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Somaliland's Foreign Policy Strategy: Exploring Plausible Options to Statehood Status

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ABSTRACT

Somaliland's quest for statehood status is faced with adverse reactions from the sovereign states, leading to its limited interaction in the global affairs. This adverse reaction is due to the global society's view on *de facto* states as unlawful entities, sources of perpetual conflict, irresponsible anomalies, and lawless ecosystems. A perception that throws *de facto* states at bay, almost indefinitely. A unique case to further explain this phenomenon is Somaliland's quest for statehood status, which was lingering for the last thirty years.

Because state recognition is a political matter, this article will advance a plausible foreign policy strategy for Somaliland. A foreign policy strategy aimed at (a) pushing back the international system's adverse reactions and (b) bolster its cooperation with the states and other pieces of global governance.

De facto states are entities that came to power through the will of the people, delivering services in a defined territory over an extended period. Still, they lack state recognition and, therefore, are considered illegal entities.

This article intends to examine the systemic and state levels opportunities available for Somaliland's foreign policy discourse in tandem with theories of international relations relating to foreign policy analysis. A foreign policy strategy that is aimed at bolstering Somaliland's ability to interact and cooperate in the international system. The liberal theory of international relations provides a coherent explanation of foreign policy prospects for Somaliland.

Findings concluded that Somaliland needs to craft a foreign policy strategy that articulates its compliance with instruments of international law, norms, and practices; projects its policies as a responsible actor in the maintenance of global and regional peace and security; conducive for international business while wisely applying its strategic location and resource into the geopolitical equation; and projects itself as a sustainable entity—socially, economically, and politically.

INTRODUCTION

The history of political science narrates rich events of state formation and dissolution. The beginning of the 20th century, for example, quadrupled the number of states operating in the international system. Several events heralded this sharp spike: decolonization, the aftermath of the Cold War, the dissolution of merged colonies, and states (once) united under a federal umbrella that later dissolved their amalgamation. The latter two are exemplified by Senegambia, United Arab Republic, Fédération du Mali, and the Somali Republic. States' fluctuation led the United Nations (UN) membership to climb its highest in the history—193 states.

In the current world order, state is the primary actor in shaping and shaking the behavior of international relations. This assumption led scholars of international relations to consider the state as their preferred unit of analysis to understand the behavior of the international system. The scholars of international law also observe the state as the primary legal unit of the international system.^[i] This interdisciplinary consensus cemented the state's firm position to manipulate the behavior of international politics. Since the Westphalian Peace Agreement, the state's supremacy further cemented purely based on its legal personality.

Moreover, the 1964 Westphalian Peace Agreement codified a set of implicit rules and standard practices that would govern the contemporary international relations, including formal recognition accorded to the states by other sovereign states. This formal recognition legitimizes the states' membership in the international community and permits them the privilege to pursue independent foreign and domestic policies.

However, *de jure* states are no longer alone in the international system. *De facto* states are gaining ground in the international system. Scott Pegg defines the *de facto* state as a political institution that came to power with the will of the local community, capable of delivering the essential services in a defined territory over an extended period but lacks formal recognition from the international community; therefore, considered as illegitimate anomalies in the international system.^[ii] Somaliland neatly sits within this categorization.

It is the lack of Westphalian recognition that poses an existential threat to *de facto* states since *de jure* states view them as disturbing agents to the international order. As a result, states often restrict all diplomatic engagements as well as social and economic interaction with these entities from the inception. This antagonizing stance largely explains why very few *de facto* states graduate to statehood status. Therefore, a competent foreign policy (FP) strategy is indispensable for the *de facto* states to steer through the troubled water of the international system.

Foreign policy is set to advance the state's interest in the complex international system. Like the sovereign states, *de facto* states formulate FP goals to advance their interests in the global system—aimed at changing the attitude of the states. In this case, state recognition should serve as the guiding principle of Somaliland's

FP discourse.[iii]

This article argues that granting state recognition is principally a political discourse.[iv] James Ker-Lindsay argued that recognition is “a political act based on interests and assessments made by states individually.[v] Therefore, Somaliland’s prospects for state recognition require competent FP discourse along the lines of liberalism theory of international relations for two reasons.

First, liberalism promotes cooperation among the state and non-state actors through trade and interaction. Second, liberalism discourages hard politics and instead inspires reliance on international rules, norms, and institutions to counterbalance the apprehension of the security dilemma.

This article, therefore, proposes for Somaliland to adopt an FP strategy that articulates: (1) Compliance with instruments of international law, norms, and practices; (2) Projects its policies as a responsible actor in the maintenance of global and regional peace and security; (3) Wisely utilizes its strategic location and resource into the geopolitical equation; and (4) Project itself as a sustainable entity—socially, economically, and politically.

FOREIGN POLICY: DEFINITION, PRINCIPLES, OBJECTIVES

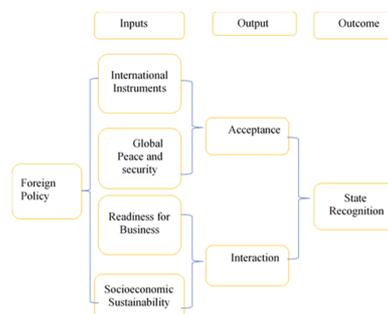
Foreign policy sets objectives and actions of the state to achieve its national interest in the international plane. Christopher Hill defines FP as “the sum of official external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually a [s]tate) in international relations.”[vi] James Roseau linked FP actions state’s internal and external factors in shaping its FP.[vii] At an operational level, the state often “translates its broadly conceived goals and interests into concrete courses of actions to attain these objectives and pressure its interests.”[viii]

Similarly, *de facto* states craft foreign policy objectives to advance their interests in the international plane. Their FP is directed “towards other actors in the international system, particularly states, [that] is extremely vital for the continuous maintenance of *de facto* independence, survival, and consolidation of *de facto* states.”[ix] For instance, Somaliland emphasizes that securing state recognition remains the utmost guiding principle of its foreign relations.

States’ international relations often correspond to the major International Relations (IR) theories—i.e., liberalism, realism, and constructivism—explicitly or implicitly. In the conduct of foreign policy, it is permissible to discern that one theory outweighs the other. A similar pattern is distinguishable in the foreign policy conduct of the *de facto* states, like Somaliland, whose primary objective is to seek acceptance of, and interaction with, the sovereign states and other pieces of global governance.

Liberalism should guide the foreign policy conduct of Somaliland. This is because this theory advances principles of interdependence, international regime, collective goods, collective security, and civil society. These principles augment human interaction irrespective of their political organization, be it recognized or unrecognized. Moreover, liberalism theory brings international organizations, individuals, non-state actors, and the business community as part of its central analysis of international politics. Relying on these liberal principles will augment the foreign policy objectives of Somaliland to reverse the domino fear of the *de jure* states and other pieces of global governance.

The below diagram advances an instructive foreign policy prescription. It proposes four major foreign policy lines to achieve two critical objectives: Acceptance of, and interaction with, international actors. The first line should articulate to the state actors that its cause is completely compliant with the international instruments to crush the systemic gate. The second line will project its image as a responsible and reliable actor to maintain global peace and security. The third policy line articulates its readiness for international business—from its strategic location and hydrocarbon stances. Finally, it should articulate that it is not only economically sustainable but also politically from statehood and nationhood aspects.



(<https://irpj.euclid.int/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Screen-Shot-2021-05-13-at-2.58.26-PM.png>)

Figure 1 Foreign Policy framework

Source: Najah M. Adam (2021)

The following sections expand each of the foreign policy inputs in the framework.

CRUSHING THE GATE: COMPLIANCE WITH INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS

Articulation of *de facto* state's compliance with international instruments is essential to crushing the gate. In fact, it should serve as the first foreign policy line to achieve acceptance from the international system. Proper articulation of this foreign policy line delivers an essential task—that is, reversing a perception that associates unilateral declaration of independence with a violent disintegration of internationally recognized borders. Because of this adverse association, states approach *de facto* states with punitive aversion and prolonged avoidance, resulting in the *de facto* states to operate at the periphery of the international system.

Over the years, states had been heavily legalizing the international system with myriad international laws, norms, and practices to govern the behavior of the international actors. This heavily legalized system created a dilemma for the *de jure* states to accept *de facto* states. A dilemma faced by states when balancing between being compliant with the international instruments on the one hand and creating strategic relations with *de facto* states on the other.

While some may argue that public international law that governs state recognition faces an existential threat, [x] its relevance is still far from obsolete. For this reason, Somaliland should align itself with such a heavily legalized system. Its foreign office should embark on a “complex series of claims and decisions, negotiations and/or struggles”[xi] to change the behavior of other states based on international norms.

Because membership to the clubs of states is attained through the international instruments, Somaliland should posture its image as a compliant entity with universal, continental, and regional instruments. Among the relevant instruments include the self-determination concept, the Constitutive Act of the African Union, IGAD Declaration of Principles, Montevideo Convention, and EU Guidelines of State Recognition.

Self-determination

The concept of self-determination forms a strong argument for *de facto* states aiming for state recognition. The origin of this legal concept dates back to the French Revolution.[xii] And its modern flora is still observable in the realm of international law after the Fourteen Points of US President Woodrow Wilson.[xiii] The United States relied on this concept when granting state recognition to Kosovo. The Federal Republic of Russia applied similar legal lines for its Recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Comparably, the legal argument for Somaliland relies on the principles of self-determination. One key argument is that its people overwhelmingly rejected the adoption of the Somalia constitution in 1962 to rectify the nascent union.[xiv] Another argument is the 2001 constitutional referendum, where the people of Somaliland overwhelmingly reaffirmed their commitment to the unilateral dissolution of the 1960 union with Somalia. However, some argue that the 2001 referendum falls short of international thresholds since a large portion of the population in the Sool and Sanaag regions did not participate. Because democracy and participation are enshrined in the concepts of self-determination, such a claim may backfire on the viability of the 2001 referendum.

Sovereignty often offers a counterargument for the *de facto* states. It assumes the recognition of the *de facto* states as a fundamental breach of international law.[xv] The principles of sovereignty are related to the state's territorial integrity and political independence, the very legal instrument by which the international community uses to abrogate the right to self-determination. These legal objections are in line with the peremptory norms of international law. Article 2 (4) of the UN Charter instructs “all members shall refrain... from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State.”[xvi]

Nevertheless, sovereignty has its limitations, which mainly lie at the origin of the state. The critical question is: When and Where is territorial protection applied? Does it apply to pre-or post-union territories? A deceiving argument is often constructed around the post-union; for example, in the case of the Somali Republic, but what about the pre-union Somali states?

AU Constitutive Act

Regional intergovernmental organizations stand for the maintenance of the peace and security of their regions. The Constitutive Act of the African Union adopted the universal principles of non-aggression and non-interference in domestic matters. In doing so, the AU Charter declared that the boundaries demarcated by the European powers remain sacrosanct to strengthen the peace and security of the continent. This declaration spawned the norms and practices of the territorial integrity that governs the relations among the African states. The pre-colonial boundaries are inalterable in the view of the Charter.

Equally, the international community embraced a non-interference posture to the internal matters of the continent, particularly when addressing sovereignty-based conflicts bordering on the creation of a new state or dissolving existing one. International organizations and great powers concluded that state recognition for Somaliland is contingent to the position of the African Union.”[xvii] This conclusion is in accordance with Article 3 (b) of the Constitutive Act of the AU ratified in Lomé (Togo), July 2000. This article gives the principal responsibility of resolving any sovereignty-based conflict to the continental instruments. Political realism, however, portrays a contrary persona. While the AU maintained an observant stance toward several sovereignty-based discords in the continent, it effectively midwived the creation of South Sudan together with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the UN.

Somaliland’s quest for statehood status should advance its non-violation of the pre-colonial boundaries encoded in the AU Charter. This claim is supported by the conclusion made by the fact-finding mission commissioned by the AU to advise on whether Somaliland infringes on the territorial declaration of the Charter. The report read: Somaliland’s case is “unique and self-justified in African political history” and adds that “the case is not ‘opening Pandora’s box.’”[xviii]

The AU inactiveness posture is largely because Somaliland afforded a generous venue for Mogadishu to publicize its territorial integrity narrative. A meaningful follow-up to the fact-finding mission report went missing on the part of Somaliland. This claim is evidenced by WikiLeaks’ diplomatic cable that revealed the content of a discussion between former Assistance Secretary Jendayi Frazer with former Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi on Somaliland’s application for an AU membership. Meles disclosed that Somaliland made a momentous misstep in reapplying AU membership instead of following up on the recommendations of the fact-finding mission by “asking for a timeframe for a discussion on Somaliland.”[xix] AU fact-finding recommendation demonstrates the convergence of Somaliland’s cause to the continental laws. While it may seem to be a missed opportunity, this recommendation remains essential for furthering Somaliland’s cause to statehood status.

IGAD Declaration of Principles

The Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) evolved into the regional instrument to address political, peace, and security issues. IGAD’s role in mitigating the sovereignty-based conflict between the North and South Sudans is a case in point. IGAD successfully negotiated with the two parties in a pre-conflict settlement framework. This success is mostly because IGAD’s executive leadership received the issue of *de facto* state recognition with minimal apprehension.[1] What further simplified the mediation of Sudans is that the matters surrounding secessionism is allowed in the constitution of Ethiopia—an influential member state.

The Declaration of Principles (DoP) was adopted in 1994—an instrument that formed a strong foundation for the key areas of contention in Sudans’ dialogue. The DoP incorporated several provisions to resolve the sovereignty-based conflict. A pertinent provision in the instrument is found in Article 2 of the declaration, which authoritatively affirms “the rights of self-determination of the people of South Sudan to determine their future status through a referendum.” [xx] DoP paved the way for creating the youngest state in Africa—a conflict that was more contentious than Somalia-Somaliland one. DoP’s provision for self-determination provides regional precedence.

IGAD started developing relations with Somaliland at a technical level. It has recently intervened in the border conflict that broke between Somaliland and Puntland. The primary goal of the intervention was cessation of hostilities and finding a durable solution to the conflict.

IGAD’s involvement in this conflict avails another opportunity for Somaliland. One, Somaliland builds a rapport with the institution and its team, which would have otherwise been difficult since Somalia is a founding member. Two, Somaliland to link the border conflict with future relations with Somalia. This FP opportunity should be advanced through the other socioeconomic relations Somaliland maintains with some member states.[xxi] This policy line complements attempts for AU to reopen the case of Somaliland based on its fact-finding report.

Montevideo Convention

The Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, known as the Montevideo Convention, challenged the existing description of what would universally constitute the state. It has crystalized the declaratory theory of recognition into customary international law. The Montevideo Convention has also revolutionized the parameters of the state by establishing a clear-cut legal threshold to gauge against the entities claiming to acquire international legal personality. This Convention generated four prominent criteria, including a defined border, possessing a permanent population, functioning government structures, and capacity to engage with the other states.

Several limitations are, however, discernable in the Convention. First, it is not universally ratified, so it does not create a legal obligation to all states. Second, satisfying the above criteria would not lead to an automatic recognition for *de facto* states. A relevant example is that Bosnia lacked an effective government when the UN considered its membership, while Somaliland has lacked recognition with an effective government for the last 30 years. This contradiction shows the normative flaws of international instruments in deciding matters relating to statehood status.

Montevideo outlines for the *de facto* states to establish their arguments in a manner that is compliant with Article 1. A relevant instance is the case of Kosovo's state recognition. The Badinter Committee made explicit reference to this article by stating that "the state is commonly defined as a community which consists of a territory and a population subject to an organized political authority; that such a state is characterized by sovereignty."^[xxii] As much as complying with this international instrument brings impetus to Somaliland's quest for state status, it is the precedence factor that provides an extra mileage to changing the behavior of the states. Hence, a consistent reference to the Convention and the Badinter Committee's legal opinion should be the first FP line, particularly when dealing with the European states.

Guidelines on State Recognition

Another applicable but distant instrument is the European Community (now European Union, (EU)) Guidelines on the Recognition of New States in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The EU Guidelines remain the most explicit legal instruments on matters pertaining to state recognition. These guidelines were solely conceived to resolve the sovereignty-based conflicts that emerged from the Soviet Union. Relevant conditions in these guidelines include democratic governance, compliance with international legal obligations, commitment to the peace process, and negotiation.^[xxiii]

Two shortcomings stand out from the EU Guidelines in relation to Somaliland. First, the critical moment for these guidelines is now long overdue. Second, Somaliland is geographically a member of another continent—Africa— and the European Union is reluctant to arbitrate debacles in Africa.

Somaliland should, however, focus on its strengths in these guidelines. This is to say that Somaliland offers similar circumstances that led to the recognition of some of the Soviet Republics, including democratic culture, respect for international obligation, particularly in peace and security, and commitment to a peaceful settlement with Somalia. In other words, a reference to these guidelines as global precedence can serve as another plausible FP line.

Foreign policy line

It is now clear that compliance with international law, norms, and practices is vital for crushing the fortified gate of isolation. The first plausible FP line of Somaliland should impeccably articulate that its case is a litmus test on the effectiveness of international law and norms. This FP policy line should stress that failure to comply with international standards is tantamount to lack of predictability on the part of the international community.

Somaliland should also conduct smart public diplomacy targeted at the public of the foreign states, media houses, academic forums, and other international forums. Delivering this FP line may be an expensive venture but much cheaper than missing an opportunity to advance people's aspirations.

RESPONSIBLE ACTOR: MAINTENANCE OF THE REGIONAL AND GLOBAL SECURITY

Somaliland locates one of the significant geostrategic strips in the world and the Horn of Africa. Its territorial waters stretch approximately 85% of the Gulf of Aden, facing Yemen from the South. Its location links the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea trade route, an international waterway that connects three main continents: Africa, Asia, and Europe. The global trade volume and economic interest that cross this international shipping line almost every year are worth approximately 700 billion US Dollars. ^[xxiv] Moreover, an estimated 3.2 million barrels of oil pass through this international shipping line daily toward Asia, Europe, and Asia.^[xxv] It is a critical chokepoint that lies at the heart of global peace and security.

This strategic region grapples with a series of strategic disputes and security tensions threatening regional and global stability. It should be noted that most of the international conflicts are linked to fierce competition over the exploitation of strategic location and resources.^[xxvi] Whereas the intensity of competition varies, their influence remains a major shaper of international politics. Considering these facts together, the security of this region sits at the heart of global economic power foreign policy.

A guide for strategic calculations

To better understand the foreign policy decision-making processes in the region, it is pertinent to critically examine actors, interests, the nature of the alliance, the distribution of power, and the contested agenda.^[xxvii] This is partially because the nature of the system determines the behavior of the alliance: be it a competition as per realists or cooperation as per neoliberalists. Therefore, a critical question ahead of Somaliland's FP makers is understanding these complex geopolitical arrangements. In other words, what are the contemporary geopolitical constraints and opportunities for Somaliland?

Red sea competition

The Horn of Africa region attracted the attention of global and regional powers in an unprecedented way at the beginning of the last decade, turning this strategic location into a theater for military powers. There are several reasons to explain the accumulation of major powers in the region.

First, there are commercial, economic, communication, and political interests. The Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea chokepoints are transit roots for a large portion of the global commerce and trade movements; they also serve as a line of communication between Asia, Africa, Europe, and America and hold a vast quantity of mineral resources. It is also known that the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden littoral states are vital to navigating

Arabian and African politics. An excellent example of the latter is Saudi Arabia's immense influence on the Arab and Muslim world and the Egyptian influence on Arabian and African politics. Israel is another key player whose interest lies in preventing economic, political, and economic isolation.

Second, there is a historical incursion of the major international powers. As a result of the large volume of international trade and oil shipments, it became important for the major international powers to ensure safe navigation in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea waterways. Hence, the increasing military installations are entrusted with guarding the safety and security of this trade route. Among the major powers, including the US, whose major interests are to avoid interruption of a smooth flow of oil to its economy, expel the influence of unfriendly states, and protect the security and economic interest of its allies, such as Israel.

Similarly, Russia's interest relates to the safety and security of its navigation route between Europe and the Indian ocean. Third and final, this region is a major entry to large Africa landlocked markets, including Ethiopia, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

It is this complex geopolitical significance of the region that compels Somaliland's diplomatic corps to examine the rationale and interests of the global powers' presence in the region and chart out entry points as part of its long-term planning horizon.

Nile waters competition

Nile waters competition is a major security threat in the region, with possibilities of spawning proxy wars. Somaliland should be mindful of the strategic conflict between Ethiopia and Egypt over the use of the Nile waters.

The position of Ethiopia is a complex stance regarding its future relations with Somaliland. Its attitude toward the case of Somaliland is faced with both inward and outward calculations. Its outward calculation centers around its "security calculus vis-à-vis Somalia in general, and Ethiopia's geopolitical calculus vis-à-vis Egypt and the Arab League." [xxviii] There is also an inward calculation in the equation shaped by the fear of secessionism in the Somali region.

Hence, Ethiopia is concerned that recognition of Somaliland might leverage the policy position of some political parties in the Somali region (Ogaden Liberation Front, to be specific), which continually pushes the vote for self-determination in the region. Hosting a significant Somali population, Kenya also holds a potential concern of Somali irredentism claims.

At the regional level, the power relations related to the Nile competition took another shape. The change of guard in Ethiopia that brought Abiy Ahmed, the current Prime Minister, to power manifested a significant departure from the historical alliance of states in the region. Somalia, a former ally of Egypt, changed its gears. Ethiopia reversed the historical tension with Somalia and subsequently cajoled Somalia to his side. Previously, Ethiopia's worked towards less-centralized, less-united, weakened Somalia, while Egypt wanted the opposite version.

The new Som-Ethiopia alliance changed Mogadishu's strategic significance for Egypt. First, Egypt needed a strong unitary state of Somalia, which is not now the case. Second, Somalia's Red Sea and Gulf of Aden location served Egypt's national security interest; now, these critical waterways fall under the control of Somaliland. This strategic position offers Somaliland a significant FP opportunity to engage with the interested actors in the geopolitics of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. However, it should adopt a non-partisan policy that leads to stability and peace in the region.

Extremism and Terrorism

Relentless attacks by the radical groups in Somalia became a significant source of insecurity in the region since the collapse of the central government. Al Shabab's (AS) influence is channeled through the mainstream and social media platforms attracted many sympathizers, like-minds, and cynical volunteers across the world. Citizens of many countries, including Europeans, Asians, Americans, and Africans, joined AS to mastermind their operations in Somalia and elsewhere. It is also known that Da'ish (ISIS) established a base in a mountainous swamp in the Northern East region of Somalia, albeit a poorly defended one.

These extremist organizations pose a long-term threat to the maintenance of regional and global peace and security. First, they are Al-Qaida-affiliated groups aiming to expand Al-Qaida slogan in the region—hampering international efforts in the fights against global terror and extremism. Regionally, it is known that AS is also linked to Boko Haram of Nigeria as well as other active terrorist elements in Tanzania—all declared to target and also "strike outside Africa, including American and European targets." [xxix]

Somaliland is a success story in fighting extremism. Hargeisa is a victim of the vicious attacks of AS, targeted at its Presidential Palace, Ethiopian Consulate General, and the United Nations compound in 2008. Ever since Somaliland was successful in eliminating the AS cells, imprisoning a large portion of AS sympathizers, and ultimately making its territory relatively safe from imminent terror operations. Somaliland is also a buffer zone in preventing AS from infiltrating Ethiopia, Djibouti, and the Arabian Gulf and Red Sea littoral states. Another critical comparative advantage for Somaliland is its experience in the fight of terrorism and extremism in the Somali context: culture, history, identity, and language.

Bringing forward a workable Somali perspective to the fight against extremism is a significant step in advancing Somaliland's acceptance by the regional and international forums. Therefore, this comparative advantage should be converted to a plausible FP line to achieve regional and global acknowledgment and acceptance.

Border conflict

The Sool and Sanaag regions are two geo-strategically important pieces of land. Sanaag, for example, is a region with a fertile agricultural wetland, possessing a huge potential of blue economy and mountainous terrain bestowed with minerals and tourism. The Sool region, bordering with Ethiopia, connects Somaliland to Somalia in the east through Puntland. While the geographical significance of these regions matters, the political factors hold the center of the conflict between Somaliland Puntland. Perhaps, the political factors predominantly explain why this conflict persisted.

Somaliland claims its territory is based on the colonial border demarcation between Italian Somaliland and British Somaliland: a claim that sits well with the AU Charter and internationally accepted practices for the borderline demarcation in African, Asia, and elsewhere. On the other hand, the Puntland claim is grounded on clan affiliation. Puntland state, an autonomous region of Somalia, challenged the territorial claim of Somaliland. Puntland contests that its borders are defined by clan allegiance. Simply put, the Darood clan that is partially inhabiting Sool and Sanaag regions should be merged with the Puntland.

These territorial counterclaims impacted the peace and security of these regions. A security tension intensified in 2003 when Puntland forcefully took control of Las'Anod city, the regional capital of the Sool region, a time the then President of Somaliland, Dahir Rayale Kahin, was touring in Las'anod. This takeover was deemed as a political triumph for Puntland and a harsh humiliation for Somaliland. But, four years later, Somaliland forcefully reclaimed Las'anod city and beyond, which it maintains to date. Since then, several military confrontations have occurred, including one in early 2019.

The dominance of the Dhulbahante clan in the Sool region is a critical factor in the equation. The leaders of this clan often switch their allegiance and sometimes pursue a neutral stance. Displaying its disappointment with both administrations, this clan established several local administrations, while others threw their allegiance behind Somalia's Federal Government. Finally, Somaliland negotiated with Dhulbaahante's political units and later integrated with Somaliland.

A sustained militarization may lead to a security void for extremism. Therefore, Somaliland should lead in engaging with regional and international institutions such as the UN and IGAD to find a lasting solution to this impasse to avoid worsening peace and security in an already conflict-ridden region.

Foreign policy line

Maintenance of regional and global peace and security is a plausible FP line. Somaliland's FP corps should articulate that the world will benefit when Somaliland is accepted from peace and security perspectives. So far, Somaliland has proven this claim: it has remained an oasis of peace in the troubled region of the Horn of Africa. It has been a risk-free territory for an extended period—territory free from terrorism and other antipeace elements. Somaliland has successfully controlled its domestic problems through the consensus and reconciliation processes.

Furthermore, it is worthy to argue that it has effectively deterred antipeace elements from infiltrating the broader region and global strategic locations such as the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. More importantly, Somaliland should also present to the world and the region that its strategic location only serves to deter global threats and proxy policies to ensure regional and global peace and security.

MINDING BUSINESS: STRATEGIC RESOURCE AND LOCATION

Access to strategic resources and foreign policy are inseparable elements in contemporary international politics. The advent of the 21st century exposed the abstract concepts—nationalism, religion, ideology, and culture—are no longer the only *raison d'états* for states to protect their interest. Access to strategic resources became a key driver of contemporary FP conduct. For instance, the FP doctrine of the US drastically shifted from Soviet containment to securing energy sources for its vast growing economy. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, the "protection of critical raw materials and transit routes has, of course, been a major theme in American security policy"[xxx] as well as others.

Developing countries, including China, India, and South Korea, to mention a few, are equally convinced that their economies would not function and expand in the absence of uninterrupted oil supply; hence, they adopted a similar FP approach. These states reoriented their FP approach by investing to secure reliable oil supplies for their expanding economies. A relevant example is China, South Korea, and India's quest for international energy supplies. For example, Indian's energy demand is expected to more than double and is likely to surpass Japan and Russia.[xxxi] Some forecasts show that the combination of China and India's energy demand will reach a record close to half of the world total. [xxxii] South Korea is equally facing a similar trend in energy demand.

Is there a place for Somaliland in these changing dynamics?

Somaliland oil prospects

The territories of former Somalia hold a promising oil reserve prospect. Many geological analysts and renowned scholars, including Walls and Kibble, Retinae and Shaw, Balthasar, Mohamed Y. Ali, and recently Pegg, concluded the existence of commercially viable oil reserves both offshore and onshore fields. For example, Wall and Kibble provided a generous estimate amounting to approximately 110 billion barrels—an estimate that might make former Somalia territories claim as the fifth-largest oil producer in the world.[xxxiii]

If these accounts turn to be accurate, these potential reserves will overtake known oil-rich countries such as Nigeria (37 billion barrels of proven reserves) and Russia (102 billion barrels).

Somaliland claims promising and commercially viable oil reserves beneath her soil. The Ministry of Energy and Mineral (MoEM) demonstrates various oil blocks with reliable survey data. This geological data is available through TGS-NOPEC Geophysical Company (TGS)—a third-party firm that collected and interpreted speculative survey data and was later contracted to sell the data to the potential investors on behalf of MoEM.

Despite the recent invitations, history illustrates that the interest of international companies to explore oil in Somaliland started at the beginning of the 19th century to evaluate areas identified with soil seepage, and three wells drilled proved no commercially available accumulation. The period of this survey is known as the first generation of oil exploration. The second-generation exploration activities date back to the late 1970s and early 1980 when the Siyad government contracted an international firm called GECO to carry out a speculative seismic survey targeting the offshore zones in the Gulf of Aden. Somaliland carried out the third-generation speculative seismic survey.

Furthermore, the geographical size of the oil reserves supplements speculative data. The landmass of the identified oil blocks is estimated to be similar to the entire Kurdistan Region of Iraq. MoEM argues that the geological formation of Somaliland assimilates the geological characteristic of Yemen, while its political characteristics are similar to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Two conclusions to be inferred from the successive speculative surveys. The first conclusion points toward the existence of a reliable accumulation of oil reserves. These explorations show unfinished work. The second conclusion builds on the former: The technological advancement creates a renewed expectation. This claim is explained by MoEM, which holds a strong belief that three formerly drilled wells would have shown better results had the operators utilized subsurface control aid technology. MoEM also argues that drilling three wells is far beyond a credible conclusion—Mohamed Y. Ali advanced a similar argument asserting that Somaliland is highly unexplored. [xxxiv]

Potential target states

Acceptance of the *de facto* states by the international actors requires the handholding of regional or global power. The Arabian support of Eritrea is a case in point. [xxxv] Also, the United States' support for South Sudan's quest for statehood status further explains the role of the global power's interest in attaining self-determination. Bereketeab argues that oil reserves and security factors attracted the US to South Sudan. [xxxvi] He further explained that “geostrategic security, energy, political and economic interests determine the divergent international approaches.” [xxxvii]

Similarly, oil reserves in Timor-Leste attracted international attention. [xxxviii] The Kurdistan Region Government (KRG) is another similar case that would provide a relevant FP pathway for Somaliland to elevate its international image. All explain the significance of the geostrategic, economic, and security interests to attract the support of powerful states.

Since energy security poses a credible challenge to many economies, Somaliland should capitalize on its strategic resources by aiming at (1) economies that are progressively growing and looking for diversification of energy sources and (2) economies with strategic resource scarcity, and (3) economies with some risk appetite.

A powerful lesson can be drawn from KRG. It created an interesting nexus between the strategic resources and FP priorities. KRG used its production capacity to gain political mileage by (a) awarding geographically strategic blocks to strengthen its claim over these territories, (b) awarding contracts to high profile firms to bolsters its political image in the international system, and (c) focusing on Western companies in countries such as the US, UK, and Canada as well as neighboring Turkey. This empirical evidence affirms that the possession of such strategic resources is a “critical arsenal to propel FP priorities.” [xxxix]

Oil reserves in Somaliland offer a wide latitude of options to create a neat nexus between the strategic resources and FP priorities. The immediate options include engaging with China, India, and South Korea—in addition to current investors.

1. China

Why China?

Economically, China is an ideal target for Somaliland's FP to transact with its strategic resources. China has enjoyed 30 years of double-digit economic growth. The secret of its explosive economic growth is attributable to a broad range of factors, including cheap labor, manufacturing, and export. But recently, these factors reached their limits, making China rethink its economic growth strategy. The World Bank's country overview analysis portrays that China needs to reorganize its economy from low-end manufacturing to higher-end manufacturing and service. [xl] This recommendation is supported by China's ongoing reforms on its energy sector through domestic exploration and external source diversification. [xli]

China's energy source diversification is due to several factors. First, its significant oil imports are mainly sourced from the Middle East, such as Iran. And the repetitive US sanctions on Iranian oil exports posed both short- and medium-term challenges to China's economy. Hence, the Middle East volatility is strategically troubling China's economy in the long run. Second, the current rate of China's economic growth demands an alternative source of energy. Third, some of its major oil-producing aquifers are expected to deplete very soon. [xlii]

Africa is among the target destinations for China's energy security strategy. Somalia is a priority country for China's quest for energy in Africa. China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) has been engaging with Mogadishu since 2007 and later secured permission to extract oil from the President of the Transitional Federal Government, Abdilahi Yusuf Ahmed. [xliii]

States are progressively directing, regulating, and coordination of strategic resources, such as oil. [xliv] In China, state involvement is even mostly mandatory. Several government institutions are tasked to safeguard the energy sector against the powerful Western oil market and their undesirable influence. [xlv] Besides, China is aggressively encouraging its oil investors to adopt a "go-out" (*zou chuqu*) strategy to 'secure' overseas energy supplies and conducting bilateral 'oil diplomacy' to secure future oil supplies. [xlvi] This strategy intends to meet the future energy needs of its economy.

It is evident that engagement with oil investors is tantamount to engaging with China. This shows a foreign policy opportunity for Somaliland to capitalize on China's energy diversification strategy, where the establishment of mutual interests is conceivable. But the initial engagement should be handled with care. Among the tactical approaches include engaging with China's public and private investors as a stepping-stone for future relations.

2. South Korea

South Korea would be considered as another destination for Somaliland's FP to transact on its strategic resources. The current rate of economic growth in South Korea is spectacular. Fifty years ago, South Korea managed to successfully escape from the scourge of poverty to the 15th largest economy in the world [xlvii]—an economic progression known as 'the Miracle of the Han River.' The agriculture, service, and manufacturing industries are largely responsible for South Korea's spectacular economic growth over the last half-century. Essential export commodities that played an indispensable role in economic performance include electronics, telecommunications, shipbuilding, automobiles, chemicals, and steel. The production of these commodities consumes a large volume of energy, especially hydrocarbons.

South Korea imports about 98% of its fossil demand, making it among the top 10 energy consumers in the world. [xlviii] Under such circumstances, it is compelled to constantly search for reliable sources to bridge its natural resource deficiency. South Korea instituted its national oil and gas enterprise known as KNOC (Korea National Oil Corporation) to secure energy sources. KNOC imports a large amount of oil supplies to its refineries from Africa, the Middle East, the Americas, Oceania, Asia, and Europe. [xlix] Like China and India, South Korea's top crude oil suppliers are Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iran, though the US sanction imposed on the latter in 2019 doubled its crude oil importation from the US. [l]

Ostensibly, the government is a leading player in energy supply-chain endeavors. South Korea adopted an energy security policy aimed at regulating its dependence on imported crude. For example, strong public institutions were created to secure an uninterrupted supply of crude oil to its economy—among them are KNOC, KOGAS, KEPCO. [li] These public institutions determined to seek downstream concession opportunities across the world, largely in exploration and production rights. South Korea has also exposed these public institutions to the outside world, resulting in maintaining a cordial relationship with Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

In South Korea, the state directs the major aspects of the energy sector—it is this involvement that avails an opportunity for Somaliland to explore political and economic cooperation.

3. India

India would be the next target for Somaliland's FP to transact its strategic resources. The current rate of economic growth in India is spectacular. India has been recently showing a robust economic performance, resulting from aiming a middle country by 2030. [lii]

Indian economic growth is unsustainable without securing oil supplies from domestic and foreign sources. While India represents the fifth-largest consumer of energy globally, its consumption is expected to overtake Japan and Russia in a decade. [liii] A large volume of India's energy exports is mainly sourced from the Middle East, a region where its security concerns its FP planners; hence, both public and private officials shifted their focus beyond current sources. [liv]

India's policymakers are concerned by the recurrent instability in the Middle East region, compelling the state officials to adopt a lookout policy and encourage private investors to aim Africa. Congo, Egypt, Gabon, Libya, Madagascar, Nigeria, and Sudan are heavily invested by India's private and public sectors. One should note that investments made in these countries are equally prone to immediate and long-term instability. Still, India's energy policy shift toward Africa embraces the principle of source diversification.

Apart from India's energy requirement and sources diversification policy, several other factors can encourage Somaliland to contemplate engaging with India. First, India showed interest in the hydrocarbon industry in the region. For a while, India has been watching Somalia's hydrocarbon industry in exchange for aid,

technology, and military training.[lv] Second, the risk appetite of India is equally encouraging. This argument is evidenced by India's current engagement with several war-torn countries in Africa—these countries include Congo and South Sudan.

The energy aspirations of India are considerably different from China's energy policy orientation. While China is largely dependent on public and private sector companies, India demonstrates aggressive policy orientation toward securing alternative energy sources. State officials support companies in the bidding processes abroad and combine with diplomatic engagement, technological transfer, and investment in other sectors of the target energy-producing countries.[lvi] This illustrates that India's energy security approach greatly benefits to Somaliland's cause for statehood status.

Foreign policy line

Smart utilization of strategic resources is a plausible FP line. Somaliland's FP corps should articulate that the world will benefit when Somaliland is recognized from the global economy and international trade positions. Somaliland should focus on exploiting its strategic resources to advance its aspirations.

Somaliland should utilize its strategic resource and location to increasing its interaction with the outside world. National-level coordination is pertinent to synergize efforts and close existing gaps, including legal and policy ones—particularly in the oil and gas sectors. It is also relevant that Somaliland's FP should consider marketing its strategic assets to the emerging Asian powers, including China, South Korea, and India—in addition to the existing concessions.

SUSTAINABILITY OF *DE FACTO* STATES: BEYOND THE CONCEIVING STAGE

For *de facto* states, sustainability is synonymous with the national security of the *de jure* states. The source of their insecurity emanates from political, economic, and military fronts. Hence, projecting that the Somaliland project is self-sustainable is a crucial foreign policy line.

Among the sustainability issues faced with *de facto* states is a potential reintegration through military assaults. Florea's dataset on the future of *de facto* states covering 66 years (1945–2011) explains. This data set captures 34 *de facto* states, of which only 18 now survive. Of the remaining 16, 12 of them reintegrated with their parent state.[lvii] Only four transitioned to statehood status: Eritrea, East Timor, Kosovo, and South Sudan. While Somaliland is among the few surviving ones, this dataset presents a bad image for the future of *de facto* states.

Sustainability should be at the epicenter of Somaliland FP discourse. This article provides a critical analysis of Kolso's main sustainability factors: "symbolic nation-building; militarization of society, "[lviii] and economic sustainability.

Nation- and state-building

Sustainability requires reinstitution of social, political, and economic fabrics. These ideational factors are often neglected during the struggle or before the unilateral declaration of independence but pose an existential threat if they are not carefully managed. Most *de facto* states are a product of a prolonged war that led to the destruction of social, political, and economic infrastructures. These annihilations are sustained due to the length and viciousness of war between the contending parties—*de facto* states vs. the parent state.[lix]

Re-institutionalization of annihilated socioeconomic fabric requires more time and space. For *de facto* states, it requires progressive policies and visionary leadership.

- **Collective Identity**

A wide range of state identity abounds in the literature of state-building. While different academic works advanced different definitions of state and collective identity, Lynch's definition combines the various dimensions and scope of the concept. For Lynch, state identity is the "set of beliefs about the nature and purpose of the state expressed in public articulations of state actions and ideals." [lx] He further argues that it is "established, reinforced, and changed by exchanging of public claims, assertions, and arguments as well as by the public observance of ritual and celebration of shared myths." [lxi] Such a common identity lays the foundation of the social contract to define the relation between the different actors, interests, and views among the community members.

The formation of a common identity is also a liberating factor for the *de facto* states. Analogically, characteristics of the *de facto* states assimilate a newborn babe, who require a new identity such as naming, membership, caring, and communication. The *de facto* state should be understood, approached, and dealt with differently from the parent state. In most cases, the identity of *de facto* states is largely restitution of historical, political, and social commonalities exclusive for the members of the new state. The source of these commonalities departs from the point of dissimilarities with the parent state. Similarly, the identity for the new state shapes the FP discourse of *de facto* states to determine friends, foes, and a potential threat to its sovereignty.

A similar process of identity creation is observable in the cause of Somaliland's state-building adventure. This process began in early 1990 when the Somali regime collapsed, where communities in the North convened the Burao Grand Conference in 1991 to discuss their future relationship with Somalia.

The Burao Conference was a historical game-changer in re-establishing Somaliland's common identity. Among the relevant principles to identity-building included that the regions situated in the former British protectorate should stand by themselves. The outcome of this conference paved the way for the ultimate unilateral declaration of independence endorsed by the delegates and later the central committee in which the Chairman became the President, Abdirahman A. Ali.

The Borama conference was another milestone towards creating a common identity in the quest for nation and state-building. It should be reminded that two major clans (Harti and Gadabursi) were not part of the SNM's struggle. However, SNM leadership understood that the creation of Somaliland would be incomplete unless the militias of other clans are fully integrated into the nation-building.

The Borama conference was followed by a referendum, successive elections, erection of war memory statues, creation of a common enemy, and reconciliation of the Sool and Sanaag regions. Tacitly, each of these sociopolitical occurrences made a considerable contribution to the process of creating a sustainable entity known as Somaliland.

Demonstration of collective memory such as war memorials mounted in public places is a source of sustainability. The statues of war memorial objects in the street of Hargeisa are a case in point. Somaliland's struggle for nation and state-building has never been smooth sailing, but there are structural shortcomings. The absence of full acceptance of the Sool and Sanaag regions is detrimental to a viable state identity for several reasons.

- Institutional Building

Institutions are depository to preserve the common identity of the society. Institutions are "aggregating up from various individuals, social networks, groups, and national culture." [lxii] This definition indicates that institutions signify the collective identity of a society. Therefore, more influential institutions tend to preserve unity in the society; the reverse is equally true—weaker institutions or a lack of them tends to impede the veracity of the social fabric.

State institutions are the depository for a common identity, making their development equate to resilience and social unity—the reverse is also correct. Weak institutions derail the sustainability of *de facto* states, particularly when revenues, royalties, and other forms of social obligation enrich few individuals in the political class. The latter undermines the credibility of the common identity since citizens will refuse to associate with them, which will lead to ultimate disapproval. Therefore, institutions and nation-building always accompany each other.

Like other states, institutions of the *de facto* state suffer a credibility deficit when faced with broken promises. This credibility deficit is expounded mainly by frustrated expectations. For example, a law-abiding social member expects reciprocity from the state institutions. When leaders of these institutions unceasingly breach their policy commitments, then "people are likely to disregard future promises from that actor." [lxiii]

- Passport as Source of Identity

Passport provides a couple of significant purposes from foreign policy aspect: Civic Identity and Freedom of Movement. First, distributing passports to the citizens strengthens the *de facto* state's ambition to create a distinct civic national identity. In other words, holding the passport of a particular political entity manifests allegiance. Because of the desperate need to convey a distinct personality from the parent state, *de facto* states issue passports to their citizens.

Second, the issuance of a passport is aimed at facilitates the freedom of movement for its citizens. Somalilanders are often faced infinite travel restrictions. Like other states, citizens of the *de facto* states need to travel for a wide range of purposes, including medical treatment, commercial and business endeavors, scholarship and pursuit for education, and tourism purposes. In the case of Somaliland, government officials insist on traveling with their passports when attending international events.

Somaliland issues passports to all persons whose parents originate from the British Somaliland Protectorate. This legal expression aims to distinguish between the two Somali regions that created the Somali Republic. Somaliland negotiated with several states to accept its passports as an official travel document, including the UK, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya, Uganda, South African, among others.

Economic viability

A working economy is a major source of cohesion and security among society. Building a working economy is a critical task for Somaliland. This is because *de facto* states transition their policy priorities from defeating the parent states to a new paradigm of building and investing in the economic fabrics to sustain the new project. [lxiv]

Somaliland needs to modernize its economy to attract foreign direct investment. This is because investors hardly make decisions devoid of a comprehensive account of one's economic performance. Negotiating potential investors to boost the local economy requires a conducive business environment, compelling data, and visibility across the economic sectors—a task often overlooked by Somaliland leaders.

Another critical challenge to building a viable economy in Somaliland is the perception of international investors on its legal personality. It is also worth mentioning that investors are concerned about the reaction from the parent state. A case in point is Somalia's rejection of Dubai World's investment in Somaliland. And in other cases, the parent states disallow investors that are doing business with *de facto* states to operate in its larger market.

Eventually, such harsh economic sabotage reduces the economic viability of *de facto* states. Another for Somaliland's FP-makers to plan their sustainability discourse around economic viability.

Defense mechanism

States count on their defense capabilities to survive in the anarchical system. Ever since the ratification of the 1964 Westphalian Peace Agreement, states have been protected by international public law and relevant institutions to endure in the anarchical world. Nevertheless, the *de facto* state operates in a harsh political environment in the absence of explicit protection from international law and institutions. The principle of territorial integrity is activated as a pretext to eliminate *de facto* states. Therefore, *de facto* states are only left to survive in the Hobbesian jungle.

Survival in such a hostile international system necessitates the strong military capabilities of *de facto* states to reduce their vulnerability. The logical *de facto* state's defense mechanism is similar to the common defense of the *de jure* states. Applying the adage of 'if you want to be a state, act like a one,' Somaliland is compelled to devise a defense mechanism comparable to the *de jure* states.

While *de jure* states rely on international law and institutions to complement the domestic defense mechanism, *de facto* states rely on the domestic support of their societies. Kolsto agrees that *de facto* states often militarize their societies to complement their domestic defenses mechanism.[lxv] For example, Nagorno-Karabakh maintains active military forces between 15,000 to 20,000 strong while Abkhazia maintains 5,000 military personnel.[lxvi] Such a defense mechanism is critical to the sustainability of the *de facto* entities. A similar defense mechanism is visible in Somaliland to protect its territories.

Foreign policy line

Somaliland's FP corps should articulate to the world that Somaliland is economically, socially, and militarily sustainable. One needs to outline that its experience, history, and governance are not only unique but different from South Sudan and Eritrea: two *de facto* states that failed to deliver their post-recognition aspirations. First, the argument of this policy should emanate from bottom-up state- and nation-building processes with a limited international intervention coupled with two decades of long democratic governance.

Second, Somaliland's FP should articulate to the world that Somaliland is unlikely to succumb to forceful integration. This line of argument since historical records show many *de facto* states that were forced to integrate with their parent states through military means. Therefore, Somaliland's FP should articulate to the world that it is sustainable economically, socially, and politically.

CONCLUSION

Because state recognition is a political matter, Somaliland should chart out a foreign policy strategy that seeks acceptance and cooperation from the members of the international system. A foreign policy strategy that reverses the natural fear of the sovereign states against the emergence of the *de facto* states. *De facto* states are viewed as illegal entities, destroying international borders, creating security havoc, and unsustainable.

First, Somaliland should demonstrate that its case is compliant with International law, norms, and practices to change states' fear towards the emergence of the *de facto* states. This foreign policy line is imperative to achieving acceptance from the international system.

Compliance with regional, continental, and global instruments is essential for the decision-making process of the potential recognizing states. It eases for them to justify that their decisions satisfy the necessary legal thresholds. In other words, the state's decision to accord recognition is primarily driven by national interests, but it is delivered in such a way that meets the international legal standards, norms, and practices. Therefore, a compliant FP posture will relieve the recognizing state from the heavy burden imposed by the deeply legalized international system.

Second, Somaliland project itself as a responsible and reliable actor in maintaining global peace and security. The Horn of Africa remains the strategic economic and political location for the international community. This region poses both massive value and immense peril to world trade. However, its geopolitical and economic conditions present complex and multifaceted images. The immediate recollection of the economic and political matters is abundant, with disturbing images of inhumane piracy activities, extremism and terror attacks, drought, and famine, as well as fierce competition and proxy wars between the middle and major economic powers. This is to say, the maintenance of its peace and security is a critical matter for regional and global actors.

Third, Somaliland should align its foreign policy with its strategic resources and location. The hydrocarbon industry has long been a matter of debate in international politics. While such strategic resources can be a boon or bane to smaller entities, the renewed hydrocarbon exploration endeavors in Somaliland avail a remarkable FP opportunity to enhance its international image. This notion is even true in the contemporary world in which strategic resources such as oil and petroleum are imminent drivers of FP conduct.

Energy security became the epicenter in the FP discourse of the major economies, including the US, the UK, China, India, and South Korea—to mention a few. And the projection of large military installations and strategic locations with rich strategic resources become politically synonymous, as evidenced by the Middle East, the Caspian Sea, and the South China Sea regions. For that reason, Somaliland's FP needs to redirect its strategic focus toward utilizing its strategic resources.

Fourth and Finally, Somaliland should demonstrate its longterm sustainability. Policy measures to bolster the collective frame of reference are required for sustainability among its people. A common frame of reference in the form of ideational factors emanates from the social, economic, and political spheres. Three broad themes were conceived as critical to serving as the major sources of sustainability: Nation- and state-building, economic viability, and defense capabilities.

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