



## Conflict Research Programme

### Research Memo

23 February 2021

# The Jubbaland Project and the Transborder Ogadeen

## Identity Politics and Regional Reconfigurations in the Ethiopia- Kenya-Somalia Borderlands

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### Overview

1. Successive Federal Governments have opposed political processes in the Federal Member State of Jubbaland – including its formation and leadership – since at least 2012. The state plays a crucial role in relation to both national as well as regional politics in the Horn of Africa, given its borders with both Kenya and Ethiopia as well as significant Ogadeen populations in both of those countries. This pattern continues with the current impasse around Somalia's Presidential election and recent fighting in northern Jubbaland.
2. Somewhat lost in the current political turbulence is that Jubbaland, under its long-standing strongman and President, Ahmed Mohamed Islam 'Madobe', has represented a return of Ogadeen identity and pride within the wider Somali milieu, after several decades of marginalisation. The Ogadeen are the single largest Somali clan family in both Kenya and Ethiopia and are highly politically influential in both countries. The establishment of Jubbaland in 2013 cemented the return of Ogaden political relevance to Somalia. This was widely celebrated across the Ogadeen population in the Horn of Africa and in the diaspora. Ahmed Madobe was its star.
3. The creation of Jubbaland, particularly under its only real figurehead, was enabled by the aligning of transborder clan interests of the Ogadeen, with the state interests of Ethiopia and Kenya. Madobe's supporters, crucially, lobbied successfully for him in Ethiopian circles. Former President Abdi Mohamoud Omar 'Iley' of SRS, Ethiopia and former Minister of Defence, Mohamed Yusuf Hajji, were part of this Ogadeen revival and, the latter in particular, of Jubbaland itself.
4. The last four years have changed many of these configurations. President Farmajo – whose term has expired – is now allied to Ethiopian PM Abiy Ahmed and Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki, and has used Ethiopia's coercive capacity in regional elections. Under this arrangement, Madobe has lost the backing of Ethiopia and relied on Kenyan support to claim victory in the largely discredited August 2019

state elections. Jubbaland has since become politically and administratively divided between federal and regional interests. The Belet Hawa attack, on 25 January 2021, widely thought to be orchestrated by Madobe and Kenya, symbolised these differences and their pertinence to the current political impasse in the country.

5. The pan-Ogaden project of Jubbaland is no more. The turmoil around the 2019 elections widely undermined belief in Madobe and reduced political contestation to narrow clan-based lines with President Farmajo. However, Madobe has successfully outstayed his peers in the country, a major achievement in many regards but, on the other hand, where the rotation of power is an unwritten norm in politics and society, he is seen as a one-man state in many eyes. It remains unclear how his story will continue.

## Background and Identity Politics

6. This memo draws upon separate analyses by the CRP of political economy, identity politics and political marketplace dynamics in Somalia's Jubbaland State, Garissa district in North East Kenya and Somali Regional State (SRS) of Ethiopia, as well as that conducted under a research grant focused on the SRS.<sup>1</sup>
7. The Somali agnatic system is renowned for its flexibility, with membership and mobilisation moving up and down the family tree, as required. Luling suggests, while clan-ism rarely explains conflict, it does provide a critical framework through which politics act: 'it is not only good to fight with (or play politics with or do business with) but it is good to think with' (2006: 471).<sup>2</sup> The salience of clan and lineage remains important in social, political and economic spheres. As Cedric Barnes puts it, the 'division of Somali peoples into different 'national' territories and the primacy of 'clan' in Somali political life continues to preoccupy Somali politics and history today' (2006: 105).<sup>3</sup>
8. The Ogadeen populations across the Somali speaking Horn of Africa originate from the present day Somali Regional State in Ethiopia (SRS) and migrated – as pastoralists – to the present-day Somalia-Kenya border areas in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>4</sup> Population movement has continued in this direction over recent decades, including over the last ten years, with Kismayo town in Somalia, as well as Dadaab refugee camp and Garissa town in Kenya all important sites for those seeking safe haven from oppression and violence in Ethiopia's Somali region.<sup>5</sup> Ogadeen populations also suffered major displacements, from Ethiopia to Somalia, as a result of the Somalia-Ethiopia war (the 'Ogaden War') in 1977/78, displacements which have had an influence on perceptions and misperceptions of territory and belonging within and outside the Ogadeen population.
9. The Ogadeen occupy an unusual position within the wider Somali-speaking sub-region. With significant numbers in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, the lineages of the Ogadeen comprise the single largest Somali clan-identified populations in Ethiopia and Kenya. In Somalia itself, two of the three regions of Jubbaland, Lower and Middle Juba, are thought to have majority Ogadeen populations. The Ogadeen have an important spatial position within the Somali territories, with the largest population located centrally, in Ethiopia's Somali region, bordering many other large clan families - Dir, Isaaq, Dhulbahante, Mijerteen, Haber Gedir, Marehan, Rahanweyn, Garre and Degodia – as well as more recently, the polities of Somaliland and Puntland. This spatiality

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1 The research grant, 'Transition times: political reform in Ethiopia's Somali regional state and its regional implication' was led by Tobias Hagmann, with Mustafe Abdi, whose published outputs included: [Hagmann-Two-years-after-Iley-final.pdf \(Ise.ac.uk\)](#); [Inter-ethnic-conflicts-SRS-Final-April-2020.pdf \(Ise.ac.uk\)](#); [SRS-Memo-Feb-2020.pdf \(Ise.ac.uk\)](#).

2 Luling, V. (2006), 'Genealogy as Theory, Genealogy as Tool: Aspects of Somali 'clanship', *Social Identities*, 12(4): 471-485.

3 Barnes, C. (2006), 'Gubo - Ogaadeen Poetry and the Aftermath of the Dervish Wars', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, Jun., 2006, Vol. 18, No. 1, Language, Power and Society: Orality and Literacy in the Horn of Africa (Jun., 2006): 105-117.

4 Little, P.D. (2003), *Somalia: Economy Without State*, Oxford: James Currey.

5 Dadaab Refugee Camp lies in Garissa district, Kenya, and although a refugee camp for Somalis, it has a strong Ogadeen identity and population, including as a hub for onward journeys to the West (see: Horst, C. (2006), *Transnational Nomads: How Somalis Cope with Refugee Life in the Dadaab Camps of Kenya*. New York and Oxford: Bergahn Books).

represents historical ties – social relations, customary agreements, conflict and peace, poetry and oral histories – that make the Ogadeen ‘known’ to many other identity groups and vice versa.

10. An Ogadeen identity has represented a potent symbol of independence and opposition to colonial oppression. Perhaps the most renowned such figure was the leader of the Dervish movement, Mohamed Abdullah Hassan – the Sayyid – active in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, who opposed the Ethiopian, British and Italian powers.<sup>6</sup> The Sayyid, an Ogadeen by paternal lineage, is considered the forefather of modern Somali nationalism. He was also a renowned poet and orator. Barnes argues that the Gubo series of poems, developed in the aftermath of the Dervish defeat, is concerned with ‘... upholding the honour of the Ogadeen clan’, although he also acknowledges that there are different interpretations of these poems, including according to other clans that were close to the Sayyid.<sup>7</sup> He further indicates that some Ogadeen suggest that the ‘... Gubo was an example of quintessential ‘Ogadeen-ness’, a moral ethnicity of sorts that represents a fidelity to the true idea of ‘Somaliness’, and that they capture the ‘ebb and flow of clan fortunes’ and continue to resonate in political language today (in 2002, when he wrote the article).<sup>8</sup> Ironically, the adulation that the Sayyid receives is arguably more mixed in Ogadeen circles than outside them, as his defeat came with huge loss of life and livestock and a weakening of the power of the clan for decades after.<sup>9</sup>
11. Other heroic figures in Ogadeen history are Ugaas Nuur (Cuburiye) Ugaas Waraa (Aar) Ugaas Magaan, who represents the pinnacle of Ogadeen power but about whom little is written, and Abdirahman Mursal, who led an armed revolt against the British, in the current Somalia-Kenya border region, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and which lasted for several years.<sup>10</sup>
12. While the Sayyid’s era marks one period in the ascendancy of the Ogadeen, the ONLF (Ogaden National Liberation Front), in SRS Ethiopia, have continued the symbolic and militarised resistance to oppression, this time directed at the Ethiopian State.<sup>11</sup> The ONLF have been driven by a politically mobilised diaspora, especially in the USA, and through a military force in the region.<sup>12</sup> The Ethiopia-Somalia war which led to the displacement of many Somalis from Ethiopia to Somalia, led to many joining the onward migratory practices of Somalia, as well as gaining education and employment in the country; the history of the SRS, Ethiopia is deeply interwoven with that of Somalia itself; a large Ogadeen diaspora, based in the USA, predominantly includes people originally from the SRS.
13. Under President Siad Barre (1969-1990) Ogadeen elements fought both for and against the regime. Those allied to Barre became part of his clan-based patronage system as his position weakened following the loss of the Ogaden War<sup>13</sup>; the MOD alliance referred to the Marehan, Ogadeen and Dhulbahante, although the Ogadeen were considered the minor party in this alliance.<sup>14</sup> Ogadeen fighters fought with Siad Barre against the Isaaq-dominated SNM (Somali National Movement) of present-day Somaliland, and therein lost face after the downfall of Barre and creation of Somaliland, with its nationalist identity.

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6 Barnes, op. cit.

7 Barnes, op. cit.: 115.

8 Barnes, op. cit.: 109.

9 Barnes, op. cit.

10 Simpson, Jr. J. L. (1999), British Perspectives on Aulihan Somali Unrest in the East Africa Protectorate, 1915-1918, *Northeast African Studies*, 6 (1-2); 7-43

11 The ONLF contested and won the first regional election under the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Party (EPRDF) but soon fell out with the ruling party and took up arms (see Haggmann, T. and Khalif, M. A. (2008). *State and Politics in Ethiopia’s Somali Region since 1991*. *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali studies* 6, (6), 25-49.

12 Haggmann, T. (2020), *Fast Politics, slow justice: Ethiopia’s Somali region two years after Abdi Iley*. Briefing Paper, Conflict Research Programme. LSE.

13 De Waal, A. (2020) *Somalia’s disassembled state: clan unit formation and the political marketplace*, *Conflict, Security & Development*, 20:5, 561-585.

14 *Ibid.* De Waal points out that the use of MOD is not to suggest the rule by clan but where individuals have been selected to represent certain clans.

14. The Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM) on the other hand was initially part of a tripartite coalition between with the SNM and USC (United Somali Congress) that opposed and overthrew Barre. However, the SPM divided into two competing groups in the 1990s.<sup>15</sup> This splintering and the violence that took place in the Lower and Middle Juba areas in the early 1990s, involving the SPM marks another – and emotional – low point and humiliation in recent Ogadeen history.
15. Following the collapse of the state and civil war, there was an absence of strong leadership emergent from within the Ogadeen. In Ethiopia, the ONLF who had won the regional election in 1991 fell out with the ruling EPRDF (Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Party) and took up arms; the leadership remained in exile abroad. Somali (especially the Ogadeen, as the dominant clan) ambitions in the SRS were severely curtailed by the ruling regime and a violent insurgency and counter-insurgency, as well as serious humanitarian emergencies.<sup>16</sup> During these years, Somaliland and Puntland emerged as viable polities, whose own prospects depended on compliance with Ethiopian interests, which included anti-Islamist and anti-ONLF credentials. The emergence of Somaliland and Puntland also signified a revival of Isaaq and Mijerteen power following Siad Barre’s patrimonial regime. Notably, Somaliland and Puntland interacted with elements of the Ethiopian Federal government (military, intelligence, foreign ministry) rather than with the Somali Regional State administration, considered weak and powerless.
16. The promotion of Abdi Mohammed Omer ‘Iley’ as the President of SRS (2010-2018), initially marked a major change in the position of Somalis and of Somali Regional State in Ethiopia and in the region.<sup>17</sup> Abdi ‘Iley’s’ early years coincided with Ethiopia’s decentralisation strategy and saw significant investment – in infrastructure and education – in regions such as the SRS. Iley gained power and influence and positioned himself as a strongman across the Somali regions, including with respect to Somaliland and Puntland. He attempted to position himself as a Somali nationalist within Ethiopia. He also attempted to portray himself as a leader of the Ogadeen and supporter of Jubbaland.<sup>18</sup> These hopes and positioning failed, however, as his rule became increasingly tyrannical.<sup>19,20</sup>
17. The pastoral northern territories of Kenya, including the Somali populated northeast, have long been marginalised within the country. The latter years of President Siad Barre and the Ogaden War destabilised the region, including northeast Kenya. However, within Kenya, the Ogadeen have grown in prominence and influence in recent decades. In 1982, Mohamoud Mohamed, a major general in the army played a key role in the foiling of a coup against President Moi of Kenya.<sup>21</sup> He was later promoted to Minister of Defence.<sup>22</sup> Lochery notes that the Ogadeen have used their political leverage to secure advantage in relation to business vis-à-vis other Somali identity groups. At a similar time to Abdi Iley’s appearance, in the mid to late 2000s, several powerful Ogadeen figures rose in the Kenyan government, including Mohamed Yusuf Haji, Minister of Defence (2008-13), his son, Noordin Yusuf Haji, a senior figure in Kenyan intelligence and later Public Prosecutor, and Aden Duale the former Majority Leader for the ruling Jubilee Party.

15 Ibid: 571-572.

16 Hagmann and Khalif, op. cit.

17 Abdi ‘Iley’ was promoted or installed as President of the SRS, by the EPRDF, with a specific mandate to crush the ONLF.

18 See Hagmann, T. (2020), *Relations between Somali Region, State and Somaliland, 2010-2019*, Research Memo, Conflict Research Programme, LSE. He is reported to have supported Madobe financially though the two were never considered close allies.

19 Ibid.

20 The signing of a peace agreement between the (United Western Somali Liberation Front (UWSLF) and the Ethiopian government in 2010 was also a marker of a change in the Federal government’s position towards its Ogadeen-Somalia population (see: [Ethiopia: Ethiopian gov’t, UWSLF sign peace deal - Ethiopia | ReliefWeb](https://www.ethiopian.gov.t/ethiopian-gov-t-uwsulf-sign-peace-deal-ethiopia-reliefweb) ).

21 See: <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/08/29/world/leader-of-kenyan-coup-attempt-said-to-have-been-a-private.html>

22 Lochery, E. (2012), ‘Rendering difference visible: the Kenyan state and its Somali citizens’, *African Affairs*, 111/445, 615-639.

18. The seeds of the Jubbaland project – initially under the name, ‘Azania’ – took root through Abdi Mohamed Abdi ‘Gandhi’, Somalia’s Minister of Defence, in 2009/10.<sup>23</sup> Kenyan interests were apparent at this time. This idea was initially rejected, seen by the transitional government at the time as an Ogadeen-dominated Kenyan project.<sup>24</sup> Gandhi continued to be the figurehead for further talks. However, it was Madobe’s military prowess that swayed attention. In 2010/11 Madobe and his Ras Kamboni brigade along with Kenyan forces captured the valuable seaport of Kismayo from Al Shabaab. Many observers credit Ras Kamboni with leading Kenyan forces from the border to Kismayo. Reaching and claiming Kismayo was a major victory for both Madobe and Kenya.

## The Rise of Jubbaland and Madobe

19. Madobe’s personal story and mythology is worth recounting, as his history in Kismayo and Jubbaland is inseparable from the wider revival of Ogadeen pride in and beyond the Horn of Africa; the mobilisation of political identity and aspiration requires its heroes. Born in the Somali Region of Ethiopia he became part of the Islamist movement from a relatively young age. He was an important figure in the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), under which he captured Kismayo in 2006, becoming its Governor. Following the Ethiopian led attack on the ICU, he was badly injured in 2007, and rescued by American forces and handed over to Ethiopia, where he spent many months in hospital recovering from his wounds, under the care of the Ethiopian state. The transitional President of Somalia, Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, helped to organise his release. When back in Somalia, his priority was to regain his Ras Kamboni brigade, which had become merged with Al Shabaab. It was with these forces he was again able to work with the Kenyans to recapture Kismayo. The compelling nature of Madobe’s journey has caught the imagination beyond a Somali audience, described (not entirely accurately) in a prize-winning short biography in *Le Monde*.<sup>25</sup>

20. The capture of Kismayo and the formation of Jubbaland in 2011 was celebrated widely in Ogadeen (and Harti<sup>26</sup>) circles from Minnesota, to Helsinki, Leicester and London to Nairobi, as evident in the numerous YouTube videos still accessible.<sup>27</sup> There was a great deal of hope in these years amongst Somalis more generally, around the internationally supported nascent state-building project, and for the Ogadeen, that Jubbaland might become a regional polity, as had emerged in the form of Puntland in the northeast previously. Madobe symbolised a new pride; The Ogadeen led a regional State and the third largest town in the country, with its major seaport. Their leader was a fighter with an Islamist background, and a charismatic leader who for a short while spoke well as a nationalist.<sup>28</sup> It is important to note however that, in many ways, Jubbaland does not fit the profile of an ‘ethno-state’ – such as Puntland – and that Jubbaland for many is in reality a code for Kismayo.<sup>29</sup>

21. Madobe’s rise within Jubbaland was also part of elite calculations and the interests of neighbouring Ethiopia and Kenya. In addition, there were considerable (and illicit) financial benefits through Kismayo port.<sup>30</sup> As indicated Kenyan interests in this border area with Somalia had already begun under Abdi Gandhi, who had worked with his counterpart, the

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23 The idea of some kind of Jubbaland entity had already been around for some time (see Ken Menkhaus, in: [Microsoft Word - RVI - Meeting Report - Nairobi Forum - Jubalanda - FINAL - 20 March 2013.docx](#) (riftvalley.net))

24 Ibid.

25 See: <https://truestoryaward.org/story/44>

26 The Harti clan (Mijerteen, Dhulbahante and Warsangeli) have a long association with Kismayo and are related to the Ogadeen through the Darod clan family.

27 See: <https://youtu.be/KUznL59Wupc> ; <https://youtu.be/7ukliohef2s> ; [https://youtu.be/1ydlAKW\\_nTw](https://youtu.be/1ydlAKW_nTw) ; <https://youtu.be/ngjNcosYZAQ> ; <https://youtu.be/Sxt7pGOSit0> ; <https://youtu.be/ZD0tFehNW7s> ; <https://youtu.be/T5LMEQdGmSk> ; <https://youtu.be/UxboiaKREGs> . These are dated between 2013 and 2015.

28 Oratory skills as well as military leadership carry great weight (see Laitin, D. D. (1979), The War in the Ogaden: Implication for Siyad’s Role in Somali History, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 17 (1), 95-115.

29 See discussion in [Microsoft Word - RVI - Meeting Report - Nairobi Forum - Jubalanda - FINAL - 20 March 2013.docx](#) (riftvalley.net)

30 Rasmussen, J. (2017), *Sweet Secrets, Sugar Smuggling and State Formation in the Kenya-Somalia Borderlands*, DIIS Working Paper, 11.

then Minister of Interior, Defence and Social Affairs, Mohamed Yusuf Hajji. Many other Ogadeni elite from the wider region, were part of discussions in Nairobi, on the possible creation of a new polity. The shift of support from Gandhi to Madobe is attributed to intra-clan dynamics with the Mohamed Zubhir, the elite of the Ogadeen, who preferred Madobe (as one of their own) and used their leverage with Ethiopia to convince them to support their man.<sup>31</sup>

22. Given his Islamist background and military credentials Madobe has achieved some noteworthy successes, particularly in a number of reconciliation conferences, a level of clan inclusivity and the relative security of Kismayo town. Menkhaus for example (2017: 20-21), states that Kismayo's relative security is 'mainly attributed to the effectiveness of the Jubaland State's security sector, most notably the intelligence branch, JISA, which monitors the city and its population more robustly than arguably any other local armed authority in Somalia except Al Shabaab'.<sup>32</sup> He adds that 'the fact that the Jubaland authorities have made the city open to all former residents, from a variety of previously quarrelling clans, has reduced the risk of clan-based clashes over the city for the time being'.<sup>33</sup> Paradoxically, while a pan-Ogadeen sentiment has certainly been part of the Jubaland story, Madobe himself is not considered a simple clannist figure, given his Islamist credential and other actions that run counter to a clan hegemony.
23. However, that said, Madobe has not lived up to the statesman-like figure that his words have often portrayed and that his supporters had initially hoped. The intelligence and security bubble of Kismayo that has successfully kept Al Shabaab at bay, leaves little room for criticizing him or the Jubaland administration. Kismayo port is well-known as a source for a large and lucrative illicit trade in sugar that involves high-level political circles in Kenya.<sup>34</sup> Sugar imports as well as (banned) charcoal exports have involved deals between the Kenyan Defence Forces, Al Shabaab and the Jubaland administration.<sup>35</sup> For some, Madobe is more a mafia leader or warlord than a statesman.<sup>36</sup> That said, at least up to 2017/18, Madobe remained a powerful figurehead for Ogadeen hopes and aspirations.

## New Regional and National Players

24. The election of President Mohamed Abdullahi Abdi 'Farmajo' in April 2017 and Ethiopian PM, Abiy Ahmed, in May 2018, have significantly changed the political landscape regionally as well as within Somalia itself. An authoritarian impulse has been revealed with the Federal Government of Somalia attempting to install compliant leaders in all regional elections. In this Ethiopia's coercive support has been clearly evident. The most visible instance of this was the 2018 South West State elections, where the FGS used money and coercion to force the removal of the two main competitors to their candidate.<sup>37</sup> This served as a warning for the Jubaland elections which were held six months later.
25. President Farmajo hails from the Marehan clan and the prominent Reer Dini lineage. In the weeks and months leading up to the Jubaland elections, political mobilisation frequently followed clan lines. Jubaland is in large part an alliance between Ogadeen and Marehan identities, but with Farmajo's known position against Madobe, the politicisation of these two identities Ogadeen-Marehan was easily evoked. Three of Madobe's most recent battles for control of Kismayo took place against Marehan elements; in 2006, with the ICU, Madobe took control of Kismayo from Barre Hirale, a Marehan-identified warlord. In 2011, Madobe again led the capture of Kismayo, this time from an Al Shabaab-Marehan alliance, and in 2015, while

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31 This was reportedly done by convincing Ethiopian intelligence that Gandhi held ONLF sympathies.

32 Menkhaus, K. (2017), *Dadaab Returnee Conflict Assessment*, report prepared for Danish Demining Group.

33 Ibid

34 Rasmussen, op. cit.

35 Journalists for Justice (2015), *Black and White: Kenya's criminal racket in Somalia*; Rasmussen, op. cit.

36 See Le Monde op. cit.

37 ICG, (2018), *Somalia's South West State: A New President Installed, A Crisis Inflamed*, Commentary. ([Somalia's South West State: A New President Installed, a Crisis Inflamed | Crisis Group](#))

Madobe was in Addis Ababa negotiating the status of Jubbaland and his position, the FGS supported an attack on the city, led by Barre Hirale, which was resisted by Madobe's forces but with many deaths. These battles are highly evocative and easily politicised along clan lines.

26. Farmajo later changed tactics, supporting Ogadeen candidates in the lead up to the elections. However, divisions had also appeared within the Ogadeen, in part probably driven by suspicions of FGS manoeuvring behind the scenes. In addition, one of the largest Ogadeen lineages in the Somalia-Kenya border area, the Aulihan, have arguably benefited least from Madobe's leadership in Kismayo, most evidently because little has changed in Middle Juba, an area where they predominate, but where Al Shabaab have remained powerful. Furthermore, the Aulihan compete with the Tolomogge (both lineages of the Ogadeen) for the Governorship in Garissa in Kenya. Tolomogge support or at least sympathy for Madobe around the time of the election may well have been aimed at concerns that Aulihan leadership in Kismayo/Jubbaland would enhance their prospects in Garissa elections.

## **The 2019 Jubbaland Election and its Aftermath<sup>38</sup>**

27. In the final weeks leading up to the election, many observers anticipated that international pressure, including the possibility that Kenya may withdraw its support, might have led to Madobe resigning or withdrawing his candidacy. There were considerable efforts from within Somali circles, close to Madobe, to encourage him to do this. However, the interests of his closest lineage<sup>39</sup>, that of the Jubbaland Chamber of Commerce and the political, military and financial interests of Kenya, supported his continuation, leading to the discredited elections that were orchestrated by Madobe's inner circle.
28. Privately Madobe and his inner circle did not believe he would win a competitive election where the FGS was supporting alternative Ogadeen candidates and had superior financial resources. Efforts were made by different Somali groups to try and persuade Madobe to hold credible elections or to stand down, arguing that he would gain from both outcomes; either by winning the election in a credible way or by losing with dignity (and potentially with a large pay-off – from the FGS) and exposing the FGS for its manipulative role. He was apparently unpersuaded and backed by close kinship circles, whose motivations were clan-driven as well as by personal grievances and self-interest.
29. Since then, Jubbaland has been in a continual struggle with the FGS, with the result that FGS forces (through the Somali National Army) have taken control of parts of Gedo region, following the capture of Security Minister, Abdirashid Hassan Abdinur 'Janaan' (who later escaped and has been hosted by the Kenyan Government).<sup>40</sup> Madobe, in his turn, has been a leading player in the opposition to Farmajo, along with President Deni of Puntland and opposition figures in Mogadishu. This culminated on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2021 with an attack on Belet Hawa, from Mandera, Kenya.<sup>41</sup>

## **Conclusion**

30. The salience of 'clan' and 'clannism' as an explanatory factor in Somali politics is often overstated, disguising other dimensions. Clan is itself highly mutable, evoked at different levels in the agnatic tree depending on purpose. Pride and prestige do however play major roles in Somali society and politics. This memo has raised attention to the longer-term ebbs and flows in the evocation and expression of power within the Ogadeen clan family. The last ten years are associated with a rise in Ogadeen power and position in the Somali regions, where powerful figures have simultaneously risen in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia.

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38 Two internal research memos were produced by the CRP, focused on this period.

39 Madobe is from the Mohamed Zubhir-Reer Abdille lineage line of the Ogadeen.

40 See: [Somalia: Arrest of Jubaland security minister must yield justice for victims | Amnesty International](#)

41 See: Fresh fighting in Belet-Hawo 'organised' by Kenya, Somalia charges – Goobjoog News English

31. Ahmed Mohamed Islam 'Madobe' has been a symbol of that rise in Somalia. Unlike many other political figures in the last ten years, he has a personal history as a military leader and warrior, a clan and Islamist leader – indeed resonant of the Sayyid himself – who has fought in the battlefield and seen many lives lost. He has – or had – inspired a loyalty through his long period living in the bush as well as through his most famous victories that have centred on Kismayo.
32. The last four years have changed many of these configurations and relationships. The alliance of President Farmajo – whose term has expired – with Ethiopian PM Abiy Ahmed, has seen Ethiopia change its position towards Somalia, in support of a strong central authority. The SRS's current President, Mustafa Omer, an Ogadeen representative, is not supportive of the Jubbaland President. Madobe has been forced to rely on Kenyan support and is therefore also seen as a stooge of Kenya and as a pawn in larger regional configurations where Kenya and Somalia are involved in a maritime dispute and Kenya is resisting the Ethiopian-Eritrean-Somalia alliance in the Horn of Africa.
33. The pan-Ogadeen project of Jubbaland is therefore no more. The turmoil around the 2019 elections widely undermined belief in Madobe and reduced political contestation to narrow clan-based lines with President Farmajo. Although he has outlasted his peers and will, in all likelihood, outlast one of his greatest foes, the still acting President Farmajo, even his closest allies acknowledge that the Jubbaland project has, at least for now, largely failed as a political project and Ogadeen enterprise. His resilience is a major achievement in many regards but, on the other hand, where the rotation of power is an unwritten norm in Somali politics and society, he is seen as a one-man state in many eyes. Madobe and his inner circle are motivated essentially in their opposition to the authoritarian Federal President, are beholden to Kenya and to their own self-interests. It remains unclear how Madobe's position will evolve.





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