



Exploring Somalia-Somaliland Talks Between 2012-2023

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Abstract

This paper looks at the lengthy talks between Somaliland and Somalia, which started in 2012 after decades of tense relations brought on by Somaliland's 1991 unilateral declaration of independence. Examining the political and historical background, the study looks at the underlying reasons for the conflict, such as failed state-building attempts, colonial legacies, and divergent governmental paths. The six rounds of negotiations that took place between 2012 and 2015 are highlighted in the report, as are the subsequent attempts in 2020 to renew talks under regional and global auspices. Minor compromises have been reached on matters like international aid distribution and airspace control, but the primary dispute over Somaliland's sovereignty vs Somalia's territorial integrity has not been settled. The study addresses the difficulties that come with negotiating, such as regional dynamics, internal resistance, and international legal restrictions, and it makes suggestions for furthering the conversation. The study concludes that substantial changes in the political landscape at the national, regional, and global levels are necessary to achieve a lasting solution. Additionally, creative ways to reconciliation that strike a balance between practical cooperation and sovereignty claims are also necessary.

Key Terms: Somaliland, Somalia, sovereignty, territorial integrity, negotiations, independence, colonial legacies, state-building, regional dynamics, international mediation, reconciliation, airspace management, achievements and objections.

Background

Somaliland was a part of the British colony until it gained its independence on June 26, 1960. Five days after southern Somalia achieved its independence from Italian colonial administration, the two regions of Somalia came together to form the Somali Republic. The people of Somaliland and their political leaders took the initiative to join forces with other Somalis without any restrictions; they did this without any restrictions. It was a happy union for the majority of Somalis, despite the fact that it appeared to be very ubiquitous. It was a big step forward for Somali nationalism.

The nascent Somali Republic set out on a daring and ambitious mission to create a Greater Somalia that would include areas outside of the recognized national borders. The goal was to create a Pan-Somali state and free the remaining three Somali-populated areas in the Horn of Africa. The Haud and Reserve Areas held by Ethiopia (now known as Region 5 or the Somali Region), the Northern Frontier District (NFD) of Kenya (now known as North Eastern Province), and French Somaliland (now known as the Republic of Djibouti) were the other three "missing" Somali regions, and their liberation was symbolized by the new Somali flag, which was sky blue with a five-pointed white star in the center.

Ethiopia and Kenya, Somalia's neighbors, who were resolved to preserve colonial territorial integrity in the face of what they perceived as Somalia's expansionist aggression, were incensed by the unrelenting quest for a "Greater Somalia." To limit the threat posed by Somalia, the nations agreed on a mutual defense treaty and established a strategic goal. The treaty was ratified in 1963 and is still in effect, allowing both nations to use it whenever Somalia poses an immediate threat.

In 1969, nine years after gaining independence, a group of military officers overthrew Somalia's democratically elected government, bringing an end to widespread corruption, political impasse, and ineffective bureaucracy. The military government, led by General Mohamed Siyad Barre, at first won over the populace with its strong institutional development, literacy and poverty alleviation, and restoration.

When the military launched an attack against Ethiopia in 1977 with the intention of liberating the Somali region, the government took what would turn out to be a dangerous risk on its vast political capital. The military's initial triumph was followed by a shattering setback, which

devastated the nation's spirit. Within the military's ranks and files, rifts soon appeared. In 1978, a group of top military officers attempted a coup. They were able to further demoralize and split the Somali National Army, even if they were unable to seize control. President Barre became more introspective as a result of losing faith in several of his important military aides. Ethiopia took advantage of this chance to formalize its goal of overthrowing the Somali government.

Several irate Somali political and military figures fled to Ethiopia and founded insurgent organizations there. Ten years later, the Somali National Movement (SNM), one of these armed groups, was engaged in combat with Somali government forces in northern Somalia's cities. President Barre's government launched a ruthless shelling and bombing campaign against Hargeisa in an effort to destroy the SNM. The inhabitants of the former British Somaliland proclaimed their independence and separation from the rest of the country on May 18, 1991, and as a result, they became known as "The Republic of Somaliland." A draft constitution that confirmed Somaliland's independence and sovereignty from Somalia as a separate state was put to a vote in 2001, and 97.1% of voters cast ballots in favor of the constitution.

Somaliland became a de facto independent state by following a divergent course. Somalia, on the other hand, consistently upheld its territorial integrity and resisted all of these judgments, viewing them as unilateral and unlawful actions. The African Union, the Arab League, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the United Nations, among other regional and international organizations, reaffirmed the unity and territorial integrity of Somalia in their resolutions and most importantly, Somaliland did not receive international recognition from any one country. Both parties underlined that their positions are non-negotiable and that their constitutions reflect this idea and there were no further direct talks between them.

During the London Conference on Somalia in 2012, the international community pledged to offer a venue for negotiations and suggested a plan for Somaliland and Somalia to have talks to define their future relations. The first dialogue between Somaliland and Somalia took place in London's Chevening House on June 20–21, 2012, following the London Conference Communiqué. Following this, discussions took place in Djibouti, Dubai, Ankara and Istanbul twice. Early in 2015, the conversation process in Istanbul broke down and reached a standstill. Following a nearly five-year break, the administrations of Somalia and Somaliland resumed their regional and international negotiations on June 14, 2020, in Djibouti.

The goal of the talks was to shake things up, move toward normalizing relations between the two parties, and reach an agreement on a few outstanding issues, chief among them Somaliland's independence from Somalia, which the latter still opposes out of concern for the consequences at home. Of course, the main source of contention between Mogadishu and Hargeisa is the issue of Somaliland's sovereignty. The two sides made headway on pragmatic cooperation issues including airspace management during earlier rounds of negotiations between 2012, 2015, and 2020, but they were unable to resolve the core problem of Somaliland's status. Tensions subsided while negotiations continued. However, after negotiations broke down in 2015, things drastically worsened once more.

Early-Stage Talks and Subsequent Interactions

Somaliland continuously disregarded the numerous Somali reconciliation conferences (the first of which took place in Djibouti in 1991) for many years after claiming independence, claiming that it was no longer a part of Somalia. However, it underwent a radical shift in its stance when it attended the London Conference on February 23, 2012. "The international community should support any dialogue between Somaliland and the Transitional Federal Government or whoever takes its place in order to clarify future relations between the two," was one of the points of agreement formed by the conference. In June 2012, the federal government's president, Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, also had his first meeting with his counterpart from Somaliland, Ahmed Mohamed Silanyo. This was an unprecedented step, and served as the springboard for negotiations after more than two decades of diplomatic silence.

Three of the six rounds of negotiations between the two sides since 2012 have taken place in Turkey, which has recently shown an increasing interest in Somalia. Following the election of a new president and the full international recognition of Somalia's government, the first round, which featured the presidents themselves, took place in Ankara on April 13, 2013. The Ankara Document, the result of these discussions, contained thirteen points that called for, among other things, intelligence sharing, collaboration in the fight against terrorism, extremism, piracy, and the prevention of the unlawful disposal of toxic waste in Somali waters.

This was followed by the Istanbul Conference, which took place from July 7 to 9, 2013, and did not address contentious issues of sovereignty. Instead, it produced an accord that gave

Somaliland complete authority over its airspace and the ability to accept foreign funding directly from donors. Another conference was conducted in Istanbul from January 16–19, 2014. This time, it was decided to create a joint committee with four members (two from each side) to monitor aviation traffic, with its headquarters located in Hargeisa, the capital of Somaliland. A phrase denouncing the 1988 mass murders of Somaliland's residents by the Somali military dictatorship was also included in the paper.

A new round of negotiations took place in Djibouti on December 21, 2014. The need to refrain from politicizing development assistance or leveling charges that could harm the negotiating process was underlined, and the outcomes of previous discussions were restated. Ninety days later, in Istanbul, a fourth round of negotiations was planned. However, that was not to be. Despite the fact that both countries sent delegations in January 2015, negotiations broke down in the interim because the Somali mission contained Somali landers. Discussions came to a complete halt amid a barrage of accusations and the prior airspace agreement was never put into effect.

When Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo and Muse Bihi Abdi were elected president of Somalia and Somaliland, respectively, in 2017, relations only became worse. The two sides took opposing stances on the Gulf crisis, which started the same year and intensified their differences. After the Dubai Ports Company was awarded the contract to run the Berbera port in Somaliland, which Somalia viewed as a violation of its sovereignty, a diplomatic crisis erupted between the Somali government and the United Arab Emirates. Ahmed Awed, the former foreign minister of Somalia, said in an interview that the Emirates were "insulting" Somalia by continuing to work with a party that had no international legitimacy.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed of Ethiopia made an effort to rekindle talks between the two sides in February 11, 2020. On the fringes of the most recent African Summit in Addis Ababa, he was able to persuade Farmajo and Bihi Abdi to agree to an informal meeting during which he proposed that they travel to Hargeisa, exactly as he had done in Eritrea in 2018 (which led to the mending of relations). However, unless the Somali president gave them official recognition, the Somaliland administration declined to welcome them and urged the international community to follow suit.

Abiy's efforts to promote dialogue between Somalia and Somaliland, Conversely the discussions reportedly yielded limited progress due to deep seated disagreements over Somaliland's demand for independence and Somali's commitment to maintaining territorial integrity.

The dialogue between Somalia and Somaliland, which was initiated following the London Conference in 2012, has continued for more than a decade, with both parties participating in numerous sessions of negotiations. These discussions aimed to clarify their future relations, as highlighted in the London Conference Communiqué, paragraph six. In February 2012, the Somaliland government passed a resolution enabling discussions with Somalia, thereby advancing the process. The first six rounds were as follows. 1. Chevening House, London June 20–21, 2012 2. Dubai June 28, 2012 3. Ankara April 13, 2013 4. Istanbul I July 7–9, 2013 5. Istanbul II January 16–19, 2014 and 6. Djibouti December 21, 2014.

There were subsequent phases between 2015 and 2023, which included: 7. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia February 10, 2015 8. Djibouti May 18–19, 2018 9. Nairobi, Kenya June 28, 2019 10. Djibouti June 14–15, 2020 11. Somaliland March 22, 2023. While these negotiations symbolized an ongoing commitment to dialogue, minimal substantive results have been achieved, reflecting the complexities and entrenched positions of both parties. The journey continues as both sides grapple with sensitive political and historical issues.

London

Two technical committees representing Somaliland and Somalia convened at Chevening House in London on June 20–21, 2012, in the wake of the London Conference. This preparatory dialogue, which was sponsored by the UK and co-hosted by Norway and the EU at the request of both parties, was intended to set the stage and create a framework and agenda for the next discussions. The two presidents were summoned to an urgent meeting to review the progress, and the international community was urged to continue supporting and facilitating the talks as well as providing legal, economic, and security experts. The two sides also emphasized the importance of using a common approach to avoid anything that could jeopardize the talks. The two sides committed to working together in the fight against terrorism, piracy (both at sea and on land), maritime crime, illegal fishing and toxic dumping.

Dubai, UAE

According to the Chevening House meeting, on June 28, 2012, the United Arab Emirates convened a meeting in Dubai between Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, the president of Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG), and Ahmed Mohamed Mohamud "Silanyo," the president of Somaliland. The two presidents gave their formal approval to the procedure and instructed the two committees from each side to carry on the discussion.

Ankara, Turkey

A presidential level conference between Somalia and Somaliland was hosted by the Turkish government in Ankara on April 13, 2013. Resuming the dialogue process following the government change in Somalia, when President Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud took over from Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, was one of the goals of this gathering. Furthermore, the talks may have been impacted by the end of Somalia's transitional period and the establishment of the Federal Government of Somalia, which replaced the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia and received international recognition that the previous transitional governments did not. The Turkish Prime Minister and Foreign Minister were present when the two parties decided on and collaboratively created a seven-article communiqué.

- i. The two sides committed to the continuation of the dialogue.
- ii. Agreed to accept and act in accordance with the London and Dubai agreements.
- iii. Stated that the Dialogue is between the Federal Government of Somalia and the Government of Somaliland, and the international community that is supporting this process will only provide facilitation when needed.
- iv. Agreed to share the aid received from the international community, and to encourage and facilitate aid provided to Somaliland.
- v. Agreed to cooperate in security sector and share related intelligence, training and scholarships for security sector professionals in order to become more effective in the fight against terrorism, extremism, piracy, illegal fishing, toxic dumping, maritime crime and serious crimes.
- vi. The two parties agreed to meet in Turkey within 90 days; and finally.
- vii. The two sides agreed to avoid any inflammatory words and actions.

Istanbul, Turkey

After the Ankara talks, the two sides met in Istanbul from July 7–9, 2013, to discuss a crucial issue: air traffic control. The United Nations, with operations centered in Nairobi, Kenya, had been in charge of aviation and air traffic control since the fall of Somalia's central government. The parties agreed at this meeting to create a joint control organization with its headquarters located in Hargeisa, Somaliland, and to regain control of air traffic management from the United Nations. Its duties included developing a framework for fair revenue sharing and supervising air traffic operations across the country. In addition, all sides pledged to continue the dialogue process and agreed to meet again in Turkey in 120 days to continue the conversation. Similarly, Delegations from the Government of Somaliland and the Federal Government of Somalia met in Istanbul from January 16 to 19, 2014. A communiqué detailing significant agreements that progressed the dialogue process was the outcome of the meetings. Among the important resolutions were the following: The Turkish government promised to keep the world informed about the discussion process on a regular basis. The parties also agreed to form a temporary technical committee with two representatives from each side and to create an Air Traffic Control Board within 45 days. Under the direction of the corresponding ministries of both parties, the technical committee was assigned the responsibility of creating the Air Traffic Control Board's terms of purpose. The agony that the Somali people had to face under the previous military rule was acknowledged and solidarity was expressed by both delegations. With particular reference to the experiences of the Somaliland people, they denounced the atrocities done against all Somali communities.

The seventh round of discussions was scheduled to occur in January 2015 in Istanbul. While both delegations arrived as planned, they were unable to proceed directly with deliberations on the agenda due to certain obstacles. Each side attributed the responsibility for the meeting's failure to the other. The Somaliland delegation expressed apprehension that Somalia's representatives were intentionally comprised of individuals native to Somaliland, which they contended violated previous agreements. Consequently, they refused to engage in dialogue with the delegation. Additionally, Somaliland accused Somalia of breaching aviation agreements and disrupting the agreed-upon schedule. Conversely, the Somali delegation emphasized that neither side has the authority to dictate or influence the composition of the other side's representatives, reiterating this as a key principle of the process.

Djibouti 2014

On December 21, 2014, Somalia and Somaliland conducted a high-level presidential summit in Djibouti. The sides came to the following agreement during this discussion:

Make major progress in forming future political ties and to further the execution of previous accords. Guarantee that political meddling doesn't affect development and humanitarian efforts. Include as needed, the Djiboutian government in the talks. Hold the next talks of negotiations on February 26–27, 2015, in Istanbul.

The two parties have stayed away from discussing the "core issue" of their future political relationship, even though the Djibouti talks pushed them to do so, in line with the agreements made during the six previous sessions. Neither side seems inclined to take on this exceptionally difficult subject.

Ismail Guelleh, the president of Djibouti, spearheaded a fresh round of regionally and internationally sponsored talks between the Somali Federal Government and Somaliland on June 14, 2020. This effort mirrored the goals of the United States and important regional players, including Ethiopia and Djibouti, to find a lasting solution to a war that has afflicted the area for more than thirty years. President Guelleh emphasized in his inaugural address that after thirty years of hardship, the time for change and advancement had come. Ethiopia's prime minister also expressed optimism, while the U.S. envoy called the meeting a "historic event" and urged everyone attending to put the interests of the Somali people as a whole first. Despite these hopes, the four-day talks ended without any major progress since both sides stuck to their respective constitutional stances Somaliland's demand for separation and Somalia's dedication to unity. Any progress on the main issue was impeded by this basic deadlock. The delegations did, however, agree to meet again in Djibouti after fifteen days to discuss controversial issues like airspace management, security plans, and the distribution of foreign aid. Three specialist technical subcommittees were formed to discuss these issues in order to make this easier.

Objections

Fostering dialogue between Somaliland and Somalia's transitional government appears to be a viable and compelling strategy for addressing Somali unity. However, in practice, it is likely to become a complicated undertaking that risks heightening tensions instead of alleviating them. Both parties would face significant internal resistance to any form of dialogue, compounded by disputes over the status and roles of each side in the negotiations. Each will

likely attempt to steer the agenda to align with their opposing objectives. Somaliland, in negotiating a potential association, would expect substantial concessions as compensation for foregoing full independence, while leaders of the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) might fear that such concessions could disrupt the delicate power-sharing arrangements in the southern regions. Furthermore, effective integration of the two territories would pose significant challenges, given their disparities in political and economic development. Similarly, negotiating a separation could prove equally contentious, as Somaliland is unlikely to accept allowing the southern government to have a veto over its independence and disagreements over the terms of a referendum are almost inevitable. Adding to these complexities, international recognition of an interim Somali government implicitly favors the preservation of Somali unity, thereby complicating the prospects for a peaceful, negotiated resolution.

The international community faces the dual challenge of supporting the success of an interim Somali government while reducing the potential for conflict over Somaliland. This necessitates a proactive approach to preventive diplomacy. The African Union Peace and Security Council could formally address this issue before the establishment of an interim Somali government, thereby justifying engagement with both parties during and prior to the transitional phase. Meanwhile, foreign governments and international organizations should actively engage with both sides to reinforce their commitment to achieving a negotiated resolution. Providing a form of conditional recognition could help establish parity and incentivize negotiations. For instance, granting observer status to both parties in international organizations could serve this purpose. Additionally, the African Union and the United Nations could institute mechanisms to monitor progress throughout the transitional period, ensuring the unity question remains central to the resolution process.

Constitutions of Somalia and Somaliland

Article 7: The territory of the Republic of Somalia

- (1) The sovereignty of the Federal Republic of Somalia includes the territory of the Republic The entire Somali Federation, including land, seas, islands and their territories below, their upper air and continents, and any land and water regions that join them The Republic of Somalia, in accordance with a law approved by the National Parliament.

(2) The territory of the Federal Republic of Somalia shall not be encroached upon and shall not be divided

(3) The territory of the Federal Republic of Somalia in international border disputes that arise, resolving them through peaceful means and cooperation in accordance with the laws of the host country and those International

(4) The boundaries of the Federal Republic of Somalia are the boundaries defined in the 1960 Constitution in Somalia. (5) Borders of the Federal Republic of Somalia North: Gulf of Aden. Northwest: Djibouti West: Ethiopia. South West: Kenya. East: Indian Ocean.

Constitution of Somaliland

ARTICLE 2: The Territory of the Republic of Somaliland

1. The territory of the Republic of Somaliland covers the same area as that of the former Somaliland Protectorate and is located between Latitude 8' to 11' 30' north of the equator and Longitude 42' 45 to 49' East; and consists of the land, islands, and territorial waters, above and below the surface, the airspace and the continental shelf.

2. The Republic of Somaliland shares a border with the North Gulf. Human; Eastern Somalia; South Side and West Side Federal Republic of Ethiopia; on the Northwest side of the Republic Djibouti.

3. National land is sacred, and they are not violated.

Endorsements

The Somali Federal Government should continue engaging with Somaliland, striving for political accommodation and national reconciliation. This dialogue needs to include voices from across society, ensuring the negotiating team reflects diverse perspectives, including those of northern unionists. Trusted individual politicians, business leaders and religious figures should lead these discussions. It is crucial to acknowledge Somaliland's grievances, apologize for past wrongs and propose a comprehensive plan to address historical injustices. Offering power-sharing arrangements could encourage Somaliland leaders to consider a united future. Confidence-building measures, like creating shared economic zones, organizing joint

sports leagues and promoting cultural and educational exchanges, can help foster mutual trust. International partners should also be urged to continue supporting Somaliland's economic development and security.

For its part, the Somaliland administration should remain open to dialogue with the Federal Government of Somalia, working peacefully to mediate and resolve inter-clan conflicts in regions like Sool, Sanaag and Awdal. Similarly, the Somaliland administration must address the violations recently committed in the SSC region, which have resulted in significant loss of life and property.

It is equally important to engage with Puntland State of Somalia to resolve border disputes amicably. Restrictions preventing northern politicians from visiting family and friends in Somaliland should be lifted. Additionally, Somaliland should collaborate with Somalia to combat shared challenges, including terrorism and piracy. Confidence-building steps, such as joint initiatives in the economy, sports, culture, and education, can pave the way for greater cooperation and understanding.

The international community has an essential role to play in these efforts. Rather than pursuing separate mediation tracks, global actors should unite behind a single mediator agreed upon by both parties. Development projects and support focused on shared economic and social benefits could provide incentives for reconciliation. At the same time, efforts to disrupt peacebuilding initiatives, whether by local or international players, must be firmly discouraged.

Conclusion

Somaliland's quest for international recognition has spanned over three decades but remains unfulfilled. Meanwhile, the Somali Federal Government continues to emphasize the importance of national unity. Given Somalia's ongoing struggles with terrorism and internal instability, a formal agreement on Somaliland's status may remain out of reach for now. This reality could lead to a prolonged acceptance of Somaliland's de facto autonomy without formal recognition.

Achieving a breakthrough in negotiations will be challenging as long as Somaliland demands full independence and Somalia insists on preserving its territorial integrity. Over time, a federal solution granting Somaliland significant autonomy might offer a viable path forward, though it remains uncertain whether this would be acceptable to Hargeisa.

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