

RESEARCH REPORT



Gedo, Jubbaland and the Translocal Marehan

State fragmentation, identity politics and regional reconfigurations in the Somali territories

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PeaceRep Somalia research aims to deepen the understanding of the country's fragmented predicament, ten years after the establishment of the Federal government and in light of the continued pervasiveness of conflict and political instability, both domestically and regionally. Our research themes include: sub-national governance through checkpoints; justice and security in Somalia; building on the Galkayo 'local' agreement; emergent conflict and peace dynamics across the Somali regions (Ethiopia, Somalia and Kenya). The programme will continue to analyse and engage stakeholders around peacebuilding processes and in relation to events that unfold in real time.

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Executive Summary

Processes of state fragmentation have become more evident in Somalia in recent years, reflecting both national and sub-national factors as well as their intersection with regional and global dynamics. Gedo region – and its dominant Marehan clan constituency – provides one such example, with its ongoing and ambiguous incorporation into the Federal Member State of Jubbaland.

The report highlights the importance of understanding territoriality – the relationship between identity and territory – in processes of state fragmentation. Several factors are pertinent to the Gedo/Marehan case:

- ▶ a historical presence of the Marehan in Galmudug and Mudug regions (extending across the Somalia-Ethiopia border) and from where many of their elite originate.
- ▶ a legacy of the 20-year leadership of the independent state, from Mogadishu, under ex-President, Mohamed Siad Barre (1969-1990).
- ▶ Marehan interests and presence in Kismayo that expanded immediately following the collapse of the state in 1990/91
- ▶ an inward displacement and migration to Gedo region from Mogadishu and neighbouring areas of Ethiopia over the last four to five decades.

Gedo's initial territorial incorporation into Jubbaland (established 2013) was largely achieved through the alliance of Gedo strongman, Abdirashid Hassan Abdinuur 'Janaan', with Jubbaland President, Ahmed Mohamed Islam 'Madobe', alongside the support of Ethiopian security forces. This arrangement was undone by ex-President Mohamed 'Farmajo', from 2017, since when Gedo has been contested between Jubbaland and Mogadishu.

A critical factor in Gedo's political trajectory is the geographic dispersal of Marehan elites. This especially concerns the Reer Dini sub-clan of the Marehan, the traditional leaders of the clan,¹ whose direct influence in Gedo has weakened over time and whose politics and interests are focused on Mogadishu and Kismayo. This dispersal and focus on the national and regional capitals have resulted in Marehan elites neglecting dialogue with regard to Gedo; a lack of united leadership and a focus on toppling President Ahmed 'Madobe' has undermined stability in Gedo itself.

Under current conditions, Gedo's position within Jubbaland is likely to remain fluid, fractured and subject to outbreaks of localised conflict. Only when Marehan political elites embark on a serious dialogue process with respect to Gedo, involving not only their own clan constituencies but other clans in the region, will Gedo itself become a more coherent political entity; this is not a scenario that the leadership in Kismayo or Mogadishu appear to be working towards as both compete for control of Gedo region.

Introduction

Processes of state fragmentation have become more evident in Somalia in recent years, reflecting both national and sub-national factors as well as their intersection with regional and global dynamics. Gedo region provides one such example, with its ongoing and ambiguous incorporation into Jubbaland. This paper accompanies a previous and sister paper – ‘the Jubbaland Project and the Transborder Ogadeen’ – which examined the evolution of Jubbaland situating an Ogadeen clan positionality and agency within an Ethiopia-Kenya-Somalia prism.²

This paper focuses on Gedo region and a Marehan – the dominant clan constituency within Gedo – positionality, within Jubbaland and Somalia, highlighting a number of characteristics of the Marehan including:

- ▶ a historical presence in Galmudug and Mudug regions (extending across the Somalia-Ethiopia border) and from where many of their elite originate.
- ▶ a legacy of the 20-year leadership of the independent state, from Mogadishu, under ex-President, Mohamed Siad Barre.
- ▶ interests and presence in Kismayo that expanded immediately following the collapse of the state in 1990/91
- ▶ an inward displacement/migration to Gedo from Mogadishu and neighbouring areas of Ethiopia over the last four to five decades.

As Somalia's first newly established Federal Member State (FMS), in 2013, it was only in its first five years that Gedo region and its dominant clan constituency, the Marehan, could claim to hold a relatively coherent and stable position within Jubbaland. This was achieved, in large part, because of the incorporation of several prominent Marehan-identified figures in the state authority, as well as conducive relations with Ethiopia, Kenya and Mogadishu. Of particular importance during this period was the Gedo strongman, Abdirashid Hassan Abdinuur 'Janaan', whose coercive dominance of northern Gedo, and alliance with the Jubbaland President, Ahmed Mohamed Islam 'Madobe' and Ethiopian security forces signified the region's partial incorporation into Jubbaland.

Since the election of ex-President and Marehan figure – Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed 'Farmajo', in 2017, and the change of regime in Ethiopia, in 2018, Gedo's internal fragmentation and instability has grown and become more visible, as political elites in Mogadishu and Kismayo have competed for control of the region. Kenyan and Ethiopian state interests have played into this competition, where both maintain a military presence in Jubbaland.

The change of regime to President Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud (HSM), in 2022, initially saw Mogadishu withdraw from competition for influence in Jubbaland, as the offensive against Al Shabaab dominated attention. However, as HSM's position has weakened tensions between Mogadishu and Kismayo have re-emerged, most evidently in the Ras Kamboni debacle in December 2024.³

A critical factor in Gedo's political trajectory is the geographic dispersal of Marehan elites. This especially concerns the Reer Dini sub-clan of the Marehan, the traditional leaders of the clan, whose direct influence in Gedo has weakened over time and whose politics and interests are focused on Mogadishu and Kismayo. This dispersal and focus on the national and regional capitals have resulted in Marehan elites neglecting dialogue with regard to Gedo; a lack of united leadership and a focus on toppling President Ahmed 'Madobe' has undermined stability in Gedo itself.

Under current conditions, Gedo's position within Jubbaland is likely to remain fluid, fractured and subject to outbreaks of localised conflict. Only when Marehan political elites embark on a serious dialogue process with respect to Gedo, involving not only their own clan constituencies but other clans in the region, will Gedo itself become a more coherent political entity; this is not a scenario that President 'Madobe' works towards as he benefits from and manipulates Marehan disunity. At the time of writing Abdirashid 'Janaan' has been brought back to the political scene and conflict has intensified in Gedo region.

This report draws upon a long history of engagement in Jubbaland by the authors including through two major research programmes at LSE as well as a number of other studies that both authors have been involved in, with a focus on either Gedo or Jubbaland. Data has been gathered through semi-structured interviews, informal conversations and participant observation.⁴ The report has been reviewed by five analysts with a deep knowledge of Gedo and Jubbaland.

The report begins with a brief outline of Marehan history within Somalia and the Somali regions, referring to pertinent migratory factors before and after the collapse of the state in the early 1990s. We then explain how a Marehan identity was incorporated into the formation of Jubbaland and then its disruption – under the 'Farmajo' administration – after which its political status has remained ambiguous. A brief discussion of the salience of inter-clan proximity and relations is then raised before concluding.

Background and Identity Politics

This report adopts a 'clan' lens, acknowledging the salience of clan identity and politics in Somali history and society. According to Luling, while clan-ism rarely explains conflict it provides a 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).⁵ De Waal identifies the period 1987-1992 as one where militarised clan identities were produced and concretised in Somalia, the legacy of which continues today.⁶ Finally, 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).⁷

The Marehan, a prominent Darod clan, occupy a privileged place in Somalia's post-colonial history, with President Mohamed Siad Barre (1969-91) – of Marehan lineage – leading the state for much of the period following independence, including in the war with Ethiopia and up to its collapse. This gave privileged access to the benefits of the state – employment, education, travel, urbanisation – for many Marehan. While initially driven by an experiment in scientific socialism, the defeat of Somalia by Ethiopia during the 1987-88 Ethiopia-Somalia war, led to the increasing politicisation of clan identity as a tool of the Barre regime; MOD – Marehan-Ogadeen-Dhulbahante – became a moniker of the ruling regime during the late Barre years.⁸

The Marehan are identified with three regions in Somalia, Galgaduud and Mudug (now the Federal Member State of Galmudug) in central Somalia and Gedo in Jubbaland. Gedo is one of three regions in Jubbaland, along with Lower and Middle Juba, and the only region in Somalia having borders with both Kenya and Ethiopia. Jubbaland is of interest to many of Somalia's domestic constituencies, given its demographic composition: the Digil and Mirifle of Southwest State extend up to the Juba River in eastern Jubbaland; the Gaal Jecel (Hawiye) have significant numbers in both Hiiraan region (Hirshabelle) and Jubbaland. The Marehan (along with the Habargidir (Hawiye)) controlled Kismayo for almost a decade following the collapse of the state, expanding business interests and their own resident population. Harti populations, originally from Puntland, also have a long history in Kismayo, prior to and since state collapse and have aspirations to lead Jubbaland.

The historical home territory of the Marehan is the border area between the central regions of Mudug and Galgaduud and the corresponding areas of Somali Regional State (SRS) of Ethiopia. The two main branches of the Marehan, the Reer Hassan and Isaq, are associated with this 'homeland'. The Isaq, as a collective identity group, are normally 'silent', as powerful sub-clans such as the Reer Dini, Wagardhac and Ali Dheere present themselves as independent actors. The Reer Hassan (and the Talhe), while originally associated with central regions, migrated south to present-day Gedo during the 19th century⁹ and have virtually no population left in the central plains. Furthermore, a portion of the Reer Hassan moved on from present-day Gedo, into the Negele area of Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) – following the Borana – where they still have a sizeable population, therefore making up a cross-border population in this Somalia-Ethiopia area.

While the Reer Hassan have mostly left the central regions, the sub-clans of the Isaq moved later, but many have remained in central Somalia, unlike the Reer Hassan. They moved in three main waves. The first wave, between approximately 1880 and 1910, consisted of armed and mounted men and members of the Dervish movement.¹⁰ A second wave took place from around 1910, which was associated with the defeat of the dervish movement. The final wave took place after the collapse of the Somali state in 1991. The people of the second wave are referred to locally as Galti (strangers, newcomers, or guests), while the Reer Hassan and Talhe (Hawarsame, Soon-Fure, Fiqi-Yaqub) who preceded these waves are classified as Reer Guri (the family of the house or local inhabitants).¹¹ The competition between these two groups – Galti and Guri – continues today, and is the basis of many political fissures within the Marehan.¹²

The last movement, during the civil war, involved the flight of many Somalis from Mogadishu in particular, and is associated with major demographic shifts throughout central and southern Somalia. For much of the Marehan in Mogadishu at this time, movement to Gedo (and Kismayo) took place because central regions were not easily accessible as a result of the conflict.

Six main Marehan subclans broadly dominate Gedo today – in political, security and economic terms – namely, the Reer Hassan in Luuq, the Reer Ahmed in Dolo and Beled Hawa, the Ali Dheere in Beled Hawa, the Reer Diini in Garbaharrey, Baardheere and Burr Dhuubo, the Talhe in Baardheere district (the most southern sub clan), and the Hawarsame who do not dominate any single district but are an important constituency in many districts (especially in the three northern districts of Belet Hawa, Luuq and Dolo).

Although one subclan dominates each district, all are spread over more than one district. The only subclan that dominates more than one district is the Reer Diini.

The traditional leaders of the Marehan are considered to be the Reer Diini, who comprise the dominant political and business elite, an equivalent position to the Mohamed Zubhir amongst the Ogadeen. They are considered both the most influential and the most numerous; ex-President, Mohammed Siyaad Barre, was a member of the Reer Diini. The rule of Barre enabled the Reer Diini to develop the political and human capital that contributes to their still powerful position today. Recent President, Mohamed Abdullahi 'Farmajo', as well as two prime ministers under HSM's first term – Abdi Farah Sheridan Saaid and Abdiweli Sheikh Ahmed – were all members of the Reer Diini.¹³

The SNF, Al Itihad and Ethiopian Engagement – the 1990s

During the years of the civil war in the early 1990s, when much of the Marehan population from Mogadishu and the rest of southern Somalia moved to Gedo region, General Mohamed Farah Aidid (Hawiye-Haber Gedir) of the United Somali Congress (USC) quickly followed them, occupying much of the region. However, the Marehan organised themselves under two political-military groupings, the Somali National Front (SNF) and Al Itihad al Islamia (AIAI – Islamic Union). These two groups wrestled back control of the region from the USC but quickly fell out.¹⁴ AIAI prevailed in northern Gedo, basing itself in Luuq and Beled Hawa, avoiding Dolo as it was close to the Ethiopian border. The SNF, who were stronger in southern Gedo (and Kismayo), turned to the Ethiopian government for support, who were battling their own AIAI problem in SRS, Ethiopia, and therefore a convenient ally.

In 1996-97, the Ethiopians invaded Gedo, defeated AIAI¹⁵ and installed SNF leader, Omar Haji Masalle as their preferred counterpart in the region. Masalle was a former general and minister from the Barre era, who also hailed from a close lineage to the Reer Diini.¹⁶ Barre Adan Shire (Hiiraale), from the same sub-clan and a former officer of the Somali army emerged as a successful military leader of the SNF.¹⁷ At this time, in the 1990s, Abdirashid 'Janaan' – later to become Madobe's key ally in Jubbaland – was a young man and member of AIAI in Somalia.

As Ethiopia established its presence in northern Gedo, creating a security buffer zone, it turned the local sub-clans against the Reer Dini elites. The Reer Hassan who, as indicated previously, have a significant presence in both Ethiopia and Gedo, were keen to assert themselves vis-à-vis the dominant Reer Diini. In addition, their numbers in Gedo had been growing from the 1980s, due to both displacement and in-migration from Ethiopia.¹⁸ They became an obvious choice for Ethiopian patronage. This opportunity materialised when SNF's deputy leader, Dr Ali Nur Mohamed Mukhtar (Reer Hassan) was killed by a member of the Reer Ahmed (Marehan), in 1998, over a border control and tax collection disagreement. This ignited an intra-Marehan war in which the Reer Hassan took control of Luuq town – with Ethiopian support – which they maintain today. From this time, northern Gedo has slipped away from the influence of the Reer Diini elites, who nevertheless remain dominant in central regions, Mogadishu and Kismayo.

Meanwhile, in Kismayo, Omar Haji Masalle and Barre 'Hirale' of the SNF, were in charge but were facing serious challenges from Harti clan leader, Mohamed Said Morgan (the infamous General Morgan).¹⁹ In 1997, Masalle participated in the Cairo peace conference²⁰ and, as a result, developed good relations with Haber Gedir leadership, powerful in Mogadishu and other areas of south and central Somalia. These relations ultimately turned into an alliance, with the Haber Gedir supporting Masalle with arms and militia, and which turn was able to wrestle back control of Kismayo from Morgan;²¹ the operation to do so was led by Barre (Hiralle), who became the military leader of this new alliance – the Juba Valley Alliance (JVA) – and later the political leader in control of Kismayo. The JVA was only removed by the Union of Islamic Courts (ICU) in 2006, when Ahmed 'Madobe', current President of Jubbaland, became the town's governor.²² This period, from the early 1990s to the mid-2000s, increased the Marehan presence and economic interests in Kismayo where, for example, there is now a Marehan-identified neighbourhood in the town. This population group is predominantly composed of people from Galmudug rather than Gedo, reflecting the underlying territorial-identity distinctions of the Marehan in Jubbaland.



The Emergence of Jubbaland and its Marehan incorporation

While Ogadeen and Marehan elites were both instrumental in the establishment of Jubbaland, the Marehan generally opposed Madobe's nomination and actual leadership from the outset. The greater proximity to and relations between Marehan and Hawiye elites influenced the opposition to Madobe from Mogadishu's Hawiye leadership at the time; underlying inter-clan relationships and familiarity is an underappreciated dynamic in Somali politics and is particularly salient in the Hawiye-Marehan-Ogadeen configuration (see further discussion below). That said, the most important actors in Jubbaland's formation including the selection of its leadership were from the elites of the Ogadeen, and their influence on Ethiopia and Kenya, leading to Madobe's eventual selection as interim President.²³ However, Gedo region and the Marehan needed to be onboard to legitimise the Jubbaland project.

Ogadeen and Marehan competition and conflict over Kismayo was a distinct challenge in creating a political settlement between the two groups over Jubbaland. On at least two separate occasions in the recent past Ahmed Madobe, with his forces and allies at the time, have captured or held Kismayo from Marehan elements: in 2006, Madobe took control and governed Kismayo under the auspices of the ICU, removing Barre 'Hirale'; in 2011, Madobe again led the capture of Kismayo, with the support of the Kenyan Defence Force (KDF),²⁴ this time from Al Shabaab.²⁵ Later, in 2013 soon after the establishment of Jubbaland, while Madobe was in Addis Ababa negotiating the status of Jubbaland and his position, the FGS supported an attack on the city, again led by Barre Hirale – this most recent attack was resisted by Madobe's forces in Kismayo,²⁶ in his absence. These events reflect the ongoing claims on the town by the Marehan.

Once Madobe was confirmed as interim President of Jubbaland, in 2013, Marehan figures needed to be incorporated. A number of alliances constituted this arrangement, a key member of which was the District Commissioner of Dolo at the time, Abdirashid 'Janaan' (Reer Ahmed/Marehan), whose power had grown in previous years, extending across much of northern Gedo, through his control of the economy (trade and aid) and his alliance with Ethiopian security forces in the area.²⁷ In addition, Janaan, Madobe and SRS/Ethiopia President, Abdi 'Iley', all had a common Islamist backgrounds.²⁸ At the Mogadishu level, this arrangement was supported by Abdullahi Ismail 'Fartag', the Somalia vice-president at the time, who was also close to Ethiopia.²⁹

Abdirashid 'Janaan' is a highly controversial figure in Gedo's recent history, whose position of power became increasingly violent and repressive between 2012 and 2019.³⁰ However, his coercive dominance of northern Gedo, and ability to collaborate with the leadership in Kismayo and Jijiga led to him becoming Security Minister of Jubbaland and Gedo's key representative within the emergent FMS.³¹

Two other important figures who later became part of the Jubbaland administration, were Adam Ibrahim Aw Hersi, who was appointed in 2016, following his previous position in the FGS, in Mogadishu, and who remained until 2019. A former Gedo governor, also of the Reer Diini, he is a vocal figure in social media and a prominent person, who acts to counter some of the Mogadishu-centric interest in Kismayo and Jubbaland. The third figure of significance is Mohamoud Sayid, Vice-President, and long-standing ally of Madobe, from the Reer Hassan/Marehan. The dominance of Ogadeen and Marehan constituencies within Jubbaland is reflected in their respective representation in parliament, together accounting for just over 50% of the MPs in the regional state.³²

President Farmajo and the 2019 Elections

The election of President Mohamed Abdullahi Abdi 'Farmajo' in April 2017 and Ethiopian Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, in May 2018, significantly changed the political landscape within Somalia and regionally. The authoritarian impulse of the Farmajo regime, and his alliance with Ethiopia, led to the FGS attempting to install compliant leaders in the FMS elections that took place under his leadership. This began with the 2018 Southwest State elections, where the FGS used money and coercion to install their preferred candidate, Abdiaziz Hassan Mohamed (Laftagaren).³³ Jubbaland elections were due six months later with Madobe duly warned of the direction coming from Mogadishu and where Ethiopia was no longer an ally.

Mogadishu's tactics to undermine Madobe in the run up to the Jubbaland elections were ultimately unable to oust him. Oppositional clan narratives between the Ogadeen and Marehan were animated as part of these election politics, and Madobe was also able to call on the support of Kenya, who remained supportive of Jubbaland's existing leadership. Madobe was ultimately able to control the election and secure his re-election, in a largely discredited process, but nevertheless a major defeat for the ruling cabal in Mogadishu.³⁴

The FGS rejected the Jubbaland election results and the conflict between the two sides escalated. The FGS enforced a flight blockade on Kismayo and brought Gedo under its direct control utilising Turkish trained forces commanded by the federal intelligence body, NISA. This in turn loosened Janaan's grip in northern Gedo, forcing him to temporarily switch alliances. He later tried to attack Gedo from Kenya using Jubbaland forces but when this attack failed, he lost control of Gedo permanently. Northern Gedo has been increasingly fractured since, with security deteriorating further over the years.

The Aftermath and Gedo's Continued Ambiguity

As reflected above, regime change in Ethiopia and Somalia undermined the previous status quo in Jubbaland, albeit where Gedo and its Marehan's incorporation was partial in both territorial and identity terms, mainly reflecting northern Gedo (under the Reer Hassan) as well as some Reer Diini figures in Kismayo. The election of Hassan Sheik Mohamud (HSM), in 2022, and the appointment of an Ogadeen Prime Minister, Hamza Abdi Barre, was a major setback for Marehan power and aspirations at both Mogadishu and Kismayo levels; at the time Hamza was considered close to Madobe. In addition, federal forces were redeployed from Gedo, to join the offensive against Al Shabaab, that was focused on central regions, with Madobe effectively left to appoint his own people in the Gedo administration. This weakened the influence of the FGS in Gedo and gave greater space to local actors.

The Jubbaland administration in Kismayo struggled to assert itself in Gedo with no powerful figures to work with, and little local support. As FMS elections grew closer, in 2024, FGS-FMS tensions re-emerged. In this light, HSM in Mogadishu – like Farmajo before him – looked for ways to increase his own chances of re-election on the national stage by attempting to control the FMS level.³⁵ A weakening of support for HSM led in turn to a falling out with Ahmed 'Madobe' (their relationship was always ambiguous and tactical).³⁶

However, by the time the FGS renewed its interest in Gedo, it had little purchase on the ground and could not offer much in Mogadishu, for example, in terms of government positions. This weakening of Marehan power has contributed to the recent infighting in Gedo which was always latent but masked by the influence and tensions at higher levels.

The Ethiopian presence in both north and south Gedo remains in place, but its influence has diminished with no apparent strategy for the region emanating from Addis Ababa, nor any alliance with a dominant Somali figure, such as with Janaan previously. Ethiopia's changed engagement in Somalia – particularly in Gedo – since Farmajo's departure, has contributed to today's political and security volatility, with neither Marehan elites nor Ethiopian forces able or willing to consolidate control. Security has deteriorated through much of the region, in both the urban and rural areas, with different sub-clans and families attempting to assert themselves. Serious localised conflicts have included an alliance between the Marehan and Gabaweyn (Somali Bantu) against the Ma'allin Wayne (Digil and Mirifle), in Luuq.³⁷

In Baardheere, the control of the airport and the district have changed hands several times as both Madobe and HSM have attempted to outbid each other for local allies. In Dolo, which is closest to the Ethiopian border, there has been fighting in town and at the airport between forces loyal to Jubbaland and those loyal to the FGS.

Given this predicament, Marehan elites have become disillusioned with HSM's government and have also not reconciled with Madobe. HSM is blamed for deposing Farmajo in an undignified manner and initially siding with Madobe, as well as abandoning Gedo and the Marehan. They look to the next federal elections to bring them a renewed ability to contest power in Jubbaland.

Competing Narratives and Inter-clan Relations

A further perspective regarding core-periphery relations, between Mogadishu and Kismayo in this case, concerns the juxtaposition of Hawiye, Marehan and Ogadeen actors and narratives. The history of the Marehan in Mogadishu and Kismayo, alongside Haber Gedir (Hawiye) and Harti has enabled much stronger relations to have developed between their respective political and business elites, compared to that between the Hawiye and Ogadeen. This is manifest in the return of many Marehan families, business elites and political elites to Mogadishu for example, since the reestablishment of the central state, from 2012, in addition to their increased presence in Kismayo in the first decade after the collapse of the state, as indicated previously. Furthermore, in the central regions of Somalia, the Marehan live in close proximity to the Hawiye, and have a history of intermarriage and exchange. This gives Marehan interlocutors an advantage in Mogadishu and amongst the Hawiye, when it comes to Jubbaland, as they are able to 'sell their story' – or influence Hawiye elites – better than the Ogadeen. The inverse of this is that the Ogadeen feel that they are – or can be – marginalised from the centre of power in Mogadishu, expressed by some as a form of existential threat; a common narrative in this regard is that the Ogadeen are portrayed as Somalis from Ethiopia and Kenya, which neglects their history and presence in Gedo and Lower and Middle Juba. This narrative is animated by the current political power of Ogadeen elites in both Kenya and Ethiopia.

Another fissure of political contestation concerns the Guri-Galti divide. The long-standing Vice-President of Jubbaland, Mohamud Sayid, is from the Reer Hassan sub-clan of the Marehan – Reer Guri – who arrived in the early migration of the Marehan to southern Somalia. Ahmed Madobe expresses his preference – as a form of political manipulation – for the Reer Guri. This is ironic as Madobe himself, as a relatively recent arrival from SRS, Ethiopia, is a Galti within the Ogadeen; the Marehan also utilise this fissure, preferring to deal with the Reer Guri of the Ogadeen (known as the Reer Waamo), rather than outsiders.

Conclusion

In our sister memo, the Jubbaland Project and the Transborder Ogadeen, we raised attention to the longer-term ebbs and flows in the evocation and expression of power within the Ogadeen clan family, describing an alignment of transborder clan interests with Ethiopian and Kenyan state interests, articulated through a charismatic leader and directed at a major political (Jubbaland) and economic (Kismayo) prize. This initiative did not last long, as we concluded in 2021 (although neither has it completely collapsed):

*'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.'*¹³⁸

This report draws out a parallel story for the Marehan, locating current concerns about Gedo within a broader historical and national context, where the dominant elites of the Marehan, the Reer Diini, are focused on Mogadishu and Kismayo, a function of their marginalisation and disengagement from Gedo. One of the outcomes of this process was that it enabled Abdirashid 'Janaan' to rise, alongside Ethiopian support, and thereby to symbolise an at least partial incorporation of Gedo region into the Ogadeen-led Jubbaland project. Following his arrest in August 2019, Gedo region has remained contested, divided and unstable.

Today, Marehan elites are in relatively weak positions in both Mogadishu and Kismayo, perhaps a low point in the ebb and flow of clan power, as time will tell. At the same time Ethiopia does not have a clear direction in Gedo or influence in Jubbaland. This status quo suits Ahmed Madobe, as he faces multiple threats and challenges, from Mogadishu as well as from within the Ogadeen. This in turn is enabling new local contestation to emerge, such as the challenge to the Marehan-Reer Hassan by the Ma'allin Weyne in Luuq. In this environment, local elites appeal to different patrons, in Mogadishu and Kismayo, as they compete for local resources and elite patronage, often on a highly transactional basis, sometimes shifting alliances quickly.

Under the current political trajectory in Somalia and in the wider region, Gedo's position within Jubbaland appears likely to remain fluid, fractured and subject to outbreaks of localised conflict. Only when Marehan political elites embark on a serious reconciliation process with respect to Gedo, under a united leadership and vision, involving not only their own clan but other clans in the region, will Gedo itself become a more coherent polity.

Endnotes

¹ The Mohamed Zubhir have this status within the Ogadeen.

² Majid, Nisar, and Abdirahman, Khalif. 2021. 'The Jubbaland Project and the Transborder Ogadeen Identity Politics and Regional Reconfigurations in the Ethiopia-Kenya-Somalia Borderlands.' Research Memo. Conflict Research Programme. London: London School of Economics and Political Science. (see: <https://www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/Assets/Documents/Conflict-Research-Programme/crp-memos/jubbaland-project-transborder-ogadeen.pdf>). A forthcoming paper by the same authors extends that analysis, theoretically and empirically.

³ See: https://hiiraan.com/news4/2024/Dec/199351/kenya_to_repatriate_600_somali_soldiers_after_ras_kamboni_clash.aspx

⁴ This includes research undertaken during the LSE Conflict Research Programme (CRP-2018-21) and the LSE PeaceRep programme.

⁵ Luling, Virginia. 2006. 'Genealogy as Theory, Genealogy as Tool: Aspects of Somali 'clanship', *Social Identities*, 12(4): 471-485.

⁶ De Waal, Alex. 2020. "Somalia's disassembled state: clan unit formation and the political marketplace." *Conflict, Security and Development*. 20 (5): 561-585.

⁷ Barnes, Cedric. 2006. 'Gubo - Ogadeen Poetry and the Aftermath of the Dervish Wars', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*. 18 (1), Language, Power and Society: Orality and Literacy in the Horn of Africa (June, 2006): 105-117.

⁸ Lewis, Ioan. M. 2002. *A Modern History of the Somali: Nation and State in the Horn of Africa*. London: James Currey.

⁹ <https://brill.com/display/book/9789004255227/B9789004255227-s003.xml>

¹⁰ Lewis, A Modern History. Op. cit.

¹¹ These time periods are approximate and based on oral histories.

¹² The use of Galti and Guri is sometimes limited to the pre and post-state collapse period, but can also be extended historically, see: Menkhaus, Ken. 2002. Political Islam in Somalia. *Middle East Policy*, 9 (1): 109-123.

¹³ Both had positions in Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's first presidential term (2010-2015); The Rer Ahmed and Ali Dheere, as part of the Isaq branch of the Marehan are closer to the Rar Diini in terms of genealogy giving them further allies and number when needed.

¹⁴ Menkhaus. Op. cit.

¹⁵ The AIAI in Gedo were reportedly supporting the AIAI in Ethiopia although they were not part of the same organisation.

¹⁶ His lineage is the Farah Ugas, the brother of Reer Diini (Dini Farah and Guled Farah lineages).

¹⁷ He reportedly proved himself in battle with the USC.

¹⁸ Many Reer Hassan members arrived in Gedo in the eighties as refugees from Ethiopia and were settled in camps in Luuq district but did not return as they considered Gedo their homeland.

¹⁹ Kismayo changed hands on several occasions during the 1990s, particularly between the SNF and the Juba Valley Alliance, see: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/report/24598/somalia-kismayo-seized-morgan-militia>; Narbeth, Simon, and McLean, Calum. 2003. 'Livelihoods and Protection: Displacement and vulnerable communities in Kismaayo, southern Somalia.' Network Paper 44. Humanitarian Practice Network. London: ODI; Skjelderup, Michael, Ainashe, Mukhtar, and Abdulle, Ahmed Mohamed "Qare". 2020. "Militant Islamism and local clan dynamics in Somalia: the expansion of the Islamic Courts Union in Lower Jubba province." *Journal of Eastern African Studies*. 14 (3): 553-571.

²⁰ https://www.peaceagreements.org/media/documents/ag317_55c0be9d030cf.pdf

²¹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/somalia-icrc-and-somali-red-crescent-assist-victims-fighting-over-kismayo-0>

²² <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2006/9/25/islamists-take-main-somali-port-city>

²³ Majid and Abdirahman, 2021, Op. cit.

²⁴ <https://nation.africa/kenya/life-and-style/dn2/outnumbered-outgunned-and-outwitted-how-kdf-took-charge-of-kismayu-town-1102096>

²⁵ Al Shabaab may have had an agreement with Marehan elements at this time, but this is not clear or easy to ascertain.

²⁶ <https://www.africa-confidential.com/article-preview/id/4956/madobe-consolidates-in-kismayo>

²⁷ See Majid, Abdirahman and Adan, forthcoming.

²⁸ The support of Abdi 'lley' towards both Madobe and Janaan is an underexplored element in the establishment of Jubbaland and reflects the entanglement of Ethiopian and Somalia actors at different levels of the state.

²⁹ Fartag is from the Reer Diini, and his support for Janaan reflects a variation from the underlying argument we are advancing but indicates that individual positions can vary from our more general clan-based argument.

³⁰ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/24/high-profile-jailbreak-undermines-somalias-fight-justice>

³¹ Janaan's incorporation was straightforward financially, as he already controlled the lucrative trade revenues through North Gedo as well as the aid economy.

³² There are 21 representatives and 19 Marehan (out of 75 MPs in total), with the remaining 35 positions coming from other clans: Digil and Mirifle, Harti, Sheekhal, Ga'al Jecel, Jarer, Bajuni.

³³ ICG. 2018. Somalia's South West State: A New President Installed, A Crisis Inflamed, Commentary (see: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/somalias-south-west-state-new-president-installed-crisis-inflamed>)

³⁴ See: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/8/22/somalias-jubaland-region-re-elects-ahmed-mohamed-as-president>

³⁵ See: <https://peacerep.org/publication/mid-term-corruption-and-international-engagement/>

³⁶ This may also have been driven by Ogadeen figures in Mogadishu who have also fallen out with Madobe.

³⁷ See: <https://hornobserver.com/articles/2830/Somalia-Deadly-clashes-in-Luuq-as-unknown-people-torch-down-the-towns-market>; <https://shabellemedia.com/heavy-fighting-erupts-in-luuq-gedo-region-as-clan-militias-clash/>.

³⁸ Majid and Abdirahman. 2021:2, The Jubbaland Project.

About Us

PeaceRep is a research consortium based at Edinburgh Law School. Our research is rethinking peace and transition processes in the light of changing conflict dynamics, changing demands of inclusion, and changes in patterns of global intervention in conflict and peace/mediation/transition management processes.

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