

STRATEGIC POLICY ARTICLE

THE NOW OR NEVER STRATEGY

A Strategic Framework for Somaliland–Ethiopia Relations in a Changing Horn of Africa

“Somalia has joined a coalition seeking to contain Ethiopia. Somaliland offers Ethiopia connectivity, stability and mutually beneficial access to the world.”

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POLICY ANALYSIS • REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY • DIPLOMATIC STRATEGY

Executive Summary

The El Alamein alignment among Somalia, Egypt, Eritrea and Sudan has altered the strategic environment of the Horn of Africa. By combining opposition to Somaliland’s recognition with positions that challenge Ethiopia on the Nile, maritime access and Red Sea governance, the coalition has tied Somaliland’s diplomatic future to a wider regional contest. This development increases Somaliland’s value to Ethiopia—but it does not automatically produce Ethiopian recognition. Hargeisa must turn the present opening into a structured, reciprocal and enforceable partnership.

The central recommendation of this paper is immediate, disciplined engagement with Addis Ababa around an updated Somaliland–Ethiopia package: dependable access through Berbera, accelerated corridor development, integrated customs and logistics, Ethiopian investment, maritime and intelligence cooperation, and a written political roadmap toward recognition. Somaliland should frame the initiative as a peaceful economic partnership serving regional integration—not as an anti-Somalia military bloc.

STRATEGIC JUDGMENT

Somaliland’s leverage has increased, but the window is time-sensitive. Recognition must be secured through measurable reciprocity before Somaliland grants irreversible strategic concessions.

1. A New Strategic Environment

The geopolitical environment surrounding Somaliland has changed sharply. Somalia’s participation in the El Alamein Declaration was not merely symbolic diplomacy. The declaration linked four positions: support for Somalia’s territorial claims, rejection of recognition or support for Somaliland, exclusion of non-littoral states from Red Sea governance, and opposition to unilateral action affecting existing Nile-water uses. Together, these positions create a coordinated regional front whose practical effect is to constrain both Somaliland and Ethiopia.

For Somaliland, the declaration confirms that Mogadishu is internationalizing its campaign against recognition. For Ethiopia, it demonstrates that Somalia is prepared to coordinate with Cairo and Asmara on issues that Addis Ababa considers central to its national security and long-term development. The result is a convergence of interests between Somaliland and Ethiopia that is more pronounced than it was before the summit.

2. Somalia’s Strategic Contradiction

Only days before the summit, Somalia’s president stated publicly that Mogadishu did not oppose Ethiopia obtaining access to the sea. Ethiopian state media initially treated those remarks as a constructive opening based on dialogue, international standards and regional integration. Yet Somalia then joined a declaration asserting exclusive littoral control over Red Sea governance while aligning with Ethiopia’s principal regional rivals.

This creates a credibility problem. Mogadishu may offer commercial access in principle, but any arrangement negotiated through Somalia could remain vulnerable to Egyptian influence, domestic political reversal or renewed diplomatic confrontation. Ethiopia does not merely require permission to use a port; it requires an efficient, secure and politically dependable maritime corridor capable of supporting national development over decades.

3. Somaliland's Strategic Proposition

Somaliland offers Ethiopia a fundamentally different proposition. It does not treat Ethiopia's economic transformation or maritime ambition as a threat. It can connect Ethiopia's large internal market to the Gulf of Aden through Berbera while generating investment, employment, infrastructure and revenue for Somaliland.

Somaliland can offer Ethiopia:

- A stable and dependable political partner on the Gulf of Aden.
- Predictable, long-term commercial access through the Port of Berbera.
- An existing transport corridor toward the Ethiopian border.
- Integrated customs, logistics, dry-port and industrial-zone arrangements.
- Opportunities for Ethiopian equity participation and infrastructure investment.
- Cooperation in counterterrorism, border security, intelligence and maritime awareness.
- A relationship founded on reciprocal strategic interests rather than temporary political calculation.

The essential point is that Somaliland is not merely offering a port. It is offering a complete maritime, commercial and security partnership that can become a durable pillar of regional connectivity.

4. Ethiopia's Emerging Direction

Ethiopia's official response to the regional alignment has been firm but measured. Its Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that Ethiopia's geographic and historical relationship with the Red Sea cannot be erased through political rhetoric, coercive measures, destabilization or proxy action. President Taye Atske-Selassie subsequently reaffirmed reliable sea access as a national priority to be pursued through diplomacy, mutual benefit and the principle of "give-and-take."

The language of mutual benefit creates an opening for Somaliland. It also demands clarity. Somaliland should not exchange strategic access for general expressions of goodwill or indefinite promises. Any renewed agreement must define the economic benefit, security responsibilities, political milestones and timetable expected from both parties.

5. The Updated Somaliland–Ethiopia Package

#	Pillar	Required Action
1	Reliable access through Berbera	Establish predictable, long-term Ethiopian commercial access under a transparent agreement that explicitly protects Somaliland's sovereignty, jurisdiction and economic interests.
2	Accelerated corridor development	Create binding deadlines for upgrading the Berbera–Tog Wajaale–Ethiopia route, expanding border facilities and improving the speed and reliability of cross-border trade.
3	Integrated logistics and	Develop coordinated customs systems, dry ports, bonded warehouses, industrial zones and digital cargo-tracking

#	Pillar	Required Action
	customs	arrangements.
4	Ethiopian investment and participation	Invite structured Ethiopian participation in mutually agreed corridor, logistics, energy and industrial projects so that the relationship acquires permanent commercial value.
5	Security cooperation	Strengthen intelligence sharing, counterterrorism, border security and maritime-domain awareness while avoiding unnecessary regional militarization.
6	A written recognition roadmap	Require specific diplomatic steps, deadlines and deliverables leading toward formal Ethiopian recognition of Somaliland. Recognition cannot remain an undefined future possibility.

6. A Phased Implementation Roadmap

Phase I — Political Reaffirmation: Reaffirm the bilateral partnership at head-of-government level; establish a joint steering committee; agree on confidentiality, sovereignty and dispute-resolution principles.

Phase II — Technical and Commercial Agreements: Finalize corridor, customs, investment, infrastructure and security protocols with measurable milestones and assigned institutional responsibility.

Phase III — Diplomatic Advancement: Upgrade Ethiopia's official representation in Hargeisa and Somaliland's representation in Addis Ababa; publish the agreed recognition pathway and initial diplomatic steps.

Phase IV — Recognition and Full Implementation: Complete the recognition process alongside the activation of long-term strategic, commercial and security arrangements.

7. Strategic Safeguards

Somaliland must avoid becoming a proxy in a wider confrontation. The partnership should be communicated as a lawful, peaceful and development-oriented arrangement that benefits regional trade. Berbera can serve Ethiopia without threatening Somalia, Egypt, Eritrea, Djibouti or any other neighboring state.

At the same time, Hargeisa must guard against being used merely as leverage in negotiations between Addis Ababa and Mogadishu. Ethiopia could revive the Somaliland option to secure more favorable terms elsewhere and then postpone its political commitments. Somaliland should therefore apply four safeguards:

- No irreversible concession without a reciprocal and documented Ethiopian commitment.
- No open-ended implementation schedule; every stage must have deadlines and review points.
- No transfer of sovereign authority; all arrangements must remain under Somaliland law and jurisdiction.
- No secret divergence between economic and political commitments; recognition milestones must form part of the same strategic framework.

8. The Diplomatic Narrative

Somaliland's external message should remain disciplined and consistent: it supports peaceful access, regional integration and mutually beneficial development. It is not asking Ethiopia to confront Somalia; it is inviting Ethiopia to choose the most stable and commercially credible route to the Gulf of Aden.

Somalia has joined a coalition seeking to contain Ethiopia. Somaliland offers Ethiopia connectivity, stability and mutually beneficial access to the world.

Conclusion: The Moment of Decision

The El Alamein alignment has increased Somaliland's strategic value by demonstrating that Mogadishu is prepared to coordinate with countries seeking to restrict Ethiopia's position on the Nile, the Red Sea and regional security. Somaliland stands on the other side of that equation: it offers a friendly coastline, a viable corridor and a partnership grounded in mutual benefit.

Yet geopolitical openings do not remain available indefinitely. If Somaliland acts decisively, it can transform Berbera into Ethiopia's dependable maritime gateway and convert strategic cooperation into formal diplomatic recognition. If it hesitates—or accepts vague assurances—Ethiopia may use the Somaliland option only to improve its negotiating position elsewhere.

This is the time for disciplined diplomacy, written commitments and strategic reciprocity. Somaliland must secure the partnership, protect its sovereignty and obtain a defined recognition roadmap. That is the essence of the Now or Never Strategy.

SECURE THE PARTNERSHIP • PROTECT THE NATIONAL INTEREST • OBTAIN THE RECOGNITION ROADMAP

Source Notes

1. [El Alamein Joint Declaration, Presidency of the Arab Republic of Egypt, 4 October 2026](#)
2. [Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement reported by the Ethiopian News Agency, 5 October 2026](#)
3. [President Taye reaffirms Ethiopia's peaceful pursuit of reliable sea access, Fana Media Corporation, 6 October 2026](#)
4. [Federal Government foreign-relations agenda, Fana Media Corporation, 6 October 2026](#)
5. [The Voice from Mogadishu and Ethiopia's Quest for Access to the Sea, Fana Media Corporation, 4 October 2026](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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