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The Future of “Somaliland” and Its Impact on the Security of the Red Sea

Introduction:

The ongoing escalation of regional and international competition in the Red Sea along with its transformation into a theater of geopolitical conflict has reignited interest in the concept of new political geography. This renewed focus reflects a modern trajectory in international relations, characterized by efforts to redraw boundaries and assign strategic significance to breakaway territories that, in some cases, may surpass the influence of recognized states. One such case is the Republic of Somaliland, which unilaterally declared independence from the Federal Republic of Somalia without gaining international recognition. The longstanding dispute between the two entities has largely been treated as a domestic issue, with Somalia receiving the greater share of international and African support. However, the dynamic shifts that have occurred in the Red Sea region since October 7, 2023, coupled with intensifying competition among global powers for strategic footholds along this vital maritime corridor, have elevated Somaliland's geopolitical relevance. As a geographical entity, it now occupies a potentially pivotal position on the emerging geopolitical map of the Red Sea. This context raises a pressing question: Could the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait witness the emergence of a new state?

Research Problem:

It has become entrenched in the strategic thinking of states that whoever gains control over the Red Sea holds a decisive advantage over competitors and can dominate global trade routes. With the intensification of geopolitical competition in recent years and the growing efforts of regional and international powers to establish military footholds along the Red Sea the issue of Somaliland's unilateral declaration of independence has emerged as a new challenge. This development poses potential ramifications for the security of the Red Sea, particularly given Somaliland's strategic location near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. The

situation has gained further complexity following the signing of a memorandum of understanding between Somaliland and Ethiopia, granting the latter access to a military port on the Red Sea. These developments suggest a broader attempt to reshape the geopolitical landscape and regional engagement patterns in the Red Sea.

Research Objectives:

1. To identify the nature of the Somaliland issue and assess its implications for the security of the Red Sea.
2. To explore the future prospects of international recognition of Somaliland.



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3. To propose policy recommendations for addressing the Somaliland issue at the global, African, Arab, and Egyptian levels.

Research Questions:

1. What is the nature of the Somaliland issue?
2. To what extent does the future of Somaliland impact the security of the Red Sea?
3. How can the Somaliland issue be addressed at the international and regional levels?

Research Methodology:

This study adopts a descriptive analytical approach, relying on observation, description, and analysis of the Somaliland issue and the challenges surrounding its quest for international recognition. The methodology is aligned with the study's objectives and aims to assess the implications of this case for the security of the Red Sea. Furthermore, the study will explore potential scenarios regarding the possibility of Somaliland evolving into a state recognized by the international community.

Contents of the Study:

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First Axis: Conceptual Framework of the Study

First: The Somaliland Issue

The Republic of Somaliland represents a distinct case among African separatist entities not only because it is a self-declared republic that has managed to survive, conduct elections, and ensure peaceful transfers of power, but also because its claim to independence is built on a narrative that emphasizes its *separate colonial history* from the rest of Somalia. To understand the current Somaliland issue, it is essential to examine the *historical roots of the crisis*, which can be divided into *four key phases*:

Phase One: The Berlin Conference and the Formation of the Modern State in the Horn of Africa (1884–1960)

The Horn of Africa began to take shape as a political entity in the early 19th century, particularly following the *Berlin Conference of 1884*, during which *Britain, France, and Italy* laid claim to various parts of the Somali Peninsula. These colonial powers

engaged in a race to control what became known as “*Greater Somalia*,” a region that encompasses much of the present-day Horn of Africa. This territory was divided into five colonial zones:

- *Britain* took control of the *northern part*, naming it British Somaliland, which is today's *Somaliland*.
- *France* established itself in *Djibouti* (then known as *French Somaliland*).
- *Italy* asserted dominance over *Italian Somaliland*, covering the *southern region* of the peninsula, and later expanded westward to include *Western Somalia (the Ogaden region)*, now part of Ethiopia.
- *In 1926*, Britain ceded part of Somali territory to *Kenya*, forming what is today referred to as *Kenyan Somalia*(1).

Phase Two: The Period of Independence and Unification (1960–1991)

With the successive independence of numerous African countries in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Somali demands for liberation from British colonial rule intensified. Consequently, on 26 June 1960, the territory of Somaliland gained independence from Britain and emerged as a sovereign and independent state, known as the State of Somaliland. Following its independence, it received congratulatory messages recognizing its sovereignty from 35 countries, including the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. Moreover, it concluded several treaties with the United Kingdom(2).

Phase Three: The Union Between Somaliland and Somalia on 1 July 1960

Five days after gaining independence, Somaliland opted to unite with the former Italian Somaliland, which attained its independence on 1 July 1960. The aim of this union was to establish a “*Greater Somalia*” that would bring together all Somali populations across five regions of the Horn of Africa, including Northern Kenya, Italian Somaliland, French Somaliland, and Eastern Ethiopia. Thus, the newly formed Somali Republic emerged from the merger of two formerly distinct colonial territories. The national flag, adopted at independence, featured a white five-pointed star symbolizing the five Somali-inhabited regions. However, this pan-Somali vision soon clashed with a core principle upheld by the Organization of African Unity (OAU): the inviolability of colonial borders. The territories that the Somali Republic aspired to incorporate were situated within the

internationally recognized borders of other sovereign states⁽³⁾.

Phase Four: The Declaration of Somaliland's Secession in 1991

Despite the aspirations of the newly formed Somali Republic to achieve a successful union, the Somali government ultimately failed to realize this objective. Several key factors contributed to this failure. First, the political elite proved incapable of building a nation-state grounded in citizenship and a unified Somali national identity, within a society deeply divided by clans and tribal affiliations. Second, the people of Somaliland in the north experienced political and economic marginalization, as political and military positions were disproportionately allocated to Southerners. Third, widespread human rights violations were perpetrated by President Siad Barre following his military coup in 1969, including the killing of an estimated 50,000 civilians and the displacement of approximately 500,000 people from the Somaliland region. Fourth, the union faced significant technical and legal challenges stemming from the integration of two distinct colonial administrations with differing institutional legacies⁽⁴⁾.

As a result, calls for Somaliland's secession and the establishment of an independent state began to intensify. Following the collapse of the Somali state in 1991 due to prolonged conflict with Islamist groups and the subsequent flight of President Siad Barre, Somaliland unilaterally declared its independence from Somalia on 18 May 1991. This declaration occurred in the face of continued rejection by the Somali Republic, which maintained that Somaliland remains an integral part of Somali territory. Furthermore, no foreign state has formally recognized Somaliland's independence⁽⁵⁾.

Second: The Geostrategic Importance of Somaliland

Somaliland occupies a strategic location on the southern shore of the Gulf of Aden, along one of the world's busiest maritime trade routes, near the entrance to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, which leads into the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. It boasts a long coastline approximately 740 kilometers along the Gulf of Aden, and its location just north of the equator allows for the sun to pass directly overhead twice a year. The region is also known for its mountain ranges, some of which reach altitudes of up to 7,000 feet. Somaliland possesses a deep-water port and has one of the longest airstrips in Africa. Historically, it has served as a gateway for

trade and civilization, connecting the vast interior of East Africa to the broader global network for centuries⁽⁶⁾.

Its geographic positioning particularly its protected port on the southern flank of the Gulf of Aden is central to its growing geostrategic significance. Although this has long been recognized, several recent developments have intensified international and regional interest in Somaliland, summarized as follows:

1. The 2023 Israel–Palestine War:

The events of October 7, 2023, and the subsequent escalation underscored the strategic role of non-state actors most notably the Houthi movement in Yemen, which demonstrated its ability to disrupt maritime navigation in the Red Sea. Given Somaliland's proximity to Yemen across the Gulf of Aden, it has become strategically relevant as a potential platform for international actors to launch coordinated airstrikes against Houthi positions. Thus, Somaliland's location enhances its appeal as a counterbalance to destabilizing forces in the region⁽⁷⁾.

2. The January 2024 Memorandum of Understanding with Ethiopia:

In a move to secure direct access to the Red Sea, Ethiopia signed a memorandum of understanding with Somaliland in January 2024. The agreement involved granting Ethiopia access to a military port on Somaliland's coast in exchange for de facto recognition of Somaliland's independence. This agreement refocused international attention on the strategic potential of Somaliland's geography and its leveraging position in regional maritime access⁽⁸⁾.

3. Rising Discourse Around International Recognition:

The issue of Somaliland's international status has re-entered the political arena with renewed urgency, particularly following the re-election of Donald Trump as President of the United States. A group of U.S. Senators submitted a proposal advocating for the formal recognition of Somaliland, and a similar motion was supported by approximately 20 members of the UK House of Lords. These developments have revitalized debates on Somaliland's international standing and amplified its strategic profile⁽⁹⁾.

4. Peaceful Transfer of Power in the 2024 Presidential Elections:

In November 2024, Somaliland held presidential elections in which Abdirahman Irro, candidate of the



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opposition Waddani Party, was elected. Power was transferred peacefully, marking the fourth successful election in Somaliland since its declaration of independence. Amidst a broader African context plagued by coups, instability, and democratic backsliding, Somaliland's democratic credentials have attracted international praise, which the region has actively promoted as part of its campaign for recognition as a sovereign democratic state⁽¹⁰⁾.

Third: The Legal and Political Dilemma of International Recognition of Somaliland

There are several legal theories and principles that seek to explain the challenge of gaining international recognition for regions that have unilaterally declared independence from their parent states. The most prominent among these include:

1. The Constitutive Theory

According to this theory, a secessionist entity acquires international recognition and legal personality only when it is formally recognized by existing sovereign states. Recognition is considered a constitutive act meaning that without such acknowledgment from UN member states, the entity cannot attain international legal status or participate fully in the international system⁽¹¹⁾.

2. The Declaratory Theory

This theory, in contrast, argues that a new entity automatically acquires international legal personality if it meets the four criteria outlined in the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States (1933):

- A permanent population
- A defined territory
- A functioning government
- The capacity to enter into relations with other states

Under this theory, recognition by other states is not required to validate statehood. The Montevideo Convention emphasizes that a state's political existence is independent of recognition by others, thereby allowing such an entity to defend its sovereignty and organize itself in a manner consistent with its perceived status even without formal recognition⁽¹²⁾.

A fundamental distinction can be drawn between the constitutive and declaratory theories of state recognition. According to the constitutive theory, an entity attains the status of a state only when it is recognized as such by existing states, irrespective of whether it meets the four criteria outlined in the Montevideo Convention. In contrast, the

declaratory theory holds that recognition is merely a formal or political act, and that an entity qualifies as a state once it has fulfilled the four substantive criteria, regardless of whether it is recognized by other states.

3- Despite Somaliland's fulfillment of the four criteria for statehood outlined in the Montevideo Convention, it has not attained international legal personality. This highlights the existence of a fifth essential condition for the attainment of independence by any geographical entity: international recognition. In fact, in certain cases, the absence of such recognition remains a primary reason for the continued fragmentation of states whose governments are unable to exercise effective control over their territories.

In this context, two principal factors hinder Somaliland's bid for international recognition. First, the requirement of Somalia's consent, which has consistently rejected the secession and maintains that Somaliland is an integral part of its sovereign territory. Second, the Charter of the African Union, which emphasizes the inviolability of colonial borders and opposes unilateral secession without the consent of the existing member state. Furthermore, from the perspective of the United Nations, recognition of secessionist entities becomes problematic in the absence of a request or endorsement by the African Union⁽¹³⁾.

4- The authorities in Somaliland assert that there are both political and legal justifications supporting their claim to international recognition. The most prominent of these include: first, that Somaliland was originally established as a distinct entity by colonial powers; second, that it was recognized as an independent state in 1960, albeit for a brief period; and third, that it has adopted a constitution, conducted democratic elections, and achieved peaceful transfers of power⁽¹⁴⁾. Nonetheless, the absence of international recognition has resulted in exclusion from the global political and financial system, limiting its ability to attract foreign investment, join international organizations, and capitalize on its strategic location along the Gulf of Aden⁽¹⁵⁾.

Second Axis: The Impact of the Somaliland Issue on Red Sea Security

First: Regional and International Competition over Influence in Somaliland

In recent years, Somaliland has become a focal point for regional and international rivalry, driven by a complex interplay of geopolitical

and geoeconomic factors. This competition has manifested in three primary strategic directions:

1. Competition over Ports and Military Bases in Somaliland

Several states are vying for a foothold in the Red Sea region through leasing ports or establishing military bases in Somaliland. Key actors include:

A- Ethiopia

Landlocked Ethiopia has sought to overcome its geographic limitations by securing direct access to the sea. In January 2024, Ethiopia signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Somaliland, granting it 20 kilometers of coastal access for a period of 50 years, including rights to Berbera Port and a military base, in exchange for formal recognition of Somaliland by Addis Ababa. Although Ethiopia later signed another MoU with Somalia brokered by Turkey in December 2024 to explore potential access to Somali ports, Somaliland remains Ethiopia's most viable option, due to its geographic proximity to Addis Ababa, existing infrastructure links (including those to Djibouti), and the relatively shorter distance from Ethiopia's borders to the Red Sea. In contrast, access through southern Somalia is complicated by: First, the longer distance between Ethiopia and Somalia's southern coast. Also, the presence of Al-Shabaab in those areas. Furthermore, the high investment costs required to develop infrastructure⁽¹⁶⁾.

B- Israel

Israel, whose interest in strengthening its presence in the Bab al-Mandab Strait has grown in response to threats posed by the Houthi movement in Yemen, has reportedly explored strategic engagement with Somaliland. According to several Israeli media reports, Tel Aviv has considered the establishment of a military base in Somaliland in exchange for formal diplomatic relations with the latter. Given that Somaliland lies less than 400 miles from the Yemeni port of Al-Hudaydah, which is under Houthi control, the establishment of such a base would significantly reduce Israel's operational distance for potential strikes against Yemen. Moreover, it would provide Israel with a critical foothold from which to project its influence across the Horn of Africa. It is important to note, however, that no official statement has been issued by Somaliland regarding the potential establishment of this military base⁽¹⁷⁾.

C- The United Arab Emirates

The UAE is the only Arab country with formal diplomatic engagement with Somaliland. In 2021,

the UAE appointed an ambassador to Hargeisa, while Somaliland maintains a representative office in the UAE. Although the UAE does not border the Red Sea, it seeks to strengthen its position near Bab el-Mandeb and enhance its influence over Red Sea ports. The UAE, through DP World, has invested \$300 million to expand Berbera Port and develop a nearby free trade zone, with the goal of turning Somaliland into a major commercial hub in the Horn of Africa⁽¹⁸⁾.

2. Countering Chinese Influence in the Horn of Africa

This axis of competition focuses on international efforts to limit China's expanding presence in the Horn of Africa especially since Beijing established its first overseas military base in Djibouti in 2017. Key actors in this direction include:

A- The United States

Amid intensifying U.S.–China rivalry, Washington is under growing pressure to reconsider its traditional “One Somalia” policy and engage directly with Somaliland⁽¹⁹⁾. Several developments illustrate this shift:

- U.S. Senators have proposed legislation advocating for Somaliland's recognition.
- The “Project 2025” policy agenda authored by former Trump administration officials recommends recognizing Somaliland in exchange for establishing a U.S. military base there⁽²⁰⁾.
- Congressman John Moolenaar, Chair of the House Select Committee on the CCP, has urged the State Department to open a diplomatic office in Hargeisa⁽²¹⁾.
- The U.S. State Department praised Somaliland's 2024 presidential election, calling it a model of democracy, and expressed interest in working with the new president⁽²²⁾.

B- Taiwan

Taiwan has actively sought to strengthen ties with Somaliland, seeing it as a geopolitical parallel both being de facto independent but unrecognized states. In 2020, the two sides opened representative offices: Taiwan in Hargeisa (August 2020) and Somaliland in Taipei (September 2020). For Taiwan, this relationship serves two purposes: First, Gaining strategic leverage in the Horn of Africa. Second, Challenging China's dominance in the region and appealing to Western allies for support. China has condemned these moves, and in December 2024, it demanded that Somaliland sever ties with Taiwan,



particularly criticizing the presence of a Taiwanese delegation at the inauguration of Somaliland’s new president⁽²³⁾.

3. The Race for Mineral Resources and Economic Opportunities

This trend is being spearheaded by multinational corporations, as Somaliland possesses abundant mineral resources, offering significant opportunities for the development of mining and related industries. The region is known to contain deposits of various minerals, including gemstones and potential oil reserves. Notably, the mining sector remains largely underexplored, creating a competitive environment among investors and major corporations with the expertise and financial capacity to acquire and develop these untapped assets⁽²⁴⁾.

Second: The Security Implications of the Somaliland Issue for the Red Sea

1. Militarization of the Red Sea and its Transformation into a Focal Point for Regional and International Rivalry

The existence of a separatist region that could potentially offer regional powers access to a military port on the Red Sea has contributed to the militarization of this strategic waterway, transforming it into a potential flashpoint for conflict. Furthermore, the use of diplomatic recognition of Somaliland as a bargaining tool to pressure the Federal Government of Somalia into granting access to the Red Sea via Mogadishu has exacerbated instability and insecurity in the region⁽²⁵⁾. This dynamic has led to an expansion of foreign military presence, heightened competition over military bases, and an escalation of regional tensions with an increased likelihood of armed conflict⁽²⁶⁾.

It may be argued that in the event of closer ties between Israel and Somaliland, the regional balance of power could shift significantly. This could result in the emergence of a trilateral alliance between Somaliland, Israel, and Ethiopia, positioned in opposition to the alliance formed on 10 October 2024 between Egypt, Eritrea, and Somalia. These developments are particularly concerning in light of the findings of the November 2024 report by the United Nations Panel of Experts on Yemen, which revealed a growing alliance between the Houthis movement, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and al-Shabaab in Somalia. Such an alliance suggests potential coordination in security and intelligence operations aimed at threatening Israeli interests in the region. It also indicates an expansion of maritime operations targeting

international shipping routes, posing a direct threat to maritime security and global trade.

2. The Risk of the Disintegration of the Federal Republic of Somalia

The existence of a de facto independent Somali entity like Somaliland, with many state-like characteristics, could serve as a precedent for other Somali federal states to declare unilateral independence without the consent of the Federal Government, increasing the likelihood of national fragmentation.

Several factors amplify this risk:

- Demands for greater autonomy by federal member states particularly the ongoing conflict between the Somali federal government and Jubaland State, which culminated in armed clashes and the defeat of federal forces at the Ras Kamboni battle.
- The geostrategic and economic losses incurred by Somalia should Somaliland fully secede, given its natural resources, mineral wealth, and the strategic importance of Berbera Port⁽²⁷⁾.

3. Undermining the African Principle of Colonial Border Inviolability

The recognition of Somaliland as an independent state would set a dangerous precedent for Africa by challenging the sacrosanct principle of respecting colonial borders, a foundational tenet of the African Union aimed at preserving post-colonial stability. Such a move could encourage other separatist movements, such as the Tigray region in Ethiopia or the Biafra movement in Nigeria, to renew their bids for international recognition. It can also potentially revive civil wars and territorial disputes reminiscent of the early post-colonial era in Africa⁽²⁸⁾.

4. The Prospect of Establishing a Multilateral Body That Includes Non-Littoral States

Some non-littoral states have sought to exploit the fragmentation resulting from Somaliland’s bid for independence by proposing the creation of a multilateral organization for the Red Sea that extends beyond coastal states.

This initiative is justified by the argument that secure maritime trade in the Red Sea affects a broader group of countries, not just those with direct coastal access. For instance, Ethiopia, though landlocked, seeks institutional inclusion in Red Sea governance mechanisms. However, such proposals may complicate regional dynamics, especially as Red Sea littoral states insist that governance and

security of this maritime corridor should remain the purview of those with direct access⁽²⁹⁾.

Third: Egypt's Role in Preserving the Unity and Sovereignty of Somalia

Historically, Egypt and Somalia have maintained strong and enduring relations dating back to ancient civilizations. Egypt's support has primarily aimed at upholding Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. In response to the escalating challenges facing Mogadishu recently, Egypt has intensified its support for Somalia through three main tracks:

1. Egypt's Support for Somalia's Stability through Regional Organizations

Leveraging its strategic position within the Arab League and the African Union two organizations that strongly uphold the principle of territorial integrity and the inviolability of colonial borders Egypt has actively worked to obstruct any form of recognition for Somaliland within these bodies. This is exemplified by the Arab League's January 2024 statement, which reaffirmed its support for Somalia's unity, acknowledged its right to legitimate self-defense, and expressed solidarity against the memorandum of understanding signed between Ethiopia and Somaliland. Egypt's objective behind these diplomatic efforts is to maintain Arab and African consensus that Somaliland remains an inseparable part of Somalia, thus thwarting any practical steps towards Somaliland's independence. Additionally, Egypt aims to undermine the growing Somaliland-Ethiopia alliance, which threatens to reshape regional dynamics in ways detrimental to Somalia's unity and Egyptian strategic interests, particularly its control over vital maritime trade routes via the Suez Canal⁽³⁰⁾.

2. Enhancing Egypt's Cooperation with Somalia across Multiple Sectors

Driven by a commitment to provide economic and military support to Somalia, Egypt has actively expanded bilateral cooperation since 2024, highlighted by the following:

A- Economic Cooperation

- Egyptian exports to Somalia surged to \$63.3 million in the first five months of 2024, compared to \$28 million during the same period in 2023 a remarkable increase of 126.4%.
- Total trade volume between the two countries rose to \$65.2 million in the first five months of 2024, up from \$28.2 million in the same period of 2023, marking a 130.7% growth.

- In January 2025, the Egypt-Somalia Business Forum was convened to further boost bilateral trade⁽³¹⁾.

B- Military Cooperation

- In August 2024, Egypt and Somalia signed a mutual defense agreement, establishing a comprehensive legal framework to strengthen Somalia's national institutions in maintaining security, stability, and combating terrorism.
- Egypt also participates in the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi emphasized that Egypt's involvement aims to secure peace and stability in Somalia, without threatening any neighboring states⁽³²⁾.

C- Political Cooperation

- The tripartite summit between Egypt, Somalia, and Eritrea, held in Asmara in October 2024, marked a significant milestone in diplomatic relations and coordination. Discussions focused on enhancing collaboration on regional issues, with Somalia regarded as a cornerstone of stability in the Horn of Africa.
- In January 2025, Egypt and Somalia signed a joint declaration elevating bilateral relations to a "strategic partnership", alongside several memoranda of understanding to deepen cooperation⁽³³⁾.

Fourth: Potential Scenarios for Somaliland's International Recognition

1. Scenario One: Failure of Somaliland to Obtain International Recognition (Most Likely)

This scenario foresees the continuation of the current status quo, where Somaliland unilaterally declares independence but does not achieve international recognition. Several factors underpin this likelihood:

- A- African Union's Rejection: The AU remains opposed to recognizing Somaliland, fearing that endorsing its independence could encourage separatist movements, thereby destabilizing the continent.
- B- Internal Conflicts and Instability: Armed conflicts within Somaliland, such as clashes with the Khatumo movement (which favors reunification with Somalia) and confrontations with Puntland over the Sool and Sanaag regions, contribute to insecurity.
- C- Regional Pressures: Key regional actors including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Djibouti exert diplomatic pressure to thwart Somaliland's bid for recognition.



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D- US Policy Commitment: The United States maintains its support for a unified Somalia, viewing Somaliland’s status as an internal Somali matter. While there are speculative proposals to change this policy, they remain uncertain and contingent on pragmatic political calculations.

2. Scenario Two: International Recognition of Somaliland (Less Likely)

This scenario hinges on the United States formally recognizing Somaliland and supporting its admission into the United Nations and other international bodies, potentially in exchange for a US military base in Hargeisa. However, this scenario is considered less probable due to:

A- Weak Congressional Support: US Senate members advocating recognition lack strong influence, and lobbying efforts for and against Somaliland recognition have been effectively countered, notably by Somali government-backed firms such as Von Batten-Montague-York, L.C.

B- US Strategic Priorities: Washington remains committed to Somalia’s territorial integrity while focusing on higher-priority global issues such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict, US-China trade tensions, and Middle Eastern conflicts.

C- Existing US Military Presence: The US already maintains a strategic military base in Djibouti, reducing the urgency for establishing an additional base in Somaliland. Moreover, the US expanded its military footprint in Somalia itself by announcing the establishment of five bases in Mogadishu as of February 2024.

D- Concerns over Russian and Chinese Influence: Recognizing Somaliland might push Somalia to strengthen military ties with Russia and China, which the US views unfavorably, especially given Beijing’s tensions with Hargeisa.

3. Scenario Three: Reconciliation and Formation of a Unified Federal State (Least Likely)

This scenario is linked to the possibility that negotiations between Somalia and Somaliland might result in the formation of a federal state in which the constituent states enjoy extensive autonomy. However, this outcome appears unlikely for several reasons:

A- Somaliland’s rejection of such a scenario, given its successful unilateral declaration of independence, its ability to conduct peaceful elections and facilitate peaceful transfers of power, and its strategic location along the Red Sea.

B- The weakness of the Somali state and its inability to exert military or political pressure on Somaliland to reverse its secession. This is compounded by the federal government’s failure to exercise effective control over its regions, the declaration of autonomy by some of its states, increased international and regional interventions in Somalia, and the growing influence of terrorist groups such as Al-Shabaab and the Islamic State.

Third Axis: Proposed Policies to Address the Somaliland Secession Issue

First: Proposals at the African Union Level

These proposals stem from the need to alter the African Union’s approach towards the Somaliland secession crisis. Historically, the AU has avoided engaging in mediation efforts between Somalia and Somaliland. However, recent developments including the gap created by the AU’s withdrawal, which has allowed non-African actors to lead negotiations often serving their own interests without providing viable solutions highlight the potential for the AU to act as a neutral mediator.

Thus, this study proposes active AU involvement in resolving the Somaliland issue through the following levels:

1. Leading Negotiations between Somalia and Somaliland on Key Issues::

A- Supporting both Somalia and Somaliland in reaching agreements on counterterrorism cooperation, intelligence sharing, border monitoring, and joint operations, given the increasing terrorist attacks in border areas. Counterterrorism is a priority area where cooperation via the AU, which manages the largest counterterrorism mission in the region through AMISOM, is vital.

B- Facilitating the resolution of the border dispute over the regions of Sanaag and Sool between Somaliland and Mogadishu, a conflict that has resulted in numerous casualties. This will help prevent armed confrontations between Somaliland and Puntland on their shared borders and promote peaceful development of natural resources in border areas.

C- Coordinating efforts to combat cross-border crime, enhancing freedom of movement, and establishing agreements on cross-border cooperation.

D- Coordinating maritime security, port usage, and the development of the blue economy, particularly given the control that both

Mogadishu and Somaliland exert over extensive areas along the Gulf of Aden.

- E- Supporting the signing of agreements on the management of Somaliland's airspace and agreements concerning the development and use of Berbera Port.

2. Enhancing African Roles in Addressing the Increasing Foreign Military Presence::

- A- Regulating bilateral agreements that lead to the establishment of foreign military bases in the Horn of Africa and urging Horn of Africa states to take greater responsibility for regional security, especially maritime security, amid the increasing number of such bases and their exploitation by global powers for proxy conflicts.
- B- Calling for the convening of a continental conference to discuss the expansion of foreign military bases in Africa generally, and the Horn of Africa specifically, and the implications of this for regional security, including the formulation of short- and long-term strategies to promote peace and stability.
- C- Activating the role of the African Peace and Security Council in resolving security crises across the continent.

Second: Proposals at the Arab League Level

Despite the difficulty of the Arab League playing a significant role in the Somaliland issue due to Gulf rivalries over control of ports in the Horn of Africa and the prominent role of the UAE in Somaliland several proposals are feasible:

1. Constructively participating in ongoing negotiations between Somalia and Somaliland by providing technical support and acting as guarantor for subsequent agreements.
2. Continuously reaffirming the unity and sovereignty of Somalia and rejecting any secessionist attempts, especially amid increasing demands by internal Somali states for autonomy.
3. Emphasizing that the Red Sea should be exclusively for littoral states and rejecting the involvement of external parties.
4. Supporting Somalia's counterterrorism efforts and working towards solutions for the funding crisis facing the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

Third: Proposals at the UN Security Council and United Nations Level

1. Utilizing Somalia's non-permanent membership on the UN Security Council until December

2026 to urge the Council to uphold Somalia's sovereignty and reject any secessionist attempts by Somali states or any agreements those states may make with external actors that undermine Somalia's sovereignty.

2. Leveraging UN and Security Council recognition of Somalia as a sovereign independent state to coordinate efforts among Arab and African countries supporting Somalia's unity, thereby obstructing Somaliland's diplomatic recognition efforts.

Fourth: Proposals at the Egyptian National Level

1. Exploring the possibility of enhancing Egypt's security presence in Somalia by considering joining the "S6" group (formed in 2016 by Somalia's security donors: EU, Turkey, UAE, UK, UN, and USA).
2. Proposing Egypt as a host for negotiations between Somalia and Somaliland with a focus on critical issues and designing a roadmap to resolve their disputes.
3. Investigating the potential for Egypt to mediate between the federal government and Somali autonomous regions such as Puntland and Jubaland, working towards a political settlement of the presidential election crisis.
4. Leveraging Egypt's strong relations with Kuwait to initiate an Egyptian-Kuwaiti joint initiative to support humanitarian conditions in Somalia.
5. Enhancing military cooperation by supplying Somalia with small and medium arms, artillery pieces, mortars, and corresponding ammunition.
6. Supporting the role of the Arab Organization for Industrialization in cooperation projects with Somalia and the broader Horn of Africa, including participation in developmental projects.
7. Considering the establishment of an African center jointly operated by Egypt and Somalia to coordinate anti-drug trafficking and organized crime efforts in the Red Sea region, sharing information and advanced technologies, with Egypt as its headquarters.
8. Increasing Egypt's contribution to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in the coming years.



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Conclusion:

The study concludes with several key points that forecast the future prospects of Somaliland in the coming period, as follows:

1. *Somaliland has become a central element in former U.S. President Donald Trump’s future policy towards Africa; however, official recognition of Somaliland by the U.S. is unlikely. It is more probable that Washington will revive the Somaliland Partnership Act, initially introduced in March 2022, which aims to oversee American aid to Somaliland and assess the feasibility of establishing a partnership between the United States and Somaliland, including cooperation on regional security matters.*
2. *Developments in the Middle East may transform the coastal areas of the Horn of Africa into logistical support points or conflict zones, attracting increased active foreign military presence and potentially reshaping the regional balance of power.*
3. *Regional powers are leveraging their control over Berbera Port in Somaliland to establish a new Red Sea entity that includes landlocked countries such as Ethiopia. This move is part of a strategic competition with the Arab-African Council of Red Sea and Gulf of Aden States, which was launched by Saudi Arabia in 2020 and whose membership is limited to littoral states.*
4. *Israel is exerting pressure on Somalia to normalize relations with it in exchange for its non-recognition of Somaliland. Whether Tel Aviv succeeds in normalizing relations with Somalia or Somaliland gains recognition, this signals a renewed phase of Israeli expansion in both the Arab world and Africa following its halt due to the Gaza conflict.*
5. *Ethiopia exploits the threat of recognizing Somaliland as leverage over Somalia to secure access to the Red Sea via Mogadishu, which has exacerbated instability and insecurity in the region.*
6. *Somaliland’s prioritization of international recognition as the main objective of its foreign relations has allowed regional powers to exploit this goal as a means to establish footholds along the Red Sea.*

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The Impact of the Future of "Somaliland" on the Security of the Red Sea

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Abstract:

The Republic of Somaliland, which remains unrecognized internationally, seeks to export its secessionist issue spanning more than a decade into the Red Sea in order to resolve a dilemma firmly opposed by the Federal Republic of Somalia, the African Union, and the international community. Currently, Somaliland aims to exploit the ongoing international and regional competition to gain access to the Red Sea and impose a new fait accompli at the expense of the littoral states of this vital maritime corridor, foremost among them Somalia, Egypt, Djibouti, and Eritrea. The issue of Somaliland's secession is not merely a question of power balance or demands for self-determination; rather, it is a strategic matter related to the security of the Red Sea and the future of the Federal Somali state.

Within this context, the study focuses on the most significant developments in the Somaliland issue, including pivotal events linked to the 2023 Israeli-Palestinian war, the rising calls within the United States for Somaliland's recognition amidst Sino-American rivalry for greater influence in the Horn of Africa, the role of Egypt in preserving Somali unity, and the formulation of proposals at the African, Arab, and Egyptian levels to address the Somaliland issue.

Keywords: Somaliland, Red Sea, Somali.

تأثير مستقبل « أرض الصومال » على أمن البحر الأحمر

■ **إيمان الشعراوي**

باحثة دكتوراه بكلية الدراسات الإفريقية العليا

المستخلص :

تسعى جمهورية أرض الصومال غير المعترف بها دولياً إلى تصدير مشكلة انفصالها التي امتدت لأكثر من عقد إلى البحر الأحمر لحسم معضلة اتخذت منها جمهورية الصومال الفيدرالية موقفاً مضاداً، ورفضتها منظمة الاتحاد الإفريقي والمجتمع الدولي. إذ تطمح أرض الصومال في الوقت الراهن إلى استغلال حالة التنافس الدولي والإقليمي للوصول للبحر الأحمر، وفرض أمر واقع جديد على حساب الدول المشاطئة لهذا الممر المائي، وفي مقدمتها الصومال ومصر وجيبوتي وإريتريا. إن مسألة انفصال أرض الصومال ليست مسألة ميزان قوى أو مجرد مطالبات لولاية بحق تقرير المصير، إنما هي مسألة استراتيجية تتعلق بأمن البحر الأحمر، ومستقبل الدولة الصومالية الفيدرالية.

في هذا السياق ركزت الدراسة على أهم المتغيرات في مشكلة أرض الصومال وما ارتبط بها من تطورات مفصلية تعلقة بالحرب الفلسطينية الإسرائيلية في عام ٢٠٢٣م، وتنامي المطالبات داخل الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية للاعتراف بأرض الصومال، وذلك في ظل الصراع الصيني الأمريكي على مزيد من النفوذ في القرن الإفريقي، مع الكشف عن دور مصر في الحفاظ على وحدة الصومال، ووضع مقترحات على الصعيد الإفريقي والعربي والمصري للتعامل مع مشكلة أرض الصومال.

الكلمات المفتاحية : أرض الصومال، البحر الأحمر، الصومال.