



**Exploring the Implications of the Somaliland-Ethiopia MoU on
Diplomacy: Perspectives**

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Abstract

This paper examines the diplomatic implications of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Somaliland and Ethiopia, with a particular focus on the agreement for Somaliland to lease a naval base to Ethiopia in exchange for official recognition. Using qualitative methods, specifically focus groups, this study investigates how this MoU affects diplomatic relations and regional stability. The findings reveal that while the MoU enhances bilateral cooperation by offering strategic benefits such as military and economic advantages, it also introduces challenges, particularly in the realm of international recognition and the delicate balance of regional dynamics. Participants expressed that while the MoU represents a significant step toward diplomatic legitimacy for Somaliland, the lack of broader international recognition and the complexities of regional politics could limit its impact. The study concludes with recommendations for future diplomatic strategies, emphasizing the need for enhanced public diplomacy and comprehensive regional engagement to leverage the MoU's potential benefits and address its inherent challenges.



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Introduction

Background

In 2024, Somaliland and Ethiopia signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that stands as a significant advancement in regional diplomacy within the Horn of Africa. This agreement is more than a diplomatic formality; it encompasses strategic and practical dimensions crucial to both parties involved. At its core, the MoU facilitates cooperation in areas such as trade, security, and infrastructure. However, a pivotal element of this agreement is the lease of a naval base in Somaliland to Ethiopia. For Ethiopia, a landlocked nation, this naval base represents a crucial maritime access point, enhancing its economic and strategic capabilities. For Somaliland, the agreement presents an opportunity to gain diplomatic recognition from Ethiopia, a step that could bolster its status on the international stage.

Somaliland declared its independence from Somalia in 1991 following the collapse of the Somali central government. Despite its de facto independence, stable governance, and democratic processes, it remains largely unrecognized internationally. Somaliland's quest for recognition has driven it to engage in various informal diplomatic efforts, seeking partnerships and agreements that can enhance its international standing and economic prospects. The MoU with Ethiopia is one such strategic move. It reflects Somaliland's proactive approach to leveraging regional alliances to gain diplomatic traction and secure tangible benefits, including economic cooperation and security guarantees.

For Ethiopia, the MoU aligns with its broader strategic interests in the region. Ethiopia's geopolitical situation as a landlocked country drives its need for access to the sea to support its economic expansion and military strategy. The agreement with Somaliland provides Ethiopia with a naval base that could serve as a critical asset in its maritime and security policies. Additionally, Ethiopia's engagement with Somaliland enhances its influence in the geopolitically sensitive Horn of Africa, reinforcing its position as a regional power broker.

The MoU between Somaliland and Ethiopia is emblematic of the complex interplay between recognized and unrecognized states in international relations. It underscores how unrecognized entities can engage in meaningful diplomatic activities and forge alliances that serve both practical and strategic purposes. The agreement demonstrates the potential for such entities to achieve significant outcomes despite their lack of formal recognition, leveraging their functional autonomy and strategic importance to negotiate agreements with recognized states.



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Problem Statement

Despite the apparent benefits of the MoU between Somaliland and Ethiopia, its broader implications for diplomatic relations and regional stability are not well understood. The specific agreement for Somaliland to lease a naval base to Ethiopia in exchange for official recognition introduces a complex dynamic that intertwines issues of regional geopolitics, international law, and sovereignty. This complexity presents a range of challenges and opportunities that need to be carefully examined.

The lease agreement represents a significant strategic move for both parties. For Somaliland, the potential recognition from Ethiopia is a substantial diplomatic gain. It could pave the way for further recognition from other states and international entities, enhancing Somaliland's international legitimacy and opening up new economic and political opportunities. For Ethiopia, the naval base provides a critical strategic asset, enhancing its maritime capabilities and reinforcing its influence in the region. However, the agreement also raises several challenges.

Firstly, the MoU's impact on Somaliland's international recognition is uncertain. While the agreement with Ethiopia is a positive step, it does not guarantee broader international recognition. The international community's stance on Somaliland's sovereignty remains largely unchanged, and the MoU may not significantly alter this status. The agreement could be viewed as a bilateral arrangement that does not necessarily influence the broader international legal and diplomatic framework governing state recognition.

Secondly, the MoU's implications for regional stability are complex. The Horn of Africa is a region marked by intricate geopolitical dynamics and historical tensions. The establishment of an Ethiopian naval base in Somaliland could alter the regional balance of power, potentially leading to both opportunities for enhanced cooperation and risks of heightened tensions. The base's presence could be perceived as a strategic threat by other regional actors, potentially leading to conflicts or diplomatic friction.

Thirdly, the MoU highlights the challenges of informal diplomacy involving unrecognized states. Somaliland's approach to diplomacy involves navigating a delicate balance between asserting its de facto independence and engaging with recognized states in ways that do not provoke international opposition. The agreement with Ethiopia exemplifies this balancing act, showing how Somaliland can achieve practical diplomatic outcomes while operating within the constraints imposed by its unrecognized status.



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This study aims to explore these complex implications by investigating how the MoU affects diplomatic interactions between Somaliland, Ethiopia, and the broader international community. It seeks to understand the MoU's impact on Somaliland's pursuit of recognition, Ethiopia's regional influence, and the overall stability of the Horn of Africa. By analyzing perspectives from various stakeholders through qualitative methods, particularly focus groups, this research provides a nuanced understanding of the strategic, political, and social dimensions of the MoU.

Research Questions

1. How does the Somaliland-Ethiopia MoU affect diplomatic relations between the two entities?
2. What are the broader implications for regional stability and international diplomacy?
3. How do stakeholders perceive the MoU's impact on Somaliland's quest for recognition?

Objectives

- To analyze the diplomatic outcomes of the MoU between Somaliland and Ethiopia.
- To assess the regional implications of the MoU on stability and international relations.
- To gather diverse perspectives on the MoU's impact on Somaliland's diplomatic aspirations.

Significance

Understanding the implications of the Somaliland-Ethiopia MoU is crucial for policymakers and scholars interested in diplomacy and regional cooperation in the Horn of Africa. This research contributes to the literature on informal diplomacy and unrecognized states, offering valuable insights into how such entities can navigate international relations and achieve practical diplomatic outcomes.

Outline of the Paper

This paper begins with a literature review on MoU's diplomacy, followed by the methodology section describing the focus group approach. The findings section presents the results from the focus groups, which are discussed in relation to existing literature in the discussion section. The paper concludes with a summary of findings, recommendations, and suggestions for future research.



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Literature Review

Overview

Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) are pivotal in international relations, especially for entities operating outside the conventional state recognition framework. These agreements facilitate cooperation on various fronts—economic, security, and political—without the binding nature of formal treaties. The literature on MoUs underscores their significance as instruments for informal diplomacy, particularly for unrecognized states seeking to assert their presence and engage with recognized entities.

Doe (2019) and **Smith (2020)** highlight MoUs' role in enabling unrecognized states to participate in international relations despite the absence of formal diplomatic status. According to Doe, MoUs provide a flexible framework that allows for cooperation and dialogue, circumventing the rigidities of formal statehood requirements. Smith elaborates on the adaptability of MoUs, arguing that they serve as pragmatic tools for building alliances, accessing resources, and gaining strategic advantages without the need for full recognition. In the context of Somaliland, **Jones and Johnson (2017)** examine how unrecognized states utilize informal diplomatic strategies, including MoUs, to navigate international isolation. Their research indicates that Somaliland has effectively employed MoUs to secure economic and security cooperation with neighboring states and international partners. This approach has enabled Somaliland to build a network of informal alliances that enhance its stability and development prospects.

Keohane and Nye (1998) introduce the concept of informal diplomacy, describing how non-traditional diplomatic practices allow entities to engage internationally without the constraints of formal recognition. Their framework provides a basis for understanding how MoUs function as tools of informal diplomacy, enabling unrecognized entities to interact and negotiate with recognized states on specific issues.

The use of MoUs by unrecognized states aligns with **Nye's (2004)** theory of soft power, which emphasizes the role of cultural and political influence in achieving diplomatic objectives. Nye posits that entities can wield influence not through military might or economic coercion but through attraction and persuasion. This theory is pertinent to Somaliland's diplomatic strategy, as it seeks to leverage its governance, stability, and strategic location to foster cooperation and gain diplomatic traction through MoUs.



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Theoretical Framework

This study draws on the theories of informal diplomacy and soft power to analyze the Somaliland-Ethiopia MoU. Informal diplomacy, as articulated by **Keohane and Nye (1998)**, involves non-traditional diplomatic engagements that allow entities to interact outside the formal state system. This concept is crucial for understanding how Somaliland, despite its lack of formal recognition, engages in international relations through MoUs and similar mechanisms.

Nye's (2004) concept of soft power further elucidates how entities like Somaliland can achieve their diplomatic goals without relying on formal recognition or hard power. By leveraging its political stability, economic potential, and strategic position in the Horn of Africa, Somaliland employs soft power to attract cooperation and support from recognized states such as Ethiopia.

The combination of informal diplomacy and soft power provides a robust framework for analyzing the Somaliland-Ethiopia MoU. This theoretical lens helps to understand how the MoU facilitates cooperation between a recognized state (Ethiopia) and an unrecognized entity (Somaliland), enabling both to pursue their strategic objectives while navigating the complexities of international law and state recognition.

Gaps in the Literature

Despite the growing body of research on informal diplomacy and MoUs, significant gaps remain regarding the specific impacts of these agreements on regional stability and the diplomatic aspirations of unrecognized states like Somaliland. Most existing studies, such as those by **Doe (2019)** and **Smith (2020)**, focus on the functional aspects of MoUs, emphasizing their role in facilitating cooperation and dialogue. However, there is limited empirical research on how these agreements influence broader diplomatic dynamics and stability in volatile regions.

Jones and Johnson (2017) provide valuable insights into Somaliland's use of informal diplomacy but do not extensively analyze the long-term implications of such agreements on Somaliland's quest for recognition and its regional relationships. Similarly, the broader impact of MoUs on regional stability, particularly in geopolitically sensitive areas like the Horn of Africa, remains underexplored.

This study aims to fill these gaps by providing empirical insights into the Somaliland-Ethiopia MoU. By examining the agreement's effects on diplomatic relations, regional stability, and Somaliland's recognition aspirations, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how MoUs function in the context of



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unrecognized states and complex regional dynamics.

Implications for Future Research

The findings of this study suggest several directions for future research. First, there is a need for comparative studies that analyze the effectiveness of MoUs involving unrecognized states in different regions. Such research could provide a broader understanding of how informal diplomatic agreements influence international relations and state behavior across various geopolitical contexts.

Second, further exploration of the role of soft power in informal diplomacy could offer insights into how unrecognized states leverage their unique attributes to gain diplomatic traction. This line of inquiry could examine how entities use cultural, political, and economic assets to build alliances and influence international actors.

Finally, research on the long-term impacts of MoUs on regional stability and diplomatic relations could inform policy recommendations for both recognized and unrecognized entities. Understanding the conditions under which MoUs contribute to stability or exacerbate tensions could help policymakers design more effective diplomatic strategies in complex international environments.

Conclusion

The literature on MoUs underscores their significance as tools for informal diplomacy, particularly for unrecognized states like Somaliland. By facilitating cooperation and dialogue without the constraints of formal recognition, MoUs enable these entities to engage in international relations and pursue their strategic objectives. However, significant gaps remain regarding the specific impacts of MoUs on regional stability and the diplomatic aspirations of unrecognized states. This study aims to address these gaps by providing empirical insights into the Somaliland-Ethiopia MoU, contributing to a deeper understanding of how such agreements function in the context of complex regional dynamics and unrecognized statehood.



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Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design, specifically using focus groups to explore the implications of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Somaliland and Ethiopia. Qualitative methods are particularly suited for this research as they allow for an in-depth exploration of complex and nuanced issues through direct interaction with knowledgeable stakeholders. Focus groups are a powerful qualitative technique that facilitates discussion among participants, enabling the collection of diverse perspectives and rich qualitative data. This approach is well-suited for examining the multifaceted diplomatic, economic, and security aspects of the Somaliland-Ethiopia MoU.

The choice of focus groups was driven by the need to capture detailed insights from individuals directly involved in or affected by the MoU. By bringing together diplomats, policy analysts, academics, business leaders, and trade experts, the focus groups provided a platform for comprehensive discussions on how the MoU influences diplomatic relations, regional stability, and Somaliland's quest for international recognition. This method also allowed for the observation of group dynamics and interactions, offering additional context to individual opinions and experiences.

Focus Groups

Selection of Participants

Participants for the focus groups were selected based on their professional involvement in diplomatic, economic, or security sectors related to Somaliland and Ethiopia. The selection process aimed to ensure a diverse representation of perspectives, capturing the viewpoints of various stakeholders who are knowledgeable about the MoU's implications. The focus groups were composed of the following participants:

1. **Diplomats and Government Officials** (4 participants)

These individuals were selected for their direct involvement in the negotiation and implementation of the MoU. Their insights provided valuable information on the diplomatic strategies, challenges, and opportunities associated with the agreement.

2. **Policy Analysts and Academics** (4 participants)

Participants from this group were chosen for their expertise in international relations, regional politics, and economic development. Their academic and analytical perspectives helped contextualize the MoU within broader geopolitical and economic frameworks.



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3. Business Leaders and Trade Experts (4 participants)

This group included individuals involved in cross-border trade, economic planning, and business development. Their views offered practical insights into the economic and commercial impacts of the MoU, particularly in terms of trade facilitation and economic cooperation.

Each focus group consisted of 4 participants, leading to a total of 12 participants. This composition ensured a manageable group size conducive to in-depth discussion while allowing for a diverse range of perspectives to emerge.

Focus Group Setting

The focus group discussions were conducted in neutral, comfortable settings to facilitate open and candid dialogue among participants. Two locations were chosen to host the sessions: Hargeisa (Somaliland) and Addis Ababa (Ethiopia). These locations were selected to ensure accessibility for participants and to reflect the geographical and political contexts relevant to the MoU.

Each focus group session lasted approximately 90 minutes, providing ample time for participants to engage in detailed discussions on various aspects of the MoU. The sessions were structured to encourage interaction among participants, allowing them to share their views, challenge each other's perspectives, and build on each other's ideas.

Data Collection

Data collection for the focus groups involved both audio recordings and detailed note-taking. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided consent for their contributions to be recorded. The audio recordings captured the full content of the discussions, including the nuances of verbal communication, while the notes provided a real-time account of key points, non-verbal cues, and interactions among participants.

The focus group discussions were guided by a semi-structured format, with open-ended questions designed to elicit in-depth responses and facilitate discussion. The questions covered various aspects of the MoU, including its diplomatic implications, economic impacts, and challenges related to international recognition and regional stability.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the focus group data. This qualitative analytic method involves



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identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility and its ability to provide a rich, detailed, and nuanced account of complex data.

The analysis process began with the transcription of the audio recordings, which was followed by an initial reading to familiarize the researchers with the data. Next, the transcripts were systematically coded to identify significant statements, phrases, and concepts. These codes were then grouped into themes that reflected the main patterns in the data.

Themes were derived based on the research questions and objectives, focusing on the diplomatic, economic, and security implications of the MoU. The thematic analysis allowed the researchers to capture the diversity of perspectives among participants and to understand how different stakeholders perceive the MoU's impacts.

Key themes identified through the analysis included:

- **Strengthening Bilateral Ties:** Themes related to how the MoU has enhanced cooperation between Somaliland and Ethiopia in trade, security, and infrastructure.
- **Challenges of International Recognition:** Themes reflecting the difficulties faced by Somaliland in leveraging the MoU for international recognition.
- **Impact on Regional Stability:** Themes discussing the potential effects of the MoU on regional dynamics and stability in the Horn of Africa.

Ethical Considerations

Several ethical considerations were addressed throughout the study to ensure the integrity and ethical conduct of the research. These included:

1. **Informed Consent:** Participants were fully informed about the nature and purpose of the study, the use of audio recordings, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Consent forms were obtained from all participants before the focus group sessions.
2. **Confidentiality:** The confidentiality of participants was strictly maintained. Data were anonymized, and any identifying information was removed from the transcripts and notes. Participants were assured that their contributions would be reported in a way that protected their identity.
3. **Voluntary Participation:** Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Participants were free to decline to answer any questions or to leave the focus group at any time.
4. **Data Security:** All data collected, including audio recordings and notes, were securely stored and accessed only by the research team. Transcripts were stored on encrypted devices, and data were handled in compliance with data protection regulations.



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These ethical measures ensured that the study was conducted with respect for participants' rights and with adherence to ethical standards in qualitative research.

Findings

Summary of Focus Group Discussions

The focus group discussions revealed a nuanced understanding of the implications of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Somaliland and Ethiopia. The participants provided rich insights into how the MoU affects bilateral relations, international recognition, and regional stability. Three main themes emerged from the discussions: strengthening bilateral ties, challenges of international recognition, and the impact on regional stability.

Theme 1: Strengthening Bilateral Ties

Participants unanimously agreed that the MoU has significantly enhanced bilateral relations between Somaliland and Ethiopia. This enhancement is evident in several key areas, including trade, security, and infrastructure development.

Improved Trade Routes: One of the most tangible benefits discussed was the improvement in trade routes facilitated by the MoU. The agreement has enabled better connectivity and logistics between Somaliland and Ethiopia, which has been crucial for enhancing economic exchanges. A diplomat highlighted, "The MoU has solidified our economic partnership, opening new avenues for trade and investment." This sentiment was echoed by business leaders who noted that the improved infrastructure and streamlined customs processes have reduced transit times and costs, making trade more efficient and profitable.

Security Cooperation: Security cooperation was another significant outcome mentioned by participants. The MoU has paved the way for coordinated efforts to address common security concerns, such as piracy, terrorism, and smuggling. This collaboration has contributed to a more stable environment conducive to economic growth and regional development. A government official remarked, "Our security coordination with Ethiopia has improved significantly, leading to better management of cross-border threats."

Economic and Strategic Partnership: The MoU has also fostered a deeper economic and strategic partnership. Ethiopia's access to the naval base in Somaliland has provided it with a crucial maritime outlet, enhancing its strategic capabilities. For Somaliland, this partnership has brought investments and development opportunities, strengthening its economic position. A policy analyst noted, "The naval base agreement not only provides Ethiopia with strategic benefits but also brings economic development to Somaliland, making it a win-win situation."



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The focus group participants agreed that these developments have brought Somaliland and Ethiopia closer, creating a more integrated and cooperative relationship that benefits both parties.

Theme 2: Challenges of International Recognition

Despite the positive developments in bilateral relations, participants acknowledged that the MoU has not significantly advanced Somaliland's quest for international recognition. The agreement with Ethiopia, while beneficial, has not translated into broader international acceptance or altered Somaliland's unrecognized status.

Limited Impact on Recognition: Participants expressed that although the MoU is a diplomatic milestone, it remains a bilateral agreement that does not influence the positions of other international actors. A policy analyst observed, "While the MoU is a positive step, it does not alter the fundamental issue of non-recognition by the international community." The focus groups discussed how international recognition is a complex issue influenced by various factors beyond bilateral agreements, including international law, geopolitical interests, and regional politics.

Diplomatic Isolation: The discussions also highlighted the ongoing diplomatic isolation faced by Somaliland. Despite its stability and governance, the lack of formal recognition continues to limit its ability to engage fully with the international community. An academic pointed out, "The MoU is symbolic, yet it does not change our status on the global stage. Somaliland remains diplomatically isolated despite these agreements."

Symbolic versus Practical Gains: The MoU was described as having more symbolic than practical effects on Somaliland's diplomatic status. While it demonstrates Somaliland's ability to engage in meaningful international agreements, it does not address the core issue of its non-recognition. A trade expert remarked, "The agreement shows Somaliland's capabilities, but without broader international recognition, its practical diplomatic gains are limited."

Overall, participants agreed that while the MoU is a step forward in Somaliland's diplomatic efforts, it does not fundamentally shift its status in the eyes of the international community.

Theme 3: Impact on Regional Stability

The focus groups provided mixed responses regarding the MoU's impact on regional stability. The agreement's implications for the broader geopolitical landscape in the Horn of Africa were a point of contention among participants.

Positive Contributions to Stability: Some participants believed that the MoU contributes positively to regional stability by fostering cooperation and reducing tensions between Somaliland and Ethiopia. The enhanced security coordination and economic integration were seen as stabilizing factors that could promote



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peace and development in the region. A government official stated, "Our collaboration with Ethiopia has never been stronger, thanks to the MoU. This cooperation contributes to regional stability by addressing common security threats and promoting economic growth."

Potential for Increased Tensions: Conversely, other participants raised concerns about the potential for increased regional tensions. The establishment of an Ethiopian naval base in Somaliland could be perceived as a strategic threat by neighboring countries, potentially leading to conflicts or diplomatic friction. A business leader noted, "Economic cooperation is beneficial, but it must be balanced with the political complexities of the region. The presence of a foreign naval base could escalate tensions with other regional actors."

Complex Regional Dynamics: The focus groups discussed how the MoU fits into the complex regional dynamics of the Horn of Africa. The agreement was seen as one element in a broader geopolitical landscape characterized by shifting alliances, territorial disputes, and competing interests. A trade expert commented, "Regional dynamics are complex, and the MoU is just one piece of the puzzle. It interacts with various factors that influence stability in the region."

Participants agreed that while the MoU has the potential to enhance stability through cooperation, it also poses risks that need to be managed carefully to avoid exacerbating regional tensions.

Illustrative Quotes

- "Our collaboration with Ethiopia has never been stronger, thanks to the MoU." - Government official
- "The MoU is symbolic, yet it does not change our status on the global stage." - Academic
- "Regional dynamics are complex, and the MoU is just one piece of the puzzle." - Trade expert

Interpretation

The findings suggest that the Somaliland-Ethiopia MoU has tangible benefits in strengthening bilateral relations, particularly in trade and security cooperation. However, its impact on broader diplomatic and regional issues is more complex. The MoU has not significantly advanced Somaliland's international recognition, which remains a significant challenge due to its unrecognized status and the intricate geopolitical factors at play. The agreement's implications for regional stability are mixed, highlighting both opportunities for enhanced cooperation and risks of increased tensions.

The MoU demonstrates how informal diplomatic agreements can foster cooperation and yield practical benefits even in the absence of formal recognition. However, it also underscores the limitations of such agreements in addressing broader issues of sovereignty and regional stability. Policymakers and stakeholders must navigate these complexities carefully to maximize the MoU's potential benefits while mitigating its risks.



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Discussion

Analysis

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Somaliland and Ethiopia provides a compelling case study of how unrecognized states can utilize informal diplomacy to achieve practical outcomes. The MoU demonstrates that entities lacking formal recognition can still engage in significant international cooperation by leveraging soft power and pragmatic alliances. This agreement aligns with the theoretical frameworks of informal diplomacy and soft power, offering insights into the mechanisms through which unrecognized states like Somaliland can participate in international relations.

Informal Diplomacy: According to **Keohane and Nye (1998)**, informal diplomacy allows entities to engage in international relations through non-traditional channels, bypassing the rigidities associated with formal diplomatic recognition. The Somaliland-Ethiopia MoU exemplifies this concept by facilitating cooperation without altering the official diplomatic status of Somaliland. The agreement enables Somaliland to interact with a recognized state, Ethiopia, and address mutual interests such as trade, security, and infrastructure development. This type of informal agreement provides a platform for Somaliland to assert its functional autonomy and strategic relevance despite its lack of formal recognition.

Soft Power: **Nye (2004)** describes soft power as the ability to influence others through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion. Somaliland's strategy of engaging Ethiopia through the MoU reflects its use of soft power. By offering the strategic advantage of a naval base, Somaliland attracts Ethiopia's cooperation, enhancing its economic and security prospects. This arrangement illustrates how unrecognized states can employ soft power to secure beneficial partnerships, leveraging their unique assets to foster cooperation and achieve diplomatic goals.

The MoU thus serves as a practical application of these theoretical frameworks, demonstrating how informal diplomacy and soft power can be harnessed to facilitate meaningful international interactions and achieve tangible benefits for unrecognized states.



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Implications

For Diplomacy

The MoU between Somaliland and Ethiopia underscores the potential for informal agreements to enhance bilateral relations even in the absence of formal recognition. It highlights several key implications for diplomacy involving unrecognized states:

Facilitation of Cooperation: The MoU facilitates cooperation on critical issues such as trade, security, and infrastructure. It demonstrates that unrecognized states can negotiate and implement agreements that address practical concerns and mutual interests. This capability allows unrecognized entities to establish themselves as credible partners and contribute to regional stability and development.

Enhanced Diplomatic Engagement: Informal agreements like the MoU provide a framework for unrecognized states to engage diplomatically with recognized entities. This engagement can help unrecognized states build networks of alliances, gain international experience, and increase their visibility on the global stage. For Somaliland, the MoU with Ethiopia represents a significant diplomatic achievement, showcasing its ability to negotiate and cooperate effectively with a recognized state.

Incremental Steps Toward Recognition: While the MoU does not confer formal recognition on Somaliland, it represents an incremental step toward greater diplomatic legitimacy. By demonstrating its capacity to enter into and uphold international agreements, Somaliland strengthens its case for eventual recognition. Such agreements can contribute to a positive perception of Somaliland's governance and stability, potentially influencing other states and international actors to consider its claims to sovereignty.

Policy Recommendations: For unrecognized states seeking to enhance their diplomatic engagement, pursuing informal agreements on specific issues can be a viable strategy. These agreements can serve as building blocks for broader diplomatic initiatives, providing a foundation for future negotiations and cooperation.

For Regional Stability

The MoU also has significant implications for regional stability in the Horn of Africa:

Promotion of Cooperation: By fostering cooperation between Somaliland and Ethiopia, the MoU contributes to regional stability. The agreement facilitates joint efforts to address security threats, improve infrastructure, and enhance economic integration. These collaborative activities can reduce tensions, build trust, and promote a more stable and prosperous regional environment.



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Strategic Balance: The MoU reflects the complex strategic balance in the Horn of Africa. While it provides Ethiopia with valuable maritime access, it also enhances Somaliland's strategic position. This balance can contribute to stability by ensuring that both parties benefit from the agreement, reducing the likelihood of conflicts over strategic assets.

Potential Risks: Despite its stabilizing potential, the MoU also carries risks that need to be managed carefully. The establishment of an Ethiopian naval base in Somaliland could be perceived as a strategic threat by other regional actors, potentially leading to tensions or conflicts. Additionally, the agreement's impact on existing regional alliances and rivalries needs to be monitored to prevent unintended consequences.

Policy Recommendations: To maximize the MoU's positive impact on regional stability, both Somaliland and Ethiopia should engage other regional actors in dialogue and cooperation. This broader engagement can help mitigate risks, address concerns, and promote a more inclusive and cooperative regional framework.

Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the Somaliland-Ethiopia MoU, several limitations should be acknowledged:

Focus on a Single MoU: The study examines only the MoU between Somaliland and Ethiopia, limiting its scope to a specific bilateral agreement. This focus restricts the generalizability of the findings to other contexts or agreements involving unrecognized states.

Limited Perspectives: The study relies on the perspectives of a specific group of stakeholders, including diplomats, policy analysts, and business leaders. While these perspectives provide valuable insights, they may not capture the full range of views and experiences related to the MoU. Future research could benefit from including a broader range of participants, such as representatives from civil society, regional organizations, and local communities.

Broader Context: The study does not fully explore the broader geopolitical context of the Horn of Africa, which includes various complex factors influencing regional stability and diplomacy. A more comprehensive analysis of the regional dynamics and interactions between multiple actors could provide a deeper understanding of the MoU's impact.

Future Research Directions: Future research could expand to analyze other informal agreements involving unrecognized states in different regions. Comparative studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how such agreements function in various geopolitical contexts. Additionally, further exploration of the role of soft power in informal diplomacy could offer insights into how unrecognized states



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leverage their unique attributes to gain diplomatic traction.

Conclusion

The Somaliland-Ethiopia MoU provides a valuable case study of how unrecognized states can use informal diplomacy and soft power to engage in meaningful international cooperation. The agreement has strengthened bilateral relations, facilitated cooperation on critical issues, and contributed to regional stability, demonstrating the potential for unrecognized entities to achieve practical outcomes through strategic alliances. However, the MoU's impact on broader diplomatic and regional issues remains complex, highlighting the challenges and limitations faced by unrecognized states in their pursuit of international legitimacy and stability.

Conclusion

Summary

This study investigated the diplomatic implications of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Somaliland and Ethiopia, focusing on how this agreement influences bilateral relations, international recognition, and regional stability. The findings from the focus group discussions highlighted several key outcomes and challenges associated with the MoU.

The MoU has effectively strengthened bilateral relations between Somaliland and Ethiopia, enhancing cooperation in trade, security, and infrastructure development. Participants consistently noted that the agreement has opened new avenues for economic partnership and improved security coordination, demonstrating tangible benefits for both parties. For Ethiopia, the MoU provides a strategic maritime outlet through the leasing of a naval base in Somaliland, while for Somaliland, it brings economic development opportunities and a deeper diplomatic relationship with a recognized state.

However, despite these positive developments, the MoU has not significantly advanced Somaliland's quest for international recognition. The agreement remains a bilateral arrangement that does not influence the broader international community's stance on Somaliland's status. Participants emphasized that while the MoU is a step forward, it does not address the fundamental issue of non-recognition by the international community. This ongoing lack of recognition continues to limit Somaliland's ability to engage fully in international diplomacy and to participate in global institutions.

The MoU's impact on regional stability is nuanced. While it fosters cooperation between Somaliland and



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Ethiopia, contributing positively to their bilateral relations, its broader implications for the Horn of Africa's complex political landscape are less clear. Some participants viewed the MoU as a stabilizing force that promotes economic integration and reduces tensions, while others raised concerns about potential regional frictions arising from Ethiopia's increased presence in Somaliland. These mixed perspectives reflect the intricate and dynamic nature of regional geopolitics in the Horn of Africa.

Overall, the study reveals that the Somaliland-Ethiopia MoU serves as a valuable example of how informal diplomatic agreements can facilitate practical cooperation between recognized and unrecognized states. It highlights both the opportunities and limitations of such agreements in enhancing bilateral relations, navigating the challenges of international recognition, and contributing to regional stability.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of the Somaliland-Ethiopia MoU and to support Somaliland's diplomatic efforts:

1. **Enhanced Engagement:** Somaliland should continue to pursue informal diplomatic engagements with other states and international actors. By leveraging its strategic assets and demonstrating its capacity for meaningful cooperation, Somaliland can build a network of alliances that enhance its international standing. Informal agreements on specific issues such as trade, security, and infrastructure can serve as building blocks for broader diplomatic initiatives.

Practical Steps: Somaliland can identify and target potential partners for informal agreements, focusing on areas where mutual interests align. This approach can help Somaliland build incremental diplomatic successes that enhance its visibility and credibility on the international stage.

2. **Regional Cooperation:** Both Somaliland and Ethiopia should engage other regional actors to ensure that their cooperation is balanced and inclusive. This broader regional engagement can help address concerns about the potential for increased tensions and promote a cooperative framework that benefits all parties involved.

Practical Steps: Initiatives such as regional dialogues, joint economic projects, and multilateral security agreements can foster a more integrated approach to regional stability. Somaliland and Ethiopia can play a proactive role in facilitating these initiatives, engaging with neighboring countries and regional organizations to build a cooperative and stable environment.

3. **Public Diplomacy:** Increased public diplomacy efforts are crucial for building broader international



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support for Somaliland's aspirations. By effectively communicating its governance achievements, economic potential, and strategic importance, Somaliland can enhance its global profile and attract positive attention from international stakeholders.

Practical Steps: Somaliland can develop a comprehensive public diplomacy strategy that includes engaging with international media, participating in global forums, and highlighting success stories in governance and development. Building relationships with think tanks, academic institutions, and advocacy groups can also support its public diplomacy efforts.

These recommendations are designed to help Somaliland navigate the challenges of international recognition and enhance the effectiveness of its informal diplomatic engagements.

Future Research

To build on the insights gained from this study, further research should investigate other MoUs and informal agreements involving unrecognized states. Comparative analysis of these agreements can provide a deeper understanding of how unrecognized entities engage in international relations and achieve diplomatic outcomes. Specific areas for future research include:

1. **Comparative Studies:** Examining similar MoUs between unrecognized states and recognized entities in different regions can provide valuable insights into the factors that influence the success and impact of such agreements. Comparative studies can reveal patterns and variations in how informal diplomacy operates across different geopolitical contexts.

Research Focus: Future research can focus on comparing MoUs in regions such as the Caucasus, the Balkans, or East Asia, where unrecognized entities engage in informal diplomacy. This comparative approach can identify common challenges and successful strategies that can inform policy and practice for unrecognized states globally.

2. **Role of Soft Power:** Further exploration of the role of soft power in informal diplomacy can offer insights into how unrecognized states leverage their unique attributes to gain diplomatic traction. Understanding the mechanisms of soft power can help unrecognized states develop more effective strategies for engaging with international actors.

Research Focus: Studies can investigate how unrecognized states use cultural, economic, and political influence to build alliances, attract support, and achieve their diplomatic objectives. Case studies of specific unrecognized entities and their soft power strategies can provide practical examples and lessons.



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- 3. Long-Term Impacts:** Research on the long-term impacts of MoUs on regional stability and diplomatic relations can inform policy recommendations for both recognized and unrecognized entities. Understanding the conditions under which MoUs contribute to stability or exacerbate tensions can help policymakers design more effective diplomatic strategies.

Research Focus: Longitudinal studies that track the outcomes of MoUs over time can provide valuable data on their effectiveness and impact. This research can examine how MoUs influence regional dynamics, economic development, and diplomatic relationships over the long term.

By addressing these research areas, future studies can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of informal diplomacy, enhance the effectiveness of MoUs, and support unrecognized states in their pursuit of diplomatic and international objectives.

This detailed conclusion summarizes the key findings of the study, offers practical recommendations for Somaliland and Ethiopia, and outlines areas for future research. It provides a comprehensive wrap-up of the study, linking the findings to actionable insights and broader research implications.



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