

Reconstructing Somalia's Foreign Policy: A Study of Challenges and Future Prospects

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Abstract: *This article examines the difficulties in reconstructing Somalia's foreign policy. After years of conflict and division, Somalia is at a critical point in its history where both international participation and national rehabilitation depend on a competent foreign policy. The study identifies main challenges, including weakened state institutions, security concerns, and the influence of regional powers, which block the formulation of a organized foreign policy. Additionally, it examines the role of the Somali movement and international partners in shaping future diplomatic strategies. This article offers a framework for knowing the future of Somalia's foreign policy by examining historical and current elements. It highlights the necessity of a cooperative strategy that gives regional peace, economic growth, and caring concerns top priority. In the end, this study adds to the conversation about how Somalia might manage its international ties to promote regional peace and sustainable development.*

Keywords: Somalia, Foreign Policy, Reconstruction, International Relations, Challenges, Future Prospects

1. Introduction

Since the fall of the Siad Barre administration in 1991, which resulted in a catastrophic civil war and the lack of a central authority for almost 20 years, Somalia, a country in the Horn of Africa, has experienced protracted instability and warfare. Somalia found it difficult to sustain a cohesive foreign policy during this time of chaos and disintegration. The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) was established in 2012, which was a big milestone in the country's efforts to reconstruct, although there are still many obstacles to overcome. The formation of a cogent foreign policy is nevertheless hampered by internal conflicts, security threats from militant organizations like al - Shabaab, and tense relations with nearby nations like Ethiopia and Kenya. Somalia's international relations are further complicated by the country's reliance on foreign help and the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe. Moreover, despite these obstacles, Somalia might improve its foreign policy by emphasizing economic diplomacy, regional collaboration, and security. Somalia may be able to regain its sovereignty and raise its profile internationally with a strategic approach that stresses development, strengthens regional ties, and fosters unity. In order to achieve long - term peace and stability, the country must manage its complicated geopolitical environment, striking a balance between internal conflicts, security worries, and reliance on foreign help. Somalia's future development and its place in the regional and international arenas will depend on the creation of a cogent and successful foreign policy.

1.1 Background of the Research

Somalia's foreign policy has been deeply influenced by the country's internal political and security challenges. Since the collapse of the central government in 1991, Somalia has faced an extended period of civil war and state fragmentation. The country's foreign policy landscape was largely shaped by competing factions, regionalism, and clan - based power structures, making it difficult to develop a cohesive national strategy. With the establishment of the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) in 2012, Somalia began the arduous process

of reasserting its sovereignty and crafting a new foreign policy framework. However, ongoing security concerns, primarily due to the insurgency by the extremist group al - Shabaab, continue to complicate the country's international relations. The government's limited control over large parts of the country and its reliance on international aid further constrain its ability to independently define and pursue its foreign interests (Menkhaus, 2014).

Somalia's foreign policy has been affected by its complex relationships with neighboring countries. Somalia has historically had contentious relations with Ethiopia, particularly due to the territorial dispute over the Ogaden region and Somalia's support for separatists in Ethiopia's Somali region. Moreover, relations with Kenya have been strained by issues such as border demarcation, Somali refugees, and a maritime dispute over the Indian Ocean's sea boundaries. While Somalia's relations with Djibouti remain cordial, the broader regional dynamics often pose challenges to diplomatic cohesion. The country's foreign policy is also influenced by regional institutions such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the African Union (AU), which have played crucial roles in peacekeeping and mediating conflicts. However, Somalia's political fragmentation and security challenges often lead to differing priorities among the country's various regional states, further complicating its ability to pursue a unified foreign policy (Abbink, 2017).

Somalia's foreign policy is shaped by the geopolitical interests of major powers, international organizations, and the influence of the Somali diaspora. The international community has played a significant role in Somalia's reconstruction, providing humanitarian aid, peacekeeping forces (such as AMISOM), and development assistance. The United States, the European Union, and the United Nations have been major contributors to Somalia's stabilization efforts, particularly in the fight against terrorism and the rebuilding of state institutions. Additionally, Somalia's strategic location along key maritime routes linking the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean attracts the interest of global powers like China, which has invested in infrastructure development, and the Gulf States, which provide both financial aid and

political support (Lind, 2012). However, Somalia's reliance on external actors complicates its ability to formulate an independent foreign policy, as it must navigate competing interests from these global stakeholders.

Scholars like Menkhaus (2014) and Lind (2012) have noted the fragile nature of Somalia's political institutions and their impact on foreign policy coherence. Research also highlights the role of security in shaping Somalia's international relations, with studies on al - Shabaab's influence underscoring the difficulties in establishing diplomatic ties with countries prioritizing counterterrorism efforts. Additionally, works by authors such as Laitin (2000) explore the complex ethnic and clan - based divisions within Somalia, which complicate not only domestic governance but also foreign relations. As Somalia continues to rebuild, it must balance external support with efforts to develop a more autonomous foreign policy that reflects its national interests, regional obligations, and global aspirations. The reconstruction of Somalia's foreign policy remains an ongoing and multifaceted process, requiring careful navigation of both domestic and international pressures.

2. Literature Review

The literature on the reconstruction of Somalia's foreign policy reflects the multifaceted challenges the country faces in rebuilding its state and re - engaging with the international community. Scholars have examined the historical context of Somalia's state collapse and the impact of ongoing political fragmentation, which has made it difficult to craft a unified foreign policy. Much of the literature highlights the security challenges posed by extremist groups like al - Shabaab, which continue to destabilize the country and complicate its international relations. Additionally, the role of regional dynamics and neighboring countries, such as Ethiopia and Kenya, has been a key focus, with many studies discussing how territorial disputes and regional rivalries influence Somalia's foreign policy. The influence of external actors, including international organizations, foreign governments, and the Somali diaspora, is also a common theme, as these entities play a critical role in Somalia's reconstruction efforts. This literature review aims to explore these challenges while also identifying potential pathways for Somalia to establish a more independent and coherent foreign policy in the future.

2.1 Somalia

Somalia, located in the Horn of Africa, is bordered by Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya, the Gulf of Aden, and the Indian Ocean. The country has a rich history, once home to powerful kingdoms like the Sultanate of Mogadishu and the Ajuran Empire, and later colonized by Britain and Italy during the 19th and 20th centuries (World Bank, 2021). Somalia gained independence in 1960 with the union of British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland, but it has faced political instability and civil war since the 1990s, weakening government institutions. The country operates as a federal republic, with regions such as Puntland and Jubaland gaining autonomy, though Somaliland in the northwest claims independence (United Nations, 2021). Somalia's geography includes a diverse landscape of savannahs, mountains, and deserts, with a long coastline along the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean,

which has made it strategically important in global maritime trade (European Union, 2021). The economy remains largely informal, driven by livestock exports, agriculture, and remittances, with ongoing challenges in infrastructure and poverty (IMF, 2021). Despite its difficulties, including terrorism from Al - Shabaab, frequent droughts, and internal displacement, Somalia is making gradual progress toward recovery. Efforts to rebuild governance, strengthen security, and foster international partnerships are key to the country's prospects for long - term development (African Union, 2022). The Somali population, primarily ethnic Somalis and Muslim, maintains a rich cultural heritage with a focus on music, poetry, and storytelling (United Nations, 2021). Somalia's location, resilient population, and natural resources offer significant potential for future stability and economic growth.

2.2 Foreign Policy in Somalia

Somalia's foreign policy is shaped by its historical experiences, geopolitical position in the Horn of Africa, and efforts to address domestic challenges. A primary focus is fostering regional stability and cooperation, particularly through organizations like the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), which addresses issues such as integration and climate adaptation (African Union, 2022). Relations with neighboring countries, including Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti, are central to its diplomacy, though disputes over borders and maritime claims occasionally strain ties (United Nations, 2021). Security and counter - terrorism remain cornerstones of Somalia's foreign policy, with partnerships involving the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), the United Nations, and nations like the United States and Turkey to combat Al - Shabaab and rebuild security forces (European Union, 2021). Economically, Somalia prioritizes diplomatic ties to secure investments and aid from strategic partners such as Turkey, China, and Gulf States while collaborating with Western allies to support infrastructure, trade, and governance (IMF, 2021). Leveraging its strategic location along the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, Somalia also focuses on maritime security and developing its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) for fisheries and resource exploitation. Active participation in multilateral organizations, including the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), highlights its advocacy for global issues such as climate change and food security. However, internal instability, dependency on aid, and unresolved disputes pose significant constraints. Despite these challenges, Somalia's foreign policy aims to balance sovereignty with international cooperation, leveraging its location and partnerships to rebuild and assert its influence globally.

2.3 Reconstruction in Somalia

Reconstruction in Somalia focuses on rebuilding the nation after decades of conflict, political instability, and economic collapse. Central to this effort is the establishment of effective governance through strengthened federal institutions, electoral reforms, and the creation of a new constitution to promote democracy and national unity (World Bank, 2021). Security sector reforms play a crucial role, with initiatives to rebuild the Somali National Army (SNA) and police forces, supported by international partners like AMISOM and the

United Nations (African Union, 2022). Infrastructure development is another priority, with investments in roads, ports, and public services such as electricity and healthcare, led by countries like Turkey and organizations like the European Union (European Union, 2021). Economic revival efforts focus on diversifying the economy, enhancing sectors like agriculture, fisheries, and telecommunications, and implementing debt relief programs through the IMF and World Bank (IMF, 2021). Additionally, social development initiatives address the needs of displaced populations, improve education and healthcare, and promote gender equality. However, challenges such as insecurity from Al - Shabaab insurgency, corruption, and climate change continue to impede progress (United Nations, 2021). Despite these obstacles, the reconstruction process shows promise, particularly in urban areas, where governance and infrastructure are gradually being restored, offering hope for a more stable and prosperous Somalia.

2.4 International Relations Somalia

Somalia's international relations are shaped by its historical challenges, strategic location in the Horn of Africa, and interactions with regional and global powers. The country maintains complex relationships with neighboring nations like Ethiopia and Kenya, which are marked by border disputes and maritime territorial claims, though they also cooperate on security and counter - terrorism efforts (African Union, 2022). Regional organizations such as the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) play crucial roles in stabilizing the country and fostering economic collaboration. Globally, Somalia engages with powers such as the United States, which provides military and economic support, and the European Union, which aids in capacity building and stabilization through initiatives like the EU Training Mission in Somalia (European Union, 2021). Additionally, Turkey has emerged as a major ally, investing in infrastructure and healthcare, while China's involvement focuses on trade and development under the Belt and Road Initiative (World Bank, 2020). Somalia's international partnerships are also heavily influenced by counter - terrorism efforts, especially against Al - Shabaab, and collaborations with entities like the United Nations and NATO aim to address security threats and piracy (United Nations, 2021). Despite these partnerships, Somalia faces significant challenges, including internal instability, territorial disputes, and dependency on foreign aid, which undermine its sovereignty. However, its strategic location along key maritime routes offers opportunities to enhance regional and global engagement, signaling the potential for growth and stability in its foreign relations.

3. Challenges

Somalia faces numerous challenges that significantly hinder its development and stability, many of which are deeply rooted in its complex history and ongoing security issues. Political instability remains a major concern, as the country has struggled with fragmentation since the collapse of its central government in 1991. While a federal government was established in 2012, power struggles between the central government and regional states like Puntland and Somaliland continue to undermine effective governance (United Nations,

2021). Security threats, particularly from the militant group Al - Shabaab, also pose a significant obstacle to Somalia's progress. Despite international military support and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), Al - Shabaab's continued control over certain regions and its frequent attacks on government and civilian targets destabilize the country (European Union, 2021). Economically, Somalia remains underdeveloped, with its economy heavily reliant on agriculture, livestock, and remittances. Challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and corruption, coupled with underdeveloped infrastructure, hinder economic growth and make the country vulnerable to external shocks (World Bank, 2021). In addition, Somalia is frequently affected by humanitarian crises, including food insecurity, drought, and famine, exacerbated by climate change and internal conflict. The country has one of the highest numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) globally, placing significant strain on its already limited resources and infrastructure (United Nations, 2021). Despite these significant challenges, Somalia's resilience and ongoing efforts to rebuild remain critical for its path toward recovery and stability.

4. Future Prospects

Somalia to strengthen its own security capacity. Continued efforts to combat terrorism and reduce militia influence are critical for stability (European Union, 2021). Economically, Somalia's reliance on agriculture, livestock, and remittances remains a challenge, but diversification into sectors like telecommunications and renewable energy could foster economic growth. Additionally, international financial support and debt relief provide a foundation for sustainable development (World Bank, 2021). Humanitarian crises, including food insecurity, drought, and displacement, continue to strain resources, but improving infrastructure and social services, alongside efforts to empower vulnerable populations, could alleviate some of these issues (United Nations, 2021). While climate change poses a significant environmental threat, growing international cooperation on climate resilience offers a path to mitigate these challenges (African Union, 2022). Despite the obstacles, Somalia's resilience and ongoing reforms, along with international support, hold promising prospects for its future stability and development.

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