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February 23rd, 2021

The Jubbaland Project and the Transborder Ogadeen

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The Presidential elections in Somalia are at an impasse. Since the discredited elections of August 2019 in Jubbaland, which saw both protagonists failing to achieve their aims, Jubbaland (and its President and backers) has played a key role in opposing President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed 'Farmajo'.

The purpose of this blog post is to draw attention to a [research memo](#) by the same name, which provides some historical and identity-based context to the current political impasse and the position of Jubbaland and its President within that. The Federal Member State of

Jubbaland plays a crucial role in relation to both national and 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.

Somewhat lost, however, in the current political turbulence is that Jubbaland, under its long-standing strongman and President, Ahmed Mohamed Islam 'Madobe', has – or, more accurately had – 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 Ogadeen 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.

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 Somali Regional State, Ethiopia and former Minister of Defence, Mohamed Yusuf Hajji, were part of this Ogadeen revival and, the latter in particular, of Jubbaland itself.

The last four years have changed many of these configurations. Still acting President Farmajo 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, symbolised these differences and their pertinence to the current political impasse in the country.

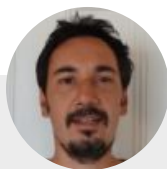
The pan-Ogaden project of Jubbaland is no more. The turmoil around the 2019 elections widely undermined belief in Madobe and reduced political contestation to narrow clan-based lines with President Farmajo. However, Madobe has successfully outstayed his peers in the country, a major achievement in many 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.

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. The [research memo](#) from which this blog has drawn raises 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.

Note: The CRP blogs gives the views of the author, not the position of the Conflict Research Programme, the London School of Economics and Political Science, or the UK Government.

About the author



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Dr Nisar Majid manages the Somalia country programme. He has worked in and on Somalia and the Somali territories of the Horn of Africa for over twenty years, in various applied research capacities. This included his doctoral research which explored transnationalism in the Somali context.



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