

How Mossad Paved the Way for Recognition of Somaliland



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's announcement of mutual recognition with Somaliland was far from a conventional diplomatic development. Instead, it reflected a long-standing intelligence-driven process that preceded and steered the political decision from behind the scenes.

The public acknowledgment of Mossad's role in brokering the deal reveals that this goes well beyond formal normalization. It marks a strategic and security-focused redrawing of Israel's sphere of influence in the Horn of Africa.

Mossad Steps Out of the Shadows

Netanyahu's explicit thanks to Mossad and its chief, David Barnea, in the official statement announcing the mutual recognition was no mere ceremonial gesture. Rather, it was a clear indication of the path that led to this development.

Unlike traditional diplomatic accords, this agreement appears to have been orchestrated primarily by Mossad, which laid the groundwork before handing it off to the political leadership.

According to Hebrew-language media citing Israeli officials, Mossad's operations in Somaliland span many years. During that time, the agency built a secret

network of relationships with key figures in the region, gradually transitioning these ties from covert security collaboration to open political recognition.

Several successive Mossad chiefs reportedly maintained personal, direct relations with officials in Somaliland as part of a long-term trust-building strategy designed to protect mutual interests under the radar.

Israeli policymakers now hope this agreement will serve as a gateway for expanding regional acceptance of Israel, encouraging others to engage in similar strategic partnerships managed primarily through intelligence and security channels.

Observers note that Israel's recognition of Somaliland is neither sudden nor surprising. In recent years, Israel has ramped up its covert operations across the Horn of Africa, in tandem with Mossad's growing regional role.

This activity includes efforts to establish an advanced intelligence base in Somaliland to supplement Israel's existing presence in Eritrea, thus enhancing its surveillance and intelligence capabilities in one of the world's most geopolitically sensitive regions.

The move wasn't solely military. A parallel political-strategic effort targeted U.S. support. Former Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer reportedly promoted Somaliland within American political circles, presenting it as a forward-operating location to monitor China's expanding presence in Africa.

Crisis as Opportunity

Mossad's long-term operations in Africa are rooted in a central tenet: investing in complex crises afflicting many African states and converting them into opportunities to expand Israeli influence.

This approach includes exploiting the needs of generals, local leaders, and separatist movements for logistical support, technological infrastructure, and indirect access to Washington with Israel positioned as a guaranteed gateway to the United States.

To that end, Mossad broadened its range of tools and front organizations to establish a foothold across the continent, favoring "quiet influence" over confrontational penetration. A 2022 study by the Al-Zaytouna Center for Studies and Consultations found that Israel maintains official or unofficial ties with more than 44 African nations, leveraging development initiatives and private firms as parallel arms to build long-term intelligence networks.

The study's author, futures studies expert Walid Abdelhay, cited an Israeli academic proposal calling for the training of African migrants inside Israel and sending them back to their home countries to form local spy networks a model

that reflects Israel's approach of transforming marginalized human capital into tools of influence.

To operationalize this strategy, Israel deployed soft-power mechanisms and civilian fronts that served as ideal covers for expanding its intelligence footprint. Through technical cooperation, agricultural aid, and security training programs, thousands of Israeli experts and advisers were dispatched not only to build African capacity, but also to cultivate enduring ties with security agencies and decision-making centers in countries like Ethiopia, Uganda, Congo, South Sudan, and South Africa.

While these efforts appeared developmental, they were in fact covers for direct recruitment and intelligence coordination. This was confirmed by leaked "Spy Cables," which revealed active Mossad networks operating across Africa with diplomatic and logistical support under official cover.

In parallel, Israeli training institutes particularly the Galilee International Management Institute continue to attract hundreds of African leaders and students in programs that go beyond administration to include military training and local defense networking. Estimates suggest that nearly every African government includes at least one official trained at this institute.

This penetration was further strengthened by high-level visits, most notably Netanyahu's 2016 Africa tour, during which he met several leaders trained in Israel underscoring the blending of political and intelligence tracks.

In 2023, Mossad chief David Barnea visited Chad to discuss establishing an advanced security base for monitoring developments in Libya and Algeria and providing support to regional allies, particularly Morocco.

The Times of Israel also reported that Israeli special forces are training local units in over a dozen African countries as part of a broader strategy to entrench Israeli influence on the continent.

Beyond military and intelligence goals, Israel prioritized helping regimes consolidate power by strengthening surveillance and repression capabilities. This turned many African states into testing grounds for Israeli surveillance and cyber tools. Israeli companies played a central role in reshaping domestic surveillance policies to serve security agendas that often transcended national borders.

Among these firms is NSO Group, developer of the infamous Pegasus spyware, used in several African countries to target political dissidents, journalists, and human rights activists. According to a Brookings Institution report, such tools have facilitated internal political repression and reinforced authoritarian governance patterns.

Investigations by Forbidden Stories and Amnesty International confirmed that countries like Rwanda, Togo, South Africa, and Uganda were either users or targets of these tools, highlighting the complexity of digital espionage in Africa.

A particularly revealing testimony came from Zwelivelile Mandela, grandson of Nelson Mandela, who accused Israel of infiltrating Africa by supplying dictatorships with advanced spyware, arming separatist militias under the guise of agricultural projects, and fueling civil wars to fracture societies from within.

A striking example is Israel's role in the partition of Sudan and its support for South Sudan's secession documented in the book *Mossad's Mission in South Sudan*. South Sudan's ambassador to Israel admitted upon presenting his credentials in 2014 that, "South Sudan was created thanks to you... the South was born thanks to the State of Israel and General John."

Deportation as an Intelligence Lever

As Israel escalates its genocidal war on Palestinians and reveals intentions to depopulate Gaza, a central challenge has emerged: where to forcibly relocate Gaza's residents amid regional and international opposition to ethnic cleansing.

According to Axios in March 2025, Netanyahu's office tasked Mossad with identifying countries willing to absorb large numbers of displaced Gazans. The move followed the rejection of a previous proposal by then-President Donald Trump, who had suggested resettling over two million Gazans under the guise of reconstruction calling it the "Middle East Riviera."

Israeli officials reportedly held talks with Somalia, South Sudan, and others including Indonesia but gave special attention to Somaliland. The proposal involved a political quid pro quo: support for international recognition of the breakaway region in exchange for its cooperation in hosting displaced Palestinians.

In March, Israel's Kan public broadcaster quoted Somaliland's Foreign Minister Abdirahman Zahir expressing openness to resettling Palestinians from Gaza. However, he later denied the existence of formal talks in comments to Reuters.

The Jerusalem Post and the Associated Press also reported on Israeli-American outreach to three East African parties Sudan, Somalia, and Somaliland to explore potential resettlement plans.

Simultaneously, Israel's cabinet approved the formation of a special unit within the Defense Ministry to oversee what was dubbed the "voluntary departure" of Palestinians from Gaza a move aligned with military tactics aimed at making life in the enclave unlivable.

In July, Axios again reported that Mossad chief Barnea informed Washington that

countries like Ethiopia, Libya, and Indonesia were open to accepting Gazans, proposing economic and political incentives. Libya's Foreign Affairs Committee later denied these claims, warning against involving the country in forced displacement schemes.

In November, the South African government expressed deep concern over the mysterious arrival of 153 Palestinians from Gaza in Johannesburg. Foreign Minister Ronald Lamola said the lack of Israeli exit stamps on their passports raised suspicions, suggesting a hidden agenda of ethnic cleansing.

All evidence points to Mossad's central role. Haaretz later revealed that the flights were organized by a foundation led by a dual Israeli-Estonian national, fronting for a consulting firm registered in Estonia.

According to the Associated Press, Israel facilitated the movement of Gazans through the Kerem Shalom crossing to Ramon Airport, then to Nairobi and finally to Johannesburg.

Broader Strategic Ambitions

Even after the ceasefire, Israel's displacement efforts continue, aimed at turning the outcomes of its war on Gaza into a permanent strategic reality that pressures its residents to leave.

However, Israel's interest in normalizing ties with Somaliland goes beyond the issue of relocation. The region holds high geopolitical value for Israel's security calculus, especially as recent regional wars have exposed the need for forward-operating bases that can oversee trade routes and enable direct or proxy interventions.

Le Monde framed the Israeli recognition of Somaliland as a geopolitical and security breakthrough more than just a diplomatic win for Hargeisa. It represents a broader Israeli repositioning in the Horn of Africa aimed at redrawing regional power dynamics.

The French paper noted that the move aligns with Israel's strategic objective to expand its alliance network near the Bab al-Mandab Strait one of the world's most critical maritime chokepoints amid growing tensions in the Red Sea, particularly the Houthi-led attacks during the Gaza war.

This perspective aligns with reporting from Yedioth Ahronoth, which highlighted shared Israeli and U.S. strategic interests in Somaliland due to its long coastline and vital location. Its proximity to Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen, the paper noted, makes it a key outpost for countering threats to regional trade.

Somaliland sits on the southern shore of the Gulf of Aden, near the mouth of the Bab al-Mandab Strait that leads to the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. With a

coastline stretching roughly 740 kilometers, it directly overlooks one of the busiest global trade routes.

It borders Ethiopia to the south and west, Djibouti to the northwest, and Puntland to the east, placing it at the nexus of the Horn of Africa's key conflict and commerce zones.

A study by Tel Aviv University's Institute for National Security Studies estimated that Somaliland's coast lies 300–500 kilometers from Houthi-held areas in Yemen, including the port of Hodeidah.

The study argued that this proximity, combined with the failure of the U.S., Israel, and Gulf states to decisively defeat the Houthis, positions Somaliland as a potential “game-changing” platform for military and intelligence operations.

The study likened Somaliland's potential role to that of Azerbaijan for Israel a strategic depth platform against Iran and suggested that Somaliland could play a similar role against the Houthis.

The Times of Israel echoed this, reporting a shared Israeli-Somaliland understanding of Red Sea threats and pointing to the potential for a multidimensional strategic partnership encompassing security, defense, military affairs, counterterrorism, and freedom of navigation in the Bab al-Mandab.

The report noted that Israel could leverage Somaliland's location to counter maritime threats, while Somaliland could benefit from Israeli military and tech support to develop its defense sector. The article identified the “ultimate prize” for Somaliland as American recognition of its independence a step that could trigger a domino effect among U.S. allies.

More broadly, Somaliland is viewed as a counterweight to China's expanding presence in Djibouti. Le Monde reported growing calls among conservative U.S. Republicans particularly those aligned with “Project 2025” to recognize Somaliland, especially after its offer to host a U.S. military base in Berbera in exchange for formal independence.

In this vein, Republican Senator Ted Cruz sent a letter to President Donald Trump urging him to recognize Somaliland, calling it a “friend of Israel” and a supporter of the Abraham Accords.

Ultimately, Netanyahu sees this trajectory as a new lever to revive Israel's stalled normalization drive since the Al-Aqsa Flood battle and to reintroduce the policy of “peripheral alliances” across Africa.

But this approach carries significant risks, as it opens the door to a perilous new formula: normalization in exchange for recognition a dynamic that could fuel separatist movements and destabilize the fragile equilibrium in the Horn of Africa



for years to come.

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