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Restoration, not secession: Schirrmacher makes the case for Somaliland's sovereign statehood

New IIRF Report published simultaneously in English and German

(Bonn, 28.10.2026) In a new report for the International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF), Thomas Paul Schirrmacher presents a consolidated legal and political argument for recognising Somaliland as a sovereign state. The study has been published simultaneously in English ("The Case for Somaliland's Sovereign Statehood – A Consolidated Argument", IIRF Reports 2026/26) and in German ("Ein Plädoyer für die staatliche Souveränität Somalilands", IIRF Reports 2026/25).



The report responds to a new momentum on the issue. In December 2025, Israel became the first UN member state to formally recognise Somaliland. Since then, recognition has become a live policy question not only in the Horn of Africa but also in the U.S. Congress and the UK House of Lords.

Reasserting a suspended sovereignty

The report's central thesis is that Somaliland is not seceding but resuming an interrupted statehood. The former British protectorate gained independence on 26 June 1960, was recognised by 35 states including the US and the UK, and only five days later voluntarily united with the former Italian Somaliland. According to legal scholars, the Act of Union was never properly ratified. When the union collapsed in 1991, Somaliland returned to the pre-existing borders from the colonial era.

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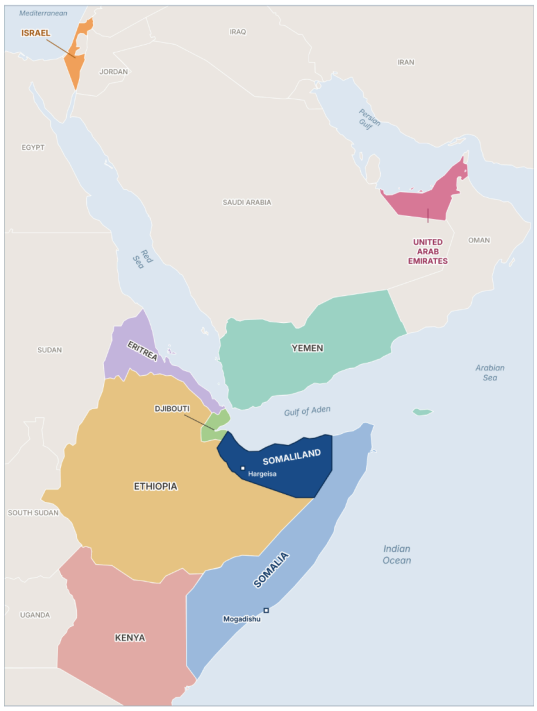
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Schirrmacher points to the doctrine of state continuity, which allowed Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to resume their place among nations in 1991, and to the dissolution of the Senegambia Confederation in 1989 as the closest parallel.

Twelve arguments

The report develops this thesis in twelve sections: Somaliland meets the Montevideo criteria of statehood, leaves unaffected the principle of respect for the African borders existing at the time of independence (uti possidetis juris), and has a comparatively strong democratic record – including a 2003 presidential election decided by just 80 votes and peacefully conceded.

Somaliland and the Horn of Africa



Further arguments are the principle of rebus sic stantibus and remedial self-determination in light of the Barre regime's 1988–89 bombardment of Hargeisa and Burao, which killed tens of thousands of Isaaq civilians. Drawing on the International Court of Justice's 2010 Kosovo Advisory Opinion and on Articles 2(4) and 2(7) of the UN Charter, the report concludes that recognition is a lawful diplomatic act.

A partner against Islamist extremism

Considerable attention is given to the strategic dimension: the port of Berbera as an alternative for landlocked Ethiopia, which routes an estimated 95 percent of its foreign trade through Djibouti, and Somaliland's role as a moderate, democratic partner. While al-Shabaab continues to hold territory in Somalia and networks linked to the Muslim Brotherhood exert influence within the federal government, Somaliland has kept both out of its state institutions.

Facing the controversy

The report also documents the opposing positions: at the UN Security Council, 14 of 15 members spoke against Israel's move, the African Union and IGAD called it premature, and the U.S. administration has so far not followed the push from Congress. "The episode shows that formal recognition remains politically contentious even where, as argued here, it is legally sound," Schirrmacher writes.

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In a preliminary remark, the author makes clear that the views expressed are entirely his own and do not represent the official position of any organisation with which he is affiliated or which he leads.

Downloads and Links

- Thomas Paul Schirrmacher: The Case for Somaliland's Sovereign Statehood – A Consolidated Argument. IIRF Reports Vol. 15 (2026) No. 26 (PDF): https://iirf.global/?p=7547, https://thomasschirrmacher.net/?p=26054
- Thomas Paul Schirrmacher: Ein Plädoyer für die staatliche Souveränität Somalilands. IIRF Reports Vol. 15 (2026) No. 25 (PDF): https://iirf.global/?p=7536, https://thomasschirrmacher.info/?p=26054
- Photo gallery Eritrea: https://thomasschirrmacher.net/?p=25883
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