



# Ururka Midnimo

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## **The Link Between Somaliland's Secessionist Propaganda Agenda and Somali Instability**

Somalia has endured decades of civil unrest, governance instability, and persistent security challenges, compounded by the activities of extremist groups. These groups, although small in number, are highly effective in conducting acts of terrorism both within Somalia and across the broader East African region. Their leadership often comprises foreign operatives with global agendas that are disconnected from Somali national interests. Alarming, these organizations exploit local vulnerabilities by recruiting Somali youth, with leadership structures including both foreign nationals and Somali individuals.

A notable proportion of these leaders hail from Somaliland, the self-declared independent region in northern Somalia. It is argued by some analysts that Somaliland benefits from the instability in other parts of Somalia, as it bolsters their case for international recognition as a separate state. Reports from captured militants have allegedly indicated links between extremist groups and Somaliland's security apparatus, including claims of training and material support facilitated by Somaliland military and intelligence units.

In recent weeks, Puntland's security forces have engaged in sustained operations against pockets of Da'esh (ISIS) militants in the mountainous regions near the Somaliland border. These operations highlight Puntland's proactive role in counterterrorism efforts amidst the broader challenges of regional instability.

Simultaneously, the ongoing armed conflict in the SSC (Sool, Sanaag, and Cayn) regions underscores the deep divisions between Somaliland and unionist communities in these territories. Since early 2023, unionist forces in SSC have resisted Somaliland's attempts to assert control over their territories. The city of Las Anod, in particular, has suffered catastrophic consequences due to indiscriminate shelling by Somaliland forces, resulting in hundreds of civilian casualties, the displacement of over 200,000 people, and the destruction of critical



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infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, markets, and places of worship.

Recent developments have seen the SSC-Khatumo forces, with support from Puntland, successfully reclaim significant areas of the Sool region, driving Somaliland forces back toward Ainabo.

In the Sanaag region, tensions persist, with periodic skirmishes between unionist groups and Somaliland's Isaaq clan militias. It is noteworthy that among the five major clans in Somaliland, only the Isaaq clan supports secession, while the Dhulbahante, Warsangali, Gadabursi, and Issa clans oppose it. However, dissenting voices within these clans face systematic suppression, including imprisonment and threats, limiting their ability to express opposition to Somaliland's secessionist agenda.

If Somaliland were to gain recognition as an independent state, it would almost certainly ignite a civil war among the clans in the region who have endured gross human rights violations under the Isaaq-dominated administration in Hargeisa. Such recognition would likely draw Puntland into the conflict, as it would come to the aid of the SSC communities resisting Somaliland's claims. Additionally, this upheaval could create a security vacuum, providing opportunities for foreign terror groups to infiltrate the region and establish bases.

Contrary to the narrative promoted by Somaliland lobbyists and supporters, that recognition would bring stability and counter China's growing influence in the region, Somalia already enjoys closer ties to Western nations than to China. Undermining Somalia's territorial integrity and sovereignty would alienate an ally that has long aligned itself with Western interests, potentially creating new vulnerabilities rather than addressing existing ones.

It is important to note that following the collapse of the Somali government in 1991 and the subsequent civil war, nearly a million Somalis sought refuge in Europe, Canada, and the United States. These diaspora communities have since become integral to their adopted countries, contributing as faithful citizens. Their children serve in the military and armed forces, embodying dedication to their new homelands.



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At the same time, these communities remain strong advocates for the unity, territorial integrity, and sovereignty of Somalia, while also fostering close and cooperative relations between Somalia and Western nations.

Moreover, recognizing Somaliland would set a dangerous precedent for other African nations grappling with secessionist movements. The African Union's steadfast policy of maintaining colonial-era borders has so far prevented a Pandora's box of fragmentations across the continent. Abandoning this principle in Somalia's case would embolden secessionist groups elsewhere, undermining stability not just in Somalia, but across Africa as a whole.

Another contentious aspect of Somaliland's political strategy is its allocation of nearly 30% of its annual budget to lobbyist firms in the United States and the United Kingdom. These firms are employed to promote Somaliland's narrative as a stable and democratic entity in contrast to the instability in southern Somalia.

However, this portrayal is increasingly scrutinized, as it diverges from the realities on the ground. Somaliland's elections are widely criticized as exclusionary, with political competition limited to candidates from the Isaaq clan. Similarly, key government institutions, including the legislature, judiciary, military, and police, are dominated by the Isaaq clan, leaving minimal representation for other major clans.

Given these dynamics, it is imperative for the international community to adopt a more factual and evidence-based approach to Somaliland. The global discourse must beware and move beyond the polished narratives presented by lobbyist firms and critically examine the realities of exclusion, repression, and regional instability perpetuated by the Somaliland administration. A balanced assessment grounded in the facts on the ground is essential to ensure a just and equitable resolution to the challenges facing Somalia and its regions.

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