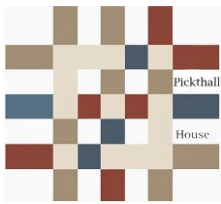


# Hope and Disharmony on the Horn: Somaliland Recognition and its Implications

## Introduction

Recent years have seen increasing speculation that the US under President Donald Trump may decide to recognise *de jure* the independence of the Republic of Somaliland, in a move that would break from decades of precedent regarding the preservation of colonial borders on the African continent. Situated on the shores of the Gulf of Aden, on the northern coast of the Horn of Africa, Somaliland declared independence from Somalia in 1991 after a decade's long war which saw genocide waged against the region's majority Isaaq clan by the US-backed regime of Siad Barre. Formerly a British protectorate and later the Crown Colony of Somaliland from 1884 to 1960 - during which time Britain fought a two-decade campaign against the anti-colonial Dervish movement - the region merged with the Italian Trust Territory of Somaliland a week after independence in June 1960, forming modern Somalia.

The question of whether the United Kingdom should recognise Somaliland as an independent state has resurfaced with urgency. Somaliland has demonstrated three decades of relative stability, democratic practice, and state-building, exceeding the time it spent as part of Somalia which has in



contrast demonstrated a stark fragility. While recognition has been argued to align with British commitments to supporting democratic governance, advance British strategic interests in the Gulf of Aden, and benefit Britain's historical connections to the territory, Pickthall House considers such a decision ultimately detrimental.

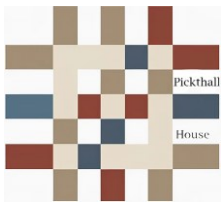
For instance, British recognition of an independent Somaliland would destabilise relations with Mogadishu, provoke Turkish obstruction within NATO, and unsettle the African Union's stance on territorial integrity. Domestically, while recognition would resonate with older Somaliland-origin communities in Britain, it could equally provoke dissatisfaction among Britain's growing Somali community at large, and raise uncomfortable parallels and accusations of hypocrisy in regards to discouraging Scottish demands for independence.

Most of all, such a move would signal a dangerous break with the post-colonial consensus around the maintenance of colonial borders in Africa, supported by the African Union. This could potentially further the aspirations and therefore activity of many separatist movements across Africa, such as in Azawad, Dar El Kuti, Ambazonia and across Ethiopia, with the potential for violence and bloodshed as seen in Biafra, Katanga, and the recent Tigray War.

For these reasons, Pickthall House advocates for Britain to demonstrate a clearer strategic stance on the issue including greater support for Somalia's internationally recognised government in partnership with Türkiye, in regaining control from insurgents including Al Shabaab, healing Somali inter-clan divisions, and establishing a stronger Somali federal system, perhaps based on the successful model of Somaliland. This report examines the implications of recognition across foreign and domestic policy, drawing on recent political statements, regional dynamics, and historical precedents.

## **Somaliland and the UK**

In the over three decades since Somaliland's declaration of independence, the fledgling state has built functioning institutions, ratified a constitution by referendum, held multiple peaceful transfers of power, and established a successful hybrid governance model blending clan elders with elected representatives. Indeed, the Chair of the UK's All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Somaliland Sir Gavin Williamson MP, a prominent advocate of



Somaliland's independence, has in June of this year described the territory as "a beacon of good governance" and stated that:

*"Recognizing Somaliland would not only strengthen the UK's strategic foothold in the Horn of Africa but also unlock new commercial markets and send a powerful message to developing nations about the value of democracy".<sup>1</sup>*

Nevertheless, the outbreak of violence in Las Anod since early 2023 - the historic heart of Dervish resistance to British rule - and the establishment of a Mogadishu-backed SSC Khatumo interim federal administration there in the east of the territory - known since July 2025 simply as "North Eastern State" - has complicated Somaliland's narrative of stability. Amnesty International and UN reports have documented indiscriminate shelling by Somaliland against civilian populations, contributing to the displacement of over 150,000 people.<sup>2</sup> For the UK, although recognition could reward the territory's record of political stability and reinforce Britain's reputation as a supporter of democratic self-determination, to do so amid these unresolved territorial disputes risks accusations of double standards and could risk provoking Mogadishu and its close ally Ankara into more active opposition.

There is already a sense within Somaliland that Britain is hedging its bets. Despite a visit of UK Ambassador to Somalia, Charles King, to the Somaliland capital, Hargeisa, where Britain maintains a mission, coinciding with the Las Anod uprising's declaration of a pro-Mogadishu administration, the UK has been largely silent on the renewed conflict.<sup>3</sup> Just last week on 29 September 2025, the UK contributed \$30 million to support Somalia's security transition through Somalia and AU forces,<sup>4</sup> on top of the three training programmes

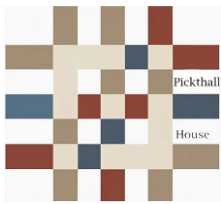
---

<sup>1</sup> <https://somalilandstandard.com/uk-parliamentary-group-push-for-somaliland-recognition/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/somalia-flash-update-no-4-situation-laas-caanood-sool-region-3-april-2023>

<sup>3</sup> <https://hornreview.org/2025/10/02/the-perfidious-albion-britains-strategic-ambiguity-in-the-horn-of-africa-and-somalilands-precarious-position/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-contributes-over-30-million-to-support-somalias-security-transition>



Britain already runs for the Somali National Army in Baidoa, capital of Southwest State, as part of operation TANGHAM.<sup>5</sup>

Somaliland considers the uprising in Las Anod to have been orchestrated by Somalia, with Britain's silence going as far as being evidence of complicity. Britain's recognition of Palestine in September 2025 in the context of the Gaza genocide, while denying Somaliland recognition, which itself suffered the Isaaq genocide, while also functioning as a *de facto* independent state, exposes British "strategic hypocrisy".<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Britain would benefit from a clear strategy in regards to Somaliland, to avoid emboldening destabilising rival actors, both in Somalia, Ethiopia and further afield.

Britain's Somali population would also be a consideration. The 2021 Census recorded 176,645 Somalis in England and Wales.<sup>7</sup> British Somalis are significant as the largest Black British ethnic group among British Muslims (further information is available in our August 2024 white paper, "A Portrait of Muslim Britain").<sup>8</sup> Although a significant proportion of early, pre-1960 Somali migration came from British Somaliland, with communities settling in Cardiff, Liverpool and London, the 1980s-90s civil war brought larger refugee flows from Mogadishu and the south, concentrated in Tower Hamlets, Brent and Camden in London, as well as Bristol, Leicester and Manchester, who tend to identify with the Federal Republic. This division explains why pro-Somaliland lobbying networks are more entrenched among older British Somalis. Despite a lack of formal polling, academic studies have revealed that Somali diaspora politics is largely split among clan and regional lines, although second-generation British Somalis have begun calls for greater pan-Somali, i.e., inter-clan, unity.<sup>9</sup> As the community is divided, this would not push British policymakers in either direction particularly, but internal dynamics are worth

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/british-military-train-somali-army-in-baidoa>

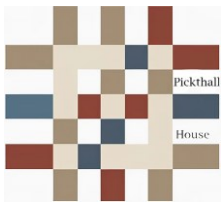
<sup>6</sup> <https://hornreview.org/2025/10/02/the-perfidious-albion-britains-strategic-ambiguity-in-the-horn-of-africa-and-somalilands-precarious-position/>

<sup>7</sup>

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/somalipopulationsenglandandwales/census2021>

<sup>8</sup> <https://pickthallhouse.org/white-papers/a-portrait-of-muslim-britain/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.pure.ed.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/30927001/LiberatoneDAC2017ForgingAGoodDiaspora.pdf> (p20)



consideration. While recognition could resonate with older, minority Somaliland-origin communities, it might risk alienating the majority of unionist British Somalis who identify with and support Mogadishu.

## The Gulf of Aden and Bab al-Mandab in global strategy

Strategically, the Gulf of Aden and the vital Bab al-Mandab Straits continue to increase in importance to global trade and logistics, as has been highlighted by the flurry of basebuilding in the region and most of all the explosive US-UK response to the Houthis' stopping of international trade flow heading to traverse the Suez Canal, in protest of Israel's genocidal campaign in Gaza, which has seen the hijacking of at least one vessel and attacks on over one hundred by Houthi forces with approximately one thousand airstrikes launched by the US and UK at Yemen's capital, Sanaa, in response, before the May 2025 ceasefire, not to mention multiple Israeli strikes.<sup>10 11</sup>

Fighting a multi-front campaign against the STC, the Saudi- and internationally-backed Yemeni government and Israel, the Ansar Allah movement, commonly known as the Houthis, has declared British assets "legitimate targets" following UK airstrikes in Yemen. A House of Commons Library briefing last year noted that Houthi attacks reduced Red Sea shipping capacity by 64%, directly threatening UK trade.<sup>12</sup> Recognition of Somaliland could allow Britain to deepen security cooperation at Berbera, securing Red Sea shipping lanes. However, given that Houthi attacks on shipping only began in response to Israel's war in Gaza, the prompt resolution of that conflict and thus the answering of Houthi concerns is likely to be a much more effective solution, while other already recognised states in the region offer a more practical solution for basing any enhanced British military presence.

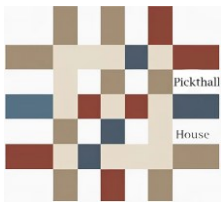
As for major international rivals, the opening of China's first overseas military base in Djibouti in 2017, lying just miles from the maritime lifeline of the Bab al-Mandab Straits, has signalled a shift in the balance of power in the Horn of

---

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.bairdmaritime.com/security/incidents/piracy/factbox-summary-of-houthi-terror-attacks-on-merchant-ships-in-the-red-sea>

<sup>11</sup> <https://yemendataproject.org/data/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9930/>



Africa.<sup>13 14</sup> The US and France both also operate bases in Djibouti while Japan opened its first and only overseas base in the country in 2011 to counter piracy.<sup>15</sup> Even Russia, with its obscure historical connection to the small Djibouti town of Sagallo and which had a naval base in Communist-ruled Socotra between 1968 and 1985, is set to reenter the region through planned naval facilities in Sudan,<sup>16 17</sup> and is even reportedly considering an installation at Somaliland's Berbera port.<sup>18</sup> However, despite the fact that, as of 2023, 12% of global shipping and 30% of global container traffic transited the Red Sea, through the Bab al-Mandab and Suez Canal,<sup>19</sup> the UK only maintains a token presence of as few as three personnel in Djibouti at the US base, Camp Lemonnier, which has been linked to British drone activity in Yemen.<sup>20</sup> The UK's larger bases are further afield, at Duqm in Oman, alongside a training unit (BATUK) at Nyati barracks in Nanyuki, Kenya. For this reason, the UK may be wise to consider the potential strategic value of Somaliland's Berbera port, which it previously controlled for three quarters of a century.

In opposition to the growing presence of China, which is keen to establish control at the Straits of Malacca and Bab al-Mandab upon which its Maritime Silk Road depends, Taiwan has already initiated diplomatic engagement with Somaliland since 2020, despite not recognising the country. This has evolved into a strategic partnership, culminating in a 2025 Coast Guard Cooperation Agreement focused on maritime security and anti-piracy operations.<sup>21</sup> Taiwan's Representative Office in Hargeisa has become a symbol of democratic solidarity between two (partly-)unrecognised states claimed by a larger unitary nation, in

---

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.congress.gov/crs\\_external\\_products/IF/PDF/IF11304/IF11304.5.pdf](https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/IF/PDF/IF11304/IF11304.5.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.cfr.org/blog/chinas-strategy-djibouti-mixing-commercial-and-military-interests>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.hscentre.org/africa/a-long-way-from-home-the-unexpected-smart-power-role-of-japan-self-defence-force-base-djibouti/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c30del8dz51o>

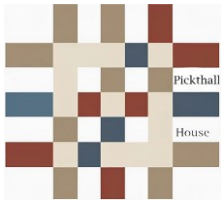
<sup>17</sup> <https://horninstitute.org/russias-naval-base-in-port-sudan-a-gateway-to-africa-and-the-indian-ocean/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.wrmea.org/gulf-gcc/why-is-russia-involved-in-yemen-again.html>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.geostrategy.org.uk/research/the-red-sea-britains-uncertain-link/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.declassifieduk.org/revealed-the-uk-militarys-overseas-base-network-involves-145-sites-in-42-countries/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202507240027>



a region increasingly shaped by authoritarian influence. In September 2024, Taiwan's envoy to Somaliland, Allen Chenhwa Lou, stated that "freedom and democracy constitute the fundamental and common values that connect Taiwan and Somaliland to the international community",<sup>22</sup> while in May of this year he announced:

*"Taiwan warmly congratulates Somaliland on its 34th National Day for its democratic achievements & steadfast commitment to regional peace & stability in the Horn Of Africa. Our cooperation shall go from strength to strength. A friend in need is a friend indeed".<sup>23</sup>*

This partnership directly challenges China's military and commercial dominance in Djibouti, where Beijing operates its first overseas base and controls key port infrastructure and offers the West a foothold in the Horn of Africa, counterbalancing the entrenchment of China's Belt and Road Initiative. Therefore, it can be argued that recognition of Somaliland would allow Britain to deepen its security presence at Berbera, counterbalancing Chinese influence.

## **Türkiye, Egypt, the Emirates, and Israel on the Horn**

On the other hand, Britain's NATO ally, Türkiye, has entrenched itself as Mogadishu's closest ally, operating its largest overseas base, Camp TURKSOM, its largest overseas base including a defence university, in Mogadishu, and having last year signed a 10-year maritime security pact with Somalia.<sup>24 25</sup> Ankara frames any potential recognition of Somaliland as an attack on Somali sovereignty and given Türkiye's NATO membership, recognition could provoke Ankara to obstruct UK initiatives within the Alliance. This would echo its past use of veto power over Sweden's accession for hosting Kurdish separatist

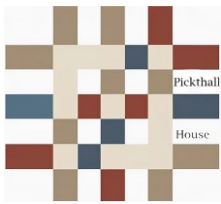
---

<sup>22</sup> [https://www.roc-taiwan.org/smd\\_en/post/1070.html](https://www.roc-taiwan.org/smd_en/post/1070.html)

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.horndiplomat.com/2025/05/taiwan-congratulates-somaliland-on-34th-national-day-reaffirms-deepening-ties/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://theconversation.com/somalia-and-türkiye-are-becoming-firm-allies-whats-behind-this-strategy-240578>

<sup>25</sup> <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2024/05/06/the-turkish-somali-connection-why-does-the-horn-of-africa-matter-for-Turkey/>



elements,<sup>26</sup> and its current blocking of Israeli participation in NATO exercises over the war in Gaza.<sup>27</sup>

Meanwhile, Türkiye's regional rival, the UAE, has invested heavily in Berbera port and has recently been reported as having facilitated Israeli radar and intelligence installations in Somaliland and Eritrea,<sup>28 29</sup> whose long-standing dictator Isaias Afwerki stands alongside Cameroon's Paul Biya as one of the few major Israeli allies remaining in Africa that refuses to recognise a Palestinian state.<sup>30 31</sup> The UAE also seized *de facto* control of the island of Socotra, situated in the mouth of the Gulf of Aden, for two weeks in 2018. Following international outcry it withdrew, but since June 2020 has returned through its proxy in the Civil War, the Southern Transitional Council (STC), and a UAE-Israeli base is in development.<sup>32</sup> So long as the UAE remains a Western ally, this triangulation may strengthen the maritime security of Europe's trade links with the East, albeit indirectly, but international competition for bases over disunited Somali and Yemeni territory and the Emiratis' aggressive approach thereto risk further destabilisation and local opposition.

Egypt has also significantly deepened its support for Somalia since 2024, elevating relations with a military cooperation protocol in August last year, upgraded to a Strategic Partnership following Hassan Sheikh Mohamed's January 2025 visit to Cairo.<sup>33</sup> Egypt reaffirmed full support for Somali sovereignty and counterterrorism, citing historical ties as far back as Pharaonic

---

<sup>26</sup> <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9574/CBP-9574.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20250311-turkiye-blocks-israel-from-participating-in-nato-military-exercise/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/uae-yemen-somalia-circle-bases-control-gulf-of-aden>

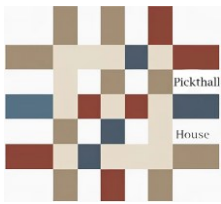
<sup>29</sup> <https://hornreview.org/2025/03/24/a-strategic-shift-uae-reportedly-brokers-u-s-recognition-of-somaliland-for-israeli-military-base/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.declassifieduk.org/the-uk-backed-african-regime-run-by-five-men/>

<sup>31</sup> <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/world/2025/09/30/-why-eritrea-and-cameroon-refuse-to-recognize-palestine-while-the-rest-of-africa-does>

<sup>32</sup> <https://emiratesleaks.com/uae-fast-tracks-development-of-joint-military-base-with-israel-in-yemens-socotra/?lang=en>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/featured/feature-egypt-deepens-ties-with-somalia-through-military-support-amid-regional-shifts>



Egypt's relations with ancient Puntland. In early September 2025, a 16-member Egyptian delegation visited Somalia to scope out deployment zones for Egyptian troops as part of the African Union's Support and Stabilisation Mission (AUSSOM) in Lower and Middle Shabelle, coastal regions between Mogadishu and Jubaland where Al Shabaab remains active. This has added to greater legitimacy to the mission which replaced the earlier African Transitional Mission in Somalia at the start of this year, and aims to transfer operations to Somali forces by 2029, but has faced notable challenges in funding and personnel. Strategically, this comes in response to a January 2024 Memorandum of Understanding signed between Ethiopia and Somaliland for use of Berbera port (see below), as rivalry between Egypt and Ethiopia increases. This was sparked by Ethiopia's filling of its Grand Renaissance Dam since 2020, which Egypt considers a threat to its Nile-dependent water security, boycotting the dam's inauguration on 9 September 2025 along with Sudan, while demanding joint management of the Nile's flows.<sup>34</sup>

The US and Israel's recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara as part of the 2020 Abraham Accords, which also involved the UAE, is probably the most relevant comparison to the question of Somaliland recognition. Despite long-running neutrality of Western powers in the Western Sahara dispute and the opposition of the African Union, which admitted the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic in 1982, leading Morocco to leave the union from 1984 to 2017, President Donald Trump took the unilateral decision in 2020 to support Morocco's autonomy plan for Western Sahara.<sup>35</sup> This came alongside recognising Israeli annexation of Syria's Golan Heights and acknowledging Jerusalem as the Israeli capital. This move has since opened the door for European powers to reaffirm their support for the plan, with France in 2019, Spain in 2022, and a total of 14 EU member states by October 2023,<sup>36</sup> with Italy following in 2024 and at last the UK in June of this year.<sup>37</sup> This illustrates how recognition deals can reshape regional alignments and demonstrates the

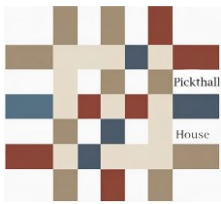
---

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/9/9/ethiopia-inaugurates-gerd-dam-amid-downstream-tensions-with-egypt-sudan>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/western-sahara/>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2023/10/27548/western-sahara-moroccos-autonomy-plan-gains-support-of-14-eu-member-states/>

<sup>37</sup> <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9906/>



veritable possibility of a Trump government again breaking with global consensus.

Indeed, in addition to the UAE's apparent facilitation of Israeli operations in the Gulf of Aden, recent reporting has highlighted controversial proposals circulating in Israeli and US political circles to explore the resettlement of Palestinians in Somaliland. According to *Al Jazeera* last month, Israel had approached Somaliland as a potential destination for Palestinians displaced from Gaza,<sup>38</sup> with some US politicians linking recognition of Somaliland to such a plan. Naturally, human rights advocates, including in Somaliland itself, have warned that such a move would "render Somaliland complicit in the genocide against Palestinians in Gaza," firmly undermining its minimal international legitimacy.<sup>39</sup> A parallel report by *African Pulse* detailed a leaked Boston Consulting Group study, allegedly commissioned by Israeli investors, which examined "Project Aurora", a financial model for relocating Palestinians to Somalia and Somaliland.<sup>40</sup> Although Somaliland's government has officially denied involvement, affirming support for Palestinian self-determination, the very circulation of such proposals risks entangling Somaliland's recognition bid with the geopolitics of the Israel-Palestine conflict, potentially further alienating African and Arab states that have historically sympathised with the Palestinian cause and are already highly skeptical of Somaliland recognition. Moreover, this prospect should be a major impediment to any British government wishing to demonstrate its commitment to international law, as Sir Keir Starmer's government has endeavoured to do through recognition of Palestine and the deal to transfer the Chagos Archipelago to Mauritius.

## Regional rivals: Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya

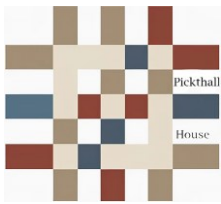
Within East Africa, Ethiopia and Kenya have both taken steps that suggest tacit or emerging support for Somaliland's autonomy, despite African Union opposition. Historically, both Ethiopia and Kenya have clashed with Somalia

---

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/9/8/somaliland-recognition-for-forced-transfer-of-palestinians-not-worth-it>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/somaliland-risks-internal-strife-plan-relocate-displaced-palestinians-gaza>

<sup>40</sup> <https://africanpulse.org/blog/african-review-4/the-bcg-plan-to-resettle-gazan-palestinians-in-somalia-a-detailed-report-and-global-responses-120>



over border disputes and security concerns regarding their significant Somali minorities. These include the 1963-67 Shifta War in Kenya's North Eastern Province, Somalia's irredentist Ogaden War for Somali-majority eastern Ethiopia in 1977-78, Ethiopia's and Kenya's failed interventions into Somalia against Islamist forces led by Al Shabaab in 2006-09 and 2011 respectively, and the alleged presence of potentially separatist Jubaland forces in Kenya as recently as September 2025,<sup>41</sup> in addition to an ongoing maritime boundary dispute between Somalia and Kenya.

Both countries now appear to view Somaliland as a buffer and partner in regional stability against Somali irredentism and insurgent Islamism. In January 2024, Ethiopia signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Somaliland, granting Addis Ababa access to Berbera port in exchange for potential diplomatic recognition.<sup>42</sup> Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's administration described the deal as "historic", prompting Somalia to recall its ambassador and accuse Ethiopia of violating its sovereignty. Kenya, meanwhile, has hosted a Somaliland Representative Office in Nairobi since 2021, and former President Uhuru Kenyatta met with Somaliland's President Muse Bihi in 2020.<sup>43</sup>

While Kenya has not formally recognised Somaliland either, its diplomatic engagement and trade facilitation suggest *de facto* recognition. Kenyan troops currently operate in Jubaland, Somalia's southernmost federal state, as part of AUSSOM, against Al Shabaab and other militants.<sup>44</sup> As in Ethiopia, Somalis constitute a significant minority in Kenya, numbering 2.8 million in North Eastern Province, from which Jubaland was partitioned as the eastern portion was transferred from Britain's East African Protectorate to Italian Somaliland in 1925 as a reward for Italy's switch to support the Entente during the First World War.

This border has seen conflict back in the 1963-67 Shifta War. Shortly before British Somaliland's independence in 1960, the UK stated its support for a united Somali state and offered an informal plebiscite in 1962 in British East

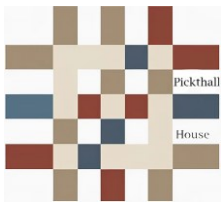
---

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/world/africa/kenya-denies-presence-of-jubaland-troops-in-mandera-labels-claims-as-baseless-rumors>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.vifindia.org/article/2025/january/24/Uncertainties-Across-the-Horn-of-Africa>

<sup>43</sup> <https://masharikirpc.org/kenya-and-somaliland-embassy-crisis-and-future-regional-implications/>

<sup>44</sup> <https://atmis-au.org/>



Africa's North Frontier District. This plebiscite indicated the interest of an overwhelming majority of Somalis and other Muslims in the district in joining Somalia.<sup>45</sup> However, upon Kenyan independence in 1963, Kenya's first Prime Minister, Jomo Kenyatta, refused any notion of surrendering control to Somalia, telling Somalis to "pack up your camels and go to Somalia". Kenyatta's KANU was not concerned about Somali insurrection, but more concerned that the British would support separatist forces, as had only recently concluded in the Republic of the Congo (modern-day DRC) when Belgium backed the separatist republics of Katanga and South Kasai from 1960 to 1963, following Congolese independence. Ultimately, Britain and Ethiopia supported Kenya in the fight against the Somalia-backed rebels until peace with Somalia was made in 1967.

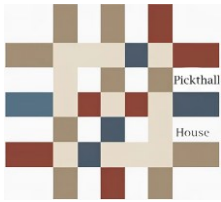
Kenya also maintains a maritime border dispute with Somalia over an area suspected to contain notable gas and petrocarbon deposits. Both countries signed a MoU in April 2009 recognising the issue and agreed to negotiate, but this was rejected by Somalia six months later, which then filed a case in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 2014. Public hearings scheduled for 2019 were delayed to 2021 at Kenya's request, which then refused to attend hearings. Between December 2020 and May 2021, Somalia suspended diplomatic relations with Kenya over allegations of electoral interference, until relations were restored through Qatari mediation. At last, in October 2021, the Court found that, contrary to Kenyan claims, no prior border agreement existed and divided the disputed area along an equidistant line.<sup>46</sup> Somalia has accepted this judgement, but Kenya continues to reject it.

Ethiopia itself, despite President Abiy Ahmed's 2019 Nobel Peace Prize, has not shown itself to be a regional source of stability, through its recent war with Eritrea, clashes with Egypt over Nile water flows and the crisis it faces with internal Tigray, Oromo and Amhara militias. The last thing the region needs is international sanction for separatist movements. Britain's primary strategic interest in the region is maritime and commercial security and its existing presence in Duqm, or hypothetical bases in Djibouti or Sudan, would be more effective to this end than risking further regional destabilisation through Somaliland recognition.

---

<sup>45</sup> <https://kenyanhistory.com/the-shifta-war-kenyas-forgotten-border-conflict-1963-1968/>

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.icj-cij.org/public/files/case-related/161/161-20211012-JUD-01-00-EN.pdf>



## Western support for Somaliland independence

Nonetheless, among conservative politicians in the US and UK, support for recognising Somaliland's independence has been growing. In America, Texas Senator Ted Cruz publicly called for recognition of Somaliland in August this year. He argued that Somaliland was “a critical security and diplomatic partner for the United States” in the Horn of Africa, noting that:

*“It is strategically located along the Gulf of Aden, putting it near one of the world’s busiest maritime corridors. It possesses capable armed forces and contributes to regional counterterrorism and piracy operations. It has enabled the opening of a Taiwanese Representative Office in the capital of Hargeisa, sought to strengthen ties with Israel, and voiced support for the Abraham Accords”.*<sup>47</sup>

As for the UK, the aforementioned Sir Gavin Williamson MP, Chair of the APPG on Somaliland, along with the group’s British Yemeni Vice Chair, Abtisam Mohamed, MP for Sheffield Central, and the first Arab woman elected to UK Parliament, has stated that “the next best time to recognise Somaliland is now.”<sup>48</sup>

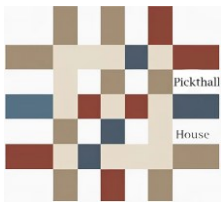
Nevertheless, a heated debate in the House of Lords just under a year ago in October 2024 demonstrated the range of nuanced positions held by British politicians on the issue.<sup>49</sup> If Britain’s position remains ambiguous and Washington does move to recognition, as in Western Sahara and the Golan Heights, UK hesitation and strategic ambiguity risks ceding influence to the US, UAE, and Israel. While recognition of Somaliland remains, the best course of action for Britain is to take a principled and preemptive stance in opposition, providing vocal and active support to Somali reintegration efforts that could discourage the risk of a maverick American move to recognition.

---

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.cruz.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/sen-cruz-calls-for-us-recognition-of-somaliland>

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.horndiplomat.com/2025/06/the-time-is-now-uk-parliament-group-pushes-for-somaliland-recognition/>

<sup>49</sup> <https://saxafimedia.com/uk-house-of-lords-somaliland-recognition/>



## Risks and opposition

Indeed, recognition would not be without risks and the inevitable, significant opposition. For instance, recognition of Somaliland could embolden other Somali federal member states to pursue greater autonomy or outright secession. Puntland, which neighbours Somaliland to the east, declared autonomy in 1998, has already suspended recognition of the Federal Government of Somalia in March of last year, accusing Mogadishu of unilaterally amending the 2012 Provisional Constitution by expanding presidential powers and introducing a multi-party system.<sup>50</sup> Puntland thereby declared its own *de facto* independence in domestic and international affairs until a new federal constitution is ratified via public referendum.

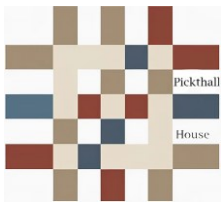
Meanwhile, in the aforementioned Jubaland, which was only officially recognised as a federal member state in 2013, has since then been led by President Ahmed Mohamed Islam “Madobe”. Backed by Kenya as a buffer against Al Shabaab, Madobe has resisted federal authority and is engaged in an ongoing constitutional crisis and armed clashes with federal forces in the Gedo region since Mogadishu refused to recognise Madobe’s re-election in August 2019 and November 2024, citing procedural violations. Nonetheless, Madobe retains control over the capital and port of Kismayo and much of the state and has accused Somali federal President Hassan Sheikh Mohamed, of pushing for civil war in Jubaland, supposedly with Ethiopian and Kenyan support, while reasserting Jubaland’s status as part of Somalia.<sup>51</sup>

Understandably, there is concern that recognition of Somaliland could set a precedent for Puntland to formalise independence, while also destabilising Jubaland and potentially reigniting separatist sentiment in Ethiopia’s Somali Region (Ogaden). It is clear that the argument of Somaliland exceptionalism in favour of independence effectively abandons any hope of a stable Somali state and has wider ramifications for the Horn of Africa. As *Caasimada Online* analysis from May 2025 indicated, Somalia’s fragmented federalism is already undermining counterterrorism coordination, with Al-Shabaab exploiting

---

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.dw.com/en/somalia-puntland-pulls-recognition-of-federal-government/a-68709757>

<sup>51</sup> <https://hornobserver.com/articles/3050/Ahmed-Madobe-Re-Elected-as-Jubaland-President-for-a-Five-Year-Term>



divisions, further compounding chaos and disunity in Somalia.<sup>52</sup> For Britain, recognition of Somaliland without a broader settlement, despite arguments for enhancing Western maritime security and rewarding democracy in the Gulf of Aden, would instead risk accelerating Somalia's complete fragmentation, creating new ungoverned spaces along the Gulf and ultimately weakening collective security against piracy and terrorism.

The post-colonial consensus in Africa, maintained by the African Union (AU), has been to accept the continents' colonial borders, notwithstanding their manifold shortcomings, in the pursuit of interstate peace and a focus on national development. This was formalised in the July 1964 Cairo Declaration, adopted by the AU's predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity, declaring the principle of "respect for borders existing at the time of independence", also known as *uti possidetis juris*.<sup>53</sup> This was reinforced in 2007 by the establishment of the African Union Border Programme (AUBP) which promotes the delimitation, demarcation and reaffirmation of inherited boundaries. The AU fears unleashing a "Pandora's box" of secessionist claims across the continent, which has already witnessed significant conflict in Katanga and Biafra, as well as more recent and ongoing examples in Azawad, Dar El Kuti, Ambazonia, Western Togoland, to name but a few. This goes without mentioning the significant risks of fragmentation in neighbouring Ethiopia following the 2020-22 Tigray War, as peace talks in 2023-24 failed to establish lasting peace with Amhara and Oromo factions.

Nonetheless, Ethiopia's 2024 MoU with Somaliland, trading recognition for Red Sea access, in order to circumvent Djiboutian port fees and infrastructure bottlenecks, and Kenya's hosting of a Somaliland "embassy" in Nairobi suggest regional cracks in the AU consensus on this matter. On the other hand, as discussed previously, Türkiye and Egypt have also already affirmed support for Somali sovereignty, and warned against Somaliland recognition.<sup>54 55</sup> As a NATO member and a British ally, Ankara could obstruct UK initiatives, complicating

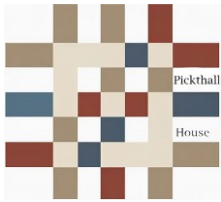
---

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.caasimada.net/from-republic-to-jsp-somalias-shift-toward-centralized-power/>

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.peaceau.org/en/page/85-au-border-programme-aubp>

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/Turkiyesource/Turkiye-signed-two-major-deals-with-somalia-will-it-be-able-to-implement-them/>

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.sam.gov.tr/snapshots/why-is-turkiye-s-recent-deal-woth-somalia-being-hailed-as-historic-0>



alliance cohesion at a time of heightened global instability. Recognition by Britain could align London more closely with Addis Ababa, Abu Dhabi and Nairobi, but at the cost of alienating Mogadishu, Ankara and Cairo.

Recognition of an independent Somaliland, despite its distance from Britain's shores, could also trigger cries of hypocrisy and embolden Scottish nationalists at home. Like Scotland, northern Somalia, modern-day Somaliland and Puntland, was historically ruled by various dynasties with greater ties to Arabia and the Gulf, separate from the centralised Ajuraan and Geledi Sultanates which dominated around Mogadishu and Shabelle from the 13th to the 20th centuries. Whitehall has long feared that endorsing secession abroad undermines its stance against Scottish independence, as can be seen in the case of Catalonia and Spain

## Conclusion and recommendations

Ultimately, despite Sir Gavin Williamson's campaigns, as recently as February 2024, Britain's Ambassador to the UN, James Kariuki, in February 2024 reaffirmed the UK's "support for Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity", while advocating for greater mediation between Somalia and Ethiopia.<sup>56</sup> This position is also in keeping with the UK's position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in which Britain maintained support for post-Soviet borders and Azerbaijani territorial integrity against the unrecognised, Armenian-backed state of Artsakh.<sup>57</sup> Although the UK did recognise Kosovar independence in 2008, ministers at the time made clear that this was a "sui generis case" setting no precedent, in part to avoid emboldening Catalanian, Scottish and Irish separatists.<sup>58</sup>

By backing Mogadishu's sovereignty more strongly, the United Kingdom can:

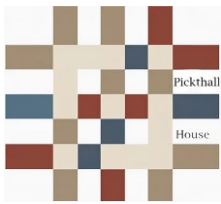
1. Assert strategic independence against potential US unilateral action,

---

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-uk-calls-for-calm-dialogue-to-de-escalate-the-situation-in-somalia-uk-statement-at-the-un-security-council>

<sup>57</sup> <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-05-18/HL7933/>

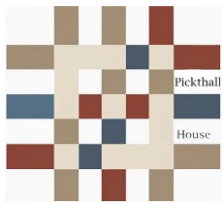
<sup>58</sup> <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2008-02-19/debates/08021967000018/Kosovo>



2. Reinforce human rights credentials by avoiding closer association with Israeli and Emirati interests and Somaliland's controversial shelling of civilians in Las Anod
3. Reaffirm commitment to international law and respect for post-colonial state sovereignty and territorial integrity,
4. Work to strengthen federal institutions and reduce incentives for separatism in Puntland and Jubaland,
5. Further develop its defensive and counter-insurgency training programme in Baidoa and offer of support to Somali and AU forces,
6. Support mediation efforts by the AU and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development in East Africa (IGAD), including a Rwanda-style, post-genocide justice and reconciliation process, and
7. Build a closer alignment and alliance with NATO ally, Türkiye, in the Middle East, including in Djibouti, Iraq and Qatar, which are also home to both British and Turkish military presence or bases.

Practically, this backing would involve increased investment in Somali federal security forces, maritime policing, and active efforts at political reconciliation between Mogadishu and federal member states, including efforts to dissuade Ethiopia and Kenya from any increased interference. A unified and stable Somali state, with UK and international backing, would arguably be better positioned to secure the Gulf of Aden, counter Houthi attacks on shipping, and resist external encroachment by China, Türkiye, and the UAE, than a vulnerable and desperate Somaliland coupled with increased government collapse and piracy to its south. While this approach may disappoint Somaliland's advocates, it offers a pathway to regional stability and maritime security that recognition alone cannot guarantee.

For these reasons, Pickthall House calls for the British government to continue to reaffirm its support for Somali sovereignty and territorial integrity against any suggestion of unilateral American recognition, coupled with greater practical contributions to peacemaking, reconciliation, and integration within a federal Somalia. This position is in line with the Government's avowed commitment to international law and human rights and does not preclude the possibility of a stronger British presence in the Gulf of Aden, either through a) an enhanced presence in Djibouti or Duqm, Oman, b) an African naval base in



the proximity of Mogadishu in partnership with Türkiye or presence in Camp TURKSOM itself, or even c) investment and development of Berbera port, albeit within a prospective united Somalia.