



POLICY BRIEF

Somaliland: A Strategic Ally for the United States in the Horn of Africa

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Laasgeel Institute for Policy Studies and Research Analysis (LIPS) is an independent think tank that promotes good governance, democratic institutions, and advocates for Somaliland's recognition through research, policy analysis, and strategic advocacy aimed at informing Somaliland's decision-makers.



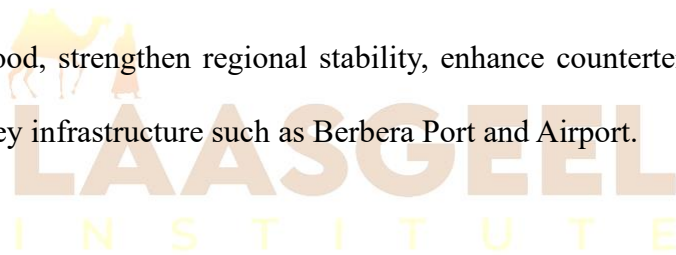
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1. Summary

This policy brief addresses why a strategic partnership between the United States and the Republic of Somaliland benefits U.S. national security, economic interests, and geopolitical goals in the Horn of Africa. Somaliland's strategic position along the Gulf of Aden and near the Bab El-Mandeb Strait offers Washington a valuable opportunity to strengthen its regional influence, counteract entities opposed to its interests, such as China and extremist groups, protect vital maritime trade routes, and enhance counterterrorism efforts. Recognizing Somaliland would also correct a long-standing historical injustice against its people and establish a reliable democratic partner in an unstable region. With increasing bipartisan support in Congress and the Senate, along with Somaliland's strong governance, security record, and untapped resource potential, this brief recommends that the United States officially recognize Somaliland's statehood, strengthen regional stability, enhance counterterrorism cooperation, and gain access to key infrastructure such as Berbera Port and Airport.



2. Overview Context

2.1: Understanding Somaliland: Historical Background and Unique Case.

Somaliland was a former British protectorate until it achieved full independence de jure status on June 26, 1960, from Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Currently, archives hold several agreements signed between Somaliland and the United Kingdom, including a congratulatory letter sent by Queen Elizabeth II on June 26, 1960, celebrating Somaliland's independence.

Furthermore, the State of Somaliland received recognition from 35 countries, including most of the permanent members of the UN Security Council. U.S. Secretary of State Christian Herter also sent a congratulatory telegram on Somaliland's Independence Day.

The anticipated union between a newly independent Somaliland and the Italian trusteeship of Somalia never materialized. As a result, the Republic of Somaliland regained its sovereignty on May 18, 1991, after a prolonged and difficult liberation struggle. Therefore, Somaliland is not a new country attempting to secede from Somalia because it has never legally transferred its jurisdiction to Somalia.

Additionally, Somaliland's international borders were established when it declared independence on June 26, 1960, based on historical treaties such as the Anglo-French Agreement of 1888, the Anglo-Italian Protocol of 1894, the Anglo-Ethiopian Treaty of 1897, and the demarcation along the southern coast of the Gulf of Aden.

The African Union's 2005 fact-finding mission recognised the uniqueness of Somaliland's situation, emphasizing that it would not open a "Pandora's box" of secessionist movements across the continent. Therefore, recognition would not violate the African Union Charter, as Somaliland's borders are based on the *Uti Possidetis Juris* principle, and the African Union Organization endorses the Cairo Resolution of 1964.

Since reclaiming its sovereignty, Somaliland has demonstrated remarkable progress in peacebuilding and state-building. It has maintained stability, upheld democratic governance, and safeguarded the rule of law and freedom of speech—all without external support or official recognition. The country is free from piracy and terrorism and has successfully conducted more than 11 elections, including four peaceful presidential elections with smooth transfers of power. These achievements reflect Somaliland's resilience and the common values it shares with the United States of America.

The Republic of Somaliland occupies a strategically important position along the Gulf of Aden, the Red Sea, and near the Bab El-Mandeb Strait, attracting growing attention from global powers due to its geopolitical significance. This prime location, therefore, offers the United

States a valuable opportunity to advance its economic, security, and geopolitical interests in the Horn of Africa.

2.2: The U.S. Diplomatic Engagement Building Momentum

U.S. Interest in the Port of Berbera, Somaliland, is not new. During the Cold War, the United States operated a military base there, recognizing its strategic value.

Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthi rebels may have replaced Somalia pirates as the main disruptors of traffic in the Red Sea, but their attacks remain a major threat to global trade and draw the region closer to the Middle East conflict. Russia is eyeing Port Sudan, while Djibouti hosts numerous foreign forces, including Chinese troops. Meanwhile, Turkey maintains its largest foreign base in Somalia. In this complex environment, Somaliland offers the U.S. a unique strategic alternative to strengthen its military presence and serve as a counterbalance

The United States already has a presence in the Horn of Africa, with its key military base, Camp Lemonnier, located in Djibouti, a neighbor of Somaliland. However, concern is growing over China's influence in the region as Beijing continues to strengthen its ties with Africa. Countering a rising China remains a top priority for President Trump, including disrupting China's Belt and Road Initiative, which is expanding across much of Africa. In this regard, the international port of Berbera, located in Somaliland, presents a valuable alternative. China has no presence there and was outraged when Taiwan established diplomatic relations with the Republic of Somaliland in 2020.

Several international media outlets have reported that U.S. President Donald Trump is contemplating extending formal recognition to the Republic of Somaliland in exchange for access to a military base in the strategically located Berbera Port. This development aligns with U.S. efforts to expand its military footprint in the region.

In a surprising development, U.S. President Donald Trump commented on the possibility of recognising Somaliland statehood. During a press conference with leaders from Azerbaijan and Armenia, he addressed Somaliland's quest for international recognition, stating, "Good question, we are looking into it right now," signaling that the U.S. is actively considering Somaliland's case for recognition.

The 2026 U.S. Government Budget allocates funding to strengthen and improve Somaliland's democratic institutions and security capabilities. According to the House Appropriations Committee report accompanying H.R. 4779, the Secretary of State must submit a report within 120 days of the bill's enactment. The report should detail potential areas for expanded U.S. engagement with Somaliland, including security, diplomacy, trade, and development.

Additionally, Prominent Republican think tanks, diplomats, former ambassadors, and powerful, influential Republicans are pushing for the same thing, including Congressman Scott Perry, who introduced a bill proposing the recognition of the Republic of Somaliland's independence act. Recently, other Congress Representatives, Pat Harrigan, Thomas Tiffany, Andrew Ogles, Rose, and Tim Burchett, joined in standing with the people of Somaliland.

It followed the publication in April 2023 of Project 2025, a roadmap for the second Trump presidency compiled by the prominent right-wing Heritage Foundation and more than 100 other conservative organizations. The document mentions only two African territories in its section on sub-Saharan Africa: Somaliland and Djibouti. It proposes "the recognition of Somaliland statehood as a hedge against the U.S.'s deteriorating position in Djibouti."

Moreover, an influential U.S.–China subcommittee in the U.S. House of Representatives is calling on the State Department to open a representative office in the Republic of Somaliland to counter rising Chinese influence in the region.

Additionally, Chairman John Moolenaar (R-MI) of the House Select Committee on China and Co-Chairman Chris Smith (R-NJ) of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) sent a letter to Secretary of State Marco Rubio, urging him to distinguish the Republic of Somaliland from Somalia in the U.S. travel advisory report.

U.S. Senator Ted Cruz (R-Texas), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health Policy, has formally urged President Donald Trump to recognize the Republic of Somaliland based on its 1960 independence status and internationally defined legal borders, in a letter issued on Thursday (August 14). He added that Somaliland faces threats, particularly from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), as Somalia, a close ally of China, opposes Somaliland's stronger pro-American stance and its diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

The US Africa Command has visited Somaliland several times, monitoring the Berbera International Port and Airport. The new head nominated for AFRICOM, Lt. Gen. Dagvin Anderson, has declared that the Pentagon is looking to deepen its partnership with the Republic of Somaliland.

In Somaliland, President Abdirahman Irro has welcomed these developments. Speaking at the World Government Summit, he expressed optimism that the United States will be the first country to recognize Somaliland. Additionally, in his recent interview with Bloomberg, he stated that "Somaliland is willing to offer the US a military base at the entrance to the Red Sea and a critical minerals exchange in its quest for international recognition." He also mentioned that "Somaliland has a good relationship with both the U.S. Department of Defense and Department of State, signaling growing ties between Washington and Hargeisa."

At the crossroads of key maritime trade routes, Somaliland is well-positioned to develop a strategic partnership with the United States in areas such as security, diplomacy, and economic

development, thereby boosting stability, prosperity, and countering anti-U.S. influence in the Horn of Africa.

The U.S. partnership with Somaliland would benefit both U.S. national security and economic objectives. The previous U.S. “One Somalia” policy has failed to safeguard interests, especially as Somalia closely collaborates with China. The Republic of Somaliland is a willing partner of the U.S., avoiding adversarial tactics in hopes of forming a potential alliance.

3. Somaliland: A Strategic Partner for the United States

The following six strategic factors make Somaliland an essential consideration for the United States in developing a new regional alliance.

3.1 Geostrategic Location

Situated along the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, near the Bab El-Mandeb Strait, Somaliland plays a crucial role in global maritime trade and regional security. Its strategic location presents the United States with a unique opportunity to secure an important maritime route and to counter the influence of regional and global actors, such as China, in the Horn of Africa.

3.2 Security Cooperation and Counterterrorism

Somaliland is a reliable partner for collaboration on intelligence-sharing and counterterrorism efforts in the Horn of Africa, including actions to deter piracy and violent extremism. Despite lacking international recognition, Somaliland allocates nearly 40% of its national budget to security, underscoring its commitment to regional stability. The people of Somaliland are open-minded and strongly support their security forces, enabling the country to repel extremist groups from neighboring Somalia.

3.3 Democratic Governance and Stability

Somaliland has a fully functioning democratic system, characterized by peaceful transfers of power and respect for the rule of law, which sharply contrasts with many regimes in the region. Therefore, given President Trump's focus on democratic values and good governance, Somaliland emerges as a natural and trustworthy ally for the United States.

3.4 Untapped Resource Potential

Somaliland is endowed with substantial untapped natural resources, including oil, gas, and high-quality rare earth minerals. These reserves, therefore, represent a potential alternative supply chain for U.S. industries, thereby reducing dependence on China and other unstable supply corridors, including those through Ukraine and the DRC. Critical and rare earth minerals now feature predominantly in national security strategies for many governments, but securing supply requires a partnership based on mutual interest. Notably, Somaliland's untapped resources include lithium, gold, gypsum, Tin, gas, and oil.

3.5: President Trump will earn the Nobel Peace Prize

President Trump's decision to recognise Somaliland will correct a long-standing historical injustice and nullify Somalia's unlawful political claims over Somaliland's sovereignty, as Somaliland's case is a legal matter rather than a political one. By doing so, he will demonstrate his leadership in advancing global peace and will merit the Nobel Peace Prize. The people of Somaliland, together with President Abdirahman Irro, have united their voices in nominating President Trump to be awarded this prestigious honor.

3.6 Strategic Value of Somaliland–Taiwan Relations

Somaliland has effectively countered Chinese influence, which exists in all its neighbors, and is one of only two nations in Africa that recognizes Taiwan. The U.S. relationship with Somaliland is a strategic move aimed at achieving advanced U.S. security and diplomatic goals to counter China's increasing influence in the region.

4. Policy Recommendations for the U.S. Government

- 1. Recognize Somaliland's statehood:** Based on its historical sovereignty, continuity of statehood, and decolonized borders on June 26, 1960, in line with U.S. values and international law.
- 2. Open a Counterterrorism Office in Hargeisa:** Improve intelligence sharing, monitor extremist threats, and enhance regional security coordination.
- 3. Secure strategic access to Berbera Port & Airstrip:** Strengthen maritime security and counter China/Iran influence in the Red Sea.
- 4. Support democratic resilience:** Provide targeted assistance to protect Somaliland's institutions from external pressure and destabilization.
- 5. Invest in Somaliland's natural resources:** The United States should invest in Somaliland's natural resources, such as oil, minerals, livestock, agriculture, and fisheries, given that Somaliland has an 850 km shoreline.
- 6. Recognition delay is a risk:** The delay in recognizing Somaliland risks adversely impacting U.S. interests and allows rival powers to expand their influence in the region, despite Somaliland's strategic position.
- 7. Address Somalia's baseless claims:** Somalia's unfounded territorial claims over Somaliland Sovereignty pose a significant risk of destabilizing the region and undermining broader U.S. interests in this strategic position.

1. Conclusion

Recognizing Somaliland and forming a strategic partnership would allow the U.S. to secure Red Sea maritime routes, enhance counterterrorism, and strengthen a stable democratic ally in

the Horn of Africa. It would also counter Chinese influence, safeguard global trade, and diversify access to critical minerals. Recognition would not violate international law or the African Union Charter, as Somaliland gained independence on June 26, 1960, and never entered a binding union with Somalia. Acting decisively now would secure Berbera's strategic advantages, bolster democratic governance, and make Somaliland a cornerstone of U.S. policy before rival powers establish a foothold.

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