

**Somaliland's Recognition: Geopolitical, Strategic, and Legal Opportunities for the U.S. and U.K.
with U.S. Legislative Impacts**

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Abstract

This paper explores the multifaceted case of Somaliland's quest for international recognition, with an emphasis on its implications for the United States and the United Kingdom. Somaliland's unique historical trajectory, stable governance, and strategic geographic position make it a compelling candidate for state recognition, despite resistance from Somalia and broader geopolitical complexities. The introduction of U.S. House Resolution 10402 and the potential policy shifts under Project 2025 underscore growing U.S. interest in Somaliland as a partner in counterterrorism and trade in the Horn of Africa. Similarly, the United Kingdom's historical ties and strategic considerations position it as a key actor in this debate. However, recognizing Somaliland poses significant diplomatic challenges, including potential destabilization of Somalia and broader repercussions for separatist movements worldwide. This analysis highlights the interplay between legal principles, geopolitical strategy, and international norms in shaping Somaliland's path to recognition.

Keywords

Somaliland, international recognition, U.S. foreign policy, U.K. diplomacy, House Resolution 10402, Project 2025, state sovereignty, Horn of Africa, counterterrorism, geopolitical strategy.

Introductions

The issue of Somaliland's quest for international recognition has been a subject of significant debate and evolving discourse in recent years. Its official recognition by the international community has remained elusive. Recently, however, a combination of legislative initiatives and shifting geopolitical considerations has brought the issue to the forefront of international diplomacy, particularly in the context of United States and United Kingdom foreign policy. Central to this development are two key factors: the introduction of U.S. House Resolution 10402 and the release of Project 2025, a policy document that outlines priorities for a potential second Trump administration. This paper examines the historical, geopolitical, and strategic complexities surrounding Somaliland's bid for recognition, with particular attention to the interests of the United States and the United Kingdom.

A Historical Foundation for Somaliland's Pursuit of Recognition

Somaliland's historical trajectory provides essential context for understanding its pursuit of international recognition. The region was a British protectorate until 1960, when it gained independence and subsequently united with the Italian-administered territory of Somalia to form the Somali Republic. However, the political union quickly became strained as Somaliland's population faced political and economic marginalization by the central government in Mogadishu.

The Somali Civil War, which erupted in 1991, worsened the situation. As Somalia descended into anarchy and state collapse, Somaliland unilaterally declared its independence, choosing to separate from the rest of Somalia. Since then, Somaliland has effectively governed itself, establishing democratic institutions, maintaining a relatively stable political environment, and developing a functioning economy. Despite these successes, Somaliland's lack of international recognition has hindered its ability to access the global financial system, secure international aid, and integrate into the global economy. Consequently, it has become heavily reliant on remittances from its diaspora and faces challenges in regional trade.

For Somaliland, international recognition would not only be a political victory but would unlock significant economic potential. Recognition would grant access to global markets, attract investment, and enable the country to secure loans from international financial institutions. The prospect of recognition, therefore, holds profound implications for Somaliland's development in critical sectors such as energy, logistics, and infrastructure.

Geopolitical and Strategic Significance of Somaliland

Somaliland's geographic position underscores its strategic importance in both regional and global contexts. Located along the Red Sea and bordering the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, a vital maritime chokepoint for global oil shipments, Somaliland occupies a critical position in international trade. The Berbera port, which has attracted significant international investment, including a \$442 million expansion by the UAE, plays a central role in facilitating trade for landlocked Ethiopia, thus cementing Somaliland's status as a strategic economic hub.

In addition to its economic importance, Somaliland's stability offers significant security advantages. While Somalia continues to struggle with the presence of al-Shabaab militants, Somaliland has largely remained secure, with a relatively low incidence of terrorism and armed conflict. This stability stands in stark contrast to Somalia's chaotic situation, positioning Somaliland as a potential partner for counterterrorism cooperation in a region where the United States and other global powers have vital strategic interests.

The United States, in particular, has growing interests in the Horn of Africa due to its proximity to key trade routes, the fight against terrorism, and the influence of China and Russia in the region. A formal relationship with Somaliland could provide the United States with an alternative to its current base in Djibouti, where China has established its largest overseas military base. Diversifying U.S. partnerships in the region could reduce dependence on a single location and strengthen its strategic position relative to rising global powers.

The Role of the United States: Legislative and Strategic Considerations

The introduction of U.S. House Resolution 10402, spearheaded by U.S. Representative Scott Perry (R-PA-10), represents a significant development in the ongoing debate surrounding Somaliland's pursuit of international recognition. This resolution, which calls for the official recognition of Somaliland as an independent state by the United States, highlights critical aspects of Somaliland's democratic governance, political stability, and alignment with U.S. strategic interests in the Horn of Africa. Representative Perry, a vocal advocate for Somaliland's cause, has framed the issue as a matter of

American foreign policy that transcends the interests of one nation, viewing it as a broader strategic opportunity to strengthen U.S. influence in Africa and counter geopolitical adversaries, such as China and Russia, who are increasing their foothold on the continent. Proponents of the resolution argue that recognizing Somaliland would significantly enhance American credibility in supporting democratic, stable nations in a volatile region, in line with U.S. ideals of promoting democracy and countering authoritarian regimes.

Despite these strategic advantages, U.S. recognition of Somaliland presents a series of formidable diplomatic challenges. Chief among these is the unwavering opposition from Somalia's government, which considers Somaliland's independence a direct threat to its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Somalia has long argued that the recognition of Somaliland would not only undermine its national unity but also set a dangerous precedent for other separatist movements across Africa and beyond. The Somali government's concerns are grounded in the belief that allowing Somaliland's secession could spur similar independence movements in regions with ethnic or territorial tensions, particularly in the Horn of Africa. The United States, in choosing to recognize Somaliland, would risk further destabilizing its relations with Somalia, a country with which it maintains crucial counterterrorism partnerships, especially in the ongoing battle against Al-Shabaab. Such a move could complicate U.S.-Somalia cooperation on security matters, heightening tensions and potentially endangering the delicate balance of counterterrorism operations in the region.

Moreover, the broader geopolitical implications of recognizing Somaliland are profound. U.S. recognition could set a precedent that encourages separatist movements worldwide, especially in regions where the principle of territorial integrity remains central to state sovereignty. Countries like Spain, with the ongoing issue of Catalonia, and India, with the situation in Kashmir, could perceive U.S. recognition of Somaliland as a threat to their own territorial unity. The United States, therefore, faces the delicate task of navigating these complex dynamics, ensuring that support for Somaliland does not inadvertently embolden separatist factions elsewhere, thereby jeopardizing broader international stability.

Beyond these immediate concerns, the publication of Project 2025, a policy document outlining priorities for a potential second Trump administration, suggests a strategic pivot toward bolstering U.S. ties with Somaliland. The framework articulated in Project 2025 envisions a recalibration of U.S. foreign policy in Africa, reducing reliance on Djibouti, a key regional ally, and fostering closer diplomatic and economic relations with Somaliland as part of a broader strategy to counter China and Russia's growing influence on the continent. For Representative Perry and other supporters of the resolution, this strategic shift presents an opportunity for the United States to establish a foothold in Somaliland, reinforcing its position in East Africa while advancing broader geopolitical objectives. The recognition of Somaliland, in this context, would not merely be a gesture of diplomatic support for a nascent democracy, but also a calculated move to enhance U.S. influence in a region where China's economic expansion and Russia's military outreach have become increasingly prominent.

For a future Trump administration, recognizing Somaliland could serve multiple purposes. Pragmatically, it would strengthen U.S. strategic alliances with a stable, democratic partner in the Horn of Africa, potentially serving as a bulwark against the growing influence of adversarial powers. Symbolically, it could reflect a commitment to supporting self-determination and democratic governance in Africa, aligning with American values while challenging the traditional norms of state sovereignty that often complicate international recognition of self-declared states.

In conclusion, while the recognition of Somaliland offers clear strategic advantages in terms of countering Chinese and Russian influence, as well as fostering ties with a stable and democratic partner,

it also presents a myriad of diplomatic and legal challenges. The United States must weigh these factors carefully, considering not only the immediate benefits but also the long-term consequences of setting a precedent that could influence global separatist movements and shape its future foreign policy direction

The United Kingdom: Historical Legacy and Strategic Interests in Somaliland's Recognition

The United Kingdom's position on Somaliland's recognition is intricately shaped by both its historical legacy as the former colonial power and its evolving strategic interests in the Horn of Africa. As the colonial ruler of Somaliland until its union with Somalia in 1960, the U.K. has maintained a degree of influence over Somaliland's political and economic trajectory. This historical connection has not only given the U.K. a unique perspective on Somaliland's quest for recognition but also a vested interest in its stability and governance.

The United Kingdom has played a pivotal role in Somaliland's development, providing substantial aid and fostering democratic governance. British officials, including former Defence Secretary Sir Gavin Williamson, have been vocal advocates for Somaliland's recognition, frequently emphasizing its democratic achievements and strategic importance in the region. Williamson and other key British figures have championed Somaliland as an example of stability and success in a region marked by political volatility. Their advocacy highlights Somaliland's democratic processes, including free and fair elections and peaceful transitions of power, which stand in stark contrast to the turmoil that often characterizes neighboring states. These democratic successes, British officials argue, make Somaliland a valuable partner in promoting regional peace and stability, and a beacon of governance in a volatile region.

Moreover, British officials, including Williamson, have underscored Somaliland's strategic importance due to its location in the Horn of Africa, an area critical for international trade routes, maritime security, and counterterrorism efforts. With its proximity to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, a vital gateway for global shipping, Somaliland holds significant geopolitical value. The U.K. has recognized the potential benefits of strengthening ties with Somaliland, particularly in terms of maritime security, anti-piracy operations, and regional counterterrorism initiatives.

Despite growing public and grassroots support for Somaliland's recognition, the U.K. government remains cautious in its formal stance. A formal recognition could risk antagonizing Somalia, a crucial partner in East African diplomacy, and undermine the African Union's guiding principles concerning territorial integrity and the inviolability of borders. This cautious approach has kept the U.K. in a diplomatic balancing act, carefully navigating its historical ties with Somaliland while maintaining its broader commitments to regional stability.

However, the recent election of Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi (Irro) as Somaliland's president may present a turning point in U.K. policy. Irro's focus on economic reform, alongside his emphasis on international diplomacy, could provide a compelling basis for the U.K. to engage more directly with Somaliland. His administration's prioritization of economic growth, security cooperation, and the fostering of international partnerships may present an opportunity for the U.K. to reconsider its approach, particularly in the realms of trade, infrastructure, and counterterrorism collaboration.

For the United Kingdom, deepening ties with Somaliland is seen not only as an avenue for fostering regional stability but also as a means of securing strategic interests in a key geopolitical hotspot. With the Horn of Africa increasingly central to global discussions on security and trade, the U.K.'s diplomatic recalibration regarding Somaliland could prove to be both an act of moral support for a stable democracy and a pragmatic shift in foreign policy that aligns with broader geopolitical objectives.

The Legal and Political Complexities of Recognition

The recognition of Somaliland presents a host of complex legal and political questions that challenge traditional frameworks of international law and the evolving norms of statehood. One of the central debates revolves around the principle of territorial integrity, a cornerstone of the African Union's approach to sovereignty. Historically, this principle has precluded the recognition of secessionist entities, regardless of their internal governance or aspirations for independence. Recognizing Somaliland could therefore establish a precedent that might encourage other separatist movements across Africa, potentially triggering further destabilization in countries already grappling with internal secessionist conflicts.

On the global stage, Somaliland's case brings into sharp focus the criteria that guide state recognition. While traditional international law has prioritized historical territorial claims, it is increasingly being questioned whether effective governance, the presence of democratic institutions, and political stability should take precedence in determining statehood. Somaliland's remarkable ability to establish and maintain a functioning state, free from the violence and anarchy that have plagued Somalia for decades, challenges conventional definitions of state sovereignty and calls for a reconsideration of the underlying principles governing state recognition in the modern international system.

For both the United States and the United Kingdom, recognizing Somaliland would signify a commitment to the values of democracy, stability, and counterterrorism. Somaliland's relative peace, coupled with its strategic position in the Horn of Africa, aligns with these priorities, presenting a compelling case for recognition. However, such a decision carries risks, particularly in terms of the diplomatic repercussions it may have. The potential for strained relations with Somalia and its allies, including key regional actors such as Turkey and Qatar, cannot be overlooked. Additionally, countries with their own internal separatist movements could view the recognition of Somaliland as a precedent that undermines their territorial integrity.

Conclusion: A Pivotal Moment in Global Diplomacy

The debate surrounding Somaliland's recognition is emblematic of the broader tensions that arise when balancing strategic interests, historical precedents, and the evolving norms of statehood in international relations. As the United States weighs the implications of H.R.10402 and the United Kingdom revisits its policy toward Somaliland, the future of this self-declared state remains uncertain. Recognition could offer Somaliland substantial political and economic opportunities, positioning it as a key player in both regional and global affairs. However, the potential for destabilization within Somalia and the broader Horn of Africa necessitates a careful, nuanced approach to diplomacy and policy formulation.

Somaliland's quest for international recognition extends beyond the desire for statehood; it represents a critical test for the international community's capacity to adapt to the shifting dynamics of global geopolitics. For major powers like the United States and the United Kingdom, Somaliland presents both an opportunity and a challenge. Their response to this issue will not only shape the future of Somaliland but also influence the evolving norms surrounding sovereignty, statehood, and global diplomacy in the 21st century.