

## Somaliland: The Little Country that Could

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### Introduction

Somaliland was an independent state for five days in 1960 before it merged with the former Italian Somalia. Since the Somali Democratic Republic became a failed state in 1991, Somaliland is the one part of the former entity that has managed to put in place sustained stability and a constitutional government accepted by most of its inhabitants. There is virtually no visible, armed security presence. Supported by an unusually talented and active diaspora, the capital of Hargeisa is experiencing a modest economic boom in spite of a continuing Saudi ban on Somaliland livestock exports, which traditionally account for most of its foreign exchange income. As recently as 1996, the atmosphere in Hargeisa was tense, and the city still reflected the extensive bombing by Siad Barre's air force and shelling by his artillery. Today, nearly all of the damaged and destroyed buildings have been repaired or replaced. Hargeisa's population has grown from less than 10,000 in 1991 to more than a half million.

Somaliland declared its independence from Somalia in 1991, and most Somalilanders are now preoccupied with the question of international recognition. To date, no country has recognized the Republic of Somaliland. The African Union has instead given Somalia's seat to the Transitional National Government (TNG) based in North Mogadishu. The TNG also claims to represent Somaliland but has no influence there. It is not surprising, of course, that Somaliland seeks international recognition, as this would open many foreign assistance possibilities that are now largely closed. In the meantime, there are other steps Somaliland could take that would enhance its chances for recognition. This analysis looks at the background to Somaliland's declaration of independence, notes the obstacles to recognition, and discusses the current situation in Somaliland based on a recent visit there.

## Somaliland Independence and then Merger

Known as British Somaliland until it achieved independence on June 26, 1960, the new government of Somaliland agreed to join five days later with former Italian Somalia, which became independent on July 1, 1960. The two territories then became the Somali Republic. The idea of unity had been discussed during the year leading up to independence on the basis that Somalis are the same people, speak the same language, and have a common religion. Often called northwest Somalia after unification, Somaliland's merger was not easy, and problems developed almost immediately. There was a national referendum in June 1961 to approve a provisional constitution for the Somali Republic in the absence of an act of union. The leading political party in the northwest, the Somali National League, boycotted the referendum. Of the 100,000 votes cast in the northwest, about 60 percent opposed the constitution. An attempted military coup occurred in Somaliland late in 1961. Although it failed, one of its goals was to secede from the Somali Republic and establish an independent government.

Northwest Somalia subsequently worked out a *modus vivendi* with Mogadishu. An Ishaq clan member from Somaliland, Mohammed Ibrahim Egal, even became prime minister of the Somali Republic in 1967. He did not last long in the position. In 1969, a bodyguard assassinated the president of the Somali Republic, and several days later a group of army officers seized power and installed Major General Mohammed Siad Barre in his stead. The new military government arrested Egal, who remained in jail until 1982 except for a six-month period in 1975 when he was assigned as ambassador to India. Barre's rule rekindled animosities with northwest Somalia, and by 1981 Somalilanders formed the Somali National Movement (SNM), which had the goal of toppling the Barre government. By 1988 an all-out civil war developed and Northwest Somalia experienced considerable devastation at the hands of government-sponsored forces. The brutal repression resulted in more than 20,000 killed and left a deep bitterness among Somalilanders. The war ended in January 1991 with the fall of the Barre government.

## Somaliland Declares Independence Again

The Central Committee of the SNM assembled in Burao in May 1991 and declared unilaterally at the end of its deliberations that northwest Somalia would henceforth become the independent Republic of Somaliland. The SNM named Abdirahman Ahmed Ali “Tur” as interim president for two years. Near the end of his term, the 150-member Council of Elders began meeting in Borama to determine the political future of Somaliland. They expanded the representation at Borama to some 500 persons representing elders, religious leaders, politicians, retired civil servants, intellectuals, businessmen, and others. They agreed to establish an executive president and a bicameral legislature. The traditional leaders of Somaliland then elected Mohammed Ibrahim Egal, the onetime prime minister of the Somali Republic, as president of the Republic of Somaliland in 1993. They reelected Egal in 1997. The Conference of Somaliland Communities consisting of various Somaliland leaders adopted a constitution at Hargeisa in 1997. It was to remain in effect for three years and would come into full force only after a referendum.

## Somaliland Rejects the Arta Process

Somaliland chose not to participate in the process aimed at unifying Somali factions that was initiated by the government of Djibouti in 2000 in the Djiboutian town of Arta. The conference was organized along clan lines but included a cross-clan delegation of 100 women. A number of key factions and groups were not represented at Arta. The government of Somaliland not only refused to participate in the conference, but its Parliament passed a law that prohibited representatives of the government or private citizens to attend, declaring attendance a treasonable offense.

The Arta conference resulted in creation of the Transitional National Government (TNG) that took up residence in North Mogadishu and claimed to represent all of Somalia, including Somaliland. The TNG occupied Somalia’s seats at the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity, and the Arab League. Somaliland continues to reject both the Arta process and the government it created, arguing that the independence of Somaliland is nonnegotiable. The TNG has so far been unable to establish control outside of North Mogadishu, although it does have loose alliances with several other groups. Only five countries (Djibouti, Eritrea, Sudan, Libya, and Egypt) have extended diplomatic recognition to the TNG.

## 2001 Referendum on Constitution and Independence

Somaliland conducted an important referendum on May 31, 2001, which had the effect of endorsing a new constitution and reaffirming its status as an independent state. The referendum offers some useful insights on the thinking of Somalilanders on the issue of independence. The Initiative and Referendum Institute, an international nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C., sent a 10-member team to observe the referendum process from May 28 until June 7. Eight of the delegates were from the United States, one from the United Kingdom, and one from Switzerland. The institute acknowledged that its ability to observe the referendum was imperfect. On the day of the referendum, it was only able to visit 57 of the 600 polling stations in five of Somaliland’s six regions. The institute chose, for security reasons, not to send any observers to Sool Region and had only one observer in Sanaag Region. The institute concluded, however, that overall the referendum was conducted “openly, fairly, honestly, and largely in accordance with internationally recognized election procedures.” Irregularities and procedural deviations were *de minimus*, and occurrences of fraud were insignificant and very rare. The referendum was peaceful and without violence.

Ninety-seven percent of the voters approved the constitution. The institute believes that the referendum was primarily a vote to show support for independence rather than an endorsement of the numerous provisions of the constitution. It concluded that approximately two-thirds of eligible voters participated. The institute suggested that some of those who chose not to vote were probably exercising their opposition to the referendum. In Las Anod District of Sool Region, for example, where there was the greatest opposition to the referendum, voter turnout was only 31 percent, well below the national average. The opposition was not unified around one issue. Some opposed Somaliland’s independence while others supported independence but were opposed to the administration of President Egal. But even assuming that all eligible voters that did not vote were opposed to the constitution, independence, and/or the Egal administration, 97 percent of two-thirds of the voters still supported the constitution and independence.

## Preparing for Elections

Political parties only returned to Somaliland following the passage of enabling legislation in 2000. Late in 2001 Somaliland postponed for one year the previously scheduled 2001 municipal elections and the 2002 presidential and legislative elections to allow more time for preparation. President Egal died of natural causes in May 2002. In accordance with the

Somaliland constitution, his vice president, Dahir Riyale Kahin, who was also elected by traditional leaders, succeeded him. President Kahin's mandate ends in February 2003.

Municipal elections are now scheduled for December 15, 2002. National presidential elections must occur by January 23, 2003, unless the House of Elders authorizes an extension. Parliamentary elections are slated for May 2003. These will be the first multiparty elections since 1969 and the first occasion that Somaliland women will be able to vote. Somaliland's political parties and its Electoral Commission are inexperienced, and technical expertise is in short supply. Somaliland's budget for the elections is exceedingly limited, and few outside groups have expressed a willingness to assist due in part to the fact that no government recognizes Somaliland. Not surprisingly, the seven-member Electoral Commission is concerned about organizing a successful result. To its credit, the International Republican Institute has allocated \$200,000 in support of political party training workshops and voter education programs. The European Union may provide direct assistance to the Electoral Commission. There is some pressure from Somalilanders to go forward with elections even if they are flawed.

Voter registration is the most urgent and contentious issue facing the Electoral Commission. Some Somalilanders believed voter registration should precede the municipal elections. Others argue that this is impossible in a society with such a high percentage of nomads, and instead contend that registration and voting should take place at the same time. The latest information suggests that Somaliland will try to have a separate voter registration process. Local Somalilanders will screen persons who register to vote in order to verify eligibility. The issue of Somaliland citizenship is not, however, entirely clear. The voter registration system does not ensure that ethnic Somalis from neighboring Somalia, Ethiopia, and Djibouti will not participate in the election.

Somaliland has borrowed an electoral model that uses municipal elections to determine which parties may participate in the national elections. According to the constitution, only the three political organizations that receive the most votes and at least 20 percent of the vote in the municipal elections will be able to register as political parties and participate in the presidential elections. At last count, there were nine largely clan-based political organizations. Somaliland wants to limit the number of parties in order to encourage nationalism rather than clan-based factionalism. There is a concern, however, that the municipal elections will not result in three political organizations meeting the criteria for participating in the national elections. In fact, it is possible that only one organization would qualify. This would pose a real dilemma and damage Somaliland's

hopes for international recognition.

A technically well-managed, free, and fair election at both the municipal and national levels will strengthen Somaliland's argument for recognition. Most observers will be willing to overlook relatively minor glitches. Even some world powers have not yet succeeded in ironing out all the wrinkles in the electoral process. Seriously flawed elections, on the other hand, will be a setback to Somaliland's efforts to win international recognition.

## The Problem of Puntland

An issue that has a direct bearing on Somaliland's ability to attract international recognition is neighboring Puntland's claim to most of Sool and Sanaag Regions, a claim that Somaliland rejects. In 1998, the Harti leaders of northern Somalia and eastern Somaliland declared Puntland an autonomous republic within a federal Somalia. Unlike the leaders in Somaliland, they decided not to opt for independence and oppose the independence of Somaliland. Puntland's boundaries correspond to those areas where the Harti, a subgroup of the larger Darod clan, reside. The Majerteen, a subset of the Harti, predominate in that part of Puntland known as northern Somalia, which borders Somaliland. Two additional Harti subsets, the Warsangeli and the Dulbahante, reside inside that part of Somaliland claimed by Puntland. The Warsangeli predominate in the eastern part of Sanaag Region while the Dulbahante predominate in Sool Region. Two Harti leaders that come from different subgroups—Abdullahi Yusuf and Jama Ali Jama—have been competing for power in Puntland. Abdullahi Yusuf achieved a military victory over Jama Ali Jama earlier this year and established a new regional government. Clan reconciliation has not yet occurred, however, in Puntland.

Sool and Sanaag were part of British Somaliland when it became independent in 1960. Puntland's claim to most of the two regions, based on clan ties, complicates the issue even though there are differences of opinion among the Harti themselves. The fact that voters in Sanaag and, especially, Sool were decidedly less supportive of Somaliland's 2001 referendum on the constitution and independence is explained by this clan situation. It is generally agreed that about half of the residents of Sanaag and a higher proportion in Sool have sympathies with Puntland. Both Puntland and Somaliland authorities are trying to increase their support in the two regions. One country that might be in a position to help resolve differences between Somaliland and Puntland is Ethiopia. It has good relations with Somaliland and Abdullahi Yusuf (but not Jama Ali Jama) in Puntland. In fact, Ethiopia has given military support to Abdullahi Yusuf. Ethiopian Dulbahante live across he

border from Sool Region and are part of the same clan structure. So far, Ethiopia has chosen not to help resolve differences between Puntland and Somaliland. A resolution of the dispute with Puntland would enhance Somaliland's case for international recognition.

## Somaliland and the Rest of the World

Three countries—Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Saudi Arabia—loom especially large in Somaliland's ability to survive politically and economically. Somalia also plays a critical role in spite of the fact that it does not recognize Somaliland or have a widely accepted government of its own. Egypt and Yemen have traditionally had a special interest in Somaliland. The African Union, Arab League, and United Nations are also important actors if only because they have accepted the credentials of the TNG as the legal representative of the Somali entity. Specialized agencies of the United Nations, the European Union, and to a lesser extent the United States provide important, albeit limited humanitarian and development assistance.

Somaliland's longest border is with Ethiopia, and ethnic Somali nomads on both sides of the border regularly cross it seeking seasonal pasturage. Landlocked Ethiopia has made minimal use of Somaliland's port of Berbera, even after ports in Eritrea became off limits. This could well change. In fact, an Ethiopian delegation visited Berbera in September 2002 to discuss with Somaliland the expansion of the port and improvement of roads between Berbera and southeast Ethiopia. For the first time ever, Ethiopian Airlines has established regular service between Addis Ababa and Hargeisa. Ethiopia and Somaliland have also exchanged liaison offices in their respective capitals. Somaliland sees Ethiopia as an ally in its quest for support and recognition. Although probably sympathetically inclined, Ethiopia is unwilling to be the first to recognize Somaliland. Somalia would immediately attribute nefarious motives to Ethiopian recognition of Somaliland, arguing that it wishes to balkanize Somalia and weaken Somali unity.

Djibouti borders Somaliland to the north. There are important clan ties between Somalilanders and the some 60 percent of the Djiboutian population that is Somali. Relations between Somaliland and Djibouti are correct but not warm. Somaliland resents Djibouti's initiative in helping to create the TNG in Somalia and is not comfortable with the current Djiboutian leadership. Djibouti continues to have a complex set of financial and commercial links with the TNG. Its commitment to the preservation of Somali unity suggests that it wants to prevent the emergence of a viable and independent Somaliland. Even with the current tension in the relationship, there is

considerable informal trade between the two countries, and because taxes are lower in Somaliland, many Djiboutians buy goods there. Somaliland officials argue that Djibouti needs Somaliland more than Somaliland needs Djibouti. They also suspect that Djibouti fears competition from the port of Berbera once it is fully rehabilitated. With so few ships now using the port, there is little incentive to rehabilitate it.

Saudi Arabia poses a huge dilemma for Somaliland. A major financial backer of the TNG and supporter within the Arab League, Saudi Arabia was traditionally the major importer of Somaliland livestock. For the better part of the last five years, Saudi Arabia has banned livestock from Somaliland on the grounds that it might be infected with Rift Valley Fever. Somaliland denies the charges, and there does not appear to be any current scientific evidence to support the claim. Recent investigations by the Food and Agricultural Organization and World Health Organization found no evidence of Rift Valley Fever in Somaliland. Several Gulf States that import small quantities of Somaliland livestock have lifted the ban. Some observers suspect that the ban is linked to Saudi business interests and the importation of livestock from other countries. In the meantime, the Saudi ban is doing grievous harm to the Somaliland economy. The ban has impacted nearly every kind of employment in the country—pastoralists, truck drivers, livestock traders, animal health staff, brokers, port employees, and private business people. The impact is especially great in the port of Berbera. The town is not prosperous, and the large international airport built during the Soviet interlude in Somalia is effectively shut down. Berbera is lucky to have one or two ships in the harbor on any given day. The problem is aggravated because the government of Somaliland does not have any access to the Saudi royal family and has been unable to make its case directly to the Saudi government. Governments with close ties to Saudi Arabia, including the United States, appear to have little interest in making Somaliland's case.

Yemen, located across the Gulf of Aden from Somaliland, has a long history of links to Somaliland and has served periodically as a refuge for Somalis fleeing unrest. Somaliland was improving relations with Yemen until the Arta process in Djibouti stopped the initiative. Yemen subsequently accepted the Arab League position on the recognition of the TNG in Mogadishu, and relations with Somaliland soured.

Egypt has maintained an interest in the Somali coast dating back several centuries. In more recent years, Egypt has been a supporter of Somali unity and a strong Somali state that can serve as a counterweight to Ethiopia. Eighty-six percent of the

water reaching the Aswan Dam in Egypt emanates from



Ethiopia. The Nile River is, of course, Egypt's lifeline, and the leadership in Cairo wants to maintain maximum leverage over Ethiopia. A unified Somalia that might one day reassert its claims to Somali-inhabited areas of Ethiopia and has close links to Egypt would add to this leverage. Consequently, Egypt supports the Arta process, opposes an independent Somaliland, and is one of the five countries to extend recognition to the TNG. An Egyptian envoy visited Hargeisa in October 2002, congratulated Somaliland for the success it has achieved, and then urged it to participate in talks in Kenya on Somali unity with groups from Somalia. The Somaliland president rejected any suggestion of participating in the Kenyan-sponsored talks and reminded the Egyptian envoy that Egypt was one of the countries that recognized Somaliland's first independence on June 26, 1960.

Somaliland officials have a low opinion of the African Union, which was quick to recognize the TNG and has shown no interest in Somaliland's declaration of independence. One opposition political party leader in Somaliland commented recently that the African Union has been pressing Somaliland to participate in the unity talks in Kenya, while refusing to even send a delegation to Hargeisa. Somaliland's attitude is equally dismissive toward the Arab League, another organization that recognizes the TNG. It welcomes the assistance it receives from specialized agencies of the United Nations, such as UNICEF, the World Health Organization, and the World Food Program. On the other hand, Somaliland has a bad memory of the UN Mission to Somalia (UNOSOM) in the mid-1990s. UNOSOM spent hundreds of millions of dollars in Somalia to end a famine and engage in nation building, but took virtually no interest in Somaliland. Authorities in Hargeisa are also deeply disappointed that the UN political structure supported the Arta process and that the UN General Assembly voted to allow the TNG to occupy Somalia's seat in the UN.

Bilateral donors have not been very forthcoming in providing assistance to Somaliland. Some probably shy away for fear that provision of assistance connotes diplomatic recognition. The European Union has been the most helpful over the past decade. U.S. development assistance to all of Somalia totals only about \$2.5 million annually, although most of that now goes to Somaliland because it is the only safe and stable part of the country. Somaliland would be an excellent choice for increased U.S. development assistance.

## Some Matters Needing Attention

It is not surprising that Somaliland faces many obstacles. No country recognizes it, and as a result, foreign assistance is modest. The annual budget of the country is only about \$20

million. Somaliland entered its second independence in 1991 with a militia of some 40,000 men that it began to reduce to less than 10,000. An estimated 50 to 70 percent of the Somaliland budget goes to the military, primarily to pay salaries. Some payments go to soldiers who do not exist or are no longer in uniform. Corruption is pervasive, although the amounts involved appear to be modest, and its record may well be better than is the case in most developing countries.

Although Somaliland declared HIV an epidemic in 1998, it is not paying sufficient attention to the problem. UNICEF conducted a useful HIV/AIDS behavioral survey in 1999, but there is still no UNAIDS presence in the country. Somaliland's National HIV/AIDS Coordination Body held its first meeting in 2002. The civil war destroyed the health service delivery system, which is only slowly reviving with assistance from international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), agencies of the United Nations, and private clinics. There is a severe shortage of skilled health workers, and except for efforts to raise awareness, little is being done. Testing is almost nonexistent. Blood donors found to be HIV positive are not informed of their status because there is no counseling service. The stigma of HIV/AIDS is huge. Neighboring Djibouti has an adult prevalence rate of at least 12 percent and neighboring Ethiopia a rate of somewhere between 7 and 18 percent, although the rate is lower in rural Somali Region that borders Somaliland.

It is generally believed that the prevalence rate in Somaliland is relatively low. The 1999 UNICEF study, drawing on anecdotal information, concluded that the prevalence rate for the general population is about 1 percent. At the same time, the study noted that young people are sexually very active, and condom use generally is very low. Knowledge about the way that HIV/AIDS is transmitted is also low. UNICEF believed that infection rates are increasing. Those few people who follow the subject suggest that the prevalence rate today is about 4 percent. If Somaliland, aided by international organizations, bilateral donors, and NGOs, were to wage a major campaign now against HIV/AIDS, it might actually be possible to prevent the catastrophic situations that confront its neighbors. This is an area where Somaliland should seize the initiative and request international assistance and a UNAIDS presence.

Another serious and growing problem in Somaliland is the habitual use of *khat*. The green leaves of *khat*, which are chewed during lengthy sessions, contain cathinone, an active brain stimulant that acts much like amphetamine. *Khat* ingestion results in decreased appetite, euphoria, and hyper alertness. Chronic use of *khat* often produces sleeplessness, nervousness, impotence, loss of appetite, constipation, and nightmares. When you ask Somalilanders what percent of the

population regularly used *khat* at the time of independence in 1960, the responses vary between 1 and 5 percent. A Somalilander who recently researched this issue estimated that 5 percent of women and 75 percent of men now use it on an almost daily basis.

The average daily cost of a *khat* session is \$5, a huge amount for most Somalilanders. It is having a severely negative impact on family life as the men ignore or even abuse their families. Prolonged anorexia associated with *khat* use causes malnutrition and increased susceptibility to infectious diseases such as TB, hepatitis, and HIV/AIDS. It impacts significantly economic productivity of the workforce and removes from the economy scarce capital that could be used for productive purposes. There is no organized effort in Somaliland to combat this scourge. Interestingly, a Web site for the Somaliland diaspora, <[www.somalilandforum.com](http://www.somalilandforum.com)>, recently had a lead item that railed against the use of *khat*. There are also stirrings in Hargeisa that suggest there is real concern about the use of *khat*. In late September 2002, President Kahin issued a directive that limits the number of daily *khat* flights from Kenya and Ethiopia to no more than 50, which is down from about 150. He also ordered that *khat* no longer be imported by surface across land borders. It remains to be seen if this order can or will be enforced.

Traditionally a pastoral society where camels were the prestigious form of wealth, Somaliland is facing growing urbanization, especially in Hargeisa, and perhaps a new way of life for most of its inhabitants. Although this may be unavoidable, it will certainly be disruptive. Frequent drought and civil war have changed the situation. Somalilanders in rural areas are fencing off traditional pasturage for agricultural crops so that herders find it more difficult to raise their animals. Deforestation is a growing problem as Somalilanders cut down what few trees and shrubs remain in order to make charcoal, the main cooking fuel. It won't take long for Somaliland to be denuded of trees. The combination of these developments raises serious questions about the ability of Somalilanders to continue their pastoral existence.

## A Preoccupation with Recognition

During my visit, Somalilanders seemed to be almost obsessed with the question of recognition or, more correctly, nonrecognition. It is hard to blame them when one considers that the United Nations, Organization of African Unity (now African Union), and Arab League were quick to accept the TNG, which claims to represent Somaliland but controls little more than North Mogadishu. Lack of recognition makes it exceedingly difficult to attract foreign assistance and prohibits

membership in such important organizations as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Somaliland officials have mastered all the arguments and precedents for recognition. They cite East Timor, Western Sahara, the breakup of Yugoslavia, etc. Interestingly, they do not mention the case of Eritrea. This may be due to the fact that Eritrea has recognized the TNG. The government published in 2001 a booklet, entitled *Somaliland: Demand for International Recognition*, which set out to make the case.

A senior member of Somaliland's Parliament explained that Somalilanders were never enthusiastic about greater Somalia or the stated goal of the original Somali Republic to unify Somalis living in British Somaliland, Italian Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia's Ogaden and Haud Reserved Area, and Kenya's Northeastern Frontier District. He said this was a concept that had far more resonance to the south. He argued that Somaliland had and still has stronger ties to Somalis living in neighboring Ethiopia and Djibouti than to those in former Italian Somalia. The official insisted that Somaliland's experience with the Siad Barre government convinced Somalilanders that they do not want to join with Somalia. He concluded that Somaliland sees no benefits deriving from union with Somalia and asked rhetorically, "Can you give one reason why it is in the interest of Somaliland to join Somalia?"

The problem Somaliland faces is convincing the rest of the world, and especially the members of the African Union, that its case is special and deserves support. The Organization of African Unity and its successor, the African Union, strongly support the concept of respecting national borders that prevailed at independence. Article 4 of the Constitutive Act of the African Union signed on June 12, 2000, in Lome, Togo, states that the union shall function in accordance with the following principle: "respect of borders existing on achievement of independence." But a strict interpretation of this provision actually provides Somaliland with the legal sanction that it seeks. Presumably, the African Union is reluctant to recognize Somaliland for fear that it would increase pressure by other groups in Africa to support changes in borders inherited at independence. The fact that Somaliland does not fit in the same category seems to be of little importance.

The former British Somaliland became independent on June 26, 1960, within the borders that it now claims as an independent state. Thirty-five states recognized Somaliland. The U.S. secretary of state, Christian Herter, sent a congratulatory message, and the United Kingdom signed several bilateral agreements with Somaliland in Hargeisa on June 26, 1960. Five days later Somaliland opted for the sake of Somali unity to join with the former Italian Somalia, which became independent on July 1, 1960, to form the Somali Republic. Technically,

therefore, Somaliland complies with Article 4 of the Constitutive Act of the African Union.

It is up to the Assembly of the African Union, however, to consider requests for membership, and it is here that Somaliland has had no success. Somaliland would be well advised to focus its efforts on convincing several key African countries to support it within the African Union. Important countries like South Africa, Algeria, and Senegal, if convinced of the merits of Somaliland's case, could make an enormous difference. There is always the option that an independent Somaliland could propose unification at a later date with a Somalia that finally achieves its own peace and unity. At the same time, Somaliland needs to continue to work to improve or solve the problems discussed above, especially the issue of competing claims by Puntland for Sool and Sanaag Regions.

It is up to the government of Somaliland to take a more aggressive position, especially before the African Union and its individual members, on the question of international recognition. As of this writing, the rest of Somalia remains a failed state. There is no indication that peace and stability will return anytime soon. It is unreasonable to expect peaceful Somaliland to join willingly with Somalia, which is not at peace. For their part, international organizations and donor countries should provide more assistance to Somaliland. Disputing factions in Somalia might even learn from the Somaliland example that they, too, could benefit by achieving peace and stability. Finally, the United States needs to take Somaliland more seriously. Let the Africans be the first to offer diplomatic recognition. But the United States could open a small liaison office for the purpose of monitoring a larger development program and monitoring developments in this strategically important part of the Horn of Africa. This would not constitute diplomatic recognition, but it would signal support for a little Islamic country in Africa that has shown it "could."

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