

Research Article

Navigating New Horizons: Somaliland's Administration and Its Evolving Foreign Policy Strategy

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Abstract

Somaliland, a self-declared independent state in the Horn of Africa, has long sought international recognition while navigating a complex geopolitical landscape. Despite its lack of formal recognition, Somaliland has developed a distinct administrative structure and a pragmatic foreign policy strategy aimed at fostering economic development, regional stability, and international engagement. This article examines the evolution of Somaliland's foreign policy, analyzing its diplomatic efforts, regional partnerships, and the challenges it faces in gaining global legitimacy. By exploring Somaliland's unique approach to statecraft, this study highlights the interplay between domestic governance and international relations in unrecognized states, offering insights into the broader dynamics of sovereignty and diplomacy in the 21st century. Somaliland's foreign policy strategy is driven by its objectives of gaining international recognition, fostering economic development, ensuring regional security, and building diplomatic relationships. While it has made significant strides in these areas, challenges such as lack of recognition, border disputes, and limited resources continue to hinder its progress. Somaliland's ability to leverage its relative stability and democratic governance remains central to its foreign policy efforts. Somaliland's diplomatic efforts have achieved notable successes, particularly in building economic partnerships and engaging with regional and international actors. However, its lack of formal recognition, strained relations with Somalia, and internal challenges remain significant setbacks. Somaliland's ability to navigate these complexities will determine its future diplomatic trajectory.

Keywords

Somaliland, Foreign Policy, Unrecognized States, Horn of Africa, Diplomacy, Statecraft, International Relations

1. Introduction

Somaliland's declaration of independence from Somalia in 1991 marked the beginning of a unique experiment in state-building. Despite its absence of formal recognition, Somaliland has established a functioning government, maintained relative stability, and pursued an active foreign policy aimed at securing its place in the international community. This article explores the evolution of Somaliland's foreign policy

strategy, focusing on its diplomatic initiatives, regional engagements, and the challenges it faces in navigating a world dominated by recognized nation-states. Methodologically this article employed a qualitative research methodology, rely on desk reviews and content analysis as methods of data collection.

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2. Historical Context: The Foundations of Somaliland's Statehood

Somaliland's claim to statehood is rooted in its historical legacy as a former British protectorate, distinct from Italian-administered Somalia. Following the collapse of the Somali state in 1991, Somaliland reclaimed its independence and embarked on a path of democratization and state-building. This section provides an overview of Somaliland's historical trajectory, highlighting the factors that have shaped its administrative structure and foreign policy objectives.

3. Domestic Governance and Its Influence on Foreign Policy

Somaliland's domestic governance model, characterized by hybrid political institutions and a commitment to democratic principles, has played a crucial role in shaping its foreign policy. This section examines how internal stability, economic development, and public opinion influence Somaliland's international engagements. It also discusses the role of key institutions, such as the presidency, parliament, and civil society, in formulating and implementing foreign policy.

Somaliland, a self-declared independent state in the Horn of Africa, operates as a de facto sovereign entity despite lacking international recognition. Its domestic governance significantly influences its foreign policy, particularly in its quest for recognition, economic development, and regional stability. Below is an analysis of Somaliland's domestic governance and its impact on foreign policy, supported by reputable sources. Key features include:

Democratic Elections: Somaliland has held multiple peaceful elections since declaring independence in 1991, including presidential, parliamentary, and local elections. This democratic process is rare in the region and is often cited as a model for other African states.

Clan-Based Governance: Traditional elders play a significant role in conflict resolution and political decision-making through the Guurti (upper house of parliament). This system has helped maintain stability and social cohesion.

Rule of Law: Somaliland has developed its own legal and judicial systems, which are relatively functional compared to neighboring Somalia.

4. Influence of Domestic Governance on Foreign Policy

Somaliland's domestic governance directly shapes its foreign policy objectives and strategies. Key influences include:

a) Quest for International Recognition

Somaliland's relatively stable and democratic governance is a central argument in its campaign for international recognition. It contrasts itself with Somalia, which has struggled

with instability and weak governance since 1991 [1]. Somaliland's leaders frequently highlight their democratic credentials and effective governance to garner support from the international community [2].

b) Economic Development and Trade

Somaliland's governance has enabled it to attract foreign investment and establish trade relationships, particularly with neighboring countries like Ethiopia and Djibouti [3]. The Berbera port, managed in partnership with DP World (UAE), is a key example of how domestic stability facilitates foreign economic engagement [4].

c) Regional Security and Diplomacy

Somaliland's governance has allowed it to position itself as a stable actor in a volatile region. It collaborates with international partners, including the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU), on issues like counter-terrorism and maritime security [5]. Its ability to maintain internal stability enhances its credibility as a regional partner [6].

d) Challenges to Foreign Policy

Despite its achievements, Somaliland faces challenges in its foreign policy due to domestic issues such as:

Limited Resources: As an unrecognized state, Somaliland lacks access to international financial institutions, limiting its ability to fund development projects.

Clan Divisions: While clan-based governance has been a strength, it can also lead to political fragmentation, complicating foreign policy coherence [6].

Border Disputes: Tensions with Puntland over the Sool and Sanaag regions undermine Somaliland's stability and international image [7].

5. Somaliland's Foreign Policy Strategy: Objectives and Priorities

Somaliland's foreign policy strategy is shaped by its unique position as a self-declared independent state that lacks international recognition. Its objectives and priorities are centered on gaining recognition, fostering economic development, ensuring regional security, and building diplomatic relationships. Below is an analysis of Somaliland's foreign policy strategy.

This section analyzes the key pillars of Somaliland's foreign policy, including its efforts to build bilateral relationships, engage with regional organizations, and attract foreign investment.

1) Primary Objectives of Somaliland's Foreign Policy.

a) International Recognition

The foremost objective of Somaliland's foreign policy is to gain formal recognition as an independent state. Since declaring independence in 1991, Somaliland has sought recognition from the African Union (AU), the United Nations (UN), and individual countries [8]. Its argument for recognition is based on its historical status as a former British protectorate, its distinct borders, and its relative stability com-

pared to Somalia [2].

b) *Economic Development and Trade*

Somaliland aims to attract foreign investment and establish trade partnerships to boost its economy. Key projects include the development of the Berbera port, which is managed in partnership with DP World (UAE), and the Berbera Corridor, a trade route connecting Somaliland to Ethiopia. These initiatives are critical for reducing unemployment and improving infrastructure [3].

c) *Regional Security and Stability*

Somaliland positions itself as a stable and reliable partner in the Horn of Africa, a region plagued by conflict and instability. It collaborates with international actors on counter-terrorism, piracy prevention, and maritime security. Its stability is a key selling point in its diplomatic engagements [5].

d) *Diplomatic Engagement*

Somaliland seeks to build bilateral and multilateral relationships with countries and international organizations. While formal recognition remains elusive, Somaliland has established informal diplomatic ties with several countries, including Ethiopia, Djibouti, and the UAE [6].

2) *Priorities in Somaliland's Foreign Policy*

a) *Strengthening Ties with Neighboring Countries*

Somaliland prioritizes relationships with neighboring states, particularly Ethiopia and Djibouti, due to their strategic and economic importance. Ethiopia, in particular, is a key trading partner and has a vested interest in the Berbera port as an alternative to Djibouti's port [7].

b) *Engaging with International Organizations*

Somaliland actively engages with international organizations such as the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU), and the United Nations (UN) to advocate for recognition and support for its development projects. While it is not a member of these organizations, it seeks observer status or other forms of engagement [1].

c) *Attracting Foreign Investment*

Somaliland's foreign policy emphasizes attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) to develop its infrastructure, energy, and telecommunications sectors. The government has signed agreements with international companies, such as DP World, to develop the Berbera port and expand its trade capacity [6].

d) *Countering Piracy and Terrorism*

Somaliland plays a role in regional security by combating piracy and terrorism. Its coastguard has been effective in patrolling its waters, and it collaborates with international partners to address security threats in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea [5].

6. Regional Dynamics: Somaliland's Engagement in the Horn of Africa

The Horn of Africa is a region marked by complex political, economic, and security dynamics.

Somaliland's engagement in the Horn of Africa is shaped

by its unique position as a self-declared independent state that lacks international recognition. Despite this, Somaliland has managed to establish itself as a relatively stable and functional entity in a region often characterized by conflict and instability. Its regional dynamics are influenced by its quest for recognition, economic partnerships, security collaborations, and diplomatic engagements. Below is an analysis of Somaliland's regional dynamics.

1) *Economic Engagement*

Somaliland has prioritized economic partnerships with neighboring countries, particularly Ethiopia and Djibouti. The Berbera port, managed in partnership with DP World (UAE), is a key asset in Somaliland's economic strategy. The port serves as a gateway for Ethiopian trade, reducing Ethiopia's reliance on Djibouti's port. The Berbera Corridor, a trade route connecting Berbera to Ethiopia, is a critical infrastructure project that enhances regional trade [6]. Somaliland has attracted foreign investment from countries like the UAE and Turkey, particularly in infrastructure and energy sectors. These investments are crucial for Somaliland's economic development and regional integration.

2) *Security Collaboration*

Somaliland has played a significant role in combating piracy in the Gulf of Aden. Its coastguard, supported by international partners, has been effective in patrolling its waters and ensuring maritime security. This has contributed to the overall reduction of piracy in the region. In the same vein, Somaliland collaborates with regional and international actors to counter terrorism, particularly the threat posed by Al-Shabaab. Its relative stability and effective governance make it a valuable partner in regional security initiatives.

3) *Diplomatic Engagements*

a) *Relations with Ethiopia*

Ethiopia is one of Somaliland's most important regional partners. The two countries have strong economic ties, particularly through the Berbera port and trade corridor. Ethiopia has also been supportive of Somaliland's quest for recognition, although it has not formally recognized Somaliland's independence.

b) *Relations with Djibouti*

Djibouti, another key neighbor, has a complex relationship with Somaliland. While Djibouti hosts Somaliland's main trade competitor (the Port of Djibouti), it also engages with Somaliland on regional security and economic issues.

c) *Engagement with Somalia*

Somaliland's relationship with Somalia is strained due to its unilateral declaration of independence. While Somalia insists on the unity of its territory, Somaliland seeks recognition as a separate state. Despite this, there have been occasional dialogues between the two sides, facilitated by international actors.

4) *Regional Challenges*

Somaliland's territorial disputes with Puntland over the Sool and Sanaag regions remain a significant challenge. These conflicts undermine Somaliland's stability and com-

plicate its regional engagements. In addition, the absence of formal recognition limits Somaliland's ability to fully engage in regional organizations like the African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). This hinders its diplomatic and economic prospects. As an unrecognized state, Somaliland lacks access to international aid and loans, which limits its ability to fund development projects and provide public services. This affects its capacity to engage effectively in regional initiatives.

7. Case Studies: Somaliland's Diplomatic Successes and Setbacks

Somaliland's diplomatic efforts have been marked by both successes and setbacks as it seeks international recognition and regional integration. Below are case studies highlighting key diplomatic achievements and challenges.

1) Diplomatic Successes

a) Engagement with Ethiopia

Ethiopia is one of Somaliland's most important regional partners. Although Ethiopia has not formally recognized Somaliland's independence, it has established strong economic and political ties with Hargeisa. In 2018, Ethiopia signed an agreement to acquire a 19% stake in the Berbera port, signaling its commitment to Somaliland's economic development. This partnership underscores Somaliland's strategic importance in the region [3].

b) Berbera Port Agreement with DP World

In 2016, Somaliland signed a \$442 million agreement with DP World, a UAE-based global port operator, to develop and manage the Berbera port. This deal not only boosted Somaliland's economy but also enhanced its international profile. The UAE's involvement signaled growing interest in Somaliland as a strategic partner in the Horn of Africa.

c) Diplomatic Outreach to the African Union (AU)

Somaliland has actively engaged with the African Union to advocate for recognition. In 2005, the AU sent a fact-finding mission to Somaliland, which acknowledged its unique case for statehood. Although the AU has not granted recognition, Somaliland's diplomatic efforts have kept its case on the agenda [1].

d) Informal Diplomatic Ties

Somaliland has established informal diplomatic relations with several countries, including the UK, Belgium, and Sweden. These countries maintain liaison offices in Hargeisa, providing Somaliland with a degree of international engagement despite its lack of formal recognition [8].

2) Diplomatic Setbacks

a) Lack of Formal Recognition

Despite its relative stability and democratic governance, Somaliland has failed to gain formal recognition from any country or international organization. This remains its most significant diplomatic setback, limiting its access to international aid, loans, and participation in global forums.

b) Strained Relations with Somalia

Somaliland's unilateral declaration of independence in 1991 has led to ongoing tensions with Somalia, which insists on the unity of its territory. Despite occasional dialogues facilitated by international actors, no resolution has been reached, and Somalia continues to oppose Somaliland's recognition.

c) Border Disputes with Puntland

Somaliland's territorial disputes with Puntland over the Sool and Sanaag regions have undermined its stability and international image. These conflicts have diverted resources from development and complicated its diplomatic efforts.

d) Limited Engagement with the Arab League

Somaliland's efforts to engage with the Arab League have been largely unsuccessful. The organization has consistently supported Somalia's territorial integrity, leaving Somaliland with little room to maneuver in the Arab world.

3) Case Studies

Case Study 1: The UAE's Role in Somaliland

The UAE's involvement in Somaliland, particularly through the Berbera port agreement, highlights both opportunities and challenges. While the deal has brought economic benefits and enhanced Somaliland's international profile, it has also sparked tensions with Somalia, which views the agreement as a violation of its sovereignty [3].

Case Study 2: The African Union Fact-Finding Mission (2005)

In 2005, the AU sent a fact-finding mission to Somaliland to assess its case for recognition. The mission acknowledged Somaliland's unique historical and political circumstances but stopped short of recommending recognition. This case study illustrates the complexities of Somaliland's diplomatic efforts within the AU framework.

8. Conclusion

Somaliland's domestic governance, characterized by democratic elections, clan-based conflict resolution, and relative stability, significantly influences its foreign policy. Its governance model is a key asset in its pursuit of international recognition, economic partnerships, and regional security collaboration. However, internal challenges such as resource limitations and clan divisions continue to hinder its foreign policy objectives.

Somaliland's foreign policy strategy is driven by its objectives of gaining international recognition, fostering economic development, ensuring regional security, and building diplomatic relationships. While it has made significant strides in these areas, challenges such as lack of recognition, border disputes, and limited resources continue to hinder its progress. Somaliland's ability to leverage its relative stability and democratic governance remains central to its foreign policy efforts.

Somaliland's engagement in the Horn of Africa is characterized by its efforts to build economic partnerships, enhance

regional security, and pursue diplomatic recognition. While it faces significant challenges, including border disputes and lack of recognition, Somaliland's relative stability and effective governance make it a key player in the region. Its ability to leverage these strengths will determine its future role in the Horn of Africa.

Somaliland's diplomatic efforts have achieved notable successes, particularly in building economic partnerships and engaging with regional and international actors. However, its lack of formal recognition, strained relations with Somalia, and internal challenges remain significant setbacks. Somaliland's ability to navigate these complexities will determine its future diplomatic trajectory.

Abbreviations

AU	African Union
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority Development
UNSC	United Nations Security Council

Author Contributions

Abdillahi Mohamed Bile is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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Biography

Abdillahi Mohamed Bile currently is a Director of Good governance Department at Somaliland Good Governance Commission. He holds BA in Development Management, MA in Peace and Conflict Studies, LLM in International Law and Diplomacy and MSc in Energy Policy and Climate Change. His area of research interests are analysing for security, governance and diplomacy issues in the region. He has a scholarly articles published in reputable international journals such as, 1. "The Human Security Challenges in the Horn of Africa: The Case of Somaliland. published at the International Journal of Conflict. management. 2. A Legal Analysis of Somaliland's Guest for Statehood under International Law. Published at International Law for Modern Law and Policy. 3. The climate change and security nexus: Addressing the Impact Of Climate Change On Peace And Security In Somaliland. Published at the international Peer-Reviewed and Multidisciplinary IRE Journals. He is a Senior Lecturer at Civil Service Institute and Abaarso Tech University Post Graduate Schools for courses related to the International Security, Diplomacy and International Law. He is a founder of the Guul-arag Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies.