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Somalia-Somaliland Relations: Assessing Scenarios for Negotiations and Averting Possibility of Fresh Crises in the Horn of Africa

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Abstract. This paper focuses on the Somalia-Somaliland unresolved politico legal issue on their relationship. The contestation between the two has been dragging for a long time as a domestic issue, but due to the growing interest of both western, (re)emerging eastern and middle eastern powers, the Somalia-Somaliland sovereignty dispute is getting a new momentum and started to involve regional geopolitics. Deep political division within Somaliland over the power and resource sharing precipitated by exclusionary politics and failure of democratization efforts as well as insecurity in Somaliland's eastern regions has finally led to armed conflict and deadly confrontations in Lasanod in Early February 2023. Because of fragility and the sensitivity of the conflicting political agendas between Somalia including Puntland and Somaliland, it attracted the attention of the United Nations Security Council, and regional bodies. Traditionally, the Horn of Africa has always been volatile for political and security dynamics. Over the past five year, the region has been shaken by the Gulf crises, followed by the US-Chinese competition over the Bab al-Mandeb strait that connects red sea to the gulf and the Indian ocean. To avert possibility of fresh escalations that may lead to regionalizing the dispute, consolidating extremism, or importing international proxy, the paper will assess three potential scenarios as methods to pursue by both authorities and by the United Nations in search for a solution of the Somalia-Somaliland question.

Keywords. Somalia, Somaliland, Horn of Africa, geopolitics, sovereignty, conflict, fragility, security, exclusionary politics, international community, negotiations

1. Introduction

A few months after the ouster of the long-time military ruler, Siyad Barre, Somaliland declared a unilateral secession from Somalia without endorsement by Somalia or recognition by any other state, but it has been able to maintain internal political stability.

Over the past two years, Somaliland has been in turmoil with electoral crises and now violent conflict in the east, but the root cause goes back to the formation and inclusivity of statehood and partially to the failure of building sustainable democracy. Somaliland's democratization process has been backpedalling. More recently, it was turning out to be

authoritarian, exclusive, and thus unsustainable.¹ The new developments started with pro election protests led by the opposition parties, which were violently responded to by the government in June and August 2022. The opposition responded by withdrawing the legitimacy of the ruling government.² The political crises shifted into armed conflict after traditional leaders of the eastern regions announced self-determination and their intention to denounce Somaliland's secession on 6th February 2023. A full-scale fighting broke out in Lasanod, the capital of Somaliland's Sool region bordering with Somalia's Puntland State. After three weeks of fighting, on 22 February 2023, the United Nations reported an alarming situation including the targeting of civilian infrastructure, displacement of more than 185,000 people, and civilian deaths.³

This comes at a critical time. Somalia comes out of disputed and prolonged electoral dispute, but with the support of public uprising against Al-Shabaab, it unlocked a new military offensive that targeted central and southern Somalia with the objective of comprehensively defeating Al-Shabab against past containment and degrading strategies that characterized both national and international terrorism response efforts in Somalia.⁴

Somalia's problems are not limited to the fight against Al-Shabab. More substantially, it needs to build stable politics and sustainable governance that are equally agreed upon by the powerful regional states and, most importantly, to conclude a final status settlement with Somaliland. These are prerequisites for finalizing the constitution that has been in provisional mode since 2012.

For the first time, the London Conference on Somalia brought both Somalia and Somaliland under one roof in February 2012 and encouraged them to engage in negotiations to clarify their future relationship.⁵ Consequently, several other countries including the UK, Turkey and UAE as well as neighbouring countries facilitated good offices for the leaders of the respective administrations to negotiate. After a decade of on and off talks with no substantial discussions on the question of separation or unification, no result-oriented agreement or mediated settlement had been achieved between Somalia and Somaliland.

The country is strategic by its location and the influencing role that it can play in the geopolitics of the Horn of Africa (HoA) can be decisive. The renewed geopolitics may adversely affect the current status quo and inflict a new rift that may put the country and the entire region in a new hotspot involving competing traditional and emerging powerful states.

Since 2018, the region has been experiencing violent transitions and fragility that have not yet revealed its final destiny. In Ethiopia, public protest brought the end of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) regime in 2018, but that immediately turned into an ethnic crises before it finally led to a threatening civil war that involved Eritrea and the use of technological warfare, making other African nations study and equip drones against internal and external opponents.⁶ In Sudan, similar public protests led to the end of Bashir's rule in 2019, but pockets of armed forces led by competing generals of Bashir's ally stalled people's aspiration of civilian government. In Somalia, insecurity posed by Al-Shabab and post-conflict fragility still continues making it susceptible to any political or security dynamics. These

¹ (Elder, 2021)

² (Somaliland opposition parties, 2022)

³ (United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), 2023)

⁴ (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2022)

⁵ (London Conference on Somalia: Communique, 2012)

⁶ (Scharre, 2021)

transitions have also wakened border disputes; Sudan and Ethiopia fought over Fashaqa farmlands; the border dispute between Eritrea and Djibouti continued as unresolved issue and the maritime delimitation case between Somalia and Kenya led to friction between two.

Comparatively, of all African regions, HoA hosts the most secessionists; Somaliland seeks independence; and Tigray is believed to have developed a pro-independence tendency.⁷ In advance, Eritrea and South Sudan seceded from Ethiopia and Sudan, respectively, but the two new states failed to deliver the aspirations of their people; South Sudan is marred by ethnic driven and resource based deadly conflict and Eritrea ended up under a ruthless rule since its independence in 1993.⁸

2. Post-Conflict Fragility and State Building in Somalia

Somalia is post-conflict fragile state. It has a long way to recover. In its first three decades following independence in 1960, Somalia passed through radical political shifts. It started with a democratic and unitary system, but within nine years, it switched to a highly centralized system under a socialist and military regime for twenty years, before it fell into a total collapse. The under-construction agenda of federalism is the latest bid to rebuild stable politics.

Over the past decade, significant progress has been made in shaping the federal map, but the constitution to delaminate the mandates between the federal government and its member states and between the federal institutions is still under discussion. The constitution is a prerequisite for building an all-inclusive and responsive political framework that clarifies the power sharing, mandate division, and democratic modality to pursue. It is also a requirement for setting up sustainable governance, trusted national security systems, and economic development.

The federal government considers federalism an approach to accommodating demands of the social clans and particularly to addressing grievances experienced under the military rule and civil conflicts.

Since 2012, there are about eight principal constitutional questions the federal government and the regional states are still unable to reach consensus-based power sharing; first, the security sector structure is the main source of the tension and impediment to the constitutional finalization. Due to a mistrust between the two orders of the government, there had been no effective political cooperation on the implementation of the national security architecture of 2017. The regional state's current map is the result of clan-based power sharing consensus, some regions argue that they have to be involved in controlling the armed forces, but the federal government consider it as a national issue that has to be treated under a single federal command. Secondly, shifting from a traditional single judicial hierarchy to a new inclusive structure in federal set up has been another highly competitive issue. While there are three technical options (single, integrated, and dual hierarchy systems) presented, again it needed political agreement by all stakeholders. Thirdly, natural resource sharing including possible offshore oil explorations. Fourthly, final agreement on the political representation of Banadir and the status of the country's capital city, fifthly, public services control, including education sector management and certification, is a reoccurring political issue that Puntland and the federal government bitterly disputes over. Sixth, the election remains another flashpoint challenging the efforts to bring sustainable transition and maintain political stability. A moribund, complex, stability threatening electoral transition process has been observed

⁷ (Schipani, 2021)

⁸ (UN News, 2023)

particularly in mid-2021. This didn't halt the ongoing recovery process, but it also kept threatening the political and security gains made. Seventh, the president and prime minister's unclear division of mandates and power relationships. Stiff contestation of power between the two has several occasions led to political crises in the past. The eighth and final constitutional impediment yet politically unresolved is the need for clarifications in Somalia-Somaliland relations. These are top political issues, but because of the institutional fragility, they always happen along clan lines, and this is what makes them politically sensitive and possibly impactful across all sectors. It also dominates all other priorities, slows the recovery process, and critically affects shared and sensitive national issues, including undertaking elections. For instance, the disagreement over the actualization of the security architecture has led to suspended ties between the center and the regional states in 2018.⁹ The dispute over the certification of the secondary schools has equally led to the political rift between the center and Puntland.

While the political context is complex, the security situation is equally challenging. Utilizing any security gaps precipitated by the political dysfunction, Al-Shabab is still militarily capable and continues to wage deadly attacks against civilians and public facilities. In less than a year, between 2020 and 2021, Al-Shabab conducted more than 1,000 attacks in Somalia.¹⁰ Even the security tension practically restricts better cooperation between the country's political orders as well as public service performance.

Identifying political actors and stakeholders in Somali politics is not that easy. It is because of the multiple overlapping identities of the political elite. On the one hand, it is about the political orders of those in the federal government or in the regional states, but these same actors represent clan groups. Yet there are cross-cutting interest groups with religious or business interests.

This fragility makes Somalia vulnerable to absorbing conflicting and competing political developments in the Middle East and Horn of Africa regions. In the onset of the Gulf crises in 2017, the federal government pursued a neutral position, although it was perceived to have allied with Qatar and Turkey, but some of the regional states and Somaliland supported the Saudi and UAE-led ally. The development was quickly reflected in the already existing political context. Its far-reaching consequences could be seen from how it jeopardized the results of a major international summit; London Somalia Conference 2017.¹¹ It was a summit jointly hosted by the UK prime minister, Theresa May and United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to accelerate progress on security sector reform. The Gulf crises of 2017 could be studied as a litmus test on how Somalia is actually vulnerable for the geopolitical developments and its spill over.

3. Stagnant Situation and Deep Division in Somaliland

While Somalia has enough internal problems to resolve, but it enjoys internationally recognized sovereignty all over Somalia including Somaliland, which showcase itself as a successful, functioning democracy that controls most of its territory. For Somaliland, international recognition is the only assignment and key to achieving the next level of development. For a long time, political leaders used "search for recognition" as a vision for maintaining internal cohesion, and its absence is used as a scapegoat to blame and cover up local challenges including exclusionary politics.¹² They also point it out whenever people feel

⁹ (UN Security Council Report, 2018)

¹⁰ (Heritage Institute, 2023)

¹¹ (UK Government, 2017)

¹² (Ismael, 2023)

the burden of three decades of unchanged status quo or critiques raise appraisal inquiries. However, the domestic political reality reflected by the latest developments reveals the unsustainability of that long status quo. The fact that Somaliland suddenly and dramatically lost the control of significant eastern parties to the pro-Somalia SSC-Khaatumo comes when the people in the center of Somaliland are deeply divided over the inequality of resources and power sharing tells more than that. Losing Lasanod will undermine Somaliland's argument of complete territorial control which in turn makes it incomplete and thus disqualify the credibility of the claimed unanimous bid that it advocated for so long. The potential risks around the issue had been repeatedly raised and warned as an issue but the government aggressively denied, and sometimes, it was redlined and criminalized by the radical secessionists in the system.

Somaliland is predominantly inhabited by three major clans; Isaq being approximately two third of the population inhabits at the center, Dir (Samaron and Issa) at the western periphery and Darod/Harti (Warsangali and Dhulbahante) at the Eastern periphery. When Isaq felt side lined by the regime in 1980s, they established Somali National Movement (SNM) as a political and military force to represent them, but the other two clans remained to ally with the regime until its fall down, making them losers and powerless in 1991.

In 1991, the SNM shifted its original founding goals by limiting to focus only on Somaliland, and brought the major clans inhabiting Somaliland to envision the next political journey. While it was commendable move from SNM to bring clans together for reconciliation, it is worth to note that the secession project was imposition¹³ on the non-Isaq periphery and particularly Harti clans. The following three issues were particularly of importance. Firstly, when making that strategic move, the negotiating actors were not in equal footing; SNM was the only powerful actor to dictate. Secondly, it was chaotic situation filled with public emotion that could threaten the non-Isaq clans,¹⁴ and thirdly, the primary purpose of the clan gathering was for internal reconciliation but within the arrival of the conference, the agenda was extended to included self-determination of Somaliland.

Due to the prolonged absence of any Somali government to re-emerge, the non-Isaq clans could not have mobilized political or military might to confront or effectively negotiate an armed, victorious and emotionally motivated rebel force representing a victim community, they had formally agreed whatever political proposal SNM wanted. For them, the three identities (Isaq, SNM and Somaliland) were identical. Since then, Somaliland always kept some Harti elites into its camp as representatives of eastern regions, but the majority of Harti disengaged in participating Somaliland's state building process.¹⁵ Out of the thirteen official traditional leaders, Somaliland always has one in its camp. The other twelve were pro Somalia.

While Somaliland largely engaged reconciliation in the first decade and thus inspired both internal and external onlookers in the first years, but to the eastern periphery, things started to change from the 1998 when Puntland state was formed to its eastern borders. Somaliland's territorial claims are based on the colonial borders just before the unification with Somalia, but Puntland refreshed by introducing a kinship borders (Harti community). At this time, Dhulbahante felt they found a new ancestral-based political ally to help them voice up and decline what they have perceived as SNM imposed secession.

Since then, Puntland stationed and controlled Lasanod and significant parts of Sool and Sanag until 2007 when Abdilahi Yusuf was elected as the president of Somalia's transitional

¹³ (Aw-Adan, 2019)

¹⁴ (Rift Valley Institute, 2015)

¹⁵ (Rift Valley Institute, 2015)

federal government and had to relocate significant contingents of Puntland forces to defend against Al-Shabab involved insurgency against his transitional government in Mogadishu. Somaliland ceased the opportunity, pushed Puntland back and took charge of Lasanod and other areas. Since then Eastern regions remained contested and flashpoint for frequent clashes, mainly between Somaliland and Puntland.

Although, SNM disintegrated and ceased to exist as a physical political entity due to the Somaliland internal conflict in 1991-1996, yet it continued to be used as a political tool used as a base to determine national identities, historical baselines to represent all (including Harti) and a reference for making strategic moves. This divisive political tool had particularly, re-insurged from 2010 when the old guard of SNM came to power. For instance, no consultation was ever made with Harti communities on the positions Somaliland has to pursue in regards to Puntland or about Somalia where they have immediate and strategic interests. It was not hidden that Somaliland leaders and more specifically president Muse and members of the parliament, repeatedly implied characterizing some clans involving Harti community as *Faqash* - a populist term SNM used to characterize Siyad Barre regime, supporters and later extended to politically discredit particular groups.

In 2010, Dhulbahante established the SSC (Sool, Sanag, and Cayn) Front, a semi-rebel force to represent them politically, which was replaced in 2012 by Khatumo State, hoping it would be considered a regional state by the federal government.

After years of armed clashes with Somaliland, Khatumo led by Prof. Ali Khalif Galayr (former prime minister of Somalia) and Somaliland president, Ahmed Silanyo concluded an agreement in 2017 to address the exclusionary politics of Khatumo communities, amend the constitution to accommodate the grievances of the past, and to resolve the question of power-sharing. When president Silanyo left office, the next president Muse halted the implementation of the agreement with no clear justification. Professor Galaydh started to appeal for 'Inclusive Somaliland', engage in civic dialogue, hoping for popular acknowledgements, but has not been luck.

On top of the active hostility in the eastern region, Somaliland's political stability is facing uncertainty. There are three emerging factors; erosion of cohesion within Isaq, the resumption and growth of the Somali state, and the revival of geopolitical dynamics in the Horn of Africa. First, the secret success of Isaq both in the SNM era and later in the state building lied in their common consensus on the rotation of power and resource sharing through negotiated democracy. That culture of rotation of power through political consensus, mixed with customary and electoral practices has been downgrading more recently, and that remains the main point of division. This could give a signal to periphery clans to refresh their grievances and express their long-time oppressed demands. Learning predominantly opposition's party's appraisal against the government in June, August, and November 2022, SSC-Khatumo, triggered by the latest assassination of a young opposition politician in 26 December 2022 refreshed their oppressed political aspiration, demonstrating the level of fragility in Somaliland state building.

Identifying political actors in Somaliland is not as easy as it is visible; formally, there are three political parties supposedly to represent the major political diversities and identities, but arguably, neither represent any political ideology. Having religiously affiliated political parties was banned in 2001 and continues to be discouraged. The last attempt to establish Islam-affiliated party, Badbaado, was in 2012, and despite having satisfied the qualifications set forth, it was nullified. Likewise, unionism or pro-Somalia activism in Somaliland is criminalized, and thus the political space is open for secessionism. The three political parties pursue a secession

agenda because they belong to only one of the three major clans. Contrary to that, the SSC-Khatumo movements and, generally, their eastern regions always had pro-Somalia aspirations. While the three political parties share the idea of secession, their approaches vary. Observing these political actors in Somaliland, they can be categorized into three groups: radical secessionists who advocate for aggressive policies to achieve independence regardless of the consequences; rationale secessionists who advocate for a realist and inclusive approach to secure independence and, thirdly, pro-Somalia movements fighting against what they see imposition of secession agenda.

The radical secessionists are more consumed by reaching colonial borders and thus acquiring SSC-Khatumo regions for the objective of qualifying statehood requirements at any cost. This is against the rational secessionists' point of view, who are against engaging in forceful acquisition. Their argument is that it will not bring lasting peace but will further exacerbate and regionalize the conflict, which may finally backfire on Somaliland itself.

However, studying the initial circumstances of extending the secession on SSC-Khatumo and tracing back the long pursued exclusionary politics in state building engaged by Somaliland, the sudden dramatic shift in Lasanod may not be seen as strange as it was waiting for a triggering factor.

Both Somalia and Somaliland are poor, and the Lasanod conflict may have consumed resources and diverted efforts allocated for counterterrorism operations at the federal level as well as at the Somaliland and Puntland levels. The conflict comes in the middle of the federal government's large-scale offensive that saw the recovery of large swaths of territory from Al-Shabab's control and following the Horn of Africa regional summit, which "agreed to jointly plan and organize a robust operational campaign at the frontline states level, of reach and destroy Al-Shabab".¹⁶ There are members of the US trained counter terrorism Somalia units (Danab) who jointed Lasanod conflict, and likewise the UK trained counterterrorism Somaliland units (Rapid Response Unit) implicated in the Lasanod conflict.¹⁷

4. Regional Geopolitical Hotspot

The Horn of Africa has long been volatile and troubled. It experienced interstate and intra-state conflicts. Apart from Somalia's fragility, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Djibouti had also seen despotic leadership for over a quarter century, as well as recurrent violent transitions with the imminent involvement of oil-rich Gulf countries. There was historic animosity and revelry between those countries. Ethiopia has always had border conflict with Sudan, Eritrea and Somalia and all had led to deadly and prolonged fighting in the past. Eritrea has similar unresolved border conflicts with Ethiopia, Sudan and Djibouti.

Internally, most of those countries have had civil wars and violent regime changes within the past three decades, leading to recurrent political instability and making them unpredictable and largely vulnerable to geopolitical dynamics.

Most of the fragility in the region is associated with ethnic-based and exclusive domination of the national powers and resources, backed by oppressive practices by the ruling elites in these countries. Over the past 25 years, the region has had two new states (Eritrea and South Sudan) recognized, but their secession failed to deliver on the aspirations of their people. Since independence, Eritrea has been run by a brutal regime and that produces a large number of refugees, and South Sudan has been in a decade-long civil war.

¹⁶ (Somalia Neighbouring States Summit, 2023)

¹⁷ (DECLASSIFIED UK, 2023)

The region hosts most of the foreign military bases in Africa, some of which even host two competing superpowers. The US and China are hosted on the coasts of tiny Djibouti. While the reason is associated with the region's prime location and its proximity to the Red Sea and Gulf, it also reveals the regional security gap and vulnerability to being mobilized into proxy conflicts. On the onset of the military invasion by the Saudi-led alliance against the Houthi in Yemen in 2015, the UAE, shortly thereafter, secured a deal with Somaliland on the use of Berbera port and airport that face Yemen. In this move, it was alerted that the Houthi movement in Yemen could retaliate by targeting Berbera port and thus endanger a civilian lifeline for large populations in Somaliland and beyond.

The Gulf crises of 2017 is also believed to have triggered a wave of instability in the Horn of Africa. Both Qatar and the UAE actively extended their trouble into the region, and during that period, the Horn experienced alliance shifts that contributed to the violent transitions in Ethiopia and a protracted transition in Sudan. In the later, both Qatar and UAE and their allies have openly tried to intervene with UAE particularly emboldening the armed groups into the power.¹⁸ In Ethiopia, both Turkey and UAE are believed to have sent drones to the Tigray conflict in northern Ethiopia. In Somalia, Turkey has Military facility and UAE has now concluded an agreement with Somalia on establishing a military base in Kismayo, after it has recklessly neglected another camp in Mogadishu in 2018, leading to the lose of large ammunitions.¹⁹

However, the biggest geopolitical contestation that may affect the Horn of Africa is the one that is increasingly intensifying between the US and China. Unlike US revelry with Russia, their contestation is about trade and investment influence with African countries. Since the past two decades, the US put more emphasis on the war against terror, but China has consolidated its trade partnership with most African countries, and the west has blamed China for debt trapping and consequently holding African independence for ransom. African leaders continue to value China's trade relationship, not only for the physical infrastructure investments that are attractive and highly valued in Africa, but also for dealing with Africans with fewer preconditions. This is why the 2018 US national defence strategy dropped terrorism as a primary concern, hence replacing it with countering China, and this is why the US Africa strategy was seen as more about China than Africa.²⁰

More recently, Somaliland has been assertive in its foreign policy and has taken diplomatic actions that could create hostility from either of the conflicting or interest groups. Undertaking diplomatic actions without calculating the associated risk may than drag Somaliland and the region into unbearable situation. In the past, Somaliland was actively involved in the Gulf crises, and now China and Taiwan issues by forging diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 2020, which China protested by threatening Somaliland.

Somaliland went further and showed hostility to China by calling for respect of "Taiwan national borders"- something that Taiwan backers and powerful states never said, but the administration in Somaliland may be hoping to exchange the US to lean its stiff position on Somaliland to pull out its forces from Lasanod and to undertake the long overdue presidential election.

5. Averting Possibility of Fresh Crises

¹⁸ (Al-Monitor, 2022)

¹⁹ (UN Security Council Committee, 2018)

²⁰ (LOWY INSTITUTE, 2018)

The armed conflict unfolding in Somaliland has multiple dimensions and may involve multiple interest groups. On the one hand, it involves Somaliland pursuing secession against the SSC-Khatumo, a pro-Somalia movement; on the other hand, it involves Puntland, a powerful Somalia regional state that has had a dispute with Somaliland over the claim of the Sool and Sanag regions since 2002. The dispute led the two administrations to engage fighting. On the third hand, the issue comes under the sovereignty dispute between Somalia and Somaliland. These overlapping situations have negatively affected the local people, making them one of the least developed parties in the country. On top of that, due to these vacuums, there were both ISIS and Al-Shabab presence as well as terror-related incidents in the area, and it is also believed that Al-Shabab and ISIS consider it a potential area to cultivate should the situation deteriorate. That can finally serve as a new flashpoint of terrorism, and this is why it is worrisome to some of the neighbours and the United Nations Security Council, who are stressing parties to end the conflict. Ethiopia, which is already scrambled by internal political and security instability, is equally concerned about Al-Shabab infiltration into its territory. In July 2022, Al-Shabab made an earlier penetration and moved some of its militants into the hinterland of Ethiopia.²¹

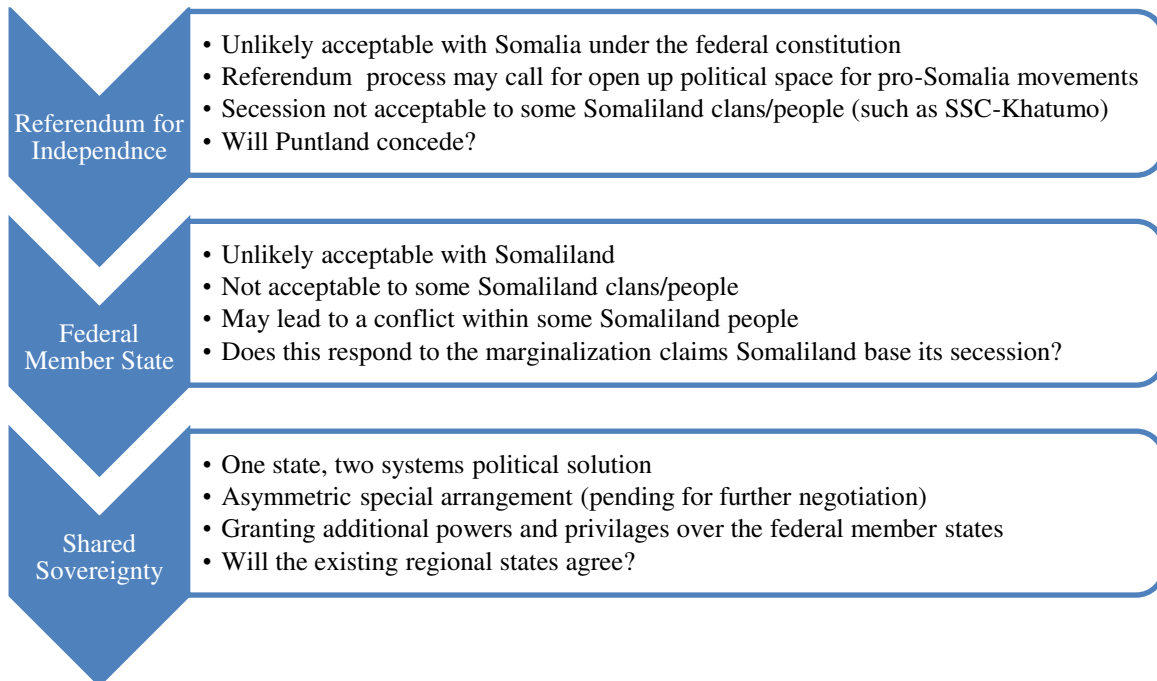
6. Scenarios for Negotiations

To avert fresh crises, the future relationship between Somalia and Somaliland must be clarified. Reaching a final settlement between Somalia and Somaliland means ending the continued unsustainable stagnant situation in Somaliland, partially ending the constitutional transition in Somalia and pre-empting possibility of a fresh and imported proxy conflict on the issue that may finally attract proliferation of terrorism.

Over the past decade, the two parties have had on-and-off dialogue to clarify their future relationship, and the last formal talk was held in May 2020 in Djibouti. Of all the meetings, no substantial results had been reached between the two. The past experiences demonstrate the need for mediation led by capable and credible bodies who have leverage over both parties to push them to reach an agreement. The past attempts at providing good offices for the parties to negotiate have failed to fruition. In any case, a coordinated effort of the international community, including regional bodies, are vital for any success.

While the final settlement is for the concerned parties to agree out of the mediation efforts, here are three possible scenarios and potential implications to consult as negotiable options for lasting peace:

²¹ (VoA, 2022)



7. Conclusion

The renewed conflict in Lasanod is another litmus test of the unsustainability of the current status quo in the Somalia-Somaliland relationship. In the past, Somaliland had superior position and unchallenged representation of all Somaliland regions, but the exclusionary politics have backfired in Somaliland and consequently it has no control over Lasanod and a new actor, SSC-Khatumo has joined in the political arena. Unlike past negotiations, this may raise questions about Somaliland's legitimacy in the SSC-Khatumo regions. Therefore, Somaliland should either let SSC-Khatumo negotiate on its behalf or come up with an inclusive polity, including a change of policies, to accommodate the SSC-Khatumo declaration on their self-determination. However, the radical secessionists still advocate for forceful acquisition against the rationale secessionists who argue for pragmatism in the issue of SSC-Khatumo and more broadly the issue between Somalia-Somaliland. This is because in contemporary Somali history, forceful domination never brought a sustainable political solution.

The parties need to work toward a result-oriented, permanent solution for their future relationship. The two should come up with innovative ideas to negotiate. During the course of resettlement, the leaders of both parties should be mindful and refrain from outsourcing destructive geopolitical revelries or the risk of regionalization of the issue. Any worsened situation will equally benefit the violent extremist groups to leverage and pose security threat to the region and that may invite counterproductive interventions. On its part, Somaliland has to engage inclusive power sharing politics to restore its local cohesion, engage meaningful negotiations and employ less aggressive foreign policy, and on its part, Somalia has to convince Puntland from further provocation.

The international community should come up with a unified mediation agenda involving relevant and interested international and regional bodies and a coordinated response with respect to future Somalia-Somaliland relations and resettlement. Equitable pressure should be mounted on the parties to effectively negotiate and reduce their difference.

Above all, all parties should work to reach a transitional settlement to cease hostility, disengage fighting forces, restore order, and build up an interim administration in SSC-Khatumo regions.

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