

## **Pan-Somalism: Unity, Irredentism and Secession**

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Since 1946 the concept of Pan-Somalism has symbolized Somali territorial unity in the Horn of Africa. However, Pan-Somalism mainly translated into irredentist politics that fostered secessionist movements in the neighbouring countries. This paper proposes a reconsideration of the nature of Pan-Somalism looking at the way it was (mis)used by Somali political leadership.

The concept of Pan-Somalism emerged in the late 1940s as a colonial invention and was soon adopted by nationalist parties to pursue the unification of the five regions populated by Somalis in the Horn of Africa. The final goal of Pan-Somalism became famous with the name of Great Somalia—i.e. the constitution of a new territorial unity to embrace French Somaliland, British Somaliland, Italian Somalia, the Ethiopian regions of Ogaden, Haud and Reserved Areas, and the Northern Frontier District of Kenya. Great Somalia was best expressed by the blue flag with a white five-pointed star of the Somali Republic in which the white star symbolizes the five Somali regions. Indeed, the formation of the Somali Republic in 1960 resulted from the unification of former Italian Somalia and British Somaliland and was considered the first success of Pan-Somalism. Subsequently, Pan-Somalism remained the central element of Somali politics: it fostered Somali secessionist movements in Kenya and Ethiopia and their unsuccessful attempts to gain independence. Further, in order to achieve Somali unity, the Somali state indirectly or directly supported those movements and eventually embarked in a disastrous war with Ethiopia (the Ogaden War 1977-78). In fact, the same territorial unity of the Somali state disintegrated in 1991 and a new wave of secessionism emerged within the borders of Somalia.

Based on a historical approach, the paper explores the emergence and development of Pan-Somalism. Specifically, the paper focuses on the role that Somali political leadership had in forging unification policy, irredentist claims and in supporting secessionist movements. Firstly, the paper discusses the basis of Somalis irredentist claims over neighbouring countries and the strict connections with the land within the context of a pastoral society. Secondly, the paper discusses the ambiguous relations between Pan-Somalism and the colonial borders. It suggests that Pan-Somalism mainly emerged in contraposition to colonial borders and that the territorial claims became a key feature of political propaganda. However, the paper argues that irredentism was subject to political manipulation that (mis)used, revised and revived the colonial borders according to particularist purposes and circumstances.