

Turkiye-Brokered Negotiation on Ethiopia-Somalia Disagreement: Time-Buying or Genuine Commitment

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Commentary

Since Ethiopia signed the Memorandum of Understanding MOU with Somaliland in January this year, there has been an egregious conflict, and both countries have frozen their diplomatic ties and traded accusations against each other. The Somali government, along with its respected people, have demonstrated against Addis Ababa's reprehensible move aimed at violating Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Ethiopia has taken advantage of Somalia's weak naval forces. The only landlocked nation in the Horn of Africa has been looking for a sea gateway since Eritrea took its independence from Ethiopia in 1993. Several times, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Abiy Ahmed, has publicly said that his country, which has more than 100 million people, cannot be landlocked anymore. Somalia, Eritrea, and Djibouti have seen these flagrant and reckless speeches by Abiy as a wake-up call for their ports. In response, Somalia signed a memorandum of understanding with the Turkish government in February this year, under which the Turkish armed forces and along with Somalia's naval forces will safeguard Somalia's maritime security for the next ten years.

This was the perfect antithesis of Abiy's naked aggression. Since then, Ethiopia has modified its provocative language and attempted to reach a wider audience by encouraging Somaliland's citizens and government to support the MOU. After five months since the MOU, the Turkish government, which has good ties with both countries, organized the first talks with representatives from Ethiopia and Somalia. On July 1, which is the Independence Day of Somalia and the unification of British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland, the minister of foreign affairs of the republic of Turkiye, his Excellency Hakan Fidan, has hosted in Ankara the minister of foreign and international cooperation of the federal republic of Somalia, his Excellence Ahmed Moallim Fiqi, and the minister of foreign affairs of the federal democratic republic of Ethiopia, his Excellency Taye Atske Selassie. Despite the lack of tangible developments, both countries have agreed to continue their discussions and reconvene on September 2 of this year to accelerate the

negotiations and reach a resolution. Also, both parts appreciated Turkiye's peerless efforts in trying to fix the disagreements in the Horn of Africa via shuttle diplomacy, as long as Ankara is an emerging global middle power that has an interest in the Horn of Africa region. In addition to Turkey's deep-rooted connection with Somalia, which dates back to 2011, when the country faced the worst droughts/famine for decades, Ankara stands as the third largest investor of Ethiopia, behind China and Saudi Arabia (US Department of State, 2021).

Way forward

The African Union and the United Nations charters clearly state that all nations must respect each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Therefore, Addis ought to rescind its unlawful Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Somaliland, which the international community regards as an integral part of Somalia. With this, I think both countries can restore their diplomatic ties. If Ethiopia insists on its gunboat diplomacy, then Mogadishu has the legal and moral rights to defend its country by any means possible; thus, Ethiopia will be responsible for the consequences.