



Policy Brief

Somaliland–Israel Cooperation: Advancing Security in the Red Sea Corridor and Regional Stability

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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.

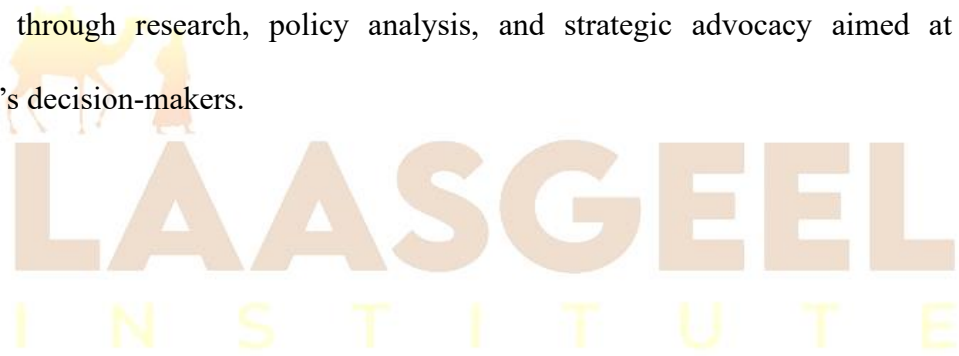


Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary	4
2. Introduction	4
3. Historical Background of Israel–Somaliland Relations	6
4. Re-engagement After 1991: Renewed Diplomatic Efforts	6
5. Why Somaliland’s Recognition Matters for Israel	7
6. Key Areas of Cooperation.....	8
6.1. Strategic defense Ally:.....	8
6.2. Diplomatic Engagement Alliance	8
6.3. Strategic Economic Alliance	10
6.4. Israel’s Pioneering Water Technologies.....	10
6.5. Sustainable Agriculture	11
7. International Reactions and Future Outlook.....	12
8. Why Key Actors Oppose Somaliland's recognition by Israel?	13
9. Policy Recommendations	15
10. Conclusion.....	15
11. Reference	16



1. Executive Summary

On 26 December 2025, Benjamin Netanyahu announced the official recognition of Somaliland as an independent and sovereign state. This historic decision marked the first recognition by a United Nations member state since Somaliland restored its sovereignty in 1991, breaking a three-decade diplomatic stalemate.

This policy brief examines the geopolitical significance, economic opportunities, and security benefits of this recognition, highlighting the strategic importance of Somaliland in the Red Sea Basin. It further analyzes historical relations between Somaliland and Israel, key areas of cooperation, and the reactions of regional and global actors.

The brief states that Israel's recognition is a strategic move to boost maritime security, expand diplomatic influence, and counter regional threats. It also offers Somaliland a unique chance to improve its international legitimacy, boost economic growth, and strengthen security partnerships.

2. Introduction

On 26 December, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made a historic move by officially recognizing the Republic of Somaliland as an independent, sovereign state.

This decision broke a three-decade diplomatic consensus and marked the first time a United Nations member state had recognized Somaliland's sovereignty since it declared the restoration of its sovereignty in 1991.

Israel and Somaliland issued a joint declaration establishing full diplomatic relations, including plans for the establishment of reciprocal embassies. Netanyahu framed the move as an extension of the Abraham Accords and invited Somaliland President Abdirahman Irro to Jerusalem.

Israel's grant of full recognition to the Republic of Somaliland represents a major shift in Red Sea geopolitics. As part of this development, Israel is expected to establish a diplomatic presence in Somaliland. It may be considered a security presence, marking its first sustained engagement in the region since relations with Eritrea deteriorated in 2020.

Israel's regional diplomacy had previously faced setbacks, particularly after the suspension of normalization with Sudan following the outbreak of civil war in April 2023. In this context, recognizing Somaliland offers Israel an opportunity to reassert its strategic presence in the Red Sea Basin and potentially encourage other states to reconsider Somaliland's international status (Washington Institute, 2025).

Since 1991, Somaliland has sustained relative peace, built functioning institutions, and held regular elections, including peaceful transfers of power, with four presidential elections and one vote-one-man. This record has strengthened its image as a credible and reliable partner on the international stage, with Israel even describing it as a “democratic, moderate Muslim” entity compatible with the Abraham Accords framework.

Widely recognized as one of the most stable polities in the Horn of Africa, Somaliland combines democratic governance with indigenous political traditions. Its predominantly Muslim society has consistently rejected extremism, upholding a model of moderate Islam alongside peace, stability, and accountable leadership.

3. Historical Background of Israel–Somaliland Relations

Diplomatic relations between the Republic of Somaliland and the State of Israel date back more than six decades. Israel was among the first states to recognize Somaliland following its independence from Great Britain on 26 June 1960, establishing an early foundation for bilateral engagement.

Israel was also the only state to provide moral and diplomatic support to the people of Somaliland during the genocide committed by the Somali regime under Mohamed Siad Barre. While much of the international community remained silent, Israel publicly called for accountability for mass violence widely recognized as genocide.

In 1990, Israel's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Yohanan Bein, formally warned the UN Security Council about the massacres carried out by Somali forces in Hargeisa, demonstrating Israel's willingness to uphold humanitarian principles even at diplomatic cost (Bein, 1990).

4. Re-engagement After 1991: Renewed Diplomatic Efforts

Following the restoration of its sovereignty in 1991, Somaliland sought to re-establish diplomatic relations with Israel. The late President Mohamed Haji Ibrahim Egal formally communicated with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, emphasizing Somaliland's strategic location and shared security concerns, including emerging extremist threats (Hagi, 2014).

During the mid-1990s, Somaliland's leadership highlighted the geopolitical shifts following the Cold War and the growing influence of transnational terrorist organizations across the Middle East and the Horn of Africa. These shared challenges created a basis for renewed cooperation.

In 2010, Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesperson Yigal Palmor stated that Israel was prepared to reconsider recognition of Somaliland based on its de jure independence of 1960 and its strategic location near the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden (Palmor, 2010).

Over the past decade, cooperation has expanded in the humanitarian sphere, particularly in health. Edna Adan University Hospital has facilitated medical training and treatment opportunities in Israel for thousands of Somaliland children, strengthening people-to-people ties and humanitarian cooperation (Ynet News, 2023).

5. Why Somaliland's Recognition Matters for Israel

The recognition of Somaliland by the State of Israel is not reckless; rather, it is a responsible and strategic move for both nations. reflecting a convergence of maritime security interests, regional competition, economic opportunity, and diplomatic ambition.

Somaliland has received its first recognition from a UN member state, while Israel gains access, presence, and influence in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea corridor to secure its national interests. The recognition breaks Somaliland's long-standing diplomatic isolation and lifts restrictions on the basic human rights of Somalilanders.

At the center of this strategy lies Somaliland's 850km coastline along the Gulf of Aden, adjacent to the Bab El-Mandeb Strait. Approximately 12 percent of global trade and a substantial share of Europe's energy imports pass through these waters.

For Israel, an alliance overlooking the strait and Yemen offers a decisive advantage in monitoring maritime traffic and countering threats originating from Yemen, particularly from Iran-backed Houthi rebels who have repeatedly targeted international shipping.

A formal Israeli presence would provide enhanced intelligence capabilities and a logistical foothold, shifting Israel's posture in the Red Sea from reactive to proactive

6. Key Areas of Cooperation

6.1. Strategic defense Ally:

Israel is among the most advanced states in the Middle East, possessing top-tier military capabilities, sophisticated intelligence systems, and a strong technological edge driven by extensive investment in research and development, artificial intelligence (AI), and a robust defense industry. It is also the only country in the Middle East that operates advanced U.S.-manufactured F-35 fighter aircraft.

Given Somaliland's strategic location in a highly sensitive geopolitical region, cooperation with Israel could enhance Somaliland's defense capacity through military modernization, intelligence sharing, and access to advanced technologies. Such a partnership would contribute not only to Somaliland's security but also to broader regional stability in the Horn of Africa and to the security of critical maritime routes, including the Bab El-Mandeb Strait, the Red Sea, and the Gulf of Aden.

6.2. Diplomatic Engagement Alliance

Following the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and Somaliland on December 26, 2025, and in line with the understandings reached during the visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gideon Sa'ar, to Somaliland in January 2026, the Government of the State of Israel has granted agreement to Somaliland's first Ambassador to Israel, Dr. Mohamed Hagi, a former Ambassador of Somaliland to Taiwan and a Special Adviser on Foreign Affairs to the President of Somaliland.

An Israeli Ambassador to Somaliland has already been appointed as an additional step in strengthening relations between the two countries, and they will soon open embassies in Hargeisa and Jerusalem.

The Foreign Minister, Gideon Sa'ar, has appointed Michael Lotem as Israel's first ambassador to Somaliland. Michael Lotem, who is currently serving as a non-resident economic ambassador to Africa, has been appointed as Israel's first ambassador to Somaliland. He previously served as Israel's ambassador to Kenya, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan. In the initial stage, Lotem will serve as a non-resident ambassador to Somaliland (Israel National News, 2026).

On April 14, 2026, the President of Somaliland, Dr. Abdirahman Mohamed Abdilahi Irro, praised Israel as the first United Nations (UN) member state to recognize the Republic of Somaliland, and the two chambers of Parliament rose in a standing ovation.

In his annual constitutional address to Parliament, the President also revealed that several other countries are expected to follow Israel in formally recognizing Somaliland in the near future, signaling that momentum may be building on the international stage.

Mr. Abdilahi also indicated that several states are in the pipeline to establish diplomatic engagement and direct working relationships with Somaliland, even in the absence of formal recognition. According to reports, Israel's allied countries are allegedly planning to follow Israel's recognition by issuing formal letters recognizing Somaliland as a sovereign state. Such a move would mark a major shift in regional diplomacy.

6.3. Strategic Economic Alliance

Somaliland occupies a strategically significant geographic position along the Gulf of Aden, with an extensive coastline stretching approximately 850 kilometers. The country is endowed with diverse economic assets, including a strong livestock sector, fisheries, agriculture, renewable energy potential, and emerging technology opportunities. In addition, Somaliland possesses largely untapped natural resources, such as oil, natural gas, and rare-earth minerals, including lithium, gemstones, and gold. These resources present substantial prospects for long-term economic growth and foreign investment, particularly when combined with effective governance and international partnerships.

In this context, Somaliland has expressed a strong interest in expanding its economic ties with Israel. President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi (Irro) has indicated that Somaliland aims to reach a formal trade agreement and is prepared to offer access to its natural resources—including minerals, oil, and gas—as a means of attracting Israeli investment (Reuters, 2026).

Such cooperation would create mutually beneficial opportunities, aligning Somaliland's development objectives with Israel's advanced technological expertise.

6.4. Israel's Pioneering Water Technologies

Israel's expertise in water technology and sustainable agriculture has positioned it as a global leader, contributing significantly to international efforts to combat water scarcity and enhance food security. Facing chronic water shortages, Israel has developed innovative solutions, including recycling nearly 90% of its wastewater, primarily for agricultural use, thereby reducing dependence on fresh water sources. (Perry, 2024).

In February 2026, a specialized course was conducted in Israel by MASHAV, the International Cooperation Center of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The course focused on capacity building for engineers from Somaliland and was led by the director general of the Ministry of Water of Somaliland. It aimed to support the construction, development and planning of water sector in Somaliland, while also strengthening professional cooperation between two states.

A delegation of 25 engineers from Somaliland completed a specialized water training program in Israel, focusing on advanced water management technologies. This program will significantly contribute to Somaliland's ongoing efforts to strengthen and develop the water sector.

These achievements demonstrate Israel's capacity to manage water efficiently, a model that could benefit Somaliland, given the similar climatic conditions, through collaboration in water cycle management. (MASHAV, 2024).

6.5. Sustainable Agriculture

Parallel to its advancements in water technology, Israel has achieved significant progress in sustainable agriculture. The country has transformed arid landscapes into productive farmland using technologies such as computerized irrigation systems, precision farming, and drip irrigation, which optimizes water use by delivering it directly to plant roots (Perry, 2024).

Israeli companies are also at the forefront of developing agricultural technologies (AgTech) that address critical issues like pest management, crop health monitoring, and soil optimization.

Somaliland, with its favorable conditions for agriculture, could collaborate with Israel to train local farmers in modern agricultural techniques, thereby increasing crop yields and enhancing food

security. Israel's integrated approach to water management and sustainable agriculture offers a model of innovation and efficiency.

Collaborative initiatives between Israel and Somaliland could enable knowledge transfer, technological adoption, and capacity building, strengthening Somaliland's agricultural sector while addressing water management challenges

7. International Reactions and Future Outlook

Somaliland's president has expressed hope that Israel's recognition will encourage other states, particularly the United States to follow suit. Israeli officials have reportedly lobbied key partners to support Somaliland's recognition (Washington Institute, 2025).

At a UN Security Council meeting on 29 December 2025, the United States defended Israel's right to recognize Somaliland. Influential U.S. policymakers, including Senator Ted Cruz and Congressman Scott Perry, have publicly supported recognition efforts. Project 2025 further highlights Somaliland's strategic importance as a hedge against declining U.S. influence in Djibouti (BBC, 2024).

Therefore, U.S. recognition of Somaliland would align with key strategic and policy interests across multiple dimensions. First, its potential inclusion in the Abraham Accords—brokered by the Trump Administration in 2020—would expand regional normalization efforts and strengthen emerging cooperation between Israel and Somaliland, both committed to peace and economic integration.

Second, Somaliland's strategic location along the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, as well as its proximity to the Bab El-Mandeb Strait, positions it as a critical partner in countering growing

Chinese influence and military expansion in the Horn of Africa, particularly given Beijing's established presence in nearby Djibouti.

Third, Somaliland possesses significant untapped rare-earth minerals and other natural resources that are increasingly important to global supply chains and U.S. economic security.

Fourthly, Somaliland has demonstrated over three decades of relative stability, democratic governance, peaceful transfers of power, and credible elections. This record sets it apart from broader regional instability and reinforces its potential as a dependable partner in advancing U.S. interests in security, trade, and long-term regional stability.

8. Why Key Actors Oppose Somaliland's recognition by Israel?

The key actors opposing Israel's recognition of Somaliland are not motivated by religion or alleged claims of Somalia's territorial unity. Instead, their opposition is primarily driven by strategic interests, as recognition threatens to disrupt their influence and objectives in the region.

Djibouti fears that recognizing Somaliland could undermine its strategic dominance as a hub for global powers. The United Arab Emirates-funded expansion of Berbera Port offers a credible alternative. With potential recognition by Israel, Somaliland's long Gulf of Aden coastline near the Bab El-Mandeb—anchored by Berbera Port—could become a strategic fallback for Western allies. This would complicate China's logistics centered in Djibouti and further deepen the Israel-UAE partnership.

The move also challenges Turkey's growing influence in Mogadishu, where Ankara operates a major military base and manages key infrastructure. By aligning with Somaliland, Israel creates a rival power center in the Horn of Africa, setting the stage for sustained geopolitical competition.

Thus, Turkey's opposition to Somaliland's recognition stems from its fear of losing its strategic interests in the Horn of Africa, most notably the agreements Somalia has signed granting Turkey significant access to its resources and cooperation on advanced military capabilities, including long-range missile testing.

Somaliland is the counter-model to Ankara's client architecture. Where Somalia becomes a vehicle for concessions and dependency, Somaliland demonstrates institutions without patrons. This challenges Turkey's narrative and its corridor strategy in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden region.

Egypt and Saudi Arabia may voice opposition to an Israeli move for tactical reasons: managing Arab consensus, relations with Mogadishu, and anxiety about precedent. Yet both face a strategic contradiction. Red Sea instability undermines their economies and security. The more instability is driven by proxy warfare, the more valuable an accountable and cooperative coastline becomes. Public objections today do not necessarily predict operational choices tomorrow.

The Chairperson of the African Union Commission opposes the recognition of Somaliland and reaffirms the African Union's unwavering commitment to the unity and so-called sovereignty of Somalia, which reflects a form of double standards and hypocrisy. Somaliland is not a secessionist entity seeking to secede from Somalia.

In this regard, the Republic of Somaliland does not violate the African Union Charter, which is grounded in the principles enshrined in the Constitutive Act of the African Union, particularly the respect for the intangibility of borders inherited at independence, as affirmed by the 1964 decision of the Organization of African Unity.

The African Union fact-finding mission in 2005 on the Somaliland case reported that Somaliland's recognition would not open a "Pandora's box" in Africa. This is what the African Union itself

determined regarding Somaliland: “The fact that the union between Somaliland and Somalia was never ratified and also malfunctioned when it went into action from 1960 to 1990 makes Somaliland's search for recognition historically unique and self-justified in African political history” (African Union Fact-Finding Mission, 2005).

9. Policy Recommendations

1. Strengthen diplomatic outreach globally
2. Institutionalize security cooperation
3. Expand economic and trade partnerships
4. Invest in water and agricultural collaboration
5. Maintain balanced regional diplomacy
6. Somaliland should initiate a targeted campaign to seek recognition from countries and organizations with economic and political ties to Israel

10. Conclusion

Israel’s recognition of Somaliland represents a transformative geopolitical shift. It strengthens bilateral security and economic cooperation, enhances regional stability, and offers Somaliland an opportunity to secure international legitimacy.

To maximize benefits, both countries must balance strategic ambitions with regional diplomacy and multilateral engagement to build a sustainable partnership in the Red Sea corridor. In conclusion, Israel’s partnership with Somaliland will boost its security in the Red Sea basin and may encourage the United States and other countries to follow suit.

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About the Laasgeel Institute: The Laasgeel Institute for Policy Studies and Research Analysis (LIPS) is an independent, nonpartisan think tank dedicated to advancing good governance, strengthening democratic institutions, fostering peace and security, and promoting Somaliland's recognition in foreign affairs. Through rigorous research, comprehensive policy analysis, and strategic advocacy, the Institute aims to shape Somaliland's future by informing evidence-based decision-makers.

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