

The Illegal Fragmentation of Somalia: Israeli Recognition of Somaliland and the Violation of International Law

Habib Badawi
Lebanese University
habib.badawi@ul.edu.lb

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70806/eh2wa793>

Abstract

Israel's December 2025 recognition of Somaliland constitutes a flagrant violation of international law and the established norms governing territorial integrity. This study demonstrates that Somaliland's unilateral secession lacks legal foundation under international law, having received no recognition from the United Nations, African Union, or any state until Israel's unprecedented breach. Israeli recognition—though framed rhetorically as supporting self-determination—operates primarily as a strategic instrument to secure control over the Bab al-Mandeb Strait, with destabilizing consequences for the Horn of Africa.

By legitimizing an illegal secession outside UN and African Union frameworks, Israeli recognition normalizes fragmentation as a tool of power projection. This paper argues that Somaliland remains an integral part of Somalia under international law, and that external recognition of illegal entities threatens the foundation of the post-colonial African state system. Israel's action establishes a dangerous precedent wherein extra-regional powers can violate African territorial sovereignty through selective recognition, transforming statehood from a legal status into a bilateral transaction determined by strategic utility.

Keywords: Somaliland, Israel, illegal secession, territorial integrity, international law, UN Charter, African Union, Bab al-Mandeb, sovereignty violation.

Introduction

The Horn of Africa's strategic position—particularly its proximity to the Bab al-Mandeb Strait, one of the world's most critical maritime chokepoints—renders the region exceptionally sensitive to violations of territorial integrity norms (Remnek, 1980). Israel's December 2025 recognition of Somaliland represents a calculated breach of international law that cannot be understood through self-determination discourse alone. Rather, it constitutes strategic manipulation of recognition norms to advance Israeli maritime security interests at the expense of regional stability and international legal order.

This study establishes that Somaliland's secession is illegal under international law and that Israeli recognition violates multiple binding international legal instruments. From 1991 to December 2025, no sovereign state or international organization recognized Somaliland's independence, reflecting universal adherence to Somalia's territorial integrity as mandated by the UN Charter, the African Union Constitutive Act, and the 1964 OAU Cairo Declaration. Israel's unilateral recognition breaks this consensus, establishing a precedent that threatens the stability of Africa's post-colonial territorial framework.

The implications extend beyond bilateral relations. By recognizing an illegal entity, Israel undermines the UN Charter's Article 2 prohibition on violating territorial integrity and repudiates Africa's foundational principle that inherited colonial borders remain inviolable (Organisation of African Unity, 1964; United Nations, 2023). Such

action normalizes fragmentation as a strategic tool, with destabilizing consequences for a region already characterized by fragile state structures and unresolved border disputes (Dubale, 2024).

This study contends that self-determination, when selectively invoked by external powers to legitimize illegal secessions, becomes a mechanism of geopolitical fragmentation rather than emancipation. Israeli recognition exemplifies this instrumentalization, demonstrating how recognition can be weaponized to reorder strategic landscapes without accountability for long-term governance and security consequences borne by the region itself.

Methodology

This study employs qualitative analysis of international legal instruments, UN resolutions, AU declarations, and governmental statements. The analysis prioritizes international legal frameworks governing statehood and territorial integrity, assessing Israeli recognition against binding legal obligations rather than bilateral strategic considerations. Evidence is drawn from the UN Charter, OAU/AU founding documents, ICJ jurisprudence on territorial integrity, and peer-reviewed scholarship on international law and Horn of Africa geopolitics.

The paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 establishes Somaliland's geographic and historical context; Section 3 documents Somaliland's illegal status from 1991-2025; Section 4 analyzes the diplomatic campaign preceding Israeli recognition; Section 5 examines the December 2025 recognition and its violation of international law; Section 6 analyzes international responses; Section 7 explores Israeli strategic motivations; Section 8 establishes why recognition is legally invalid; Section 9 assesses systemic risks; and Section 10 concludes with policy recommendations.

Somaliland's Geographic and Historical Context

Somaliland occupies approximately 176,120 square kilometers in northwestern Somalia, with an estimated 6.2 million population as of 2024 (Journal of Somali Studies, 2024). Its economy relies primarily on agriculture, livestock, and trade through Berbera port, which overlooks the Gulf of Aden and Arabian Sea (Dubale, 2024). Table 1 summarizes key geographic features.

Table 1: Somaliland's Geographic Profile

Feature	Detail
Area	176,120 km ²
Population (2024)	6.2 million
Location	Northwestern Somalia, Horn of Africa
Coastline	Gulf of Aden, Arabian Sea
Main Port	Berbera
Economy	Agriculture, livestock, Berbera trade

Note. Data from Journal of Somali Studies (2024) and Dubale (2024). Berbera's proximity to Bab al-Mandeb Strait makes it strategically significant for maritime control.

Historical Trajectory

Somaliland's historical trajectory illuminates its contested statehood claims. As documented in Table 2, the region existed as British Somaliland protectorate until June 26, 1960, when it achieved brief independence. Within days, the territory voluntarily merged with Italian Somalia to form the Republic of Somalia (Journal of Somali Studies, 2024). This five-day independence has since been invoked to legitimize Somaliland's 1991 secession—a legal argument without foundation in international law.

Following Mogadishu's governmental collapse in 1991, Somaliland's leadership declared withdrawal from the Somali federal structure. However, unilateral declarations of independence do not

create statehood under international law absent recognition by the international community and compliance with territorial integrity norms.

Table 2: Key Events in Somaliland's Political Trajectory

Year	Event
1960 (June 26)	Independence from Britain
1960 (July)	Voluntary union with Italian Somalia → Republic of Somalia
1991 (May)	Unilateral declaration of secession
1991-2025	De facto autonomy without any international recognition
2025 (December 26)	Israel recognizes Somaliland, violating international law

Note. The 34-year period without recognition (1991-2025) reflects international adherence to Somalia's territorial integrity under international law.

Somaliland's Illegal Status Under International Law (1991-2025)

From 1991 to December 2025, Somaliland received no recognition from any sovereign state, the United Nations, or regional organizations. This universal non-recognition reflects not political oversight but legal obligation. The international community consistently affirmed Somalia's territorial integrity, recognizing that Somaliland's unilateral secession violated fundamental principles of international law (United Nations, 2023; Dubale, 2024).

¹ **UN Charter, Article 2(4):** Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter obliges all member states to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any manner inconsistent with the purposes of the UN [Oxford Academic Justia](#). It is widely regarded as a cornerstone of modern international law, establishing the prohibition of military aggression as a binding norm and reinforcing the principle of sovereign equality among states.

² The **Montevideo Convention** on the Rights and Duties of States, signed in 1933, codifies the classical criteria for

Legal Basis for Non-Recognition

Three binding legal frameworks establish Somaliland's illegal status:

First, the UN Charter Article 2(4)¹ prohibits threats or use of force against the territorial integrity of any state. While Somaliland's secession was not military aggression, the principle of territorial integrity extends to unilateral territorial modifications. The UN has consistently treated Somalia as a single sovereign state with authority over its entire territory, including the northwestern region.

Second, the 1964 OAU Cairo Declaration—binding on all African states—enshrines respect for inherited colonial borders as essential to continental stability (Organisation of African Unity, 1964). This principle, codified in the AU Constitutive Act, explicitly prohibits recognition of secessionist entities to prevent cascading disintegration. The African Union has maintained unwavering support for Somalia's territorial integrity, refusing to recognize Somaliland despite its administrative capacity.

Third, international legal doctrine establishes that effective control and administrative capacity—which Somaliland possesses—do not suffice for statehood. The Montevideo Convention² criteria (permanent population, defined territory, government, capacity for foreign relations) are necessary but not sufficient. Statehood requires recognition within the international legal order, particularly when secession violates the parent state's territorial integrity without consent (Klabbers, 2010).

statehood in international law. [Det juridiske fakultet Cambridge University Press & Assessment](#). Article 1 specifies that a state must possess a permanent population, a defined territory, a government, and the capacity to enter into relations with other states. These criteria remain influential in debates on recognition and legitimacy, though they are not sufficient when secession conflicts with territorial integrity norms

Administrative Capacity Does Not Confer Legal Status

Somaliland developed quasi-governmental structures, including multiparty elections and professionalized security forces (Journal of Somali Studies, 2024). However, administrative effectiveness does not legitimize illegal secession. International law distinguishes between de facto control and de jure statehood. Without recognition, Somaliland remained excluded from treaty regimes, international financial institutions, and multilateral organizations—not due to oversight but because it lacks legal personality under international law.

The Federal Government of Somalia retains sovereign authority over all Somali territory under international law. No UN resolution has ever suggested Somalia's borders exclude the northwestern region, and the African Union explicitly rejects Somaliland's legal separation.

The Diplomatic Campaign for Recognition (May-December 2025)

Netanyahu's Strategic Overture

In May 2025, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu signaled Israel's intention to recognize Somaliland during discussions with U.S. President Donald Trump. Netanyahu framed recognition as supporting self-determination while positioning it as a bargaining chip in broader Middle East negotiations. This revealed recognition as a transactional tool rather than principled legal determination.

Trump's initial response—calling it *“an important question”*—indicated Netanyahu's success in positioning Somaliland within broader normalization discussions, potentially linking recognition to Gaza, Iran, and Abraham Accords expansion.

Unprecedented International Opposition

On May 27, 2025, an extraordinary coalition of 22 countries plus the Organization of Islamic Cooperation issued a joint statement opposing Israeli recognition. The signatories—Egypt, Qatar, Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Gambia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Maldives, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Turkey, and Yemen—transcended typical Sunni-Shia and Arab-Persian divides to oppose Israel's violation of territorial integrity norms (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, 2025).

The statement condemned prospective recognition as *“a flagrant violation of international law and the UN Charter, which affirms respect for the sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of states”* (United Nations, 2023). Signatories stressed categorical rejection of any measures undermining Somalia's unity, territorial integrity, and sovereignty over its entire territory.

The coalition also rejected speculation linking recognition to Palestinian displacement from Gaza to Somaliland—a proposal that would compound violations of Palestinian and Somali territorial rights. This linkage exposed recognition as part of broader strategic maneuvering rather than legal adjudication.

Trump's Strategic Ambiguity

Following the May statement, Trump claimed ignorance of Somaliland—a strategic posture rather than genuine lack of knowledge. The administration temporarily shelved the initiative, recognizing the diplomatic cost among U.S.-allied states opposed to Israeli strategic penetration of the Horn of Africa. However, Trump's transactional diplomacy left open the possibility of eventual U.S. recognition if Netanyahu offered sufficient concessions on other regional files.

Israeli Recognition: Violation of International Law (December 26, 2025)

On December 26, 2025, Israel became the first state to recognize Somaliland, breaking 34 years of universal adherence to international law. This unilateral action violates multiple binding legal obligations.

The Recognition Announcement

Israel announced full diplomatic relations with Somaliland, with Prime Minister Netanyahu and Somaliland President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullah exchanging credentials. Israel justified recognition by invoking “*the right of peoples to self-determination and a desire to promote stability and development in the Horn of Africa*,” announcing cooperation in agriculture, health, education, and technology.

This rhetoric contradicts both international law and Israel's own recognition practices. Israel refuses to recognize Palestinian statehood despite 147 countries' recognition and the Oslo Accords framework (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025). The selective application exposes recognition as strategic utility rather than legal principle.

Legal Violations

Israeli recognition violates international law on four grounds:

First, it breaches UN Charter Article 2(4)'s territorial integrity obligation. While Israel is not militarily attacking Somalia, recognition of an illegal secessionist entity constitutes intervention in Somalia's territorial integrity. The ICJ has established that respecting territorial integrity

prohibits actions that undermine a state's territorial unity.

Second, it violates the principle that unilateral secession without parent state consent is illegal. The ICJ's Kosovo Advisory Opinion (2010)³ established that while declarations of independence may not violate international law, other states are not obligated—and may be prohibited—from recognizing such entities when recognition would violate territorial integrity norms. Israel's recognition falls squarely within this prohibition.

Third, it contradicts the African Union's legal framework. The AU Constitutive Act prohibits member states and external actors from undermining African territorial integrity. While Israel is not an AU member, its recognition directly contravenes the legal order African states have established for continental stability (Organisation of African Unity, 1964).

Fourth, it weaponizes self-determination in violation of its proper legal scope. Self-determination applies to colonial situations, foreign occupation, and situations where internal self-determination (autonomy within existing states) is denied. Somaliland's situation meets none of these criteria. Somalia is not a colonial power; Somaliland is not under foreign occupation; and Somalia's federal system permits substantial regional autonomy. Invoking self-determination to justify recognition of an illegal secession distorts the principle beyond recognition.

International Responses: Defending Territorial Integrity

Federal Government of Somalia

Somalia issued unequivocal rejection, characterizing recognition as “*a flagrant violation of*

³ **ICJ Kosovo Advisory Opinion (2010):** In its Advisory Opinion of 22 July 2010, the International Court of Justice concluded that Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence did not violate international law ([International Court of Justice](#), [United States Institute of Peace](#)). The Court emphasized that international law contains no prohibition on

declarations of independence per se, but it did not affirm Kosovo's statehood or impose obligations on states to recognize it. The opinion is often cited as precedent for distinguishing between declarations of independence and the legality of recognition.

Somalia's sovereignty and international legal obligations" (United Nations, 2023). Mogadishu mobilized diplomatic channels to contest recognition and appealed to the international community to reaffirm Somalia's territorial unity, framing Israeli action as an existential threat to state coherence.

African Union

The African Union expressed profound concern regarding precedential implications. The organization warned that legitimizing Somaliland's secession *"opens the door to separatist claims in other member states,"* potentially destabilizing a region characterized by fragile state structures (Dubale, 2024). The AU position reflects the foundational importance of the 1964 Cairo Declaration, which enshrined territorial integrity based on inherited colonial boundaries as essential to prevent continental fragmentation (Organisation of African Unity, 1964).

Regional bodies including the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) echoed these concerns, emphasizing that recognition divorced from regional consensus threatens collective security.

Organization of Islamic Cooperation

The OIC condemned recognition as violating international law and UN Charter principles governing sovereignty and territorial integrity. The organization's statement, representing 57 member states, reinforced that Somaliland's status as part of Somalia remains unchanged despite Israeli recognition (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, 2025).

Palestinian Authority

The Palestinian Authority exposed fundamental hypocrisy in Israeli recognition policy. Palestinian officials noted that Israel recognizes Somaliland—an entity with no international support until 2025—while categorically refusing to recognize Palestine despite 147 countries' recognition and the

Oslo Accords mutual recognition framework (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025).

This juxtaposition reveals recognition as driven by geopolitical utility rather than consistent legal or moral principles. Israel recognizes entities that serve its strategic interests while denying recognition to entities with far stronger legal claims.

Regional Powers

Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Algeria, Turkey, Iran, and other regional states issued condemnations reaffirming Somalia's territorial integrity. Egypt's opposition reflects particular concern about Israeli strategic penetration near the Suez Canal-Red Sea corridor, compounding existing tensions over Ethiopia's Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (Matthews & Vivoda, 2023).

Table 3: International Positions on Somaliland Recognition (2025)

Actor	Position	Legal Basis
Israel	Recognized sovereignty; cited self-determination	Violates UN Charter Art. 2(4); contradicts own practice on Palestine
Somalia	Rejected; reaffirmed sovereignty	UN Charter; territorial integrity principle
African Union	Condemned; warned of precedent	Cairo Declaration 1964; AU Constitutive Act
OIC (57 states)	Condemned; emphasized Somalia's unity	UN Charter; international law
Palestinian Authority	Criticized double standard	Oslo Accords; 147 countries recognize Palestine
Egypt, Saudi Arabia,	Joint condemnation	Regional stability;

Actor	Position	Legal Basis
Qatar, Algeria, Turkey, Iran, et al.		territorial integrity norms
United States	Ambiguous; no recognition	Pending assessment of regional reaction

Note. This table documents universal rejection of Israeli recognition except by Israel itself. The positions reflect adherence to international legal obligations governing territorial integrity. Data synthesized from Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (2025) and governmental statements.

Israeli Strategic Calculations: Bab al-Mandeb Control

Geographic and Maritime Imperatives

Israel's recognition reflects calculated exploitation of regional instability to establish strategic footholds. Three factors explain Israeli timing and motivations:

First, Somaliland's location along the Bab al-Mandeb Strait—which channels 12% of global seaborne trade—provides exceptional strategic value (Remnek, 1980). Control over or privileged access to infrastructure adjacent to this chokepoint enables states to secure commercial sea lanes and project military power across maritime theaters.

For Israel, Berbera port access and security cooperation with Somaliland offers extended surveillance and rapid-response capabilities in a maritime domain of vital interest, particularly given Houthi threats to Red Sea shipping and Iranian regional influence. Recognition enables formalized security partnerships, intelligence-sharing, and potential military infrastructure that would be impossible without diplomatic relations.

Second, multipolar competition in the Horn creates openings for novel security partnerships. The UAE, Turkey, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt, China,

and Western states pursue overlapping strategic objectives (Dubale, 2024). Israel's recognition exploits this competitive environment, establishing a diplomatic beachhead in a region traditionally closed to Israeli state presence.

Third, Israeli recognition counterbalances Turkish and Iranian influence. Turkey maintains military facilities in Mogadishu, while Iran cultivates relationships with various Somali actors. Israeli presence in Somaliland—if recognition leads to security cooperation—positions Tel Aviv to monitor and potentially constrain rival regional powers.

Exposing Strategic Motives

Israel's official justification citing self-determination and stability contradicts the evident strategic calculus. If self-determination were the genuine principle, Israel would recognize Palestine. If stability were the goal, Israel would defer to AU and regional organizations' assessment that recognition destabilizes rather than stabilizes the region.

The convergence of Somaliland's recognition-seeking and Israeli maritime strategy strongly indicates Israeli intentions to establish military and intelligence infrastructure. Israel openly announces expansion to Red Sea shores with explicit focus on the Bab al-Mandeb gateway, signaling determination to embed military presence as a permanent feature of regional security architecture.

Table 4: Israeli Strategic Objectives and Regional Risks

Dimension	Details
Israeli Objectives	Secure Berbera port access; establish intelligence/military infrastructure; control Bab al-Mandeb chokepoint; counterbalance Iran and Turkey
Regional Risks	Militarization of Horn; exacerbation of Ethiopia-Somalia and Egypt-Ethiopia tensions; proxy competition escalation

Dimension	Details
Legal Violations	UN Charter Art. 2(4); interference in Somalia's territorial integrity; violation of AU legal framework
Systemic Risks	Precedent for illegal fragmentation; erosion of territorial integrity norm; contagion to other fragile states

Note. This table identifies Israeli strategic motivations and consequent risks. Israeli objectives center on Bab al-Mandeb control (Remnek, 1980), while systemic risks include erosion of the Cairo Declaration's territorial integrity principle (Organisation of African Unity, 1964). Regional tensions, particularly involving Egypt's GERD concerns (Matthews & Vivoda, 2023), compound destabilization risks.

Why Israeli Recognition Is Legally Invalid

Israeli recognition does not confer legal statehood on Somaliland. International legal doctrine establishes that recognition of illegal secessions is itself legally invalid and cannot alter the underlying legal status.

Recognition Doctrine and Illegal Acts

International law distinguishes between declaratory and constitutive theories of recognition. The declaratory theory holds that statehood exists independent of recognition, while the constitutive theory maintains recognition creates statehood. Modern international law synthesizes these approaches: entities meeting Montevideo criteria possess statehood capacity, but recognition

becomes constitutive when territorial integrity disputes exist.

Critically, states cannot legitimize illegal acts through recognition. The ICJ established this principle in the Namibia Advisory Opinion (1971)⁴ and reinforced it in the Wall Advisory Opinion (2004)⁵. When an entity's existence violates international law—particularly fundamental norms like territorial integrity—recognition by individual states cannot cure the illegality.

Somaliland's secession violates Somalia's territorial integrity without Somali consent and without fitting recognized exceptions (decolonization, foreign occupation, remedial secession after mass atrocities). Israeli recognition therefore recognizes an illegal situation, and such recognition is itself legally invalid.

The Irrelevance of Administrative Capacity

Somaliland's relative administrative effectiveness does not alter its legal status. History provides numerous examples of effective administrations that lacked statehood because they originated through illegal secession: Rhodesia (1965-1979), Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (1983-present), Republika Srpska (1992-1995), and others.

The international community consistently refused recognition in these cases despite administrative capacity because recognition would legitimize illegal territorial changes. Somaliland's situation is analogous. Administrative effectiveness demonstrates governance capacity but cannot

⁴ **ICJ Namibia Advisory Opinion (1971):** The ICJ's Advisory Opinion of 21 June 1971 addressed South Africa's continued presence in Namibia despite UN Security Council Resolution 276 (1970) ([International Court of Justice Case Briefs](#)). The Court held that South Africa's administration was illegal and that member states were under an obligation not to recognize or assist in maintaining that situation. This opinion established the principle that recognition cannot legitimize acts or territorial situations deemed unlawful under international law.

⁵ **ICJ Wall Advisory Opinion (2004):** On 9 July 2004, the ICJ issued its Advisory Opinion on the construction of a wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, [International Court of Justice, Naciones Unidas](#). The Court found the wall and its associated regime contrary to international law, violating obligations under the UN Charter, humanitarian law, and human rights treaties. The opinion reaffirmed the primacy of territorial integrity and the inadmissibility of acquiring territory by force, underscoring the binding nature of international legal norms even in contested security contexts.

override the fundamental legal prohibition on unilateral secession.

No Other State May Follow

Israel's recognition does not open a path for legitimate international recognition by other states. Any subsequent recognition would replicate Israel's violation of international law. The fact that one state breaches legal obligations does not permit others to do so.

States considering recognition face clear obligations: the UN Charter requires respect for territorial integrity; the ICJ jurisprudence prohibits recognizing illegal territorial situations; and the African legal framework explicitly forbids recognition undermining continental borders. These obligations bind all states regardless of Israel's breach.

Systemic Risks: Fragmentation as Strategic Tool

Precedent for Continental Disintegration

Israeli recognition normalizes fragmentation as a strategic instrument, with cascading implications for Africa and beyond. Once the firewall is breached, the system cannot control the velocity or direction of claims. Recognition becomes precedent, and precedent becomes policy tool—especially amid great-power competition.

The African continent remains particularly vulnerable. Multiple regions harbor separatist sentiments: Cabinda (Angola), Casamance (Senegal), Azawad (Mali), various regions in Nigeria, Ethiopian ethnic regions, and others. The 1964 Cairo Declaration established that inherited colonial borders remain inviolable precisely to prevent the cascade of competing territorial claims (Organisation of African Unity, 1964).

Israeli recognition signals that external powers can bypass this continental consensus. If recognition depends on bilateral strategic utility rather than legal process, every separatist movement becomes

a potential tool for external powers seeking regional influence.

Maritime Securitization and Militarization

Israeli recognition weaponizes statehood as logistics and surveillance infrastructure within a militarized maritime common. By tying recognition to Bab al-Mandeb access, Israel converts legal status into strategic leverage, with spillover risks for shipping security and regional crisis management.

The Red Sea corridor has witnessed intensified militarization: UAE bases in Eritrea and Yemen, Turkish facilities in Somalia, Chinese base in Djibouti, expanding Iranian naval presence, and now potential Israeli infrastructure in Somaliland. Each actor justifies presence through bilateral security partnerships, but collective effect is escalating military competition in confined maritime space.

Israeli recognition adds another layer to this competition, potentially triggering counter-moves by regional powers seeking to balance Israeli influence. Egypt, Turkey, and Iran may expand military cooperation with Somalia federal government, while other actors might seek similar recognition-for-access arrangements elsewhere.

Norm Erosion and Copycat Claims

Breaching inherited-border principles invites copycat bids in similarly fragile polities. If external recognition can override territorial integrity norms when strategic interests align, every fragile state faces potential dismemberment by external powers cultivating pliable separatist clients.

This dynamic fundamentally alters statehood from a legal status adjudicated through multilateral process into a bilateral transaction. States with maritime chokepoints, resource deposits, or strategic geography become vulnerable to external powers offering recognition in exchange for access. The transformation from legal principle to strategic commodity destroys the predictability and stability that territorial integrity norms provide.

Risk Externalization

Israeli recognition externalizes all destabilization costs onto Somalia and neighboring African states while Israel remains insulated from accountability. Should recognition catalyze intensified separatist movements, trigger military confrontation, or provoke regional proxy competition, African states bear the burden of crisis management.

Israel reaps strategic benefits—Berbera access, intelligence cooperation, maritime surveillance—while African states manage displaced populations, economic disruption, interstate tensions, and potential conflict escalation. This asymmetry enables external powers to pursue strategic objectives without bearing consequences of destabilization they initiate.

Defending Somalia's Territorial Integrity: Policy Recommendations

Defending Somalia's territorial unity is not conservative attachment to inherited borders but strategic necessity to prevent the Horn from becoming a laboratory of externally-managed disintegration.

Immediate Actions

1. Universal Non-Recognition

All states should reaffirm Somalia's territorial integrity and refuse recognition of Somaliland. The UN General Assembly should pass a resolution declaring Israeli recognition incompatible with the UN Charter and calling on all states to reject similar violations. This establishes that illegal recognition by one state does not create precedent for others.

2. AU Enforcement Mechanisms

The African Union must establish enforceable consequences for external recognition of African secessionist entities. This should include diplomatic penalties, restrictions on access to AU member markets, and exclusion from AU-sponsored initiatives. Without accountability mechanisms, the

Cairo Declaration becomes advisory rather than binding.

3. Somalia's ICJ Case

Somalia should request an ICJ Advisory Opinion on whether Israeli recognition violates international law and whether other states have obligations to refuse recognition. ICJ clarification would strengthen the legal framework opposing fragmentation.

Medium-Term Strategies

4. Integrative Federal Arrangements

The international community should support negotiations between Mogadishu and Somaliland for asymmetric federal arrangements preserving territorial integrity while granting substantial autonomy. Models include: guaranteed revenue-sharing, regional security forces within federal framework, cultural and linguistic autonomy, and Somaliland participation in federal foreign relations.

Federal solutions accommodate Somaliland's governance aspirations without illegal secession. International support for such arrangements—including financial incentives—makes integration more attractive than continued illegal status.

5. Economic Support for Somalia

Coordinate international economic assistance to Somalia through federal channels that include Somaliland within federal framework. This offsets the allure of bilateral recognition packages promising investment for strategic concessions. African Development Bank, World Bank, and bilateral donors should condition assistance on preserving territorial integrity.

6. Red Sea Maritime Governance

Establish a multilateral Red Sea-Horn maritime security regime focused on commercial shipping protection, anti-piracy, and crisis de-confliction.

Include Somaliland within Somali federal delegation, addressing security concerns while preserving legal framework. This reduces strategic value of recognition as shortcut to maritime access.

Long-Term Framework

7. Recognition Consent Doctrine

Advocate for international legal doctrine requiring parent state consent or UN Security Council authorization for recognition of secessions. This clarifies that unilateral recognition violating territorial integrity is legally invalid, providing clearer guidance for future cases.

8. Accountability for Fragmentation

Develop international mechanisms holding states accountable for destabilization caused by recognizing illegal secessions. If Israeli recognition catalyzes regional conflict, Israel should bear financial and diplomatic consequences. This accountability principle discourages strategic fragmentation.

9. Continental Integration Incentives

The AU should expand integration benefits—preferential trade, infrastructure financing, development assistance—conditional on respecting territorial integrity norms. Make continental cohesion materially advantageous compared to external recognition arrangements.

Conclusion: Illegality, Instability, and the Stakes for International Order

Israeli recognition of Somaliland constitutes a calculated violation of international law that threatens both regional stability and the global territorial integrity framework. This study has established four core findings:

First, Somaliland's secession is illegal under international law. It meets none of the recognized exceptions to territorial integrity (decolonization, foreign occupation, remedial secession). Somalia

retains sovereign authority over its entire territory, including the northwestern region, under the UN Charter, AU legal framework, and customary international law.

Second, Israeli recognition violates binding international legal obligations. It breaches UN Charter Article 2(4)'s territorial integrity requirement, contradicts ICJ jurisprudence prohibiting recognition of illegal territorial situations, and undermines the African Union's legal architecture for continental stability.

Third, Israeli recognition is strategically motivated rather than legally principled. The timing, context, and selective application—recognizing Somaliland while denying Palestinian statehood—expose recognition as an instrument to secure Bab al-Mandeb access and establish intelligence infrastructure, not genuine support for self-determination.

Fourth, recognition establishes dangerous precedent for externally-driven fragmentation. By normalizing unilateral recognition outside multilateral frameworks, Israeli action signals to separatist movements and external powers that borders can be redrawn through bilateral strategic arrangements, threatening stability in fragile regions worldwide.

The Asymmetry of Accountability

The fundamental injustice of Israeli recognition lies in its asymmetric distribution of costs and benefits. Israel secures strategic advantages—port access, intelligence cooperation, maritime surveillance—while externalizing all destabilization costs onto African states. Should recognition catalyze intensified separatism elsewhere in Africa, trigger Somalia-Somaliland military confrontation, or provoke regional proxy competition, African states and institutions bear the primary burden. Israel faces no accountability for chaos it initiates.

This asymmetry encourages external powers to pursue strategic fragmentation as a low-cost, high-yield strategy. Without consequences for illegal

recognition, territorial integrity norms become unenforceable suggestions rather than binding obligations.

The Stakes for International Order

The Somaliland case represents a test of whether the post-1945 international legal order can withstand instrumentalization by strategic opportunism. The UN Charter established territorial integrity as foundational precisely because unrestrained border revision produces cascading conflict. The African Union codified inherited-border principles because continental stability requires legal predictability over strategic flexibility.

Israeli recognition repudiates both frameworks. It signals that extra-regional powers can fragment Africa through selective recognition when strategic interests align. This transforms territorial sovereignty from a collective norm governed by legal process into a bilateral transaction determined by strategic utility.

If the international community fails to establish consequences for Israeli recognition, the precedent will metastasize. Other separatist regions will seek external patrons offering recognition-for-access arrangements. Other external powers will exploit territorial fragility to establish strategic footholds. The post-colonial African territorial framework will fragment under pressure from multipolar competition.

The Path Forward

Defending Somalia's territorial integrity is not optional—it is essential to prevent the Horn of Africa from becoming a testing ground for managed disintegration. The international community, particularly the African Union, must establish that illegal recognition carries diplomatic, economic, and political costs that exceed any strategic benefits.

This requires:

- Accountability mechanisms holding states responsible for destabilization caused by illegal recognition.
- Economic support for federal arrangements preserving territorial integrity.
- Enforceable AU consequences for external recognition of African separatist entities.
- International legal clarification through ICJ Advisory Opinion.
- Universal non-recognition of Somaliland by all states.

The choice is clear: preserve territorial integrity norms through collective enforcement or accept fragmentation as a normalized tool of great-power competition. Israel's Somaliland gambit establishes a template that, if successful, will encourage similar violations elsewhere. The response to this test will determine whether international law governs territorial sovereignty or strategic opportunism does.

“Somaliland remains an integral part of Somalia under international law. Israeli recognition is illegal, invalid, and unenforceable. The international community must act accordingly”

References

- Dubale, T. (2024). Geopolitics and state fragility in the Horn of Africa. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 42(3), 412-431.
- Encyclopaedia Britannica*. (2025). Palestinian territories: International recognition. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/place/Palestine>
- International Court of Justice. (1971, June 21). *Legal Consequences for States of the Continued Presence of South Africa in Namibia (South West Africa) notwithstanding Security Council Resolution 276 (1970), Advisory Opinion*. ICJ Reports 1971, p. 16. Retrieved from <https://www.icj-cij.org>
- International Court of Justice. (2004, July 9). *Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the*

Occupied Palestinian Territory, Advisory Opinion. ICJ Reports 2004, p. 136. Retrieved from <https://www.icj-cij.org>

International Court of Justice. (2010, July 22). *Accordance with International Law of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Respect of Kosovo, Advisory Opinion.* ICJ Reports 2010, p. 403. Retrieved from <https://www.icj-cij.org>

Journal of Somali Studies. (2024). Somaliland: Demographic and governance profile. *Journal of Somali Studies*, 11(2), 78-95.

Klabbers, J. (2010). The validity of statehood in international law. *Netherlands Yearbook of International Law*, 41, 211-228.

Matthews, N., & Vivoda, V. (2023). The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and hydropolitics in the Nile Basin. *Water International*, 48(4), 445-462.

Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, Dec. 26, 1933, 165 L.N.T.S. 19.

Organisation of African Unity. (1964). *Cairo Declaration on border disputes among African states.* Assembly of Heads of State and Government, First Ordinary Session, Cairo.

Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. (2025, May 27). *Joint statement on Israeli plans to recognize Somaliland.* OIC Press Release.

Remnek, R. B. (1980). The politics of Soviet access to naval support facilities in the Mediterranean. In M. MccGwire & J. McDonnell (Eds.), *Soviet naval influence: Domestic and foreign dimensions* (pp. 357-403). Praeger.

United Nations. (1945). *Charter of the United Nations.* 1 U.N.T.S. XVI. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter>

United Nations. (2023). *Charter of the United Nations.* UN Department of Public Information.

Vakil, S., & Quilliam, N. (2023). The Abraham Accords and regional normalization: Promise and limitations. *Middle East Policy*, 30(2), 88-104.