

Webinar Report

Israel's Recognition of Somaliland: Interests, prospects and Risks for the Horn of Africa



Overview

The webinar assessed the implications of Israel's recognition of Somaliland by situating the decision within the broader geopolitical, security, and diplomatic dynamics in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea. Discussions sort to analyse Israel's strategic interests in the region, Somaliland's quest for international recognition, and the potential consequences for Somalia's sovereignty, national unity, peacebuilding and counter terrorism efforts. The conversation further examined how the recognition may upset the regional balance of power equation, foreign interference in an already fragmented security environment.

Key Discussion Points

Somaliland's Perspective and Strategic Positioning

From Somaliland's perspective as articulated by Dr. Mohammed Abdirahman, Israel's recognition

was presented as the outcome the outcome of decades of internal stability, self-rule, sustained diplomatic engagement, and contributions to regional security and counterterrorism, rather than transactional diplomacy.

Dr. Mohamed also emphasized that Somaliland views this recognition as reinforcing its position as a stable, democratic regional partner. He highlighted Somaliland's claim to international recognition is grounded in international law and historical precedent dating back to 1960 and does not violate African Union principles.

Furthermore, recognition was noted to create opportunities for enhanced cooperation in technology, water, agriculture, and regional security, while leveraging the strategic importance of ports such as Berbera on the Red Sea for regional

trade and maritime security. Somaliland also indicated that it plans to respond to potential diplomatic backlash and disinformation campaigns, projecting confidence in its legitimacy and political stability.

Implications for Somalia's sovereignty, national unity, peacebuilding and counter terrorism efforts.

The discussions also examined the potential domestic consequences of Israel's recognition of Somaliland for Somalia. Samira Gaid highlighted that this development could pose challenges to Somalia's sovereignty, internal cohesion and ongoing counterterrorism operations. She noted that the move could fuel Al-Shabaab propaganda on the federal state's capacity ...national unity. It was further noted that it could hamper existing intelligence-sharing and security coordination between the two administrations.

Negotiations between Somalia and Somaliland, already fragile since 2022, were reported as likely to stall, increasing the risk of armed resistance and internal fractures within Somaliland's claimed territories. The discussion noted that the situation is further influenced by proxy dynamics linked to Gulf state rivalries, with Saudi Arabia reportedly strengthening support for Mogadishu while the UAE reduces its involvement. Samira Gaid highlighted that Somalia's federal government faces the challenge of managing internal

reconciliation, consensus-based federalism, and dialogue with domestic actors alongside external diplomatic pressures.

Israel's Strategic Interests

The webinar also examined the strategic motivations behind Israel's recognition of Somaliland, situating the decision within Israel's regional and international interests. Partha Moman highlighted that Israel's recognition is primarily motivated by its efforts to normalize revive momentum in the Abraham Accords. He noted that Somaliland's intention to join the Abraham Accords requires formal recognition, making the move strategically valuable for Israel.

Moman further indicated that Israel's strategic interests include countering Iranian influence and the Houthi threat in the Red Sea, with Somaliland potentially serving as an intelligence or operational staging ground. The discussion also covered speculative but unconfirmed reports regarding Somaliland's potential role in hosting displaced Palestinians under Israeli resettlement plans, which Somaliland has denied.

He added that the recognition carries minimal diplomatic cost to Israel relative to other policies, such as those concerning Gaza. The roles of the U.S., UAE, and Ethiopia remain unclear but are likely tacit, with the UAE's military presence in Berbera and close ties to Israel suggesting implicit support. Ethiopia's ambiguous stance reflects its Red Sea ambitions and close cooperation with Israel.

Regional and Strategic Implications

On the question of the broader regional strategic alliances, Dr. Kizito Sabala highlighted the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea as areas of significant geopolitical

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and economic importance. He noted that approximately 12–15% of global trade passes through the Red Sea annually, attracting the interest of powers such as China, Turkey, the UAE, and Israel.

Dr. Sabala further indicated that Somalia faces ongoing security challenges, with Al Shabaab controlling an estimated 20–30% of rural territories, while political fragmentation complicates counterterrorism efforts. He noted that Israel's recognition of Somaliland could challenge Somalia's political unity and potentially legitimize separatist movements both domestically and regionally. The discussion also noted that potential increased U.S. engagement with Somaliland may affect Somalia, which relies heavily on external military assistance. Dr. Sabala also observed that the recognition could expand Israel's influence in Africa, countering the presence of Iran, Turkey, and China, while also potentially provoking hostility from regional actors opposed to Israel's presence.

Global and Multilateral Geopolitical Context

The discussions situated Israel's recognition of Somaliland within broader global trends characterized by shifting alliances, contested sovereignty, and strategic competition in key maritime zones. Participants noted that the southern Red Sea remains a critical corridor for global trade and energy, with an estimated 50 per cent of European goods and

approximately 25 per cent of Europe's energy supplies transiting through the region. The realignment of Gulf states including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Turkey, alongside East African actors and external powers such as China and the United States, was highlighted as reshaping the regional balance of power.

Within this context, Israel's recognition was described as a relatively low-cost diplomatic move internationally, particularly when contrasted with the broader backlash surrounding its Gaza policies, enabling it to consolidate regional partnerships. The discussions further observed that multilateral institutions, including the African Union, IGAD, and the United Nations, face growing constraints in responding to these dynamics due to internal divisions and great power rivalries. As a result, the emergence of innovative regional forums aimed at dialogue and collective security was increasingly referenced in the discussion.

Technology, Infrastructure, and Security Cooperation

The discussions noted that, while not a primary focus, emerging cooperation and infrastructure developments underpinned broader strategic interests in Somaliland. Somaliland's pursuit of partnerships in technology, water management, agriculture, and capacity building was highlighted as part of efforts to strengthen governance and regional integration. The UAE's port management concession with DP World in Berbera was cited as positioning Somaliland as a significant node in Red Sea trade and military logistics.

Participants also observed that security cooperation, including intelligence sharing

and counterterrorism coordination, remained fragile yet central to regional stability. In this context, the potential expansion of U.S. military presence, alongside the existing Emirati base in Berbera, was discussed as providing strategic platforms for Israel and Western partners.

Diplomatic Strategies and Future Outlook

The webinar emphasized that managing the consequences of recognition will depend on dialogue, regional cooperation, and balancing competing interests amid shifting geopolitical realities. Somalia's options include diplomatic engagement to rally international support and building consensus among federal member states to facilitate dialogue with Somaliland. Peaceful resolution is contingent on negotiation in good faith and prioritization of political reconciliation over external pressures.

Somaliland was noted to advocate for responsible diplomacy and caution against reactionary measures, emphasizing the need for sustained engagement by African and international actors. The discussion also rejected claims of proxy involvement or destabilizing intentions.

More broadly, participants highlighted the potential value of renewed multilateral engagement, including consideration of a Red Sea Council or similar forum, to manage complex regional challenges that existing institutions have struggled to address. In the longer term, the discussions suggested that regional stability may require re-examining sovereignty frameworks beyond post-colonial borders, balancing regional integration with claims of self-determination.

Actionable Insights

Somaliland: Continue responsible diplomacy to counter misinformation and disinformation campaigns regarding Somaliland's recognition.

Somali Federal Government: Prioritize internal reconciliation and develop a long-term strategy to engage constructively with Somaliland to resolve the dispute peacefully.

Regional and International Stakeholders: Monitor developments in Ethiopia-Somaliland relations following the MoU and track Saudi-UAE dynamics in Yemen to assess implications for Horn of Africa geopolitics.

Multilateral Organizations (African Union, IGAD): Address shortcomings in mediating Somali-Somaliland tensions and support dialogue and peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms.

Research and Policy Institutions: Explore the feasibility and framework for establishing a multilateral Red Sea Council to coordinate regional maritime, security, and diplomatic issues.



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