

2026

GLOBAL HOUSTON MODEL UN CONFERENCE



BACKGROUND GUIDE

UN SECURITY COUNCIL

RECOGNITION OF SOMALILAND

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UNSC

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Introduction to the UN Security Council

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) was created by the United Nations charter in October 1945, charged with the maintenance of international peace and security. The founders of the UN envisioned the UNSC as the organization's premier body, giving it special authorities in a few ways. First, where resolutions drafted in the UN General Assembly (GA) are recommendations to UN member nations, Security Council resolutions are binding. Second, the GA can address an issue related to international peace and security only if that issue is not currently under consideration by the UNSC. Finally, the UNSC can take steps to enforce its decisions.

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Introduction to the UN Security Council

The structure of the security council is also unique, with 5 permanent members and 10 non-permanent members for a total of 15. The 5 permanent members (the P-5) are the United States, Russia, China, and United Kingdom, and France. The 10 non-permanent members serve two-year terms and are elected by the GA based on a geographical distribution system – three seats to Africa, two to the Asia-Pacific, two to Latin America, two to Western Europe, and one to Eastern Europe. Passing a resolution in the UNSC requires 9 of 15 votes. Of the 9 required, all 5 permanent members must vote for the resolution, as all members of the P-5 can veto any resolution. The current 10 non-permanent members of the UNSC are: Algeria, Denmark, Greece, Guyana, Pakistan, Panama, the Republic of Korea (South Korea), Sierra Leone, Slovenia, and Somalia.

These powers mean that the UNSC, and the P-5 in particular, exercise considerable control over the UN. Disagreements between P-5 members often stymie progress in the UN, drawing heavy criticism from countries outside it.

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Somaliland

In 1991, Somaliland, a northern region of Somalia, declared its independence from Somalia. Somaliland's independence is not recognized by other states, which has hindered the region's participation in the international system, especially regarding economic opportunities. Recently, Somaliland's campaign for international attention gained traction.

Wider international recognition remains the government of Somaliland's top priority. This priority seems to be maintained across political parties and even at the potential expense of other goals. Somaliland broadcasts its intention to barter military access to its coastline in exchange for recognition. Most countries declined due to concerns over interfering with Somalia's sovereignty. Notable exceptions are a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed with Ethiopia in 2024 and an agreement with Israel in 2025.

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Maritime Trade Routes

Around 30% of all maritime trade, including large quantities of the global oil supply, goes through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. (2) The number of foreign military bases hosted in Djibouti, which borders the strait, highlights the importance of shipping routes to global security. Djibouti offers relative stability for foreign powers to set up military infrastructure in a mostly unstable, but strategically important region. Officials in Somaliland want to set up a similar system of military infrastructure to that of Djibouti. Despite lacking official recognition, Somaliland is equipped for this type of model. Somaliland is one of the most stable democracies in the Horn of Africa region, contrasting Somalia, which "hasn't been a functioning country in decades", due to dysfunction and the growing control of militant groups. (2) Somaliland wants to leverage its relative stability to lease military infrastructure to other nations in exchange for official diplomatic recognition.

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Important Trade Routes Near Somaliland

Somaliland borders the Gulf of Aden near the Bab el-Mandeb strait. This cuts off Ethiopia's access to the coast, which was the catalyst for the 2024 MoU between Somaliland and Ethiopia.



Source: EIA

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Recognition of Somaliland

Regional Foreign Investment

Despite instability in the region, the Horn of Africa has seen an influx of foreign investments in recent years, especially from Gulf States. The United Arab Emirates is not only one of the largest foreign investors in East Africa, but one of the only Gulf States to invest in Somaliland. (7) One of the most notable investments is the Port of Berbera development project in 2016. This project caught the attention of Ethiopia, Somalia's landlocked neighbor and regional rival.

Even with some development agreements in place with foreign corporations, Somaliland's economic opportunities are severely limited by its lack of official state status. Any economic agreements it makes are challenged by Somalia, which claims foreign investors are bypassing government oversight and continually raising tensions over state sovereignty.

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Potential Solutions and Obstacles

Other Separatist Movements

There are separatist movements across Africa. Recognizing Somaliland as a sovereign state raises concerns about encouraging other African separatist movements. According to researchers, other secession movements, particularly Nigeria's Biafra and Morocco's Western Sahara, would feel emboldened by Somaliland's recognition. (2) This could potentially lead to more security concerns across the continent.

Regional Resource Competition

Proxy conflicts are also a large contributor to instability in the region. There are two main drivers of these types of conflict: resource scarcity and non-state actors. Environmental concerns are focused on resource scarcity and whether to maintain colonial-era agreements over the allocation of resources or to form a more equitable resource-sharing plan. (9) Hydro-geopolitical conflict is a key component of this type of conflict, especially over the use of the Nile. Additionally, it is worth noting that these types of disputes may increase as East Africa is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, leading to fewer resources and more climate refugees.

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Potential Solutions and Obstacles

Regional Instability

The Horn of Africa is an unstable region. This regional instability necessitates that nations work together to address the growing number of security concerns. Cooperation is particularly important when addressing the large presence of militant groups in the region, like al-Shabaad in Somalia. Somalia takes any agreements between recognized nations and Somaliland as a threat to its sovereignty. Most notably, there is tension between Somalia and Ethiopia over a 2024 MoU. The MoU allowed Ethiopia access to the Somaliland coast along the Gulf of Aden and provided a leased military base in exchange for Ethiopia's recognition of Somaliland's statehood. (6) While any MoU that recognizes Somaliland as a sovereign state provokes outrage from the Somali government, it causes a particularly strong reaction when the acknowledgement comes from neighboring states. This is due to longstanding disputes over territorial boundaries that have contributed to the volatile security situation in the region. Somalia refused to attend negotiations with Ethiopia unless the MoU was nullified. (6)

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Potential Solutions and Obstacles

Potential Solutions

Potential solutions regarding the debate surrounding Somaliland's recognition could include mediation between Somalia and Ethiopia, as well as generally fostering interstate cooperation in the region. Facilitating stability in the region is key to addressing Somaliland. This could include neutralizing the violence perpetrated by militant groups and addressing the general resource stressors in the region, like climate change.

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References & Further Reading

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5. CFR | What's Behind Growing Separatism in Nigeria?
6. Carnegie Endowment | Somalia's Strategic Counterbalance
7. Africa Center for Strategic Studies | Mapping Gulf State Actors' Expansion in East Africa
8. Al Jazeera | Somalia Warns Against Any Israeli Base Plans on Somaliland
9. Georgetown Journal of International Affairs
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Countries in Committee

United States	Sudan
China	South Sudan
Somalia	Yemen
Somaliland	Oman
Israel	Saudi Arabia
Ethiopia	Egypt
Eritrea	United Arab
Djibouti	Emirates
United Kingdom	Qatar
France	Nigeria
Germany	South Africa
Kenya	turkey