Somalia's Strategic Value Is Rising But Its Sovereignty Is at Risk

Today, we face two pressures at once. The international support that helped sustain our recovery is becoming less dependable, while strategic competition creates new opportunities for political actors to secure external backing without resolving their disagreements at home.

If these pressures reinforce one another, Somalia could become more valuable to foreign powers while remaining unable to convert that value into lasting public benefit. Individual leaders might find support for their survival even as the institutions serving our people become weaker.

That outcome is avoidable. We can build a country whose partnerships strengthen its independence, whose institutions command public trust and whose citizens see their own future in the success of the state. The starting point is a political settlement that gives us the capacity to act together.

Preserving Our Gains in a Changing World

Somalia’s recovery has been sustained by the resilience of its people and the contribution of international partners. Families rebuilt lives, businesses maintained economic activity, communities negotiated local peace, and the diaspora supported relatives through extraordinary hardship. African peacekeepers and international partners helped preserve the space in which institutions could be reconstructed.

Those sacrifices and contributions deserve recognition. They also place a responsibility on Somali leaders to preserve what has been achieved and complete the political work that assistance alone could never accomplish.

The international framework supporting this recovery was imperfect. Commitments to sovereignty, territorial integrity and human rights were applied unevenly, especially when they conflicted with the interests of powerful states. Nevertheless, international institutions provided avenues for assistance, diplomatic coordination and protection that weaker countries could not easily secure on their own.

As that framework weakens, Somalia must prepare for less predictable support and more selective engagement. Foreign involvement may remain substantial, but its objectives may increasingly centre on particular commercial or security interests rather than the wider requirements of national recovery.

We should respond with a clear understanding of our interests and a credible ability to advance them. Somalia needs constructive relationships with a broad range of partners, while ensuring that no partnership places essential national decisions beyond public oversight.

The responsibility for our recovery must increasingly rest with us. That means strengthening domestic revenue, improving the management of public resources and agreeing on institutions capable of carrying obligations that external partners cannot bear indefinitely. It also means acknowledging that resources will remain insufficient if political confrontation repeatedly consumes them.

Our first duty is to make the state work more coherently with the means already available.

Turning Geography into National Strength

Somalia's strategic position can support a more productive economy and a more capable state. Investment in ports,

transport, energy and communications can connect producers to markets, create employment and develop the skills our younger generation needs. Security cooperation can help protect our territory and maritime resources, provided that it strengthens institutions accountable to Somali law.

These opportunities will yield greater benefits when we negotiate collectively. When authorities pursue separate arrangements without coordination, they risk accepting terms that weaken one another's interests and diminish the country's overall bargaining position.

A common national approach must be negotiated through fair participation. Federal and regional authorities need agreed responsibilities, affected communities must have a voice, and citizens must be able to scrutinise commitments made in their name. Cooperation will endure when each participant has confidence that shared rules protect legitimate interests.

Foreign agreements should be assessed against clear public purposes: the economic benefits they generate, the domestic capacity they build, the obligations they impose and the security risks they create. Their value cannot be measured solely by the financing or diplomatic attention they bring at the moment of signature.

This is especially important where commercial infrastructure acquires military functions. Communities must not discover, after decisions have been taken, that facilities on which their livelihoods depend have exposed them to conflicts they neither chose nor control.

Some external actors may find it easier to work through individual leaders, fragmented authorities or narrow commercial networks. Where immediate access dominates their calculations,

the legitimacy of a partner and the long-term interests of the population can receive too little attention. Somali institutions must supply the scrutiny and safeguards that such relationships may otherwise lack.

Our approach should be open to cooperation and firm about accountability. Reliable rules would protect Somalia while giving responsible partners greater confidence that agreements rest on legitimate authority and can survive changes in leadership.

The strongest negotiating position begins with an agreement among ourselves.

A Peace Citizens Can Trust

A durable political settlement must reach beyond the distribution of offices among leaders. It must give citizens confidence that public authority will protect them, that disagreements can be resolved peacefully and that political change will not threaten their rights.

Part of Somalia's stability rests on what I call "exhausted peace": people refrain from renewed conflict because they remember its costs, although the grievances that produced it remain unresolved. Their restraint has helped preserve the country, but it should never be interpreted as acceptance of injustice.

Nor does this describe every Somali peace settlement. Locally negotiated agreements, customary institutions, commerce and civic initiative have created genuine cooperation, often where formal government offered little protection. These achievements provide foundations on which a stronger national settlement can be built.

The task is to make peaceful cooperation dependable. Citizens should be able to challenge abuse without seeking an armed protector; communities should be able to resolve disputes without fearing permanent exclusion; and political competitors should be able to lose an election while retaining their rights and a credible opportunity to compete again.

This requires constitutional rules that command broad agreement, workable federal arrangements, credible elections, independent justice and security institutions governed by law. The authority of these institutions will depend on whether their rules bind those in power when compliance becomes inconvenient.

Restraint in office is therefore a national asset. Leaders who accept scrutiny, respect institutional independence and honour the limits of their authority make peaceful political succession more credible. They also reduce the fear that encourages communities and political actors to seek protection outside the state.

Justice must be visible in daily life. A qualified young person should have a fair opportunity to obtain employment; a soldier's promotion should reflect merit and service; a business should be able to compete for a public contract without purchasing political favour. Citizens who contribute to the state should see public resources managed honestly and services delivered fairly.

These expectations are central to security. People are more willing to defend institutions when those institutions defend their dignity, protect their rights and recognise their equal place in the nation.

Assuming Responsibility for Our Future

The relationship between legitimacy and security is equally important in confronting Al-Shabaab. The organisation emerged after Somalia's original state collapse and subsequently became one of the most destructive forces perpetuating insecurity and obstructing recovery.

Its terrorism and coercion require a determined security response, while lasting success also demands political cooperation, credible justice and trustworthy administration. Communities need confidence that the restoration of government will bring protection, fair treatment and meaningful avenues for redress.

Security institutions must therefore serve a national purpose that remains consistent across changes of government. Their professionalism, welfare and accountability deserve sustained attention, and their deployment must be guided by lawful public objectives. Using them in political contests damages both their effectiveness and the trust on which their work depends.

International assistance can reinforce this effort, but it cannot supply the domestic legitimacy that Somali leadership must earn. Nor can foreign mediation permanently substitute for the willingness of Somali political actors to honour agreements and accept reasonable compromise.

Greater national responsibility must be matched by greater public accountability. Domestic revenue should finance visible public priorities, procurement should withstand scrutiny, and public appointments should build competence. Each improvement would strengthen the relationship between citizens and the state while reducing opportunities for resources to be diverted towards private political interests.

This work belongs to the whole society. Businesses and the diaspora can invest in the independent institutions that protect the conditions for lasting prosperity. Civil society, professional associations and the media can deepen public debate and expose abuse. Women and young people must have meaningful opportunities to shape decisions, rather than being called upon only to endorse decisions already made.

Government's responsibility is to protect the space in which these contributions can flourish. A country becomes stronger when citizens can question authority, organise peacefully and offer alternatives without fear.

Somalia has the human capacity and strategic opportunities to build a more secure future. What remains essential is leadership that brings those strengths together through fair rules, competent institutions and a willingness to place national continuity above personal tenure.

As the international order changes, we should pursue partnerships with confidence while building the domestic foundations that make confidence credible. Our strategic importance can help attract resources; our political choices will determine whether those resources create enduring national strength.

The future we should work towards is a Somalia that negotiates with others from an agreed national position, governs through institutions its citizens trust and offers every Somali a fair stake in its progress. That is how we preserve sovereignty, secure peace and give the next generation a country whose possibilities are greater than the crises it has inherited.