments regarding so-called fragile states with the aim of securing their own presence.

In the second part of the book, Phillips takes a constructivist approach to explain the maintenance of peace in, at least, Somaliland's centre. Her central argument is that Somaliland's ability to maintain peace is not attributable to the efficiency of formal and/or informal institutions. Rather, peace is maintained discursively through the 'independence discourse'.

Phillips' so-called independence discourse consists of three components: belief in a peaceful and unique 'Somalilander' identity; the othering of Somalia; and fear of 'returning' to violence. As will be seen shortly, the so-called independence discourse model, which is essentially a covert way of saying that peace in Somaliland is attributable to the latter's ongoing quest for independence, is problematic for a multitude of reasons.

First, the so-called independence discourse model denies Somalilanders agency. It implicitly denies the possibility that people in Somaliland, by means of reason, have chosen democracy over authoritarianism, statehood over anarchy, and peace over conflict. We are, in other words, asked to believe that Somalilanders are seemingly incapable of acting wisely, pro-socially, responsibly, prudently and providently independent of the quest for *de jure* recognition. After all, there would be no 'independence discourse' constraining and moderating behaviour without Somaliland's ongoing quest for *de jure* recognition. Second, according to Phillips, the independence discourse is sustained by the Issaq population's 'fear of returning to their own violent past – whether from the persecution they faced from the Barre government or the internal wars that followed' (p. 138). The bulk of the population in Somaliland is quite young and has therefore no recollection of a predatory Somali state. How long can it credibly be asserted that peace in Somaliland is attributable to the othering of Somalia? Even Somalia has come a long way since the chaos of the 1990s, accentuating the essentializing nature of Phillips' model. Third, Phillips' model cannot explain why the non-Issaq communities, who were not persecuted by the Barre government, have also been willing to build and maintain peace. Recall that it was they who voluntarily mediated peace among the Issaq in the early 1990s. While this book fails to provide a convincing account of successful self-led peace and state building in Somaliland, it is relevant to anyone interested in peace and state building more generally, particularly due to its lambasting critique of institutional peace and state building.

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doi: [10.1017/S0001972023000694](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972023000694)