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Ending the Dangerous Standoff in Southern Somalia

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What's new? Hundreds of troops loyal to the Federal Government of Somalia, on one side, and Jubaland regional state, on the other, are locked in a tense showdown in the Gedo region of southern Somalia. Clashes between them have already resulted in fatalities and uprooted thousands from their homes.

Why does it matter? Neighbouring Ethiopia and Kenya, which are both troop contributors to the African Union's peacekeeping mission in Somalia, seek to avoid direct confrontation but respectively support the opposing federal and Jubaland administrations. The situation plays into the hands of the Al-Shabaab Islamist insurgency, which is further entrenching its presence in Gedo.

What should be done? The African Union, along with the eastern African sub-regional bloc, the Intergovernmental Authority for Development, and Somalia's bilateral partners, should lean on Ethiopia and Kenya to push the two sides to de-escalate tensions. Talks would allow the sides to refocus energies on stemming Al-Shabaab's gains.

I. Overview

A standoff between forces loyal to Somalia's federal authorities and those allied to the southern state of Jubaland could trigger a wider Horn of Africa crisis. Clashes between the two sides in February and March 2020 displaced 56,000 people and killed at least ten, including civilians. The warring parties have since settled into an uneasy stalemate but discord is rife among clans in Jubaland's Gedo region, the epicentre of the violence. Mogadishu and Jubaland leaders, and their respective backers Ethiopia and Kenya, need to compromise. The African Union (AU), working with the sub-regional bloc, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and in concert with others such as the UN, European Union (EU), United States and United Kingdom, should push for revival of tripartite talks among Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. Those talks should aim to ease regional tensions and pave the way for the federal government and Jubaland leaders to end their dangerous altercation before it escalates further.

The frictions in Gedo reflect political fault lines that cut from national politics down to local clan tensions and constitute a major source of instability for Somalia. The principal conflict is a standoff between the Jubaland state, notably its leader, Ahmed Mohamed Islam "Madobe", and the federal government led by Somalia's president,

Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed "Farmajo". The dispute was triggered by Mogadishu's refusal to recognise what it and Madobe's local rivals argue was a flawed August 2019 vote that saw the Jubaland president win a second term. But it reflects deeper disagreement between Farmajo and Madobe over how Somalia's political system should allocate power. Their differences have fuelled local tensions via clan and sub-clan alliances and rivalries that characterise the country's often fractious politics. The bitter divisions are worrying, given the need for national and local consensus on key issues, such as how to organise Somalia's next election, due by the end of 2020.

The situation is worsened by tensions between external actors serving as part of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which is mandated to support efforts by federal and state governments to combat the Al-Shabaab insurgency. Ethiopia, which has a contingent of troops in the contested region of Gedo in the north of Jubaland, backs Mogadishu, the result of Addis Ababa's pivot over the past two years in favour of a centralised Somali state. In contrast, Kenya, whose troops are based farther south in Lower Juba, supports Jubaland's incumbent president. Nairobi sees him as critical to a buffer zone in that region protecting Kenya from militant incursions. Neither of the two regional heavyweights seeks a direct confrontation. But absent a resolution, their rivalry could feed a damaging conflict in Somalia that would have repercussions for regional stability.

It will take efforts by all sides to avert renewed hostilities. The AU should lean on Kenya and Ethiopia to back down and afford their Somali allies space to make concessions. As a first step, the AU Commission chairperson should urge the Kenyan, Ethiopian and Somali leaders to convene a tripartite summit they had called in March to de-escalate tensions but postponed due the COVID-19 pandemic. In turn, the AU, IGAD, the UN, the EU and Somalia's key bilateral partners, chiefly the U.S. and UK, should press Farmajo's government and Madobe to craft a compromise. Such a deal could entail Mogadishu recognising Madobe's administration in return for Madobe pledging not to seek another term as Jubaland president, reconciling with other Jubaland leaders to address grievances over his re-election and his governance more broadly, and cooperating on national priorities, notably how to hold national elections due in late 2020. A bargain would allow them to dedicate troops and resources to their shared goal of rolling back Al-Shabaab's insurgency.

II. A Divisive Vote and Its Fallout

Since coming into office, President Farmajo has moved to assert the central government's control over semi-autonomous regions known in Somalia's federalised system as federal member states.[1] Though he has installed compliant allies as presidents in some states, Farmajo has struggled to do the same in Jubaland, where opposition to Mogadishu – both his administration and its predecessors – has been particularly pronounced over the years.[2] Ahead of elections for Jubaland's presidency, held in

[1] See Rashid Abdi, "Somalia's South West State: A New President Installed, a Crisis Inflamed", Crisis Group Commentary, 24 December 2018.

[2] In Hirshabelle in September 2017, South West state in December 2018 and Galmudug in 2019-2020, the government of Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed "Farmajo" replaced incumbents with more compliant state administrations. Crisis Group interview, Somali diplomat, March 2020. The gov-

August 2019, tensions accelerated, leading to a crisis that evolved into today's military standoff.

Control of Jubaland, an economic centre of gravity in Somalia, has long been and will likely remain contentious. The country's southernmost region is potentially one of Somalia's wealthiest, with abundant seasonal rainfall, lush farm and rangeland, and possibly huge offshore oil and gas deposits.[3] Its port of Kismayo is one of Somalia's largest cities and a much sought-after asset. Previously held by Al-Shabaab, Kismayo is now controlled by troops loyal to Madobe. He and Farmajo, however, hail from two different clan groupings that have contested power in the region for decades.[4] The two men hold diametrically opposed visions of the proper balance of power between the centre and member states, with the more centralist Farmajo bitterly opposed to Madobe, who seeks greater regional autonomy.

Planning for the 2019 election proved heated from the start. Jubaland resisted attempts from Mogadishu to impose controls over the conduct of the poll organised by the Jubaland electoral authority, which opponents say was dominated by Madobe allies.[5] Mogadishu subsequently rejected the outcome, which saw Madobe re-elected to another four-year term.[6] Moreover, an anti-Madobe alliance under the banner of the Jubaland Council for Change (JCC) held its own parallel vote due to what it said were concerns regarding manipulation, despite pleas from the AU, IGAD and the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia to avoid competing polls.[7] This parallel process itself proved divisive: two rival opposition candidates, Abdirashid Mohammed Hiddig and Abdinasir Serrar, claimed victory. As a result, three men declared themselves Jubaland's president-elect.[8]

The elections' aftermath sowed further division. Mogadishu refused to accept the results, instead issuing on 7 October 2019 a set of conditions to guide the conduct of fresh elections.[9] Madobe resisted. His administration held its inauguration ceremony in Kismayo, where he was sworn in as Jubaland president. The attendees in-

ernment could not do the same in Puntland and Jubaland, federal states in a stronger position due to their institutional development, external patronage and greater financial assets. Madobe in particular has weathered resistance from successive administrations in Mogadishu since 2012. Crisis Group interview, Jubaland politician, March 2020.

[3] Claire Elder and Zakaria Yusuf, "Jubaland in Jeopardy: The Uneasy Path to State-Building in Somalia", Crisis Group Commentary, 21 May 2013.

[4] Madobe has Ogaden clan roots and has struggled to gain acceptance among many Marehaan, the dominant clan in the Gedo region, who complain about his failure to share power adequately or channel investment to Marehaan areas. Divisions also exist within the Marehaan, between those identified as *guri* (original inhabitants) and *galti* (newcomers). This division is reinforced by Farmajo's background as a *galti* Marehaan, while Madobe has tended to favour *guri* Marehaan politicians, appointing many to official positions. Crisis Group interviews, Gedo youth activist, former Jubaland politician, Jubaland presidential candidate, March 2020.

[5] Madobe appointed the Jubaland election commission's seven members in March 2019. "Jubaland leader appoints a regional poll agency", Halbeeg, 24 March 2019.

[6] "Jubbaland suspends co-operation with the federal government", Goobjoog, 25 July 2019.

[7] "AU, IGAD and UN Senior Representatives Engage with Stakeholders on Jubaland's Electoral Process", press release, UN Assistance Mission for Somalia, 15 August 2019.

[8] A similar situation prevailed at the state's formation in 2013, when Madobe, Barre Hirale and Iftin Hassan Basto all declared themselves president of Jubaland, leading to clashes among their respective militias.

[9] "Interior Ministry sets new procedures to form Jubaland Assembly", Halbeeg, October 2019.

cluded a cross-section of Somali political elites opposed to Mogadishu, revealing how the standoff between Jubaland and the federal government had been elevated to an impasse between Farmajo and his rivals.[10]

Although at first Mogadishu and Kismayo continued to cooperate on technical issues such as debt relief negotiations after Madobe's inauguration, the federal government kept seeking influence in Jubaland at his expense.[11] Rather than contesting overall control of Jubaland by seeking support in Kismayo itself, Mogadishu moved to win over the northern Jubaland region of Gedo. This approach was logical, given Farmajo's blood ties to Gedo's dominant Marehaan clan. In addition, Gedo is a weak spot for Madobe and far from Lower Juba, where he has concentrated his security forces and does most of his politicking.[12] Asserting federal government control in Gedo would help delegitimise Madobe's claims to represent all Jubaland and thus strengthen Farmajo's hand in his pursuit of new state elections or talks regarding the state's future. Forthcoming national elections, which may suffer delays due to COVID-19, also colour calculations vis-à-vis Gedo.[13] Farmajo's chances at a second term in office would increase if he were to win local allies in the regional states.[14]

Farmajo's administration thus moved aggressively to bolster its presence in Gedo, primarily through the deployment of federal security forces and the replacement or co-optation of local officials. Federal deployments have allowed Mogadishu to assert control over the districts of Luuq, Doolow and Beled Hawo, in addition to deepening its presence in Garbaharey and Bardheere. By May 2020, Mogadishu had appointed new district commissioners in those five districts.[15] It had also enticed local officials

[10] Participants included Puntland President Said Deni, former Presidents Sheikh Sharif and Hassan Sheikh Mohamud of the Forum for National Parties (FNP), Abdishakur Abdirahman of the opposition Wadajir party, and former South West and Galmudug Presidents Sharif Hassan Adan and Abdikarim Hassan Guled, as well as approximately 50 Somali MPs and senators. "MPs, former state presidents land in Kismayu ahead of Madobe's inauguration", Hiiraan Online, 5 October 2019.

[11] Cooperation on Somalia's debt relief negotiations with the World Bank and IMF's Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative continued until February, when Jubaland suspended further participation as the conflict over Gedo intensified. Crisis Group interviews, Jubaland politician, March 2020; Somalia-based researcher, May 2020.

[12] Crisis Group interviews, former Jubaland official, March 2020; UN official, May 2020; academic specialising in Somali affairs, May 2020. A common claim among those opposed to Madobe's rule is that his control is mainly limited to the two districts of Kismayo and Afmadow in the Lower Juba region. Crisis Group interviews, Gedo youth activist, March 2020; academic specialising in Somali affairs, May 2020.

[13] The onset of COVID-19 in Somalia may seriously affect the timetable and format for the planned 2020-2021 elections. See Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°155, *COVID-19 in Somalia: A Public Health Emergency in an Electoral Minefield*, 8 May 2020.

[14] Local allies could help mobilise votes for Farmajo in those areas.

[15] Gedo comprises six official districts, but Burdhubo is sometimes considered a separate seventh district, and the federal government appointed a new commissioner there as well. The district of El Waq, historically exposed to greater Kenyan influence, has not been the subject of federal government attention. Crisis Group interview, UN official, April 2020. The appointments were made by Osman Nur Haji "Moalimu", former Jubaland deputy governor of Gedo and now the federally recognised Gedo governor. Jubaland has rejected both Moalimu's current position and the new appointments. Voice of America, 2 June 2020.

to switch their loyalties, while harassing perceived opponents, including with threats of detention.[16]

Mogadishu has invoked national security to justify its actions, saying control over Gedo, which abuts both Ethiopia and Kenya, is essential to defending Somalia's borders.[17] Federal officials say having sway over Gedo would also contribute to any eventual operation to retake Al-Shabaab-controlled territories farther south in Middle Juba.[18] Mogadishu has meanwhile availed itself of federal institutions like the Somali National Army and Somalia's National Intelligence and Security Agency, and enlisted international allies such as Ethiopia to support its efforts on the ground.[19] For its part, Kenya continues to back Madobe, whom it considers a key partner in its mission to hobble Al-Shabaab's advance into Kenyan territory.[20]

III. From Confrontation to Precarious Standstill

It did not take long for hostilities between the parties to erupt. The trigger was the escape from detention in Mogadishu of Jubaland Security Minister Abdirashid Hassan Abdinur "Janan" under mysterious circumstances on 28 January 2020.[21] Janan, a Madobe ally with particular influence in Gedo's districts of Luuq, Doolow and Beled Hawo, represented a threat to Mogadishu's plans to consolidate influence in the region. The minister was detained while transiting through Mogadishu on 31 August 2019, ostensibly on charges of human rights abuses levelled against him by the Banadir regional court, but also amid rumours that he had backed out of a deal to

[16] Crisis Group interview, UN official, April 2020. The Somali National Army reportedly detained the district commissioners of Bardheere and Garbaharey in February and May 2020, respectively. "Guddoomiye ku xigeenka gobolka gedo iyo kan degmada Baardheere oo lagu xiray Muqdisho", Radio Kulmiye, 7 February 2020; "Jubaland official arrested in Gedo, flown to Mogadishu by federal soldiers", Garowe Online, 13 May 2020.

[17] Crisis Group interviews, former Jubaland politician, March 2020; Somali diplomat, March 2020; Western diplomat, April 2020; academic specialising in Somali affairs, May 2020.

[18] Crisis Group interviews, UN official, academic specialising in Somali affairs, May 2020. Bu'ale is officially Jubaland's state capital, but it has been in Al-Shabaab's hands since 2008.

[19] A senior national intelligence official from the Marehaan/Reer Dini, the same sub-clan as Farmajo, reportedly has coordinated federal activities in Gedo since February. Crisis Group interview, Jubaland politician, March 2020. Jubaland has written to UN Special Representative for Somalia James Swan, complaining about non-AMISOM Ethiopian troops in Gedo and their support for the federal government's intervention there. Letter to James Swan, Jubaland State of Somalia Ministry of Interior and Local Government, 10 December 2019. On file with Crisis Group.

[20] Since Kenya intervened in Somalia in 2011, its objectives have evolved somewhat, but they centre around pushing Al-Shabaab back from the border and supporting the development of a Jubaland administration. Crisis Group Africa Report N°184, *The Kenyan Military Intervention in Somalia*, 15 February 2012; Crisis Group interviews, Kenyan academic and government adviser, May 2020.

[21] Crisis Group interviews, UN official, Western diplomat, April 2020. Janan, a *guri* Marehaan from Doolow, is an influential but controversial figure in northern Gedo. He served as an important Marehaan member of Madobe's administration, rising to the post of security minister in 2016, yet he has been dogged by accusations of involvement in the targeting of civilians and obstruction of humanitarian assistance in Gedo. Letter from the Chair of the Security Council Committee to the President of the Security Council on Somalia and Eritrea, 31 October 2016; letter from the Chair of the Security Council Committee to the President of the Security Council on Somalia and Eritrea, 2 November 2017.

work with Mogadishu to undermine Madobe ahead of the regional election.[22] Tensions rose further after Janan's escape. He resurfaced near his stronghold by the border town of Beled Hawo and began to mobilise forces in opposition to the federal government.[23]

Farmajo reacted swiftly by accelerating the deployment of federal forces in Gedo.[24] These troops, backed by pro-federal local militias, soon clashed with forces loyal to Jubaland and mobilised by Janan.[25] On 8 February, a skirmish left between two and four combatants dead in Beled Hawo.[26] On 2 March 2020, heavier fighting occurred around Beled Hawo and Border Point One, claiming six civilian lives and displacing 56,000 people.[27]

No major violence has occurred since then, likely in part due to constraints that both sides face.[28] For Jubaland, a limiting factor is the influx of Ethiopian forces – both with AMISOM, entailing troop rotations via Gedo toward Baidoa, and reportedly outside AMISOM's auspices at the Ethiopian border and in Doolow since March.[29] While Ethiopian troops have not specifically been involved in the Gedo standoff, Ethiopia's political support for Farmajo may nonetheless cause Jubaland to hesitate before re-engaging militarily. On the federal side, Mogadishu has achieved its primary objective by asserting political and security control in much of Gedo. It is unlikely to further pursue opposition Jubaland forces mobilised by Janan in Mandera across the Kenyan border, where some now appear to be based.[30] Calls for restraint from regional and Western envoys may also have helped.[31] The lack of further combat likely reflects a pragmatic assessment on both sides that the risks outweigh potential gains.

That said, both sides have exploited the lull in violence to consolidate positions on the ground. The federal government has sought to build on its overhaul of Gedo's political leadership by undertaking quick-impact development projects and winning over local clans. Social media accounts linked to pro-Mogadishu Gedo leaders point to the federal government's community consultations, clan outreach and infrastructure projects in Beled Hawo, Doolow and Luuq districts.[32] Madobe, too, has sought

[22] Crisis Group interview, Jubaland officials, March 2020.

[23] "Jubaland security minister mobilises troops amid tensions in Gedo", Garowe Online, 8 February 2020.

[24] The Somali National Army reportedly established a training camp in Bardheere in July 2019, helping facilitate additional forward deployments. Crisis Group interview, former military official, May 2020.

[25] Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, April 2020; two confidential third-party research findings, on file with Crisis Group.

[26] Confidential third-party research findings, on file with Crisis Group.

[27] "Flash Update No. 1 on displacement in Gedo region, Jubaland", UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 5 March 2020. Crisis Group interview, Beled Hawo resident, May 2020.

[28] A small confrontation on 22 April in Beled Hawo killed four, including a Somali National Army commander. Confidential third-party research findings, on file with Crisis Group.

[29] Confidential third-party research findings, on file with Crisis Group.

[30] Crisis Group interview, academic specialising in Somali affairs, May 2020; "Roba: presence of Jubaland army threatens Mandera security", *Daily Nation*, 19 June 2020.

[31] Crisis Group interviews, Western diplomat, UN and AU officials, April 2020.

[32] The construction projects include new roads and buildings. Residents have shown their acceptance of the new authorities by giving them camels. Tweet by Osman Nooh Hajji, Mogadishu-appointed governor of Gedo, @GedoGovernor, 8:33pm, 16 February 2020; tweet by Osman Nooh Hajji, Mogadishu-appointed governor of Gedo, @GedoGovernor, 4:23pm, 19 February 2020; tweet by Ahmed

to solidify his position. In late April 2020, his erstwhile opponents Serrar and Hiddig renounced their claims to the Jubaland presidency, while Madobe pledged to form an inclusive cabinet and forgo a third term. The deal shores up Madobe's position in Lower Juba by eliminating sources of political competition.[33] Though opponents argue it entails limited representation, given that all main signatories hail from the Ogaden clan, the agreement does call for clan power sharing and a fresh round of reconciliation conferences to bring Jubaland together.[34]

The situation remains combustible. The political dispute between the parties lingers unresolved. Madobe rejected an offer in June by the federal government to recognise his presidency for a two-year interim period instead of the regular four-year term.[35] A slight provocation could generate a fresh round of violence. Many civilians remain displaced and worried, in the words of one resident from the region, that "fighting could resume at any time".[36] Further violence would only weaken all sides and give Al-Shabaab more opportunities to expand its own territorial control.

IV. National Implications

While centre-periphery tensions in Somalia predate Farmajo's presidency, the fault line has sharpened under his tenure. The president came to power with a vision to restrain what he and his allies perceived as federal member states' overreach, especially in the absence of a strong central government and clear rules outlining the division of power between centre and periphery. Where possible, Farmajo has aimed to replace state-level officials with figures more amenable to his agenda.[37]

The dispute with Jubaland is thus the latest flashpoint in the struggle between Mogadishu and the federal states, and an opportunity for Farmajo's rivals to advance their opposition by backing Madobe. The standoff over Gedo has entered the national conversation relating to power sharing and given Madobe support that may otherwise have remained beyond his reach. For example, Puntland's President Said Deni, a staunch defender of federalism in Somalia, is a firm Madobe backer.[38] The Forum

Bulle Gireed, Mogadishu-aligned district commissioner of Luuq, @LuuqDC, 8:07pm, 16 February 2020.

[33] The opposition alliance is divided over the issue, with one faction maintaining that those party to the agreement defected from the organisation. "Letter of the Jubaland Council for Change to the UN Security Council", SOM/JCC/12/2020, 29 April 2020.

[34] "The Agreement between the Jubaland President and the Leadership of the Jubaland Council for Change", Jubaland State of Somalia, 23 April 2020.

[35] Jubaland swiftly rejected a 14 June federal government statement recognising Madobe for a two-year interim period instead of his full four-year mandate, arguing it lacked constitutional legitimacy. "Jubaland officials rebuff Farmajo's recognition of interim administration", Hiraan Online, 14 June 2020.

[36] Crisis Group interviews, Jubaland elder and Gedo resident, March 2020.

[37] Crisis Group interviews, Somali diplomat, March 2020; regional analyst, May 2020. See also fn 2.

[38] Deni and Madobe released a joint Puntland-Jubaland communiqué after meeting in January. Tweet by Garowe Online, @radiogarowe, 3:03pm, 20 January 2020. Also contributing to Deni's support for Madobe and Puntland's special relationship with Jubaland is a common clan dynamic, symbolised by an alliance known as the Kabalah. The Kabalah is an association between the Harti (Majerteen, Dhulbahante, Warsengeli) and Ogaden clans, within the larger Darod clan family grouping.

for National Parties (FNP), a coalition including two former Somali presidents, has also voiced criticism of Mogadishu's tactics in Gedo.[39]

Al-Shabaab is the unambiguous beneficiary. The organisation replaced its Gedo shadow governor in February 2020, likely in a bid to intensify operations.[40] On the evening of 24 February 2020, militants killed three local officials in Bardheere – the group's first attack in the main town in years. Local residents blame Al-Shabaab's secretive Amniyat (intelligence service) for this and other recent incidents.[41] They also note the group's expanded presence into an area that was previously relatively insulated.[42] Attacks on Ethiopian convoys along the Doolow-Baidoa route have also increased.[43]

Al-Shabaab benefits, as security forces that otherwise may have been deployed to tackle the militants are instead pinned down facing each other.[44] The situation has upset some of Somalia's international partners, notably the U.S. and EU, which have made significant investments in the Somali army. These two powers have expressed frustration that AMISOM's planned drawdown could be further delayed by Somali authorities' infighting.[45] Federal and Jubaland officials each say they are preparing their own operations to rout Al-Shabaab from its strongholds in Middle Juba.[46] Any plans for two separate but simultaneous counter-insurgency operations, each involving rival forces, will have pitfalls. But even leaving these aside, it is doubtful that either side is serious about committing forces to fighting Al-Shabaab while the Mogadishu-Kismayo competition persists.[47] Neither is likely to want to sustain casualties that weaken its position vis-à-vis the other.

The former make up the majority of Puntland, including Deni himself, and the latter are Madobe's clan in Jubaland.

[39] "Qalalaasaha ka aloosan Gobolka Gedo", FNP, 15 February 2020.

[40] Confidential third-party research findings, on file with Crisis Group.

[41] Crisis Group interviews, Jubaland official, Bardheere resident, March 2020.

[42] Ibid.

[43] See, for example, "Ethiopian troops kill 17 Al-Shabaab militants in Somali weeks after ambush in Doolow", Garowe Online, 15 April 2020.

[44] Crisis Group interview, senior AU official, May 2020.

[45] The U.S. termed Mogadishu's deployment in Gedo "unacceptable", calling for an end to the "politically motivated offensive". "Remarks at a UN Security Council Briefing on the Situation in Somalia", U.S. Mission to the UN, 24 February 2020. The EU stated that the security build-up in Gedo diverts "assets and attention away from military operations against al-Shabaab". "Declaration by the High Representative on Behalf of the European Union on the Latest developments in Somalia", press release, European Council, 14 March 2020.

[46] Crisis Group interviews, UN officials, academic specialising in Somali affairs, April and May 2020.

[47] "If anyone wanted to take [the Al-Shabaab stronghold of] Bu'ale, they could and should have done it by now". Crisis Group interview, UN official, May 2020.

V. Ethiopia and Kenya Enter the Fray

Though allies in AMISOM, Ethiopia and Kenya now find themselves on opposing sides when it comes to local alliances in Somalia.[48] The two countries have a deep history of cooperation in Jubaland, given the implications of cross-border security. They both bought into the 2013 Addis Ababa agreement that installed Madobe as the head of the emergent Jubaland state. But any sense of shared vision for the region appears to have evaporated, with Ethiopia backing Farmajo in Mogadishu and Kenya deepening its relationship with Madobe.[49] The rivalry is breaking down AMISOM's cohesion and opening space for Al-Shabaab.[50] The level of discord almost led to blows on 22 August 2019, the day of the Jubaland election, when a plane carrying Ethiopian forces attempted to land at Kismayo airport, but was prevented from doing so by Jubaland and Kenyan troops.[51]

The primary reason for the divergence between Nairobi and Addis Ababa relates to a policy shift in Ethiopia. Upon taking office in April 2018, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sought to redefine Ethiopia's relations with Somalia by prioritising cooperation with Mogadishu. He did so hoping to deepen regional integration and commercial ties, and believing that a stronger central government in Somalia could better address the country's myriad issues.[52]

Ethiopia's tightening relations with Farmajo went hand in hand with a reversal of its support for various sub-national administrative units, including clan militias and other political and security actors in Somalia.[53] The deployment of, and operations by, Ethiopian security forces in some regional states prompted Farmajo's opponents to

[48] For background on Ethiopian and Kenyan involvement, see Abdul Khalif and Zakaria Yusuf, "The Regional Risks to Somalia's Moment of Hope", Crisis Group Commentary, 22 February 2017.

[49] The historical defence pact between Kenya and Ethiopia, signed in 1964, resulted directly from their shared perception of possible threats from Somalia upon that country's independence. But Addis Ababa and Nairobi have at times pursued divergent paths in Jubaland. Ethiopian involvement in the 1990s-2000s was seen as more supportive of the Marehaan clan. Kenya leaned toward the Ogaden, making Addis Ababa wary, as its overriding objective was to prevent the Ogaden National Liberation Front from using Jubaland as a rear base from which to attack Ethiopia. Following Kenya's invasion of Somalia in October 2011, the two countries' goals aligned, culminating in the 2013 Addis Ababa agreement that led to Jubaland state's establishment.

[50] Crisis Group interview, senior AU official, May 2020. Incorporating Kenyan and Ethiopian troops into AMISOM also enabled both countries to pursue their respective interests in Somalia, which further complicates the mission's coherence.

[51] Kenyan and Jubaland forces blocked the runway. Crisis Group interviews, Jubaland officials, March 2020; Kenyan government adviser, May 2020. According to one theory, Ethiopian forces were coming to arrest Madobe. "Frontier fracas", *Africa Confidential*, 19 March 2020.

[52] Crisis Group interviews, ministry of foreign affairs official, March 2020; regional analyst, April 2020. Abiy visited Mogadishu early in his tenure to discuss Ethiopian interest in developing four unnamed Somali ports. "Somalia, Ethiopia ink economic, diplomatic and security deals", Radio Shabelle, 16 June 2018.

[53] Ethiopia's past support for sub-national entities ranged from member states like Puntland to militias such as Ahlu Sunnah wal Jama and local clans. Ethiopian officials have been careful to assert that the current framework is not a complete shift toward the central government but rather a rebalancing of relationships in its favour. Crisis Group interview, ministry of foreign affairs official, March 2020.

accuse him of relying on Addis Ababa to back his agenda.[54] Such actions included the arrest of opposition candidate Mukhtar Robow in South West state in December 2018, the deployment of a small contingent of troops to Galmudug in late 2019, and reports of increased Ethiopian troop movement in Gedo and along the Doolow-Baidoa route since March 2020.[55] Ethiopian activity in Gedo is thus also seen within the wider frame of Addis Ababa backing the federal government's centralising tendencies.[56]

Domestic factors also likely play a role in Ethiopia's calculations over Gedo. Madobe enjoyed a good working relationship with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which was the dominant party in the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democracy Front coalition. Since Abiy Ahmed assumed power, and after an acrimonious split with his newly fashioned ruling front, the Prosperity Party, the TPLF has become an opposition party.[57] In addition, Madobe reportedly retains close ties with the leadership of the Ogaden National Liberation Front, a former Ethiopian rebel group that has become Abiy's main opposition in the Somali region of Ethiopia.[58] Madobe's associations with some of Abiy's rivals likely helped tilt the balance of support from Addis Ababa toward Farmajo.[59]

Kenya's core goal continues to be to retain Jubaland as a buffer between it and Al-Shabaab. As such, Madobe continues to be its partner of choice, even more so since 2019 when Nairobi's relations with Mogadishu nosedived due to renewed disagreements over the two countries' maritime boundary.[60] Support for Madobe is not unan-

[54] Both Jubaland and the FNP opposition have complained about Ethiopian involvement in favour of Mogadishu, with the latter expressing concern regarding interference and intimidation in the lead-up to national elections. "Joint Press Statement on Ethiopian Troops and AU Representative in Somalia", signed by FNP, Wadajir, Hiigsi coalition and 1 July Alliance for Change, 20 May 2020; "Sheekh Shariif oo Sheegay in Heshiisyo Qarsoodi Ah uu Ka Dhaxeeyo Itoobiya iyo Madaxda DFS", Goobjoog, 10 May 2020.

[55] After the seizure of Robow, AMISOM denied that the Ethiopian forces involved fell under its command, but the Galmudug deployment (along with a small contingent of Djiboutian soldiers) was part of the mission's activities. Press release, AMISOM, 15 December 2018; Crisis Group interview, former Galmudug government official, May 2020.

[56] Jubaland officials allege that Ethiopia has aided the federal government, saying local Gedo leaders were taken to Ethiopia in November 2019 to convince them to change sides. First Deputy President of Jubaland Mohamud Sayid maintains that he was prevented from travelling to Beled Hawo by Ethiopian forces in November 2019. Crisis Group interview, Jubaland officials, March 2020; "Jubaland deputy president blocked by Ethiopian troops in Gedo as Madobe demands for withdrawal", Garowe Online, 22 November 2019.

[57] Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°156, *Bridging the Divide in Ethiopia's North*, 12 June 2020.

[58] Madobe was reportedly close to former Somali region governor Abdi Iley, who resigned under pressure from Prime Minister Abiy in August 2018. Madobe and Iley are from the same Reer Abdille subclan of the Ogaden/Muhammad Zubeyr clan family, as is Ogaden National Liberation Front Chairman Abdirahman Mahdi. Crisis Group interviews, regional analyst, April 2020; Somali region opposition member and Somali region government official, May 2020. The regional Somali Democratic Party in charge of the Somali region of Ethiopia is a member of Abiy's Prosperity Party coalition.

[59] Mustafa Mohammed Omer, president of Ethiopia's Somali state and an Abiy ally, has reportedly expressed concern about the potential for Madobe to interfere in the region. Crisis Group interviews, regional analyst, April 2020; Somali region opposition member and government official, May 2020.

[60] In Kenya's view, there is no one better than Madobe to deliver security in the Kismayo area. Crisis Group interviews, Kenyan academic and government adviser, May 2020. Somalia referred the maritime dispute to the International Court of Justice in 2014. In May 2020, the court delayed hearing the case until March 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

imous among Kenyans. Several politicians, including Governor Ali Roba from Mandera county, which borders Somalia, openly complain that the presence in that area of pro-Jubaland forces loyal to Madobe is destabilising.[61] Still, Nairobi continues to back the Jubaland president. Influential leaders from northern Kenya have also demonstrated their support; former National Assembly Majority Leader Aden Bare Duale, for example, led a delegation to attend Madobe's inauguration.[62]

The divergent postures of Kenya and Ethiopia, and their alliances with Somali parties that oppose each other, represent a serious challenge to AMISOM's effectiveness. The AU mission already suffered from deficiencies in command and control, as national interests often trump internal coordination, and the falling-out between the two key troop contributors has exacerbated this situation.[63] While both Ethiopia and Kenya certainly will want to avoid direct confrontation, tensions in their relationship raise concerns about how far they might go to militarily support their respective Somali allies.[64]

Both Ethiopia and Kenya were preparing for a tripartite summit with Somalia's federal government in order to de-escalate Mogadishu-Kismayo tensions after the 2 March 2020 clash in Beled Hawo. But the summit, originally scheduled for 16 March, was shelved due to East Africa's coronavirus outbreak.[65] The three parties have not announced a date to resume discussions, although there have been a series of bilateral diplomatic contacts among them.[66] Fresh efforts are required to get talks back on track.

[61] Tweet by Ali Roba, governor of Mandera county, @aliiroba, 12:33pm, 5 March 2020; tweet by Ali Roba, governor of Mandera County, @aliiroba, 12:27pm, 5 March 2020; tweet by Ali Roba, governor of Mandera County, @aliiroba, 11:09pm, 11 March 2020. The Kenyan government also interrogated eleven MPs upon their return from meeting Farmajo in Mogadishu on 1 March 2020; the government suspected them of promoting Farmajo's interests in Kenya. Crisis Group interview, Kenyan government adviser, May 2020; "11 North-Eastern MPs held over unauthorised trip to Somalia", *Daily Nation*, 1 March 2020.

[62] The Ogaden clan lineage of some influential Kenyan politicians may also play a role in promoting a pro-Ogaden stance in Kenya's policy toward Somalia. Crisis Group interview, Kenyan academic, May 2020. "Kenyan delegation arrives in Kismayo for Madobe's inauguration", Garowe Online, 12 October 2019; Crisis Group Africa Report N°184, *The Kenyan Military Intervention in Somalia*, 15 February 2012. Kenya also hosted Madobe's reconciliation agreement with his Jubaland Council for Change rivals and previously served as a venue for talks between the Ethiopian government and the Ogaden National Liberation Front, all of which primarily involve the Ogaden clan.

[63] It has, for instance, held up plans for a convoy to transport a large police contingent by road between Mogadishu and Baidoa. It has also put on ice a planned merger of AMISOM's operational sectors 2 and 6. Kenyan forces run sector 2, which comprises Lower and Middle Juba, while Ethiopian troops are present in Kismayo by virtue of their participation in sector 6, but would lose this position if the merger occurred. Crisis Group interview, senior AU official, May 2020.

[64] Crisis Group interviews, UN officials, Western diplomat, April-May 2020.

[65] A 5 March telephone call between Farmajo and Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta and a 6 March visit by Kenyan Interior Minister Fred Matiang'i to Mogadishu preceded the summit proposal. External pressure from IGAD, the AU and UN contributed to de-escalating the situation after the Beled Hawo clashes. Crisis Group interviews, AU official, April 2020; IGAD official, May 2020. "MFA. REL.13/21A", Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 13 March 2020; Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, April 2020.

[66] Somali Foreign Minister Ahmed Isse Awad visited Nairobi on 11 March to meet his Kenyan counterpart; on the same day, Matiang'i visited Abiy in Addis Ababa; and Somali Prime Minister Hassan Khaire met the Ethiopian premier in Addis Ababa on 19 March. "Matiang'i meets Ethiopia premier

VI. A Better Way Forward

The risks associated with failure to resolve the standoff over Gedo, or ignoring it and allowing it to fester, are considerable. Already the dispute over the Jubaland election has dragged on for nearly a year. Tensions between Mogadishu and Jubaland as well as several other regions are jeopardising the country's planned elections and distracting from efforts to fight Al-Shabaab.

Any viable solution likely would occur in several phases and require sustained engagement from regional and other outside actors. Reconciliation is necessary at four levels: within the Marehaan clan, which in Gedo is divided between those who support Jubaland and those who favour Farmajo's leadership; among Jubaland clans, principally but not only the Ogaden and Marehaan; between Jubaland and the federal government; and between Ethiopia and Kenya. For now, efforts should focus on the latter two in the hope of achieving a breakthrough that, in turn, could open space to address local dynamics.

To that end, the AU, IGAD, the UN, the EU and other bilateral partners invested in both regional and Somali security (such as the U.S. and UK) should press Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia to de-escalate tensions. As a first step, the AU Commission chairperson, in coordination with IGAD, should urge Addis Ababa, Nairobi and Mogadishu to resurrect their planned tripartite summit, virtually if necessary.[67] Their message should be that political infighting – whether at the regional or national level – is benefitting Al-Shabaab and harming regional security. In particular, they should urge Addis Ababa and Nairobi to lean on their allies in Mogadishu and Kismayo to soften their positions and embrace dialogue.

Those same outside actors could also press Farmajo and Madobe to bring them to the negotiating table. Farmajo optimally would abandon his administration's attempt to oust Madobe, which is likely to fail or involve significant bloodshed and financial cost. The federal government, having already offered to recognise Madobe's presidency for a two-year interim period, should instead recognise it for its full four-year term. For his part, Madobe should recommit to steps to which he has hinted he is open. In particular, he should pledge not to seek a third term and should extend talks among key Jubaland communities to encourage internal reconciliation, address lingering anger at his re-election and his governance more broadly and foster greater cohesion within Jubaland. He should also agree to resume cooperation with the federal government on tasks like electoral preparations, constitutional review and continued progress on debt relief.[68]

Such steps would represent concessions from the two sides, but breaking the deadlock would bring advantages to both. For Mogadishu, not recognising Madobe could jeopardise national elections and thus the Farmajo administration's legitimacy. For

over Somalia security", *Daily Nation*, 12 March 2020; "Somali PM holds talks with his Ethiopian counterpart in Addis Ababa", Radio Shabelle, 19 March 2020.

[67] Although Farmajo and Kenyatta discussed border security in a telephone call following the Beled Hawo clashes, a revitalised tripartite structure is necessary to more fully address the crisis in Gedo. "President Farmaajo, President Kenyatta hold telephone talks", Office of the President, Federal Republic of Somalia, 5 March 2020.

[68] Madobe has reiterated his willingness to engage in dialogue with Mogadishu on many occasions. Tweet by Jubbaland TV, @JLTVOfficial, 12:11pm, 7 March 2020.

Madobe, non-recognition risks hindering Jubaland's development. Moreover, building trust and resuming working relations between Kismayo and Mogadishu would allow them to draw down their respective forces in Gedo and redirect them to fighting Al-Shabaab.

Somalia's Western partners, which provide security support and financial aid to Mogadishu and to a lesser degree Kismayo, should signal that their continued backing depends on better cooperation between them and renewed joint planning to tackle Al-Shabaab. Improved coordination is in the two Somali actors' interest: in itself, it will not defeat the resilient insurgency, but it will enable more effective operations against the militants. Even modest victories over Al-Shabaab could allow policymakers in Mogadishu and Kismayo to focus on social and economic efforts, potentially improving their popular standing and electoral prospects.

VII. Conclusion

The political standoff in Gedo has spiralled to a dangerous level. For the sake of avoiding a greater conflagration, all parties should take a step back. The many layers of conflict mean that reconciliation will have to occur sequentially. COVID-19 complicates efforts, and diplomats will have to be creative. But failure to act would give Al-Shabaab greater space and jeopardise regional stability.

Nairobi/Brussels, 14 July 2020

Appendix A: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early-warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 80 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is co-chaired by President & CEO of the Fiore Group and Founder of the Radcliffe Foundation, Frank Giustra, as well as by former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lord (Mark) Malloch-Brown.

Crisis Group's President & CEO, Robert Malley, took up the post on 1 January 2018. Malley was formerly Crisis Group's Middle East and North Africa Program Director and most recently was a Special Assistant to former U.S. President Barack Obama as well as Senior Adviser to the President for the Counter-ISIL Campaign, and White House Coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf region. Previously, he served as President Bill Clinton's Special Assistant for Israeli-Palestinian Affairs.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in seven other locations: Bogotá, Dakar, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Addis Ababa, Bahrain, Baku, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Kabul, Kiev, Manila, Mexico City, Moscow, Seoul, Tbilisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

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