



AFRICAN NARRATIVES

Somaliland Between Aspirations for Recognition and Israeli Security Calculations in the Red Sea



Author:



Farouk Hussein Abu Deif

Political Researcher_ specializing
in African affairs

Published by:
African Narratives



AFRICAN NARRATIVES



Abstract

Israel's official recognition of Somaliland on December 26, 2025, represents a seismic shift in the political landscape of the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea. This move provides Hargeisa with unprecedented diplomatic momentum after decades of existing in a legal vacuum, while simultaneously serving Israel's urgent need for strategic depth following the 2023 Gaza war and the subsequent Houthi threats to international shipping. Somaliland's relative stability and pro-Western orientation offer Israel a vital platform for maritime security and intelligence

cooperation near the Bab al-Mandab strait. However, this recognition has ignited a firestorm of opposition from Somalia, Egypt, Türkiye, and the African Union, who view it as a violation of sovereignty and a catalyst for regional fragmentation. This article examines the strategic motivations behind Israel's decision, the regional backlash, and the potential scenarios—ranging from expanded recognition to renewed conflict—that may follow this historic departure from international consensus.

Introduction: A New Chapter in Horn of Africa Geopolitics

The announcement from Tel Aviv on December 26, 2025, recognizing Somaliland as a sovereign state, effectively ended three decades of "recognition limbo" for the region. By becoming the first state to formally recognize Hargeisa since its 1991 declaration of independence, Israel has introduced a volatile new variable into the power equations of the Middle East and East Africa. This decision does more than validate a de facto entity; it reshapes the competition for influence over maritime security and global trade routes in one of the world's most sensitive corridors.

This shift is a direct byproduct of a post-2023 strategic reorientation. Faced with the limitations of a single regional foothold in Eritrea and the escalating maritime threats from the Houthis movement, Israel is diversifying its presence to secure alternative strategic depth. Furthermore, this move leverages the momentum of the Abraham Accords, attempting to consolidate Israel's African presence through a logic of normalization and security partnership.

This move is likewise a major political instrument for Somaliland, which has lived for three decades in a state of "de facto recognition without legal recognition," despite possessing relatively stable governing institutions and a political experience less turbulent than the rest of Somali geography. Israeli recognition gives the region new diplomatic momentum that may encourage other states—whether driven by strategic or economic motives—to consider a similar decision, especially as international powers look to strengthen their presence around the Red Sea and global trade lines. It also offers the region an opportunity to redefine its standing within African balances, and to expand its economic and political room for maneuver, even though this places it at the heart of a sharp recognition struggle with the Somali federal government and with regional powers opposed to any change in sovereignty

maps.

Conversely, this step ushers the region into a sensitive phase of polarization. Somaliland welcomed it as a gateway to international legitimacy, while it was met with a strong rejection from Somalia and influential regional states such as Egypt, Turkey, and Djibouti, which viewed it as a direct affront to Somalia's territorial unity and an interference in its internal affairs. This rejection suggests the region may move toward new balances characterized by diplomatic escalation and perhaps indirect security competition, as each side seeks to strengthen its leverage. It also raises a broader question about its impact on stability in the Horn of Africa, on the future of the Somali state project, and on the shape of upcoming regional alignments between a camp that sees it as a strategic opportunity and a camp that treats it as a threat to the structure of the state and the unity of the region's political geography.

Accordingly, the article seeks to pose a fundamental question: Does Israel's recognition of Somaliland represent a strategic turning point that redraws the balance of power and security in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea, or is it a temporary tactical step that may exacerbate tensions rather than produce genuine stability?



1 Lazar Berman. Israel becomes first nation to recognize Republic of Somaliland as independent state. https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/israel-becomes-first-nation-to-recognize-republic-of-somaliland-as-independent-state/

2 Abdel Rahman, Hamdy. "Implications of Israel's Recognition of Somaliland." Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies. <https://acpss.ahram.org.eg/News/21596.aspx>

3 "Israel Becomes the First State to Officially Recognize 'Somaliland' as an Independent Country amid Egyptian and Turkish Condemnation." CNN Arabic. <https://arabic.cnn.com/middle-east/article/2025/12/26/israel-formally-recognize-somaliland-as-independent-state>

4 Abdirahim M Hassan, Israel's Recognition of Somaliland: A Dangerous Precedent in Fragile Horn of Africa. <https://politicstoday.org/israels-recognition-of-somaliland-a-dangerous-precedent-in-fragile-horn-of-africa/>

Strategic Drivers: The Gaza War and Israel's "Opportunity Equation"

The recognition of Somaliland cannot be viewed in isolation from the ongoing repercussions of the Gaza war. As Israel seeks to manage international pressure and diversify its regional alliances, it is looking toward geopolitically influential areas that offer maneuverability outside the immediate zone of conflict. This "opportunity equation" is further complicated by controversial debates regarding the potential relocation of Palestinian populations—scenarios that, while officially denied by both Hargeisa and Mogadishu, continue to color the strategic discourse surrounding this rapprochement.

Furthermore, Israel has exploited the long-standing political fragility within Somalia. The persistent tension between the federal government in Mogadishu and the authorities in Hargeisa over sovereignty has created a "soft spot" in regional politics. By entering through these internal fractures, Israel has gained a foothold that risks

widening the trust gap between Somali parties, potentially pushing the central government toward a defensive or confrontational posture to safeguard its perceived territorial integrity.

Significantly, the timing of the recognition—occurring just days before a new phase of Gaza-related negotiations—suggests it may serve as a broader political instrument. By strengthening its influence in the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa, Israel may be accumulating bargaining chips to reshape post-war arrangements. This linkage transforms the Somaliland file from a bilateral matter into a component of a wider regional engineering project, designed to serve Israel's long-term security vision.

Therefore, the timing's implications go beyond legal recognition and enter the realm of a struggle for influence and a reshaping of alliance maps in a region that has become a strategic node for all regional and international actors.

The Evolution of the Israel-Somaliland Security Partnership

The Gaza war acted as an accelerator for a relationship that was previously characterized by quiet cooperation. The conflict forced Tel Aviv to look beyond its immediate geography to counter threats from Iran and its regional proxies. Somaliland, with its coastline facing Yemen and its pro-Western elite, emerged as an ideal partner—stable, strategically positioned, and relatively unencumbered by the anti-Israeli alignments found elsewhere in the Muslim world. In the same vein, the war contributed to shifting Somaliland from a polity primarily seeking international recognition into a party capable of offering leverage to Israel and its Western partners,

making the relationship more practical and less symbolic. As maritime threats escalated and the risk of Houthi attacks grew, the region came to be seen in Tel Aviv not merely as a diplomatic file, but as a potential platform for security and intelligence cooperation. Somaliland's posture—often described as "pro-Western"—also provided Israel with an opportunity to work with a partner that has political readiness for cooperation, without becoming entangled in the complexities of more sensitive states or actors with deeply intertwined relations with Israel's adversaries. Under this logic, the necessities of war intersected with political opportunities,

5 Mahmoud Sameh, Israeli Recognition of Somaliland: A Reading of the Motives and Repercussions, Shams Center for Studies and Research. <https://shorturl.at/VyYSB>

6 Israel's Recognition of Somaliland: A Dangerous Precedent in Fragile Horn of Africa. IBID.

7 Asher Lubotzky, Somaliland and Israel—Considerations Regarding Recognition and Cooperation, <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/somaliland/>

, reinforcing a path toward gradual and calculated rapprochement.

This relationship has transitioned from symbolic diplomatic outreach to a practical, transaction-focused security partnership. As Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping intensified, Somaliland's geogra-

phy transformed it into a potential platform for intelligence gathering and maritime surveillance. For Israel, Hargeisa is no longer just a diplomatic file; it is an active security partner capable of providing the monitoring and logistics necessary to protect vital trade lines leading to the Suez Canal.

The Multidimensional Importance of Somaliland to Israel

Israel's interest in Somaliland is driven by a convergence of security, geography, and diplomacy. Central to this is the potential integration of Somaliland into the "Abraham Accords" framework. By building a partnership with a stable, Muslim-majority African entity, Israel reinforces its image as a power capable of transcending traditional diplomatic barriers, thereby widening the base of normalization across the continent.

Geographically, Somaliland's position on the Gulf of Aden near the Bab al-Mandab strait offers Israel a critical observation point. This proximity allows for the monitoring of maritime threats and early warning systems regarding Houthi activity without requiring a direct military presence inside Yemen.

Furthermore, by fostering ties with a partner that is wary of Iranian influence, Israel can balance the roles of competing regional powers like Türkiye and Iran, preventing the Red Sea from becoming an exclusive sphere of influence for its adversaries.

Finally, Somaliland offers a "safe environment"

for cooperation. Unlike the more turbulent regions of Somalia, Somaliland maintains a multi-party system and a degree of institutional cohesion that makes it a reliable partner for long-term arrangements.

The absence of major jihadist groups further secures this environment, allowing for economic and security cooperation that is less prone to sudden collapse.



8 Somaliland and Israel—Considerations Regarding Recognition and Cooperation, IBID.

9 Asher Lubotzky, Somaliland and Israel—Considerations Regarding Recognition and Cooperation, <https://www.in-ss.org.il/publication/somaliland/>

10 Mohammed Mahmoud, What are the effects of Netanyahu's recognition of "Somaliland" on the conflict between Israel and the Houthis?, Al-Sharq Al-Awsat. <https://shorturl.at/w0v3U>

11 Israeli recognition of Somaliland: A reading of the motives and repercussions, IBID.

Regional Rejection and the Defense of Somali Unity

The international response to Israel's announcement was almost universally critical, reflecting a shared fear that the move could legitimize secessionist movements across the continent.

1. Somalia

Mogadishu's reaction was the most visceral, labeling the recognition a "direct assault on sovereignty" and a violation of the UN Charter. The federal government has categorically rejected any parallel entities and has explicitly linked the move to potential Palestinian displacement scenarios, which it views as a violation of both Somali and Palestinian rights.

2. Egypt

Cairo has spearheaded a diplomatic counter-offensive, viewing the recognition as a threat to its core national security interests in the Red Sea. Egypt has reaffirmed its total support for Somali unity and warned that such a precedent could destabilize the entire region, narrowing Cairo's maneuvering space in its traditional sphere of influence.

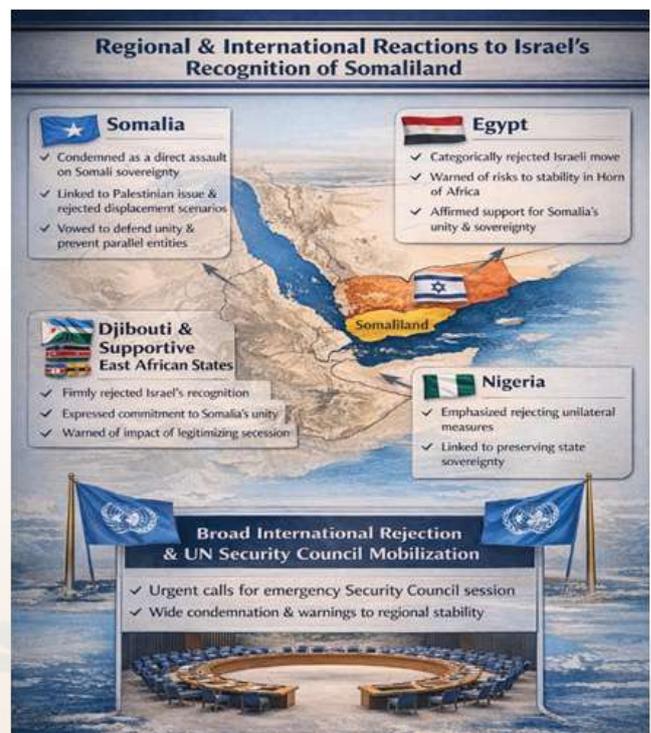
3. Türkiye, Djibouti and supportive East African states

Ankara joined Djibouti and adopted a firm stance rejecting the Israeli move, reaffirming its commitment to supporting Somalia's unity and describing the recognition as a serious violation of Somalia's sovereignty. East African states—including Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda—also expressed solidarity with the Somali government and warned of the recognition's implications for regional security. These states argued that enhancing the legitimacy of the region's secession could pave the way for other secessionist waves in Africa, threatening the continent's stability and undermining the principle of inherited borders. This regional consensus reflects a shared understanding that the Israeli step does

not affect Somalia alone, but rather strikes at one of the pillars of African regional security.

4. Nigeria

Nigeria's position stood out within the broader African response through a contact between its foreign minister and his Egyptian counterpart, during which Abuja emphasized its rejection of any unilateral measures that threaten the unity and sovereignty of states. Nigeria reaffirmed its full support for Somalia's unity, warning that the Israeli recognition could destabilize the Horn of Africa and African security more generally. Nigeria linked its rejection of secession to the preservation of an international order grounded in respect for state sovereignty. This position also aligned with Nigeria's broader outlook on counterterrorism and continental stability, arguing that state fragmentation creates dangerous security vacuums that armed groups and transnational violent threats can exploit.



12 Statement from the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

13 African regional bodies reject Somaliland's recognition as independent nation by Israel. <https://www.pbs.org/news-hour/world/african-regional-bodies-reject-somalilands-recognition-as-independent-nation-by-israel>

14 Israel becomes first country to formally recognise Somaliland as independent state. *ibid*



The Joint International Reaction and Regional Organizations

The foreign ministers of the Arab Republic of Egypt, the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, the Union of the Comoros, the Republic of Djibouti, the Republic of The Gambia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Iraq, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the State of Kuwait, the State of Libya, the Republic of Maldives, the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Sultanate of Oman, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the State of Palestine, the State of Qatar, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Federal Republic of Somalia, the Republic of Sudan, the Republic of Türkiye, the Republic of Yemen, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation issued a joint statement on 26 December 2025. In the statement, they expressed their categorical rejection and strong condemnation of Israel's decision to recognize the so-called "Somaliland" region as an entity independent from the Federal Republic of Somalia, considering it an unlawful measure that constitutes a blatant violation of the UN Charter and the rules of international law, and a dangerous precedent threatening peace and security in the Horn of Africa, the Red Sea, and the world. The statement also affirmed support for Somalia's sovereignty and territorial unity, and rejected any linkage between this step and any schemes to displace the Palestinian people outside their homeland.

The joint statement—issued by a broad group of Arab, Islamic, and African states, alongside the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Gulf Cooperation Council—represented one of

the most prominent expressions of international rejection. It strongly condemned the Israeli recognition, describing it as a flagrant breach of international law and the UN Charter and a threat to international peace and security. The signatories reaffirmed their full support for Somalia's unity and territorial integrity, and rejected any attempt to legitimize secession or establish parallel entities outside the framework of international legitimacy. The statement also warned against the danger of linking the Israeli step to any potential plans to displace Palestinians, emphasizing absolute rejection of such plans on political, moral, and legal grounds.

1. Türkiye

Türkiye adopted a sharply critical position toward the Israeli recognition, deeming it an illegal step aimed at creating instability in the Horn of Africa. It stated that the decision constitutes direct interference in Somalia's internal affairs and a violation of the principle of its territorial unity. Ankara emphasized its strong support for Mogadishu and its categorical rejection of any efforts to legitimize secession or impose parallel entities, warning that the Israeli move threatens not only Somalia but also regional security. Türkiye also linked this position to Israel's broader conduct in the region, arguing that the recognition falls within expansionist policies that undermine stability and conflict with international law and the security requirements of the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa.

2. The United States

Although no official U.S. position was issued with the same sharpness as the regional statements, Washington followed the developments with caution and interest, given the sensitivity of stability in the Horn of Africa and security in the Red Sea. This aligns with a traditional U.S. policy that supports Somalia's unity and opposes unilateral moves that could encourage separatist tendencies or open the door to new regional turmoil. The United States also views the development through the lens of influence balances in the region, especially amid international competition over maritime corridors and regional issues. It is likely that Washington will push for handling the matter through diplomatic and international frameworks, while emphasizing the need to respect international law and state sovereignty.

3. Norway

Norway's position came within the context of cautious European engagement. In its communications with Cairo, Oslo underscored the importance of preserving stability in the Horn of Africa and the necessity of respecting state sovereignty and territorial integrity. Norway emphasized the importance of preventing any steps that could undermine the international order or create dangerous precedents regarding recognition of regional secession. It also linked the new development to the situation in Gaza, stressing the need to consolidate the ceasefire and move toward stable political arrangements, while rejecting any attempts to impose new realities or displace populations. This stance reflects a broader European approach calling for de-escalation and the preservation of regional stability within the framework of international law.

4. The United Nations and the UN Security Council

At the UN level, the file moved quickly to the Security Council, as Somalia requested an emergency session to discuss the repercussions of the Israeli recognition. The United Nations responded to this political pressure by convening a dedicated session, reflecting the international

community's awareness of the seriousness of the step for regional and global security. The Council is expected to examine the legal dimension of Israel's decision and its compatibility with principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. This UN move also indicates that the issue is no longer a bilateral matter between Israel and Somalia, but has become an international file affecting the stability of the Horn of Africa, the security of the Red Sea, and the international order based on respect for the unity and sovereignty of states.

5. The African Union

The African Union rejected any recognition of Somaliland, affirming its "steadfast commitment" to Somalia's unity and territorial integrity, and warning that such moves could undermine peace and stability across the continent, according to statements by the Chairperson of the African Union Commission.



Joint International Reaction & Regional Organizations

Joint International Statement

21 Arab, Islamic, & African Nations + OIC:

- ✓ Categorically rejected Israeli recognition of Somaliland
- ✓ Condemned as illegal & dangerous precedent
- ✓ Affirmed support for Somalia's unity & sovereignty
- ✓ Rejected any Palestinian displacement plans

27 December 2025

Türkiye

- ✓ Sharply condemned Israeli move as illegal step
- ✓ Accused Israel of destabilizing Horn of Africa
- ✓ Emphasized support for Somalia's unity

The United States

- ✓ Monitored developments cautiously
- ✓ Reaffirmed support for Somalia's unity
- ✓ Viewed recognition through regional stability lens

Türkiye

- ✓ Sharply condemned Israeli move as illegal step
- ✓ Accused Israel of destabilizing Horn of Africa
- ✓ Emphasized support for Somali unity

The United States

- ✓ Monitored developments cautiously
- ✓ Reaffirmed support for Somalia's unity
- ✓ Viewed recognition through regional stability lens

The African Union

- ✓ Firmly rejected recognition of Somaliland
- ✓ Affirmed commitment to Somali unity
- ✓ Warned of threat to continental stability

Fifth: Implications of the Decision for Egypt and the Red Sea

For Egypt, Israel's presence in Somaliland represents a shift in the balance of power at the southern entrance of the Red Sea. The emergence of new, non-Arab security arrangements managed outside of collective frameworks risks bypassing Cairo's role as a central guarantor of maritime stability.

The primary concern is "strategic congestion." The addition of new intelligence and military platforms in the Gulf of Aden increases the likelihood of miscalculation among the many actors currently operating in the theater. For Egypt, any disruption to navigation or increase in maritime insurance costs has immediate economic consequences. Consequently, Cairo is expected to pursue a dual-track strategy: bolstering Somalia's legal standing in international forums while simultane-

ously enhancing its own naval deterrence and intelligence coordination with regional allies.



Prospective Scenarios: The Road Ahead

The recognition of Somaliland has initiated a period of profound uncertainty, with several potential trajectories:

1. Recognition Expansion:

Israel's move could break the international "ice," leading states like Ethiopia—who seek a Red Sea outlet—to follow suit. This would entrench Somaliland's status but could spark a "contagion of recognition" among other secessionist movements in Africa.

2. The Pressure Freeze

Intense opposition from the AU, UN, and Arab world may force Israel to "freeze" the formal aspects of recognition (such as opening an embassy) while maintaining quiet security and economic ties.

3. Internal Destabilization

The move could deepen the Mogadishu-Hargeisa rift, potentially leading to diplomatic or even military escalation. Armed groups like Al-Shabaab might also exploit the "external interference" narrative to bolster their domestic standing.

4. Operational Security Partnership

This scenario assumes a focus on the maritime dimension, where Somaliland becomes a functional—if not fully diplomatically integrated—hub for Red Sea security, potentially involving the UAE or the United States in shared surveillance tasks.

5. The Negotiating Lever

Israel may use the Somaliland file as a pressure point in broader negotiations over Gaza and the Palestinian issue, utilizing its relationship with Hargeisa to market "humanitarian-developmental" solutions that serve its long-term demographic and political goals.



16 Gen Ahmed Zaghoul, Rapidly escalating complications: What are the repercussions of Israel's recognition of Somaliland?, Ra'a Center for Strategic Studies. <https://rcsseypt.com/24230>

17 Rapidly escalating complications: What are the repercussions of Israel's recognition of Somaliland?,



Conclusion

Israel's recognition of Somaliland is far from a symbolic gesture; it is a calculated strategic gambit intended to redraw the map of influence in the Red Sea. While it offers Somaliland a historic opportunity for legitimacy and provides Israel with vital strategic depth, it simultaneously threatens the fragile unity of the Somali

state and the existing regional security architecture. Whether this move proves to be a transformative shift toward stability or a catalyst for further fragmentation will depend on how the international community manages the fallout of this new geopolitical reality.