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ISRAEL'S RECOGNITION OF SOMALILAND

Reactions and Implications
for the Horn of Africa



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Abstract

Israel's recognition of Somaliland in December 2025 has injected new uncertainty into an already fragile Horn of Africa and Red Sea security environment. While the move can lead to a potential geopolitical realignment, this paper argues that its most immediate and consequential effect is juridical, whereas broader strategic shifts are yet to be observed. The recognition directly challenges Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and thereby, Somalia has mounted an intensive diplomatic engagement across regional and multilateral institutions. The paper aims to assess the historical foundations of Somaliland's statehood claim, its strategic value along the Bab al-Mandab maritime corridor, Israel's security and geopolitical motivations, and global response to the recognition. As many regional, sub-regional, and global actors have largely opposed the Israel's recognition, seeking to contain the fallout while recalibrating their strategic postures, the recognition has not yet produced a fundamental shift in alliance structures. Instead, Israel's move has opened a Pandora's Box that risks interacting with existing rivalries, maritime insecurity, and non-state actor activity in the Red Sea and Horn of Africa. For India, the recognition reinforces a careful balancing act. As India upholds Somalia's sovereignty, the paper argues that India shall remain cautious in its diplomatic approaches towards Somaliland. The paper cohesively argues that the longer-term impact of this recognition will hinge on whether other states follow Israel's precedent, potentially converting a juridical shock into a broader geopolitical realignment which will have significant implication for regional stability and international order.

Key words: Somaliland Recognition, Somalia, Israel, Horn of Africa, Red Sea, Bab al-Mandab Strait, Territorial Sovereignty, Maritime Chokepoint, Regional Security,

Introduction

The global order is currently undergoing a period of profound geopolitical churn. This shift can be characterised by progressive dynamism within power balances and fluid strategic alignments. The escalating power rivalry has led to an increase in persistent regional conflicts, economic and technological disparities, while eroding trust on multilateral institutions. These ripples were felt on the continent of Africa as well. Internally, Africa observed a widespread outbreak of armed conflicts in 2025. The conflicts were primarily driven by the transgressions of non-state armed groups (NSAGs) coupled with the fragile condition of state institutions. The uncertainties deepened with youth-led movements in various countries, representing deep-seated frustrations with corruption, poor governance, and high levels of youth unemployment¹ that are prevalent in the region. On the economic front, the continent grappled with significant aid cuts from the US and other foreign partners, as the continent experienced an overall decline in overseas development assistance of 16-28 percent.² In the geopolitical scenario, Africa is navigating and seeking to position itself within the evolving global order under the second Trump administration.

The continent holds immense potential and undiscovered opportunities for investments while also possessing significant resources of key minerals and metals for technological development. These facets, among many other (like resources, maritime connectivity, etc.), make the continent a breeding ground for intensifying great power rivalry. One of the regions within the continent that is at a critical inflection point is the Horn of Africa. The sparking tensions across the Horn of Africa are more than just shifting borders; it is rather a high-stakes contest for access to sea, control of vital ports and shipping routes, along with a tussle for balance of power among regional and global actors. Therefore, the recognition of Somaliland by Israel in 2025 has aggravated tensions in an already-strained region.

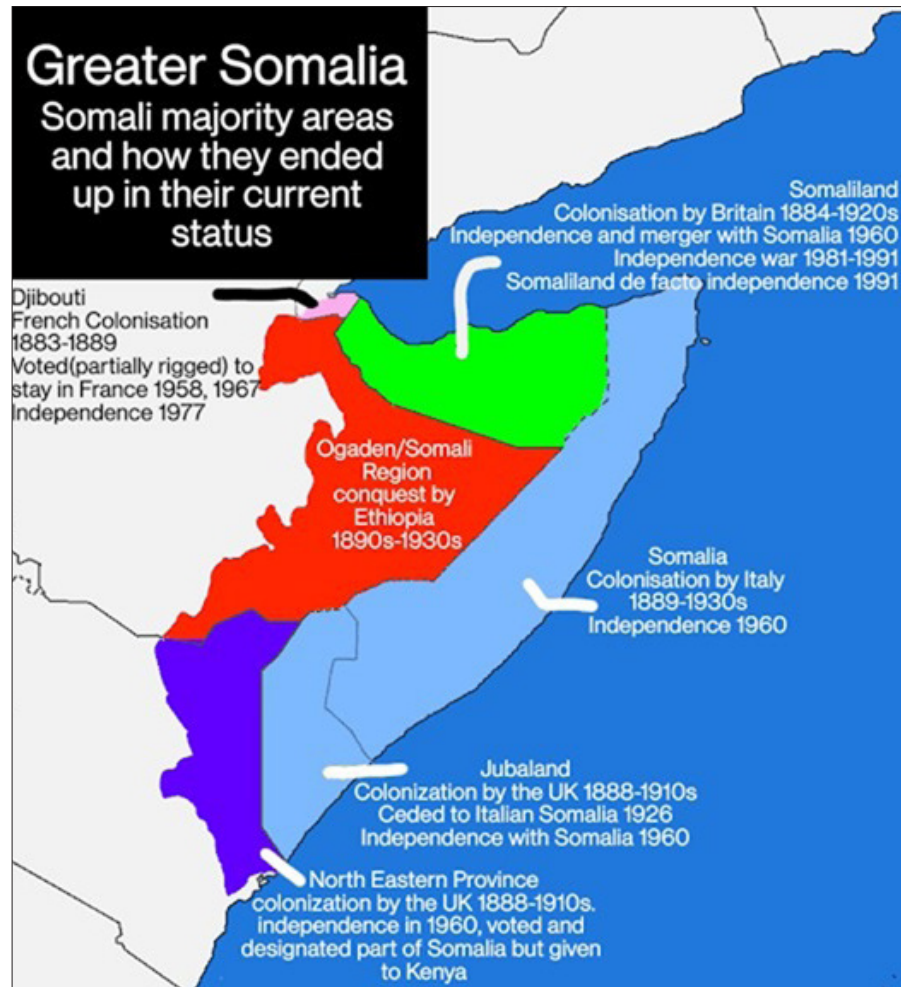
Israel's recognition of Somaliland as an independent and sovereign state has prompted regional and

global actors to reassess their established diplomatic positions and strategic calculations in the region. However, it shall be noted that the recent development has not yet constituted an immediate reordering of regional geopolitics. Rather, its most pertinent and consequential effects are de-juris in nature, that directly challenges Somalia's claim on Somaliland, and Somalia's recognised sovereignty and territorial integrity. The recognition introduces a new juridical fact that compels Somalia to pursue an intensified diplomatic counteroffensive. Within this gambit, the regional and global powers are navigating through the tensions catering to their strategic interests. Consequently, the recognition primarily reshapes the legal-normative landscape surrounding Somalia, with broader geopolitical shifts remaining contingent and uneven.

Against such an evolving backdrop, this research article delves into examining the historical foundations of Somaliland, its strategic significance within the Horn of Africa, the drivers behind Israel's recognition, and assessing the regional and global reactions to the recognition. The paper contends that the recognition has impacted Somalia's de juris claim, but a broader geopolitical shift in the region is yet to be observed.

History of the Somaliland

Before delving into the strategic significance of the region, it is pivotal to understand the historical context. Somaliland is considered to be a breakaway region of Somalia and seeks international recognition since the 1990s. Tensions between Somalia and Somaliland have been boiling since Somalilanders' claim to political independence, which they declared in 1991, although the frictions date back to the independence of the region from the European powers in the 1960s. Prior to the influence of the colonial powers, Somalia as a region was much bigger than the current geographical convention. This region was referred to as 'Greater Somalia', and only under colonialism this area was divided between European powers, separating the Somali people into five territories: Italian Somalia (today's Somalia), British Somaliland (today's Somaliland), French Somaliland (today's Djibouti), and notable



Source: Somaliland Sun⁴

Somali enclaves in Ethiopia's Ogaden region and Kenya's North-Eastern province.³

The idea of a 'Greater Somalia' persisted in the early post-independence period, most notably when British Somaliland gained independence on June 26, 1960, and voluntarily united with Italian Somaliland on July 1, 1960 – the same day the latter became independent.⁵ The tensions which occurred after the union shall be viewed under the context that, British Somaliland, after gaining independence on July 26, 1960, was recognised by 35 states (including all permanent members of the UN Security Council) and yet voluntarily united to form the current Republic of Somalia, marking a concrete step toward 'Greater Somalia'.⁶

It is disputed that British Somaliland got the short end of the union deal, but it is widely acclaimed

that there was continued brutal oppression and marginalisation of the Somaliland people under the union's dictatorial regime of Mohamed Siad Barre.⁷ The oppression was met with defiance, and the Somali National Movement (SNM) (later Somali Northern Movement) was formed, demanding to recall of the Act of the Union and reinstating the June 26, 1960, borders. As the Somali central government collapsed in the early 1990s, the people of Somaliland reclaimed their sovereignty, and on May 18, 1991, Somaliland declared its independence.⁸ Because Somalia never ratified the Act of Union, this initiated the tussle for Somaliland to be recognised as a sovereign state. To act towards resolving the dispute, African Union (AU), a prominent regional multilateral forum, sent a fact-finding mission in 2005 to understand the case of Somaliland and concluded that the fact that the union between Somaliland and Somalia was never

ratified and also malfunctioned when it went into action from 1960-1990, makes Somaliland's search for recognition historically unique and self-justified in African political history.⁹ The AU's observations and recommendations on the dispute were referred to as substantial legal determinations justifying their independent legal status.¹⁰ Findings of the AU emphasised that Somaliland does not have a precedent for widespread fragmentation, but rather the dissolution of a failed voluntary union.¹¹

Furthermore, in case of development trajectories, both Somalia and Somaliland have diverged considerably. Since 1991, Somaliland has built a functioning government, conducted more than seven democratic elections, and cultivated a strong culture of democracy and stability – an achievement unparalleled in the Horn of Africa.¹² Somaliland's peacebuilding and state formation efforts were driven by traditional Somali norms of governance, notably consultation and consensual decision-making, and informed by customary values.¹³ It can be argued that Somaliland presents a strong case to gain a sovereign nation's status as it meets the core criteria of statehood

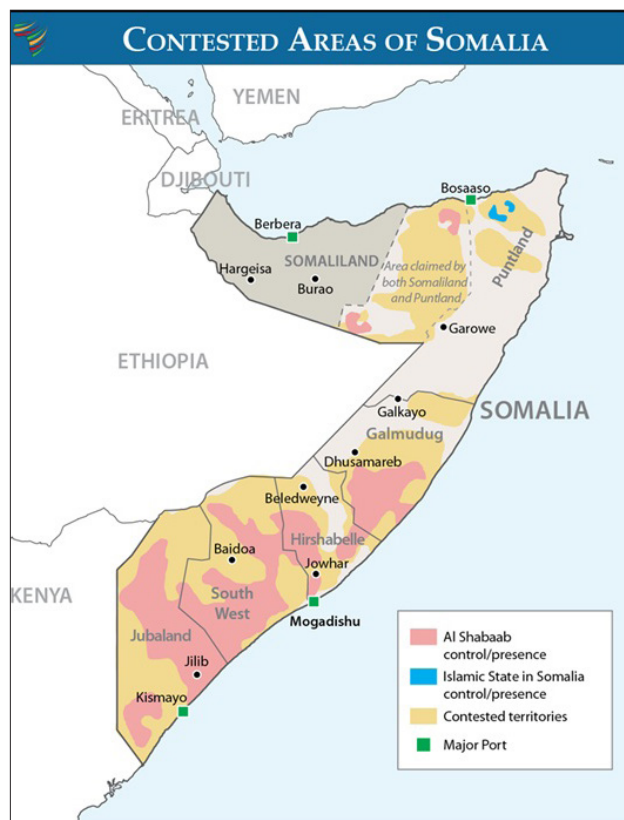
outlined in the Montevideo Convention.¹⁴

Whereas, for Somalia post 1991, the peacebuilding and state-building processes have taken a backseat. With the central government being largely non-functional, the government institutions have been weak and fragile. As a result, Al-Shabaab, the prominent militant group active in Somalia, managed to expand its territorial control relatively rapidly.¹⁶ The militant group is reported to control roughly 30 percent of Somalia's territory, which is more than the area that is under the authority of the Somalian government.¹⁷ Internal disputes further deepen for Somalia with the rise of a semi-autonomous state in 1998, namely Puntland. Puntland is a federated state of Somalia, located in the northeast of the country, it sits at the tip of the Horn of Africa.

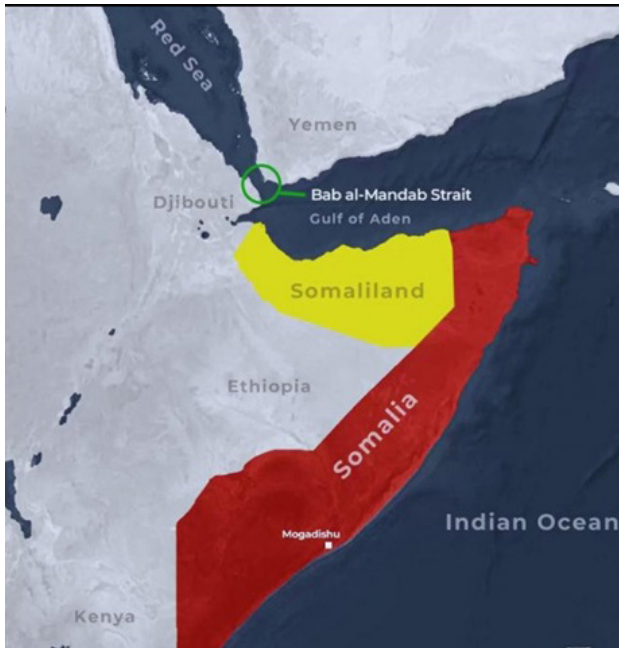
Both Somaliland and Somalia though share similar history but in current times experience extremely different scenarios. With the peace and stability displayed by Somaliland, they make a compelling case before the global powers to formally recognise the breakaway region. Whereas, for the global powers, access to the strategic location presents a strong case to recognise Somaliland and gain strategic leverage over the region.

Strategic Significance of the Region

The Horn of Africa situated in the northeastern Africa, comprises of four countries Somalia, Djibouti, Eritrea, and Ethiopia. The region holds commercial deposits of gold, potash, tantalum or lithium, copper-zinc volcanogenic massive sulphide (VMS) systems, industrial minerals, and dimension stone.¹⁹ This attracts the interest of various global actors as well. Apart from commercial allures, the region holds significant strategic importance too. Somaliland is situated at a crucial maritime corridor near the Bab al-Mandab strait, being strategically located astride the Red Sea-Gulf of Aden maritime chokepoint. The strait is a key transit point for commercial vessels connecting Asian, European, and African markets via the Suez Canal,²⁰ making it the world's most sensitive maritime passage. Bab al-Mandab strait



Source: Africa Center for Strategic Studies¹⁵



Source: *The Cradle18*

connects the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean, enabling the transit of millions of barrels of oil and various commodities every day.²¹ The strait accounts for 10 per cent to 12 per cent of worldwide trade and caters to notable oil flows through Bab al-Mandab.²² In 2023, 8.6 million bpd of oil flowed through the strait, although this declined due to the attacks by Houthis (a non-state actor active in the region) in 2024.²³ Due to turbulence in the strait during 2024, the vessels had to opt for longer routes by ferrying around the Cape of Good Hope.

Considering these uncertainties, the highest expected value of trade disrupted (EVTD) due to rerouting from Bab al-Mandab strait accounts for USD 58.3 billion per year, i.e., 0.23 per cent of global trade. Whereas on assessing the overall economic risk posed by all the global maritime chokepoints, Bab al-Mandab attributes to the largest share of risk, which accounts for around USD 4.2 billion per year (i.e., 0.02%) worth of economic risk.²⁴ These risks showcase the impact that Bab al-Mandab holds over global trade. A maritime chokepoint like Bab al-Mandab is not only a geographic bottleneck but also a financial and strategic flashpoint. Hence, the global powers seek to advance their economic, diplomatic, strategic, or even military influence over the region, especially in Somaliland.

While such historical and legal context is important, it shall be argued that it cannot establish normative legitimacy, rather it shall be understood to examine why the recognition operates primarily as a juridical disruption to Somalia's sovereign claims. Hence currently, the immediate impact of recognition questions the territorial integrity of Somalia. Yet, the uncertainty can interact with existing fault lines in Yemen, Sudan, and the Red Sea littoral, while also triggering non-state actors, including extremist groups, to exploit the instability and amplify the regional insecurity.

Israel's Recognition of Somaliland

On January 6, 2026, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Israel, Gideon Sa'ar, expressed the Israeli willingness to build an enduring and warm friendship with Somaliland.²⁵ He stated this while on a historical official visit to Hargeisa, the capital of Somaliland. During the visit, Gideon Sa'ar met Somaliland's President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi, where both nations showcased willingness to open embassies and aspired to strengthen bilateral relations, with a focus on diplomacy, security, trade, and investment, as well as regional peace and stability.²⁶ The visit is viewed historic because of the events that transpired around two weeks earlier. On December 26, 2025, Israel signed the agreement with the President of Somaliland, Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi, recognizing Somaliland as a sovereign and independent state.²⁷ This marked a watershed moment in the region as Israel became the first country to have recognised the Republic of Somaliland – enhancing Israel's influence in the region. Israel's decision to recognise Somaliland, followed by the visit of Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar, has been widely criticised and is seen as controversial by several states. However, given the volatility of the region, along with its strategic relevance, the recognition by Israel should not be viewed as a black swan event.

Israel's recognition of Somaliland has been interpreted by various regional and global powers through multiple analytical lenses, with differing assessments offered regarding the motivations underpinning this decision.

One of the most discussed, among these reasons, is Israel's willingness to relocate the Palestinian population to Somaliland. This move is anticipated to have an immense impact on the security of the region, which is already marred with the transgressions of Al-Shabab. Despite all the attributed reasons, Israel's official stance towards the recognition has been in sync with upholding the spirit of the Abraham Accords and to expand its relations through extensive cooperation in the fields of agriculture, health, technology, and economy.²⁸ At the United Nations Security Council meeting convened on December 29, 2025, Israel characterised their recognition as a lawful, principled acknowledgement of a long-established reality, consistent with international law and aligned with the values that this Council is meant to uphold.²⁹ The representative of Israel stressed that the recognition shall not be observed as an act of defiance, rather the recognition presents an opportunity to promote clarity, encourage responsibility and strengthen stability in the Horn of Africa.³⁰

Considering the strategic significance of Somaliland, there are vested interests of Israel that have been catered to with the recognition. Israel has been developing its relations with Somaliland since mid-2025, and therefore, the recognition shall not be viewed as a sudden event. On November 24, 2025, one of Israel's prominent think tanks, in their brief, flagged certain security concerns faced by Somaliland, which included³¹:

- i) the spread of global jihad, primarily Houthis,
- ii) separatist pressures along its periphery,
- iii) subversive activity linked to China and Türkiye – threats for which there is tangible evidence on the ground.

Along with these security concerns, the brief most importantly indicated that how Somaliland could potentially be a base for Israel to counter Houthis. This base can have multiple uses that included:³²

- i) intelligence collection and monitoring of the Houthis and their military buildup,
- ii) logistical support for Yemen's internationally recognized government in its war against the Houthis,
- iii) direct operations, from offensive actions to

intercepting Houthi attacks at sea or by Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs).

Considering Houthi attacks in the Red Sea that have disrupted global trade and generated strategic pressure on Israel, the pursuit of greater influence in the region may be understood as a response aimed at mitigating emerging vulnerabilities and enhancing Israel's strategic leverage. The recognition by Israel was met by dissent from the leader of Yemen's Houthi group, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi. The Houthi leader warned that Israeli presence in Somaliland would be considered as a military target by the militant group, perceiving Israel's recognition as an open threat to regional security.³³ Another regional non-state actor, Al-Shabaab, has also resisted Israel's efforts to recognise Somaliland.³⁴

In its pursuit of strategic influence in the region amid intense external competition, Israel appears to have identified Somaliland as the most viable partner for advancing its regional objectives. Somalia's close alignment with Türkiye, Eritrea's strategic ties with Iran, Djibouti's firm political and security coordination with Somalia, and Ethiopia's landlocked status collectively limit Israel's ventures in the region. Against this backdrop, Somaliland emerges as a relatively stable and receptive platform for Israeli engagement. Reports suggest that Somaliland has expressed openness to the establishment of an Israeli military facility,³⁵ which has further heightened regional sensitivities, introducing a new layer of strategic uncertainty into an already volatile geopolitical environment. Nevertheless, Israel's recognition has immense prospective implications, but the two stances have emerged very distinctly, i.e., Israel's effort to pacify Houthis in the Red Sea, and being able to counter the Turkish influence in the region. As Israel positions itself as a guarantor of international maritime navigation through a strategy of forward deterrence, the emergence of a strategic alignment among regional actors led by Israel is being anticipated.³⁶ Whereas, to dismantle Houthis' expansion, especially further in the Horn of Africa, a nontraditional proposal advocating a 'two-state solution' in Yemen could potentially be a long-term view of Israel.³⁷

While the recognition's immediate consequences are predominantly legal and diplomatic, its longer-term significance lies in how this juridical disruption may gradually interact with existing rivalries, security dilemmas, and external interventions – dynamics that shape the evolving geopolitical ramifications examined in the following section.

Geopolitical Ramifications in the Region

Set against an environment of intensifying geopolitical competition, Israel's recognition of Somaliland constitutes a significant and potentially transformative development within the strategic landscape of the Horn of Africa. This development has made the region fragile to absorb and intensify the broader geopolitical tussles or even turn into a conflict hotspot within itself. Rather than representing a discrete bilateral engagement, the recognition intersected with entrenched regional disputes, maritime security dynamics, and the expanding involvement of external powers in Africa's eastern littoral. The recognition for now has the potential to recalibrate regional alignments, while further internationalising the Horn of Africa as a theatre of great-power rivalry.

Accordingly, this development warrants analysis not solely through the prism of Israel–Somaliland relations, or even as a mere threat to Somalia's territory. Rather the move by Israel shall be analysed as a broader geopolitical inflection point with implications for regional stability, diplomatic norms, and the evolving security architecture of the Red Sea–Gulf of Aden corridor. Knowing the historical dynamics of Somaliland–Somalia dispute, the demography too plays an important role in understanding how Somaliland has maintained internal stability. With a population primarily consisting of the Isaaq clan, Somaliland is situated to the north of Somalia, away from being affected by the instability caused by Al-Shabaab, which is concentrated primarily in the south of Somalia. Having conducted democratic elections and maintained peace, Somaliland has also been active in engaging with other international actors and recognised sovereign states. Notably, Somaliland maintains diplomatic relations with dozens of

countries, having representative offices in the United States, the United Kingdom, United Arab Emirates, Taiwan, and a few other states. Moreover, Somaliland hosts embassies and diplomatic missions from the United Kingdom, Türkiye, Taiwan, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).³⁸

A. Somalia's Diplomatic Counteroffensive

With Israel's recognition of Somaliland, Somalia is at the cusp of this latest development that unfolded at the end of 2025. The recognition constitutes a de-juris challenge to Somalia's internationally recognised territorial integrity. The Federal Government of Somalia has responded to Israel's decision with unequivocal condemnation. The strong condemnation by Somalia viewed Israel's act as 'unlawful', 'the greatest abuse', and 'naked invasion.'³⁹ Immediately after the recognition was officiated, Somalia reclaimed their absolute and non-negotiable commitment to sovereignty, national unity, and territorial integrity, as enshrined in the Provisional Constitution of the Federal Republic of Somalia, the Charter of the United Nations, the Constitutive Act of the African Union, as well as the charters and covenants of the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation' through a statement on December 26, 2025.⁴⁰ Moreover, on December 29, 2025, the State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Somalia, Hon. Ali Mohamed Omar, reinforced that Somalia's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity are protected..., and that no external actor has the legal authority to alter Somalia's territorial status.⁴¹

The harsh reaction by Somalia is based on the reasoning that, since they have not ratified the Act of Union, and thereby, they consider the 1960 borders as the official boundary of the state, according to which Somaliland is a part of Somalia. Based on the similar argument, Somalia never accepted the independence of Somaliland in 1991, although it was never able to control Somaliland as well. On December 28, 2025, following Israel's recognition, Somalia called for an emergency joint session of Parliament and unanimously passed a resolution, declaring the recognition null and void – indicating that the Federal government of Somalia would take up the matter with the United Nations, African

Union, Arab League, and other regional bodies.⁴² While defending their sovereign integrity, Somalia's president Hassan Sheikh Mohamud warns that the move made by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will bring the Israel-Palestine conflict to the helm of horn of Africa. With this accusation Somalian President called the northern clans to unite against Israel and remain committed to meaningful dialogue with the Somaliland administration to strengthen unity and resolve misunderstandings.⁴³

In addition, to harness more support, Somalia has also accused Israel of planning to expel Gaza Palestinians to Somaliland. The Somali president has further stated that there are 'high-stakes Israeli strategic objectives' at play that could be the potential reason for recognition.⁴⁴ According to Somali intelligence, reinstated by the Somali president, Somaliland has accepted three Israeli conditions in exchange for Israeli recognition:

- i) the resettlement of Palestinians,
- ii) the establishment of an Israeli military base on the coast of the Gulf of Aden, and
- iii) Somaliland joining the Abraham Accords

Even though Israel and Somaliland have refuted these claims, however, those assertions might be sufficient to impose enough doubts on the minds of the African and the Arab nations.

Somalia has called for a uniform voice against the recognition of Israel, from various regional and global actors, and has succeeded in harboring support. Apart from getting support from the regional leaders of Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Djibouti, Somalia has also garnered support from regional organisations like the African Union, League of Arab States, and Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, etc. The diplomatic prowess of Somalia against Somaliland will get further strengthened as Somalia assumes the rotating presidency of the (non- permanent members) United Nations Security Council (UNSC).⁴⁵ Interestingly, after the recognition, a bloc of 21 Arab, Islamic, and African states, which included Somalia, issued a joint statement condemning the recognition and reaffirming the support for Somalia's unity and sovereignty. This shows that the move by Israel had

a ripple effect on the region and beyond, and more specifically on the neighbouring states of Somalia. Therefore, the responses and strategic implications for Somalia's neighbouring states, along with selected key regional actors, are examined below.

B. Djibouti Pushes Back Against Recognition

Somaliland has attempted to build strong relations with its western neighbour, Republic of Djibouti. After the tensions between the two countries, due to the MoU signed between Ethiopia and Somaliland, ties with Djibouti have stabilised in 2025. In May 2025, Somaliland's President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdillahi Irro conducted a high-level three-day official visit to Djibouti, underscoring ongoing efforts to strengthen regional cooperation and political dialogue in the Horn of Africa.⁴⁶ The relations further developed as in the month of October 2025, the President of Somaliland held discussions with the Djibouti's Representative to Somaliland, Ambassador Hussein Omar Kawaliyeh.⁴⁷ Somaliland is forging relations with Djibouti based on deep historical and cultural ties, along with a shared vision for regional peace and development. Moreover, the relations were expected to deepen in the domains of security and trade.

However, irrespective of a glimmer of hope towards having stabilised relations with Somaliland, Djibouti remains firmly grounded in established principles of international law – particularly respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of recognised states. Therefore, Djibouti stands against any official recognition of Somaliland. Thus, after Israel's recognition of the Somaliland, the relations between both have taken a detour again, as Djibouti has reaffirmed that it does not accept any actions that violate international law or undermine Somalia's unity.⁴⁸ Since Djibouti assumes the Chairmanship of the African Union (AU) in 2026, the former holds immense diplomatic leverage on the situation.⁴⁹ Moreover, Djibouti's stance is also driven by economic considerations, as its economy remains heavily dependent on Ethiopia's reliance on Djiboutian ports for maritime trade. Djibouti observes that the recognition could lead to a spill-over effect, enabling Ethiopia to



recognise Somaliland as well and gain access to the sea. Therefore, Djibouti has a strong incentive to preserve its near monopoly over Ethiopia's access to sea and to discourage the emergence of alternative outlets that could dilute its strategic and economic leverage for the latter.

C. Ethiopia's Calculated Caution

Among all the neighbours of Somaliland, their southern neighbour, Ethiopia, is the most favourable country for Somaliland. Ethiopia has not been vocal in critiquing the move by Israel. This is primarily because of the significance Somaliland holds for Ethiopia. Ethiopia has its own national interests at stake, and these interest makes Somaliland the most important nation for Ethiopia. As Africa's second most populous country, Ethiopia's landlocked status in an increasingly globalised world has constrained its developmental trajectory and limited its economic growth potential. Ethiopia's longstanding need for access to the sea has been burgeoning ever since Eritrea gained independence in 1993.⁵⁰ Securing access to the sea would not only provide Ethiopia with a critical conduit to expand its trade and logistical capacities but would also constitute

a strategic milestone in reducing its structural dependence for maritime transit and port access.⁵¹

It is noteworthy to mention that Israel is not the first nation to have attempted to recognise the Republic of Somaliland; this venture has been explored by Ethiopia as well. Ethiopian Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed Ali on January 1, 2024, signed an MoU with the President of Somaliland, Muse Bihi Abdi, to formally recognise Somaliland.⁵² As stated earlier, Ethiopia's attempt to recognise Somaliland was with an aim to ensure its access to the Red Sea port of Berbera for commercial interests. This attempt of recognition also brought a lot of fragility in the region's peace and security, with Somalia and Egypt reacting against it vigorously. Although the tensions eased with the mediation of Türkiye, which resulted in the signing of the Ankara Declaration between Ethiopia and Somalia on December 11, 2024.⁵³ The positive ripples of the declaration were immediately in action, as the Ethiopian defence minister visited Somalia on January 2, 2025, which was followed by the visit of the Somalian President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud on January 11, 2025, to Ethiopia.⁵⁴ Since the Ankara declaration, the MoU

between Ethiopia and Somaliland has remained largely dormant.

Having normalised ties with Somalia following the Ankara Declaration, Ethiopia does not seem to be keen to hamper the bilateral ties. This could well be the reason that neither Foreign Minister of Ethiopia Gedion Timothewos nor his deputy responded to the questions raised by the MPs on Somaliland during the first session of Ethiopia's House of People's Representatives.⁵⁵ It was only on January 3, 2026, that Ethiopia broke the isolated silence and gave an official statement, while maintaining a cautious stance. Ethiopia's ambassador to Somalia, Suleiman Daddafee, stated that we are observing what is happening... we have no fixed timeline and no set date to announce a position.⁵⁶ This stance seems to be oriented towards passive neutrality as of now. But Ethiopian analysts are anticipating the recognition of Somaliland, reinstating what former Ethiopian prime minister Meles Zenawi once captured, Ethiopia would not be the first to recognize Somaliland, but it would certainly be the second.⁵⁷ If Ethiopia does intend, eventually, to recognize Somaliland – and all evidence suggests that this is where strategic logic points – it must build the capacity to withstand the pressure that recognition will bring.

The recognition of Somaliland by Israel calls for a balanced approach by Ethiopia. Being Somaliland's most consequential neighbour and partner, this juncture calls for neither impulsive alignment nor rigid opposition by Ethiopia. Instead, it necessitates a posture of strategic ambiguity. Such a calibrated approach would enable Ethiopia to safeguard its core national interests, manage external diplomatic pressures, and retain policy flexibility. At the same time, it would allow Addis Ababa to quietly shape the conditions under which any future recognition could emerge, strictly on Ethiopia's own terms and conditions.

D. Eritrea's Strategic Resistance

On December 28, 2025, Eritrea issued a statement calling for an unequivocal response at the level of the UN Security Council.⁵⁸ The response by Eritrea did not view the recognition as an isolated

development while reiterating that it risks fuelling broader crises.⁵⁹ In addition, the East African nation drew its parallels to the 'Taiwan issue', calling for Chinese interference in the region. It is significant to mention that Eritrea has been supporting Somalia's stability to ensure regional peace and stability. Although the constructive ties between Eritrea and the region, particularly with Somalia and Ethiopia, were relatively recent. As underscored in 2018, Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali and Eritrea's President Isaias Afwerky signed the Pretoria agreement.⁶⁰ The agreement was aimed at instilling stability and peace in the region as it officially ended 20 years of conflict, which started at a border dispute in 1998 pertaining to the Tigray region, between the two countries. However, the stability was short-lived as the seemingly optimistic developments took a detour with the rising tensions in Tigray and Ethiopia's rising ambitions to access the sea. The growing tensions within the Tigray region led to the fall of Getachew Reda (former deputy chairperson of Tigray People's Liberation Front – TPLF, and a key figure in the signing of Pretoria agreement) in September 2024. Whereas, for access to the Red Sea, Ethiopia signed an MoU with Somaliland. Ethiopia's renewed ambitions towards the Red Sea triggered a deep-seated hostility, mistrust, and sovereignty concerns within Eritrea stemming from their violent history with Ethiopia.

The rising insecurities due to the MoU, along with the hope for TPLF to serve as a buffer between Ethiopia and Eritrea and to form a friendly border with TPLF for importing arms and exporting illicit gold,⁶¹ are anticipated to have nudged Eritrea to initiate an informal tactical alliance with TPLF, referred to as "XIMBO"⁶² (meaning 'agreement'). Even after sharing a violent history with TPLF for about three decades, the agreement was observed as a major development in the region. The collusion caused uncertainties within Ethiopia, hence the Foreign Minister of Ethiopia, Gedion Timothewos, accused Eritrea of preparing to wage a war against Ethiopia.⁶³ The Pretoria agreement of 2018 was viewed as a medium that led to the restoration of ties between Somalia and Eritrea.⁶⁴ The tensions between Somalia and Eritrea were primarily based on Somali accusation of

Eritrea supporting the militant group of Al-Shabaab, whereas Eritrea has always denied such accusations. Even though the Pretoria agreement did not have a lasting peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the ties between Somalia and Eritrea have strengthened since 2018. The growing ties were further affirmed when both Somalia and Eritrea aligned with Egypt to counter Ethiopia's access to the sea through the MoU with Somaliland.⁶⁵

Eritrea itself gained independence in 1993 after a long liberation struggle grounded explicitly in the right to self-determination.⁶⁶ Despite that, Eritrea positions itself against the recognition of Somaliland, highlighting that broader domestic and international insecurities are at play. Considering burgeoning tensions with Ethiopia and rising uncertainties in the region, Eritrea does not prefer an international actor, like Israel, to further stir up the instability in the region. As stated earlier, Ethiopia's access to the sea remains a central position for Eritrea to counter the recognition by Israel.

E. Egypt Firm Rejection While Drawing Red Lines

Although not an immediate neighbour to Somalia, Egypt is one of its traditional and key allies in the region. Following the trend of a lot of countries and multilateral groupings, Egypt too condemned Israel's recognition of Somaliland, calling it unilateral and illegal. On January 6, 2026, Egypt requested to convene the African Union Peace and Security Council session to support Somalia's unity and sovereignty. During the session Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs Badr Abdelatty, stressed that Egypt firmly rejects any unilateral actions that threaten the stability of the continent and attempt to create new political realities without abiding by internationally recognized legal frameworks.⁶⁷ Furthermore, at an extraordinary meeting of the foreign ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, Egyptian Foreign Minister Abdelatty warned that Israel's recognition of the self-declared region of Somaliland sets a dangerous precedent that undermines the international order and threatens regional and global stability.⁶⁸

On December 27, 2025, a day after the recognition,

Egypt coordinated an international stance against the recognition, which led to a joint statement from 21 countries and two international organizations condemning the move and reaffirming Somalia's sovereignty.⁶⁹ The joint statement addressed the claims, around Israel's interest, made by Somalia and stated the full rejection of any potential link between such measure and any attempts to forcibly expel the Palestinian people out of their land, which is unequivocally rejected in any form as a matter of principle.⁷⁰ Egypt views the growing involvement of external actors in the Horn of Africa as a national security threat.⁷¹ For Egypt, the recognition of Somaliland could potentially lead to a ripple effect, as it brings back the concerns that were confronted by them in 2024. The tensions rose as the MoU was signed between Ethiopia and Somaliland, on the water sharing issues between Ethiopia and Egypt over the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) hydro dam on the headwaters of the Nile River. The uncertainty led to the formation of an axis, against Ethiopia, between Eritrea, Somalia, and Egypt.⁷² Egypt is concerned that Israel's recognition of Somaliland can potentially lead Ethiopia to do the same as well in the near future, which heightens the insecurities for Egypt, and hence, the latter is bound to resist the recognition.

F. Türkiye Confronts Regional Reordering

Türkiye, much like Egypt, is a key partner to Somalia with an aim to harness its influence in the region. In 2017, Türkiye set up its biggest overseas military base in the Somali capital, Mogadishu, increasing Turkish presence in this Horn of Africa country.⁷³ Therefore, Türkiye too condemned the move by its geopolitical rival, Israel. Türkiye views Israel's recognition as a potential challenge to its influence in the Horn of Africa. Türkiye has a strategic presence in the Horn of Africa and especially in Somalia. The country has invested heavily in Somalia, establishing maritime ports, its largest embassy in the world, a military training academy, management of Mogadishu airport, and projects in the space, energy, trade, and education sectors.⁷⁴ As the MoU was signed between Ethiopia and Somaliland in 2024, Türkiye reaffirmed its long-standing security partnership with Somalia and signed the Defence and Economic Cooperation

Framework Agreement. Under the agreement, Türkiye would assist Somalia in developing its capacity and capabilities to combat illegal and irregular activities in its territorial waters.⁷⁵ Further, later in 2024, Türkiye sent naval support, in the form of an exploration vessel, off the coast of Somalia. Türkiye shared cordial ties with both Ethiopia and Somalia and hence requested the Ethiopian Prime Minister to initiate mediation between Ethiopia and Somalia, leading to the Ankara Declaration 2024.

Unlike the Ethiopian-Somaliland MoU, Türkiye remains acutely conscious of Israel's strategic capabilities and has therefore sought to resist the expansion of Israeli influence in the region. Notably, Türkiye-Israel bilateral relations have deteriorated significantly in the recent past, with Türkiye accusing Israel of genocide in Gaza and pushing for a decentralised Syria, countering Turkish control.⁷⁶ The threat to Türkiye had an immediate impact as it reportedly, speeds up construction of a military base in Lasqoray district of Puntland (Somalia's autonomous region).⁷⁷ Moreover, Türkiye will be sending a drilling vessel to Somalia in February 2026, to carry out its first deepwater exploration project abroad.⁷⁸

Under this context, Türkiye backlashed against Israel's move and stated that Israel's unlawful actions aimed at creating instability at both the regional and global levels, while reaffirming that Israel's expansionist policies persist and which spares no effort to prevent the recognition of the State of Palestine, amounts to an explicit intervention in Somalia's internal affairs.⁷⁹ Türkiye is likely to remain a key regional actor not only due to its substantial political, economic, and security investments, but also because it seeks to prevent the expansion of Israeli influence over critical maritime chokepoints, particularly in the Gulf of Aden and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. These reasons attribute for the Turkish willingness to contribute to the mediation between the various parties that are at odds in the Horn of Africa and even beyond the region, including in Yemen.⁸⁰

Having analysed the stakes of the major regional powers, it shall be noted that while Israel's recognition of Somaliland has been widely framed

as a geopolitical watershed, its immediate effects are better understood through a de-juris lens rather than immediate evidence of a fundamental regional realignment. The recognition led to further deepening the existing balances of power, military deployments, or alliance structures in the Horn of Africa, but it shall be noted that strategic competition predates this development.

Geopolitical Ramifications: Region and Beyond

The onset of 2026 has been fuelled by rising uncertainties and tensions in the Horn of Africa. Somaliland's recognition, which was long treated as a frozen question, has now entered a new phase and attracts great power rivalry in the region. The recognition risks setting a dangerous precedent with far-reaching implications for peace and stability across the continent as highlighted by Mahmoud Ali Youssof, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, while expressing his concerns on the unfolding developments.⁸¹ He unequivocally reaffirmed the longstanding and consistent position of the African Union which is grounded in the principles enshrined in the Constitutive Act of the African Union, particularly the respect for the intangibility of borders inherited at independence.⁸² The stance of African Union was joined by the unanimous condemnation of other regional organisations, including the Arab League, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development.

A region with such a significant strategic location, accompanied by the present resource pool of industrial minerals and dimension stones, key global powers remain intensely engrossed and active in the area. Due to these variables, the region is vulnerable to becoming an emerging geopolitical hotspot, possessing the capacity to both intensify existing global conflicts and, under adverse conditions, emerge as an independent theatre of future strategic confrontation. Unlike the MoU signed by Ethiopia and Somaliland in 2024, the Israel's recognition of Somaliland attracted a much wider global reaction. Multilateral organisations too expressed their

discontent towards the recognition by reaffirming the importance of respecting the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Somalia, while calling for a dialogue between Somaliland and Somalia.⁸³

The recognition also attracted responses from global powers like the United States (US), Russia, China, and India, despite strategic and diplomatic differences. As the recognition came under the spirit of the Abraham Accords, it is being perceived that the move by Israel was in tandem with that of the US, as Project 2025 was a blueprint to be followed by US President Donald Trump during his second presidency. Although he denied any linkages to it, some of the initial US policies did abide by the mandate. Interestingly, the mandate did emphasise the need to counter the so-called Chinese 'malign' activity in the region through the recognition of Somaliland statehood as a hedge against the U.S.'s deteriorating position in Djibouti.⁸⁴ Thus, the US eyeing a strong influence over the Red Sea, while countering Chinese influence, could be the reason for defending the recognition at the UNSC.⁸⁵

However, more than influence, the relocation of Palestinian population from Gaza is observed to be central to this move. In 2025, there were reports of the US and Israel reaching out to African countries, primarily three East African governments (namely, Somalia, Somaliland, and Sudan), to discuss using their territories as potential destinations to relocate Palestinians.⁸⁶ Although the reports did not gain too much credibility, the current development does pose a question to intentions of the US towards supporting the recognition.

In another significant development, during the UNSC meeting on December 29, 2025, Russia expressed a deep concern about Israel's recognition and considered the move as politically motivated. Interestingly, Russia opposed Israel's decision as it counters the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and unity of Somalia. Russia further advocated to resolve intra-Somali conflicts through an inclusive national dialogue without external interference.⁸⁷

Meanwhile, India and China concurred on respecting

the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Somalia. Though both nations maintain long-standing diplomatic engagements with Somalia, their respective responses to the recognition diverged in strategic intensity. China formally opposes Israel's recognition and further urged Somaliland to get a clear sense of where things are headed, while calling to pause the separatist activities and collusion with external forces.⁸⁸ Moreover, China deepened its strategic partnership with Somalia as Minister of Foreign Affairs, Wang Yi held a phone call with Somali Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abdisalam Abdi Ali, on January 12, 2026.⁸⁹ The counterparts discussed ways to expand the bilateral cooperation in domains like trade, development assistance, people-to-people exchanges, and multilateral coordination, and advancing peace and development in the Horn of Africa. Chinese dissent towards the recognition could be fuelled by the Taiwan issue, as Taiwan was one of the few global actors, to have extended support for Somaliland. The expanding bilateral engagement between Taiwan and Somaliland is viewed by the Chinese as a challenge to the 'One China Policy.' The further indication, from Taiwan, towards a trilateral cooperation between Taiwan, Israel, and Somaliland,⁹⁰ adds to the Chinese uncertainties. Another factor towards the Chinese dissent is the significance of the Red Sea. As of early 2024, an estimated USD 120 billion of Chinese imports and USD 160 billion of Chinese exports have been reported to flow through the Bab al-Mandab Strait each year.⁹¹ For China, the stability in the region, especially based on its own terms, is of important strategic relevance. This significance is not only limited to their willingness to secure trade but also to control the intensifying great-power competition in Africa.

On the other hand, India has maintained its strategic autonomy and underlined the importance of respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Somalia.⁹² While India respects Somalia's territorial integrity, it should be noted that India engages with Somaliland, though not at an official level. India figures as one of Somaliland's key trading partners, exporting pharmaceuticals, textiles, and machinery.⁹³ It is being argued that India can seek to recognise Somaliland and that



would potentially unlock formal private investment and credit lines that are currently restricted.⁹⁴ More than that, there lies a strategic interest for India. The strategic location of Somaliland aligns well with India's aspiration towards increasing its maritime presence and prowess in the region. India has frequently deployed anti-piracy patrol boats and warships to the Gulf of Aden, north of Somaliland, to maintain stability in the region and as India strives to gain more influence, Somaliland itself could become India's strategic linchpin.⁹⁵ With an overcrowded Djibouti port,⁹⁶ there have been suggestions for India to counter Chinese influence and gain strategic leverage on the Red Sea through Somaliland's port of Berbera.⁹⁷ With investments in port of Berbera from countries like UAE, one of India's comprehensive strategic partners, and Ethiopia, India's key partner in Africa, India can arguably align with the favoring partners to gain strategic influence in the region. Although India's recognition of Somaliland, or even developing formal ties, risks India's long-standing support for Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, which contradicts India's established foreign policy principles. Furthermore, the formalising of ties with Somaliland would risk straining relations with the African Union and key African partners, most of whom do not recognise Somaliland. The ties with Somaliland also risk the

severing of bilateral relations with Somalia. India and Somalia share historically rooted relation that continues to build over the presence of a small Indian business community in Somalia. Indian Navy has also been involved in anti-piracy patrolling in the Gulf of Aden since 2008.⁹⁸ Lastly, given the sensitivities surrounding the Horn of Africa, India's recognition, or formalising ties with Somaliland, would impact region's stability. Hence, the current situation might demand a cautious and a patient approach from India, where India shall be wary of the costs associated with recognising Somaliland.

Having assessed the stakes and responses of some of the prominent global players it shall be reinstated that the recognition at the foremost introduces a juridical disruption that directly challenges Somalia's internationally recognised sovereignty and territorial integrity. Both regional and global actors have largely responded by reaffirming established norms, while seeking to strategically navigate in recalibrating their strategic alignments, underscoring the limited geopolitical shift thus far.

Conclusion

Since declaring independence in 1990, Somaliland has established a functioning state, fulfilling the criteria of the 1993 Montevideo Convention. As

per Article 1 of the convention,⁹⁹ the state should possess the following four qualifications:

- i. a permanent population,
- ii. a defined territory,
- iii. government, and
- iv. The capacity to enter relations with other states.

Despite that, Somaliland had to leverage its strategic location and cater to the geopolitical rivalry to gain recognition. This showcases that recognition is a political act shaped by strategic interests rather than legal criteria alone.¹⁰⁰ The recognition received global condemnation, but for the region entrenched in its Islamic values, any instability will cause Somaliland to hold the accountability to its Gulf partners, as Gulf states have invested in ports, logistics infrastructure, and security partnerships in the region. Any deterioration in Somaliland's stability risks drawing external actors into proxy dynamics, mirroring broader rivalries within the West Asia and North Africa (WANA) region and extending them into the Horn of Africa. Considering these claims, Somaliland President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi defended Israel, stating that the recognition is 'not a threat, nor an act of hostility' to neighbouring countries.¹⁰¹ He further assured that Somaliland remains deeply rooted in Islamic values of moderation, justice, and

coexistence and does not represent an alignment against any Islamic nation or community.¹⁰²

To conclude, Israel's recognition of Somaliland is poised to further intensify the Horn of Africa's emergence as a strategically contested geopolitical theatre. The recognition has introduced a new de-*juris* reality that directly challenges Somalia's internationally recognised sovereignty and territorial integrity, compelling Mogadishu to mount a sustained diplomatic counteroffensive across multilateral and regional forums. Neighbouring states have largely responded by reaffirming established norms of territorial inviolability, even as they hedge strategically. While the move has prompted regional and extra-regional actors to reassess diplomatic positions amid an already competitive Red Sea and Horn of Africa environment, it might also prompt a fundamental alteration in the prevailing power balances, alliance structures, or security architectures. Consequently, the recognition primarily reshapes the legal–normative landscape surrounding Somalia, with broader geopolitical consequences remaining contingent, uneven, and dependent on whether additional actors choose to follow Israel's precedent. •

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