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What Israel Sees in Somaliland

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Although it has been pushed off the front pages by the Trump Administration's dramatic early January ouster of Venezuelan strongman Nicolas Maduro and the current unrest roiling Iran, another recent geopolitical development deserves sustained attention. In late December, Israel unexpectedly announced that it was unilaterally recognizing the sovereignty of the East African territory of Somaliland. Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar made clear that the move was the culmination of months of quiet, intensive diplomacy between Jerusalem and Hargeisa, leading to "mutual recognition and full diplomatic relations."¹

The international reaction was immediate – and predictable. Condemnations poured in not only from Somalia, the country most directly disadvantaged by the development, but also from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Algeria, Libya and other Middle Eastern and African states, all of whom framed the move as destabilizing and illegitimate.² Russia and China, too, weighed in in opposition.³

Notably, however, the United States did not. The Trump Administration defended Israel's right to choose its diplomatic partners while simultaneously stressing that America's own policy remains unchanged.⁴ Still, many now think that the Trump Administration should follow Israel's diplomatic lead in recognizing Somaliland – and that it soon might.⁵ (Indeed, Israel's recognition seems to have already touched off a potential domino effect, with countries like Morocco, the UAE, Kenya, Ethiopia and India also reportedly considering doing the same.)⁶

Still, at first blush, Jerusalem's timing seemed strange. Somaliland has operated as a *de facto* state for more than three decades, ever since its declaration of independence from Somalia in



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May of 1991. For most of that time, however, it has only been a bit player in African politics – and absent from global politics altogether. Yet recent geopolitical factors have made it an increasingly relevant and attractive partner for the Jewish state.

One is the threat posed by the Houthis, Yemen’s Iranian-supported rebels. Throughout the two years of the Gaza war, the group emerged as a vexing challenge for Israel and the international community at large. Sporadic Houthi attacks wreaked havoc on maritime shipping in and around the Red Sea. By June 2024, more than 65 countries had been affected by Houthi aggression, leading to a decline of about 90 percent in shipping via the Red Sea, through which between 10 and 15 percent of all global trade flows.⁷ The impact of the resulting shipping disruptions and commercial delays was immense, estimated to be in the billions of dollars.⁸

At the same time, periodic Houthi missile and drone attacks posed a sustained problem for Israel itself, despite its extensive missile and air defenses. Repeated Israeli retaliatory airstrikes on Yemeni targets, including the port at Hodeidah, did little to alter the group’s calculus, helping turn the Red Sea and Southern Gulf into an active theater in the larger confrontation between Israel and Iran.

For the moment, that threat has receded. But Jerusalem is under no illusion that it has dissipated altogether. Israel policymakers are acutely aware that the Houthis retain both the capability and the intent to renew attacks in the event of a new conflict between Israel and Iran, or should fighting with Hamas in the Gaza Strip resume. In that context, Somaliland’s geographic proximity to Yemen in the Southern Gulf makes it an attractive platform for intelligence collection, over-the-horizon radar coverage, and the potential deployment of unmanned systems – assets that could provide early warning and help blunt future Houthi aggression.

Another driver is Israel’s efforts to counteract its current international isolation. Although Jerusalem unquestionably won the conflict with Hamas, it did so at massive reputational cost in the region and in the West. While the former is to some extent predictable, the latter is less so. Yet throughout much of Europe and even in the United States, support for Israel has declined while anti-Semitism has surged alarmingly.⁹ Against this backdrop, Israel is gravitating to opportunities to change the geopolitical conversation.

Here, Africa looms large. The continent’s political dynamism and explosive population growth have positioned it to be a key global power center over the next decade.¹⁰ Israel has the means to meaningfully contribute to African development by dint of its technological prowess and its real-world solutions to local problems (such as desertification and water scarcity).¹¹ Precisely this usefulness helped sustain Israel’s ties to the countries of the “Abraham Accords” through the tumult of the past two years. And now that the Gaza war is over, Israeli officials are banking on that innovation to lead to breakthroughs in other places as well.

A clear template exists in this regard. When Israel and Morocco normalized relations in late 2020, it included a formal Israeli (and subsequently American) recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over the Western Sahara, a political prize that had long been coveted by Rabat. That experience, in turn, offered up a formula – recognition of a contested territorial claim as



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part of a broader strategic deal—that Israel has now followed in its engagement with Somaliland.

The exact contours of Israeli-Somaliland cooperation are still being worked out, but a plausible arrangement could bundle Israeli recognition, as well as security, agricultural, technological and health cooperation, in exchange for diplomatic ties, port and air access, and even potentially a broader strategic partnership. This, in turn, has the potential to align Somaliland with the broader structure of the Abraham Accords—particularly because another Accords nation, the UAE, is already heavily involved there. Nearly a decade ago, the Emirates secured a 30-year concession to Somaliland’s strategic port of Berbera making Abu Dhabi a key stakeholder in Somaliland’s long-term success.¹² All of which means that Israel’s growing connections to Somaliland could propel it and the UAE into even deeper alignment, giving both countries greater ability to ensure stability in Yemen and security in the Red Sea.

The strategic logic underpinning Israel’s outreach to Somaliland, in other words, is compelling. It simultaneously provides the country with a strategic foothold opposite Yemen, greater proximity to the ongoing threat posed by the Houthis, a deeper stake in Red Sea security, and the potential to become a much bigger player in African politics. For those reasons, Israel’s newest partnership is well positioned to endure.

¹ Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Press Release*, “FM Sa’ar speaks with President of Somaliland Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi,” December 26, 2025, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2025/12/mil-251226-israel-mfa01.htm>.

² Joint Foreign Ministry Statement, December 27, 2025, <https://x.com/ForeignMinistry/status/2004985438571037118>.

³ “China slams Israel recognizing Somaliland as ‘foreign interference,’” *Daily Sabah*, December 29, 2025, https://www.dailysabah.com/world/africa/china-slams-israel-recognizing-somaliland-as-foreign-interference?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email.

⁴ “Defending Israel, US likens Somaliland recognition to Palestinian statehood acknowledgements,” *The Times of Israel*, December 30, 2025, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/defending-israel-us-likens-somaliland-recognition-to-palestinian-statehood-acknowledgements/>.

⁵ Trevor Filseth, “Israel Just Recognized Somaliland Independence. The US Should Follow.,” *The National Interest*, December 29, 2025, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/israel-just-recognized-somaliland-independence-the-us-should-follow>.

⁶ Africa View Facts Post, January 6, 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/AfricaViewFacts/posts/five-countries-from-asia-and-africa-are-reportedly-preparing-to-recognize-somali/897821396087706/>.

⁷ Defense Intelligence Agency, “Yemen: Houthi Attacks Placing Pressure on International Trade,” (undated), https://www.dia.mil/Portals/110/Images/News/Military_Powers_Publications/YEM_Houthi-Attacks-Pressuring-International-Trade.pdf.

⁸ Željko Bogetic, Luan Zhao, Eric Le Borgne, and Holly Krambeck, “Navigating troubled waters: The Red Sea shipping crisis and its global repercussions,” *World Bank Blogs*, May 16, 2024, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/developmenttalk/navigating-troubled-waters--the-red-sea-shipping-crisis-and-its->

⁹ Lisa Lerer and Ruth Igielnik, “Americans’ Support for Israel Dramatically Declines, Times/Siena Poll Finds,” *The New York Times*, September 29, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/09/29/polls/israel-gaza-war-us-poll.html>.



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¹⁰ Andrew Stanley, "African Century," International Monetary Fund, *F&D Magazine*, September 2023, <https://www.imf.org/en/publications/fandd/issues/2023/09/pt-african-century>.

¹¹ Max Kaplan-Zantopp, "How Israel used scientific innovation to beat its water crisis," *Unpacked*, October 24, 2025, <https://unpacked.media/how-israel-used-scientific-innovation-to-beat-its-water-crisis/>.

¹² "DP World wins 30-year concession for port of Berbera in Somaliland," *The Lodestar*, June 9, 2016, <https://theloadstar.com/dp-world-wins-30-year-concession-for-port-of-berbera-in-somaliland/>.

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