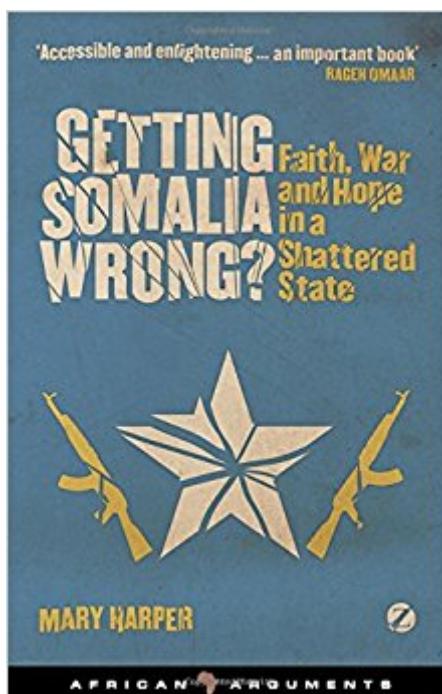


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# Getting Somalia Wrong?: Faith, War And Hope In A Shattered State (African Arguments)



## Synopsis

Somalia is a comprehensively failed state, representing a threat to itself, its neighbors, and the wider world. In recent years, it has become notorious for the piracy off its coast and the rise of Islamic extremism, opening it up as a new "southern front" in the war on terror. At least that is how it is inevitably presented by politicians and in the media. In *Getting Somalia Wrong?*, Mary Harper presents the first comprehensive account of the chaos into which the country has descended and the United States' renewed involvement there. In doing so, Harper argues that viewing Somalia through the prism of al-Qaeda risks further destabilizing the country and the entire Horn of Africa, while also showing that though the country may be a failed state, it is far from being a failed society. In reality, alternative forms of business, justice, education, and local politics have survived and even flourished. Provactive and eye-opening, *Getting Somalia Wrong?* shows that until the international community starts to "get it right," the consequences will be devastating, not just for Somalia, but for the world.

## Book Information

Series: African Arguments

Paperback: 232 pages

Publisher: Zed Books (February 9, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1842779338

ISBN-13: 978-1842779330

Product Dimensions: 5.4 x 0.6 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.5 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 8 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #631,158 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #172 in Books > History > Africa > East Africa #565 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > African #662 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > Diplomacy

## Customer Reviews

"The most accessible and accurate account available of the contemporary Somali world - pirates and all." - Iain Lewis, author of *Understanding Somalia and Somaliland* "For the past two decades, books on Somalia have tended to mirror some of the attitudes about the country itself. They have been either analyses by a small and highly specialised field of policy analysts and academics, or

written from and for the perspective that caters to the most common cliches and impressions about this most failed of failed states; a nation of warlords, pirates, jihadists and refugees fleeing in unseaworthy boats often only to drown. All of these are of course part of the narrative of Somalia's inability to break from its repeated cycles of the failure of domestic politics and outside intervention over the past 25 years, but what Mary Harper has done is to explain this narrative as a whole - rather than a series of snapshots. This is a book which is clear, accessible and thorough. It has done what books on Somalia rarely do, which is to examine the multitude of failures, misunderstandings, and wilful acts of destruction that have caused Somalia's downfall, but it has also gone much further, by outlining the huge part of the hidden Somalia that have survived the decades of turmoil and which are the only foundations upon which anything approaching a post conflict and stable Somalia can be built. There are significant parts of Somalia where civil society is functioning with fragile but functioning institutions of business and commerce, security and representation. She has written and explained this detailed yet vital aspect of the Somali crisis in a way that is accessible and enlightening not just to the international reader but also to those shaping global policy on Somalia. This is an important book for both." - Rageh Omaar, host of The Rageh Omaar Report and author of Only Half of Me

Mary Harper is a BBC journalist specializing in Africa. She has reported from Somalia since the outbreak of civil war in 1991 and from other war zones across Africa, including Sudan, Liberia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. She has written for several publications including The Economist and The Washington Post.

Having worked in Africa for over half my adult life--most recently, five years in Nairobi--where we perceived neighboring Somalia to the north as a two dimensional failed state of armed nomads, cruel Sharia law, opportunistic piracy and tribal danger, I find Mary Harper's book informative, challenging, and quite readable, which is a real forte considering the vast complexity of the clans and the history. The themes are straightforward: that Somalia has been misunderstood and mismanaged in the arena of international politics for the last century, and that despite the popular image of Somalia as a failed state, technological, banking, and governmental solutions have arisen remarkably out of the chaos. Can Somaliland and Puntland provide an functional model for the evolution of the country as a whole, or, as we recently witnessed in the Westgate Shopping Center disaster in Nairobi, will the momentum of terrorism--domestic and exported--overwhelm the grassroots, problem solving processes that Ms. Harper identifies?

Not an easy topic to find reliable resources on, Somalia. However this journalistic piece is worth the read but becoming dated. An update post 2011 would help but overall good background on commentary on Somalia and its demise and potential hope, e.g. Somaliland.

Great quick way of deepen your understanding of Somalia and challenges ahead

Mary Harper is insightful. In this well crafted book, she has a sensitivity towards a country and a people that so many only know from what they see in the news.

ANOTHER GIFT FOR MY BROTHER. BLACK HAWK DOWN WAS AN RIVETING ACCOUNT OF LIFE AND WAR IN SOMALIA. NOW, "GETTING SOMALIA WRONG" TAKES THE WORLD OF SOMALIA MANY STEPS FURTHER. IF YOU ARE AT ALL INTERESTED IN WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD THIS IS A MUST READ!

For the most part, I found "Getting Somalia Wrong" to be a well-written and informative book. I felt its presentation of Somali history (recent and not-so-recent) to be enlightening. The sections that deal with "greater Somalia" and piracy were particularly interesting and pertinent. One thing that bothered me was that I think the author spent a little too much time and effort blaming everyone and anyone for Somalia's troubles, except for the Somalis. I find myself wondering whether her seemingly contention that the Islamic Courts Union would have brought lasting and permanent peace to Somalia would have proved correct or not if Ethiopia had not intervened in 2006. Maybe it would have and maybe the factions of the ICU that evolved into al-Shabaab would have seized control from the relative moderates in the ICU. I also feel that she sometimes goes overboard arguing that Somalia isn't terribly broken in total. Yes, Puntland and Somaliland are doing relatively well but the overall condition of the entity known as Somalia is a mess that is full of terrorists. I also can't help but wonder about the endorsement of the book (which appears on the back) by Adam Curtis, the individual who made the documentary "the Power of Nightmares" which argues against all evidence that "neocons" manufactured al-Qa'ida. This is a contention that Peter Bergen, who is an internationally known expert on al-Qa'ida has rubbished (and Bergen is hardly a "neocon.") The fact that the author uses an endorsement from a conspiracy theorist like Curtis makes me kind of wonder about her overall judgment. But even with that, it's a good book.

Mary Harper shows readers the real Somalia that has survived years of turmoil and war. She is an empathetic, informed and perceptive author. The book shows how good journalism really makes a difference to how we perceive situations and countries, particularly apt with Somalia and the press it has been receiving over the last year. Harper shows how the portrayal of a country can differ from the people within it and that impartial journalism can lead a new kind of understanding.

Mary Harper shows readers the Somalia that she has seen through her years reporting from the country. As a result it is a Somalia that varies widely from what you see in the press. She shows how Somalia is only a failed state in the eyes of the Western press, but that actually human ingenuity means that people will find ways to survive and flourish. Harper shows that it is the international world that has to get it right and until they do they the country will continue to be misunderstood.

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