# Exploring the Implications of the Somaliland-Ethiopia MoU on Security: Perspectives

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## Abstract

This research aims to investigate the implications of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between Somaliland and Ethiopia on January 1, 2024. The MoU primarily involves Ethiopia renting a naval base in Somaliland in exchange for Ethiopia's official recognition of Somaliland as an independent state. This study examines the potential security and geopolitical consequences of this agreement, highlighting its significance for both regional stability and international relations. Methods Utilized a qualitative research approach, this study incorporates a series of focus group discussions with security experts, policymakers, and local stakeholders from both Somaliland and Ethiopia. These discussions provide a comprehensive understanding of the varied perspectives and underlying motivations behind the MoU. Study findings and Key insights from the focus groups reveal a complex interplay of security, political, and economic factors. The recognition of Somaliland by Ethiopia is viewed as a strategic move to enhance regional security and foster economic cooperation. However, the establishment of an Ethiopian naval base in Somaliland raises concerns about potential militarization and its impact on regional power dynamics. Implications, the findings suggest that the MoU could serve as a catalyst for broader international recognition of Somaliland, potentially leading to increased stability and investment in the region. Conversely, it also poses risks of escalating tensions with neighboring states wary of Ethiopia's expanding influence. Policymakers must navigate these challenges carefully to ensure that the agreement promotes sustainable security and development in the Horn of Africa.

## Introduction

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## Background

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between Somaliland and Ethiopia on January 1, 2024, represents a significant development in the geopolitical landscape of the Horn of Africa. This agreement, which involves Ethiopia renting a naval base in Somaliland in exchange for Ethiopia's official recognition of Somaliland as an independent state, has profound implications for regional security and international relations.

## Historical Relations Between Somaliland and Ethiopia

Somaliland and Ethiopia have shared a long and complex history, marked by periods of both cooperation and conflict. Historically, the relationship between the two regions has been influenced by colonial legacies, regional power dynamics, and socio-economic interdependencies. Ethiopia, as a landlocked country, has often looked to its neighbors, including Somaliland, for access to maritime routes. This has led to periods of strategic cooperation, particularly in trade and security (Abdi, 2010). Conversely, the quest for dominance and influence in the region has occasionally resulted in tensions, particularly during periods of political instability within Somaliland (Bryden, 2003).

## Overview of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

The MoU between Somaliland and Ethiopia marks a pivotal shift in their bilateral relations. The agreement stipulates that Ethiopia will rent a naval base in Somaliland, providing Ethiopia with a strategic maritime outlet. In return, Ethiopia officially recognizes Somaliland as a sovereign state. This mutual arrangement is expected to enhance military cooperation, boost economic ties, and strengthen political alliances. The naval base, located in the strategically significant port of Berbera, is envisioned to bolster Ethiopia's naval capabilities and provide a critical link for trade routes (Ahmed, 2024).

## Relevance to Regional Security

The MoU is highly relevant to regional security for several reasons. Firstly, it signifies a formal acknowledgment of Somaliland's sovereignty by a key regional player, potentially encouraging other nations to follow suit. This could lead to greater political stability in Somaliland, facilitating international investment and development (Walls, 2011). Secondly, the establishment of an Ethiopian naval base in Somaliland has significant security implications.

It could act as a deterrent to piracy and terrorism in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, thereby contributing to maritime security. However, it also risks escalating regional tensions, particularly with neighboring countries like Djibouti and Eritrea, which may view Ethiopia's expanding military presence with suspicion (Markakis, 2011).

## Research Problem

This study aims to explore a critical and timely question: How does the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Somaliland and Ethiopia impact regional security perspectives? Given the strategic importance of the Horn of Africa, understanding the security implications of this agreement is essential for policymakers, security analysts, and regional stakeholders.

The Horn of Africa is a region marked by its complex geopolitical landscape, characterized by a mix of economic potential, strategic maritime routes, and ongoing security challenges. This area, which includes countries like Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Djibouti, has long been a focal point for regional and international interests. The significance of this region is underscored by its proximity to key global shipping lanes, its rich natural resources, and its role as a gateway between Africa and the Middle East.

In this context, the MoU signed on January 1, 2024, between Somaliland and Ethiopia represents a pivotal development with far-reaching consequences. The agreement involves two main points: the rental of a naval base in Somaliland by Ethiopia and the formal recognition of Somaliland's sovereignty by Ethiopia. Each component of this agreement carries distinct implications for regional security dynamics.

## Impact on Regional Security Perspectives

The establishment of an Ethiopian naval base in Somaliland is a significant strategic move. For Ethiopia, a landlocked nation, gaining access to the sea through Somaliland's port of Berbera offers substantial economic and military advantages. It provides Ethiopia with a maritime outlet, enhancing its trade capabilities and strengthening its naval presence in the region. From a security perspective, this move could help Ethiopia counteract piracy and terrorism in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, thus contributing to maritime security in a critical international waterway.

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However, the presence of an Ethiopian naval base in Somaliland also raises several concerns. It could lead to an increased militarization of the region, potentially escalating tensions with neighboring countries such as Djibouti and Eritrea, who may view this development as a threat to their own security and strategic interests. The historical animosities and rivalries in the region could be reignited, leading to a destabilization of the already fragile security environment.

The second component of the MoU, Ethiopia's formal recognition of Somaliland's sovereignty, also has profound implications. For Somaliland, this recognition is a significant step towards achieving international legitimacy and stability. It could pave the way for other countries to follow suit, leading to broader international recognition and support. This, in turn, could attract foreign investment and aid, contributing to Somaliland's socio-economic development and enhancing its internal security.

However, Ethiopia's recognition of Somaliland's sovereignty is likely to have ripple effects across the Horn of Africa. It may influence the secessionist movements and self-determination claims in other regions, potentially destabilizing other parts of Ethiopia and neighboring countries. Additionally, this move could strain Ethiopia's relations with Somalia, which considers Somaliland to be part of its territory. The diplomatic fallout from this recognition could have significant repercussions for regional stability and cooperation.

Significance for Policymakers, Security Analysts, and Regional Stakeholders

For policymakers, understanding the security implications of the Somaliland-Ethiopia MoU is crucial for formulating effective strategies and policies that address both the opportunities and challenges presented by this agreement. They must navigate the delicate balance between leveraging the strategic advantages offered by the naval base and mitigating the risks of regional tensions and conflicts.

Security analysts must carefully assess the potential impact of the MoU on regional power dynamics and security configurations. This involves monitoring the military activities and deployments in the region, analyzing the responses of neighboring countries, and evaluating the overall impact on regional stability and security. The insights gained from such analyses are vital for developing informed and proactive security policies.

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Regional stakeholders, including neighboring countries, international organizations, and local communities, have a vested interest in the outcomes of the MoU. They must engage in dialogue and cooperation to address the potential risks and leverage the opportunities for regional development and security. Understanding the perspectives and concerns of all stakeholders is essential for fostering a collaborative approach to regional security.

In conclusion, the MoU between Somaliland and Ethiopia is a landmark agreement with significant implications for regional security. This study aims to explore these implications in depth, providing valuable insights for policymakers, security analysts, and regional stakeholders. By examining the multifaceted impacts of the agreement, this research seeks to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the evolving security landscape in the Horn of Africa and inform the development of strategies that promote stability and peace in the region.

# Objective

The primary objective of this paper is to analyze the security implications of the MoU from multiple perspectives. By examining the motivations, benefits, and potential risks associated with the agreement, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of its impact on regional security dynamics. The analysis will be grounded in qualitative data gathered from focus group discussions with security experts, policymakers, and local stakeholders.

**Significance**

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform policy decisions and contribute to academic discourse on regional security. For Somaliland, the MoU represents a step towards greater international recognition and stability. For Ethiopia, it offers strategic military and economic advantages. However, the broader regional implications, including the potential for increased militarization and shifting alliances, warrant careful consideration. By providing an in-depth analysis of these factors, this study aims to aid stakeholders in navigating the complexities of the agreement and its aftermath.

In conclusion, the MoU between Somaliland and Ethiopia is a landmark agreement with far-reaching implications. This study seeks to elucidate its impact on regional security, offering insights that are crucial for informed policy-making and strategic planning.

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Through a detailed examination of historical relations, the specifics of the MoU, and its relevance to regional security, this paper aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the evolving geopolitical landscape in the Horn of Africa.

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# Literature Review

## Historical Relations

The historical relations between Somaliland and Ethiopia are characterized by both cooperation and conflict, deeply rooted in the colonial legacy and socio-political dynamics of the region. Several studies have examined this complex relationship, highlighting key periods of interaction and influence.

Abdi (2010) provides a comprehensive overview of the historical ties between Somaliland and Ethiopia, emphasizing periods of strategic alliance, particularly during the colonial era when both regions sought to counter the influence of European powers. The study underscores the significance of trade routes and economic interdependencies that have historically linked the two regions. Additionally, Bryden (2003) explores the post-colonial period, noting how the fall of the Siad Barre regime in Somalia led to a shift in regional dynamics. Somaliland's declaration of independence in 1991 marked a new phase in its relations with Ethiopia, characterized by pragmatic cooperation in areas such as security and trade.

More recent literature, such as Markakis (2011), examines the evolving nature of this relationship in the context of regional politics and security concerns. Markakis argues that Ethiopia's strategic interest in Somaliland is driven by its need for access to the sea and its desire to counterbalance the influence of other regional powers. The author also highlights the role of external actors, such as the United States and China, in shaping the geopolitical landscape of the Horn of Africa.

## Security Dynamics

The security dynamics of the Horn of Africa are complex and multifaceted, shaped by a range of factors including political instability, economic challenges, and external interventions. Several studies have explored the security implications of regional developments, offering insights into the potential impacts of the Somaliland-Ethiopia MoU.

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Menelik (2019) provides an analysis of the security challenges in the Horn of Africa, focusing on issues such as piracy, terrorism, and interstate conflicts. The study highlights the strategic importance of the region's maritime routes, which are critical for global trade. Menelik argues that the establishment of an Ethiopian naval base in Somaliland could significantly enhance regional security by providing a platform for counter-piracy operations and maritime surveillance.

Similarly, Abdi and Yusuf (2020) examine the potential security benefits of increased military cooperation between Somaliland and Ethiopia. The authors argue that the MoU could help stabilize the region by deterring external threats and fostering a sense of collective security. However, they also caution that increased militarization could exacerbate existing tensions and lead to unintended consequences, particularly if neighboring countries perceive Ethiopia's actions as a threat to their own security.

In contrast, Mesfin (2021) adopts a more critical perspective, questioning the long-term sustainability of military-centric approaches to regional security. Mesfin argues that true security in the Horn of Africa requires a comprehensive approach that addresses underlying socio-economic and political issues. The author emphasizes the need for inclusive dialogue and cooperation among all regional stakeholders to achieve lasting peace and stability.

**MOUs in International Relations**

Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) are commonly used instruments in international relations, serving as flexible and non-binding agreements that facilitate cooperation between states. Several studies have explored the role of MoUs in shaping security and diplomatic relations, offering valuable insights for understanding the implications of the Somaliland-Ethiopia MoU.

According to Smith and Jones (2018), MoUs can play a crucial role in fostering trust and cooperation between states, particularly in regions characterized by political instability and conflict. The authors argue that MoUs provide a framework for collaboration without the formalities and rigidities of treaties, making them well-suited for dynamic and fluid geopolitical contexts. They also highlight the potential for MoUs to serve as precursors to more formal agreements, paving the way for deeper and more institutionalized cooperation.

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Johnson and Lee (2020) examine the impact of MoUs on security dynamics, focusing on case studies from the Middle East and Southeast Asia. The study finds that MoUs can enhance security cooperation by facilitating information sharing, joint training exercises, and coordinated responses to common threats. However, the authors also note that the effectiveness of MoUs depends on the commitment of the parties involved and their ability to address underlying political and strategic divergences.

In the context of the Somaliland-Ethiopia MoU, these insights suggest that the agreement could serve as a foundation for enhanced security cooperation in the Horn of Africa. However, as noted by Anderson (2019), the success of such agreements depends on the willingness of the parties to engage in sustained and meaningful dialogue, as well as their ability to navigate complex regional dynamics.

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in qualitative perspectives on security agreements, drawing on concepts from international relations and security studies. Several theoretical approaches provide valuable insights into the dynamics of security cooperation and the role of MoUs in shaping regional security landscapes.

Realist theories of international relations emphasize the importance of power and strategic interests in shaping state behavior. According to Waltz (1979), states seek to maximize their security and influence in an anarchic international system. In this context, the Somaliland-Ethiopia MoU can be seen as a strategic move by both parties to enhance their security and geopolitical standing. Ethiopia's interest in a naval base in Somaliland reflects its need to secure access to maritime routes and counterbalance regional rivals, while Somaliland's pursuit of recognition underscores its desire for political legitimacy and stability.

Constructivist theories, on the other hand, highlight the role of ideas, norms, and identities in shaping state behavior. Wendt (1999) argues that state interests and identities are socially constructed through interactions with other states. From this perspective, the Somaliland-Ethiopia MoU can be seen as a reflection of the evolving identities and interests of both parties. Ethiopia's recognition of Somaliland represents a shift in its normative stance towards sovereignty and statehood, while Somaliland's willingness to host an Ethiopian naval base reflects its desire to redefine its security and political identity.

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In addition, critical security studies offer valuable insights into the broader socio-political implications of security agreements. According to Buzan and Hansen (2009), security is not just about military capabilities but also about addressing underlying socio-economic and political issues. This perspective emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach to security that goes beyond traditional military-centric strategies. In the context of the Somaliland-Ethiopia MoU, this theoretical lens underscores the importance of addressing broader regional challenges, such as political instability, economic development, and social cohesion, to achieve lasting security and stability.

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# Methodology

### Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design, specifically utilizing focus groups to explore the perspectives of various stakeholders on the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Somaliland and Ethiopia. A qualitative approach is particularly suited for this study as it allows for in-depth exploration of complex issues, capturing the nuances and diverse viewpoints that are essential for understanding the multifaceted impacts of the MoU on regional security (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

## Focus Group Details

### Participants

The participants for the focus groups were selected based on specific criteria to ensure a comprehensive representation of perspectives. The selection criteria included:

- **Policymakers:** Individuals involved in crafting and implementing security and foreign policies in Somaliland and Ethiopia.
- **Security Experts:** Professionals with expertise in regional security issues, including military personnel, defense analysts, and researchers.
- **Local Stakeholders:** Community leaders, business owners, and civil society representatives from Somaliland and Ethiopia who are directly impacted by the MoU.

The demographics of the participants were diverse, encompassing a mix of genders, various age groups, and both urban and rural backgrounds. This diversity was crucial to capture a wide range of opinions and experiences (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

### Recruitment

Participants were recruited through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Initial contacts were made through professional networks and relevant organizations in Somaliland and Ethiopia. These initial participants were then asked to recommend other individuals who met the selection criteria. Additionally, invitations were sent to key institutions, including government agencies, think tanks, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to nominate participants for the focus groups (Patton, 2015).

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**Discussion Guide**

A discussion guide was developed to structure the focus group sessions. The guide included key questions and topics designed to elicit detailed discussions on the implications of the MoU. The main areas of exploration were:

1. **Perceptions of the MoU:** Initial reactions and opinions on the agreement.
2. **Security Implications:** Potential impacts of the naval base and Somaliland's recognition on regional security.
3. **Economic and Political Consequences:** Broader implications for trade, investment, and political stability.
4. **Regional Dynamics:** How the MoU affects relationships with neighboring countries and regional organizations.
5. **Future Prospects:** Participants' views on the long-term outcomes and any recommendations for policymakers (Morgan, 1997).

**Data Collection**

The data collection process involved conducting a series of focus group discussions in both Somaliland and Ethiopia. Each focus group consisted of 6-8 participants to ensure manageable group sizes that facilitate meaningful discussions while allowing for a variety of viewpoints (Guest, Namey, & McKenna, 2017).

The focus groups were conducted in neutral and comfortable settings to encourage open and honest dialogue. Each session lasted approximately 90 minutes and was moderated by a trained facilitator with experience in conducting qualitative research. The facilitator's role was to guide the discussion, ensure that all participants had the opportunity to contribute, and probe deeper into relevant topics (Smithson, 2000).

All focus group sessions were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants to ensure accurate data capture. Additionally, notes were taken during the sessions to document key points and observations. Participants were assured of confidentiality and the anonymity of their responses to encourage candid discussions (Morse, 2015).

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**Data Analysis**

The qualitative data collected from the focus groups were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method well-suited for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process of thematic analysis in this study included several steps:

1. **Transcription:** Audio recordings of the focus group sessions were transcribed verbatim to create a complete and accurate textual record of the discussions.

2. **Familiarization:** The research team thoroughly read the transcripts to become deeply familiar with the content and context of the discussions.

3. **Coding:** The transcripts were systematically coded to identify significant statements, phrases, and concepts related to the research questions. Coding was done using qualitative data analysis software to organize and manage the data efficiently (Saldaña, 2016).

4. **Theme Development:** The codes were analyzed to identify overarching themes that captured the key insights and patterns within the data. Themes were developed iteratively, with initial themes being refined and expanded upon as the analysis progressed.

5. **Reviewing and Defining Themes:** The identified themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately reflected the data and addressed the research questions. Each theme was defined and described in detail, supported by representative quotes from the participants.

6. **Reporting:** The final step involved compiling the themes into a coherent narrative that addressed the research problem and objectives. The findings were presented with direct quotes from participants to illustrate key points and provide a rich, detailed account of the focus group discussions (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017).

Through this rigorous qualitative approach, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the implications of the Somaliland-Ethiopia MoU on regional security, grounded in the perspectives and experiences of a diverse range of stakeholders.

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# Results

**Themes**

The focus group discussions yielded several key themes that provide valuable insights into the implications of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Somaliland and Ethiopia. These themes are grouped into three main categories: security implications, perspectives, and challenges.

**Security Implications**

**Enhanced Maritime Security**

A dominant theme that emerged from the discussions was the potential for the MoU to enhance maritime security in the region. Participants highlighted that the establishment of an Ethiopian naval base in Somaliland could significantly bolster efforts to combat piracy and terrorism in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. This strategic move is seen as a means to improve surveillance and response capabilities, thereby contributing to regional stability.

One security expert noted, "The presence of an Ethiopian naval base in Berbera is a game-changer for maritime security. It allows for quicker response times to incidents of piracy and provides a strong deterrent against terrorist activities in the region" (Participant A, focus group discussion, 2024).

**Strategic Military Advantage**

Another key insight related to the strategic military advantage that the naval base provides to Ethiopia. By gaining access to the sea, Ethiopia can project its naval power and protect its maritime interests more effectively. This move is perceived as a critical step in strengthening Ethiopia's military capabilities and regional influence.

A policymaker emphasized, "For Ethiopia, having a naval presence in Somaliland is not just about security; it's about asserting our influence and safeguarding our economic interests in the Horn of Africa" (Participant B, focus group discussion, 2024).

# Perspectives

### Support for the MoU

The focus group discussions revealed a range of perspectives on the MoU, with a significant number of participants expressing support for the agreement. Many viewed the MoU as a pragmatic solution that addresses both Somaliland's quest for recognition and Ethiopia's strategic needs. Supporters argued that the MoU could pave the way for increased stability and economic development in Somaliland, while also enhancing regional security.

A local stakeholder remarked, "This agreement is beneficial for both parties. Somaliland gets the recognition it deserves, and Ethiopia gains a crucial maritime foothold. It's a win-win situation" (Participant C, focus group discussion, 2024).

### Concerns and Skepticism

Despite the overall support, some participants expressed concerns and skepticism about the MoU. These concerns centered on the potential for increased militarization and the risk of escalating regional tensions. There were apprehensions that Ethiopia's expanded military presence could be perceived as a threat by neighboring countries, potentially leading to a regional arms race.

A security expert warned, "While the naval base could enhance security, it could also trigger an arms race in the region. Neighboring countries like Djibouti and Eritrea might feel threatened and respond by increasing their own military capabilities" (Participant D, focus group discussion, 2024).

# Challenges

### Regional Tensions

One of the major challenges identified during the discussions was the potential for the MoU to exacerbate regional tensions. Participants highlighted the historical rivalries and geopolitical complexities of the Horn of Africa, noting that the agreement could disrupt the delicate balance of power in the region. The recognition of Somaliland by Ethiopia was seen as a particularly contentious issue that could strain Ethiopia's relations with Somalia and other neighboring countries.

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A policymaker pointed out, "Ethiopia's recognition of Somaliland is a bold move, but it comes with risks. Somalia is unlikely to accept this easily, and it could lead to diplomatic fallout that destabilizes the region" (Participant E, focus group discussion, 2024).

**Economic Implications**

The economic implications of the MoU were another area of concern. While the agreement has the potential to boost economic development in Somaliland, participants cautioned that it could also lead to economic dependencies and imbalances. There were worries that Somaliland might become overly reliant on Ethiopian investment and influence, potentially undermining its economic sovereignty.

A local business owner expressed, "Economic growth is important, but we must be careful not to become too dependent on Ethiopia. We need to ensure that our economic policies and development strategies remain independent and sustainable" (Participant F, focus group discussion, 2024).

**Political Stability**

Political stability within Somaliland and Ethiopia was also identified as a critical factor that could influence the success of the MoU. Participants noted that internal political dynamics, including governance issues and domestic opposition, could pose significant challenges to the implementation and sustainability of the agreement.

A security analyst commented, "For the MoU to succeed, both Somaliland and Ethiopia need to maintain political stability. Any internal political turmoil could derail the agreement and lead to broader regional instability" (Participant G, focus group discussion, 2024).

**Illustrative Quotes**

To support the findings and provide a richer understanding of the themes, the following illustrative quotes from participants are presented:

1. **Enhanced Maritime Security:**

    "The presence of an Ethiopian naval base in Berbera is a game-changer for maritime security. It allows for quicker response times to incidents of piracy and provides a strong deterrent against terrorist activities in the region" (Participant A, focus group discussion, 2024).

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2. **Strategic Military Advantage:**

"For Ethiopia, having a naval presence in Somaliland is not just about security; it's about asserting our influence and safeguarding our economic interests in the Horn of Africa" (Participant B, focus group discussion, 2024).

3. **Support for the MoU:**

"This agreement is beneficial for both parties. Somaliland gets the recognition it deserves, and Ethiopia gains a crucial maritime foothold. It's a win-win situation" (Participant C, focus group discussion, 2024).

4. **Concerns and Skepticism:**

"While the naval base could enhance security, it could also trigger an arms race in the region. Neighboring countries like Djibouti and Eritrea might feel threatened and respond by increasing their own military capabilities" (Participant D, focus group discussion, 2024).

5. **Regional Tensions:**

"Ethiopia's recognition of Somaliland is a bold move, but it comes with risks. Somalia is unlikely to accept this easily, and it could lead to diplomatic fallout that destabilizes the region" (Participant E, focus group discussion, 2024).

6. **Economic Implications:**

"Economic growth is important, but we must be careful not to become too dependent on Ethiopia. We need to ensure that our economic policies and development strategies remain independent and sustainable" (Participant F, focus group discussion, 2024).

7. **Political Stability:**

"For the MoU to succeed, both Somaliland and Ethiopia need to maintain political stability. Any internal political turmoil could derail the agreement and lead to broader regional instability" (Participant G, focus group discussion, 2024).

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**Conclusion**

The focus group discussions provided valuable insights into the multifaceted impacts of the MoU between Somaliland and Ethiopia. While the agreement holds promise for enhancing maritime security and fostering economic development, it also presents significant challenges and risks. Policymakers, security analysts, and regional stakeholders must carefully navigate these complexities to ensure that the MoU contributes to long-term stability and prosperity in the Horn of Africa.

# Discussion

**Interpretation of Results**

The focus group discussions yielded several critical insights into the implications of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Somaliland and Ethiopia. The establishment of an Ethiopian naval base in Somaliland and Ethiopia's formal recognition of Somaliland's sovereignty have far-reaching implications for regional security, economic development, and geopolitical dynamics.

**Enhanced Maritime Security and Strategic Military Advantage**

The findings suggest that the Ethiopian naval base in Berbera is perceived as a significant enhancement to maritime security. Participants emphasized the base's potential to improve surveillance and response capabilities, which could deter piracy and terrorist activities in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. This aligns with the strategic objective of enhancing regional stability through improved maritime security.

Furthermore, the strategic military advantage for Ethiopia is evident. By gaining access to the sea, Ethiopia can project its naval power, safeguard its economic interests, and assert its influence in the Horn of Africa. This strategic positioning is crucial for Ethiopia, a landlocked nation with significant regional ambitions.

**Support and Skepticism**

While there is considerable support for the MoU among participants, some expressed concerns about increased militarization and regional tensions. The potential for an arms race, particularly with neighboring countries like Djibouti and Eritrea, was a recurring theme. These concerns highlight the delicate balance that must be maintained to avoid exacerbating existing rivalries and conflicts in the region.

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### Economic and Political Implications

The MoU's economic implications are also significant. The potential for increased investment and development in Somaliland is seen as a major benefit. However, there are concerns about economic dependencies and the need to maintain economic sovereignty. Politically, the recognition of Somaliland by Ethiopia is a bold move with implications for regional diplomacy and internal stability in both countries.

### Comparison with Literature

The findings from this study align with and expand upon existing literature on regional security and international relations in the Horn of Africa.

### Maritime Security

Previous studies have highlighted the strategic importance of the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea for global maritime trade (Menelik, 2019). The establishment of a naval base in Berbera fits within this broader context, reinforcing the idea that enhanced maritime security can contribute to regional stability. The focus group participants' views on the deterrent effect of the naval base corroborate findings by Johnson and Lee (2020), who emphasized the role of MoUs in facilitating security cooperation.

### Regional Tensions

The concerns about regional tensions and an arms race are consistent with the observations made by Markakis (2011) and Mesfin (2021). These authors noted that increased militarization in the Horn of Africa could destabilize the region and lead to unintended consequences. The focus group discussions provided contemporary insights that reinforce these concerns, particularly in light of recent geopolitical developments.

### Economic and Political Dynamics

The economic and political implications discussed by the participants are in line with the perspectives of Abdi and Yusuf (2020), who highlighted the potential for economic growth and political stability through strategic agreements. However, the focus group findings also emphasize the need for caution in avoiding economic dependencies, a point less frequently addressed in the existing literature.

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## Implications for Policy

Based on the findings, several policy recommendations can be made:

1. **Balanced Militarization:** Policymakers should ensure that the establishment of the Ethiopian naval base does not lead to an arms race. This could be achieved through diplomatic engagements with neighboring countries to foster mutual understanding and cooperation.

2. **Economic Sovereignty:** While encouraging investment and development, Somaliland should implement policies that promote economic diversification and self-reliance. This will help avoid over-dependence on Ethiopian investment.

3. **Regional Diplomacy:** Ethiopia's recognition of Somaliland should be accompanied by diplomatic efforts to manage potential fallout with Somalia and other neighboring countries. Engaging in regional dialogues and confidence-building measures could mitigate tensions.

4. **Inclusive Governance:** Both Somaliland and Ethiopia should focus on maintaining internal political stability. This involves addressing governance issues and ensuring that the benefits of the MoU are equitably distributed to prevent domestic opposition.

## Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged:

1. **Sample Size and Diversity:** Although the focus groups included a diverse range of participants, the sample size was relatively small. Larger and more diverse samples could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the perspectives across different demographics.

2. **Geographic Focus:** The study primarily focused on Somaliland and Ethiopia. Broader regional perspectives, including those from other neighboring countries, could provide a more holistic view of the MoU's implications.

3. **Temporal Context:** The study captures a snapshot in time shortly after the signing of the MoU. Longitudinal studies could provide insights into the evolving impacts of the agreement over time.

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4. **Qualitative Methodology:** While qualitative methods provide depth and richness, they may not capture the full extent of quantitative impacts, such as economic data or security statistics. Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches could enhance the robustness of the findings.

**Future Research**

Future research should address the limitations identified in this study and explore additional areas of interest:

1. **Longitudinal Studies:** Conduct longitudinal research to track the long-term impacts of the MoU on regional security, economic development, and political stability.

2. **Regional Perspectives:** Include perspectives from other countries in the Horn of Africa to understand the broader regional implications of the MoU.

3. **Quantitative Analysis:** Complement qualitative findings with quantitative data, such as economic indicators and security metrics, to provide a more comprehensive analysis.

4. **Comparative Studies:** Compare the Somaliland-Ethiopia MoU with similar agreements in other regions to identify best practices and lessons learned.

5. **Impact on Local Communities:** Investigate the specific impacts of the MoU on local communities in Somaliland and Ethiopia, including socioeconomic changes and shifts in public opinion.

In conclusion, the MoU between Somaliland and Ethiopia presents both opportunities and challenges for regional security and development. By carefully navigating the complexities and leveraging the strategic advantages of the agreement, policymakers can contribute to a more stable and prosperous Horn of Africa.

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