



Somalia's Jubaland State President Ahmed Islam Madoobe takes the oath of office after he was re-elected for a second term on August 22, 2019 in the state's capital Kismayu. PHOTO | JUBBALAND PRESIDENCY

JUBALAND – A BUDDING REGIONAL ROSE OF DEMOCRACY AMONG THORNS

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Getting Somalia back on the path to peace, democracy and development is still work in progress. The presidential election in Somalia's most cosmopolitan state of Jubaland on August 22nd 2019 is a bold step towards democracy. The election, was solely based on efforts to restore stability, defeat terrorism and rebuild its economy.

THE RESULTS

The re-election of the incumbent Ahmed Mohamed Islam (Madoobe) as the leader of Somalia's federal state of Jubaland reckoned a promise of hope for Somalia and was a litmus test for a democratic process in the world's most fragile country. Perhaps, this election marks a new beginning for rapprochement, particularly

for the international community to leverage on the Jubaland election as a curtain raiser for stability and re-construction of Somalia.

Hauling fresh prospects for regional economic growth, fight al-Shabab and a top security partner with Kenya, Madoobe secured 56 of 73 votes in a first round defeating six other candidates. Anab Mohamed Darir, Madoobe's closest challenger

garnered 17 votes, Mohamed Mohamud Omar got one vote, while four others technically scored zero. According to Dr Hamza Barre, the chairperson of the Jubaland Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission, Ahmed Mohamed Islam (Madoobe) won with a two-thirds majority beating his closest challenger by 39 votes.

However, it is a contested outcome with one group emerging from villa Somalia dismissed the election in Jubaland terming it “illegitimate process and unconstitutional” and insisting that “a free, credible” elections in the region should be witnessed by FGS and international community. The second group, is one trooping as the pro-opposition parliament claiming that electoral processes were mired with controversies.

THE CONTEST

The battle-lines were clearly marked. The Jubland election is a clash of titans in Somalia politics ahead the national election next year. It was a straight fight between President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed (Farmajo) in Mogadishu and the incumbent Jubaland state President, Sheikh Ahmed Mohamed Islam (Madoobe). But this clash of titanic proportion did draw in other interests.

THE PRICE

Jubaland matters, and is worth fighting for. It is the pearl of Somalia: the richest Federal State endowed with fertile farmlands, rich well-watered grazing fields, a long and beautiful coastline with marine splendid resources and pristine beaches. But the August 22nd election carried eerie echoes of the new scramble for Africa. And, is crucial for peace and stability in the Horn of Africa region.

First, as Somalia’s most cosmopolitan and multi-ethnic state, Jubaland and its people has close ties both to Kenya and Ethiopia through intricate clan networks and connections, which are palpably playing into the August polls.

Second and geopolitically, Jubaland is to Kenya and Ethiopia what Luxembourg is to major European powers: it is the buffer against Somali militants.

Kenya consider it as axial to any victory against Al-Shabaab terrorist group. It is a stark choice between stability and anarchy.

THE REFEREE

With terrorism challenging contemporary democratic values, the electoral process in Jubaland is not perfect, but like other democracies it is work in progress. Since 2013, Jubaland has put in place perhaps Somalia’s most profound and developed electoral infrastructure aligned to local laws of conducting elections under the provisional federal constitution of Somalia.

To become a presidential candidate, one must be of Somali origin and married to a woman/man of Somali origin, a definition that consciously addresses Somalia’s sprawling diaspora.

Further, Somalia’s delicate electoral process follows intricate steps.

First, a special college of elders, selected from the local clans. The elders, chosen by the electoral commission select three candidates for every parliamentary seat.

As the penultimate kingmakers, the clan elders have been the target of violence and intimidation. The names are then forwarded to the electoral agency which picks one per slot from each three until the 75 MP slots are filled.

Second, the selection follows the clan balancing formula known as 4:5 or four main clans (Ogaden, Marehan Hawiye and Diir) and a coalition of smaller ones (including smaller bantu speaking tribes).

However, critics of the system have claimed that the incumbent wields so much power that he can influence which elders are chosen on the council.

MADOOBE

Elected first in May 2013 and 2015, and now in 2019, Madobe has managed to ensure Kismayo is peaceful and is steering Jubaland to full recovery from years of conflict and neglect. "The only Somali city with traffic jam"

Equally, Madobe promised to pursue Al-Shabaab militants, end radicalisation of the youth, create an enabling environment for economic recovery, welfare services delivery and return of refugees and displaced persons, including over 400,000 Somalis in Kenya refugee havens.

Likewise, he is counting on his large multi-ethnic political power base, including smaller marginalised communities, who together are the majority if not equal in number with the bigger clans. Under his rule, these looked-down people found a voice and their fair share of the national cake.

Admirably, Madobe's call for harmony in the region has seen refugees living in Daadab troop back home.

With the help of Kenya, Madobe led the Somali forces to recapture Kismayo from al-Shabaab, thus emerging as a bulwark against terrorism.

However, the Federal Republic of Somalia is opposed to the re-election of Madobe for of two main ins and outs

First, Madobe has been spear-heading the clarion call by regional states demanding more autonomy from Mogadishu.

Second, the Jubaland administration 'suspend' cooperation with Farmaajo's government and opted out in the ongoing constitutional review process expected to introduce universal suffrage in 2021.

FARMAAJO

Madobe faces a doctrinaire competition from rival candidates some backed by Villa Somalia.

Preferably, Farmaajo's candidate of choice is currently *Mohamed Yusuf Aw-Dahir* after the Minister for Transport and Aviation Mohamed Abdullahi Salad, was disqualified from the race when the electoral body realized that he is married to a foreigner.

He is also opposed to the listing of the elders, arguing most of them had not been registered.

But Farmaajo is feeding on the unrest to dismantle what took the Somali people and their partners years to build.

Perhaps, reading from a familiar script, that no past president has ever been re-elected since 1991.

Farmaajo has slim chance of retaining power in 2021. Hence, having his point man win Jubaland's pivotal presidential election is vital if he is to return to Villa Somalia after 2021.

Equally and related to other back stage maneuvers, Farmaajo, has put his men in Hirshabele, South West and recently Galmudug. He has now set sights on Jubaland.

His re-election strategy, involve reviving the old Marehan 'ethnocracy' by filling pivotal position with members of the Marehan Clan loyal to him or their relatives.

This can be echoed by the successful installation of Abdiyaziz Laftagaren in South West State of Somalia, placement of Marehans at the top of Somali National Intelligence and Security Agency.

Consequently, supporting members of his "Nabad iyo Nolol" or "Peace and Prosperity Party" (PPP) to win state presidential elections.

In Jubaland, Farmaajo is counting on the 21 MPs from the Marehan to defeat Madoobe.

NEW OPPOSITION

On August 13, Madobe's rivals formed a local group, the Union of Presidential Candidates for Change, demanding that only registered elders be selected to select only one MP per slot.

They are believed to be supported by the federal government, threatening to boycott elections citing interference by Madoobe.

Expectedly, they now want the federal government and the international community to step in and get rid of the anomalies.

On August 12, 2019, the 12 rival candidates unveiled a parallel electoral commission, defying warning by the United Nation.

Reacting to these calls and Farmaajo's opponents in 2020 election including UPD of former Pre Hasaan-Sheikh supported the Jubaland Electoral Commission's published list of regional MPs who will be voting to decide the leader of Jubaland

In reiteration, the Jubaland administration has also insisted that the vote run as federal law requires.

ELDERS

Kenya's Ogaden sub-clans living in Garissa, the Awilyahan, Abduwak and Abdalla—endorsed Madoobe. Even though they don't have a vote in Jubbaland, Kenyan elders are good for international reputation and branding.

However, elders aligned to Villa Somalia, in a protest note addressed to the United Nations (UN) envoy in Somalia James Swan said that there had strong evidence that the poll body had skewed the outcome of the elections, so much that the other candidates stand no chance of a fair vote

Additional, on August 13, Mogadishu declared that it will not recognize the results of the election until the traditional elders who are selecting the members of parliament are registered with Somalia's Interior Ministry.

But, Ugas Omar Hiirey, the spokesman of the Jubbaland Council of Elders, defended the list as genuine — refuting claims of the opposition group and the federal government in Mogadishu.

AL-SHABAAB

With the resurgence of Shabaab attacks in Kismayu, Jubbaland elections are largely dependent on African Union Mission in Somalia (Amisom) forces buttressing local security.

Al-Shabaab has also sought a stake in the polls, ordering elders to register with them and dress in a specified code and targeting those defying the 'directive'

But US rejection of Kenya's plea to have Al-shabaab categorized as a terror group, raises the stakes in Jubaland's fight against the terrorists.

Perhaps, the international community is blowing hot and cold, while at the same time coddling Shabaab.

NEW HORN AXIS

With landlocked Ethiopia aggressively seeking access to the Indian Ocean through Somali ports including Kismayo, a surging Cushitic consciousness (Oromo and Somalis) is posing an existential ideological challenge to IGAD and the regional outfit it represents.

Coalescing around the idea of the New Horn of Africa (NHoA) and counting on the support of rival factions in the Gulf allied to Turkey and Qatar, Farmajo's men are reportedly negotiating with partners in the 'New Horn' Axis to replace Kenyan,

Ugandan and Burundian troops with the Cushite Alliance.

Presently, the battle lines have been drawn and daggers drawn as Ethiopia has openly sided with the Somalia government, although its AMISOM contingents insist they are independent of Addis Ababa.

On August 13, 2019 an Ethiopian delegation dispatched to Kismayo led by two military intelligence generals at the behest of President Farmaajo held a three-hour meeting Kowtowing with a demand to interfere with the electoral commission.

Additional, Ethiopia and Eritrea—with its large fighting force remnants from its war with Ethiopia—are seeking a new role as a military ally to Farmajo.

This raises serious questions regarding the future of AMISOM, especially its contingents from Kenya, Uganda, Djibouti and Burudi and the very war against Al-Shabaab terrorists.

KENYA

While Kenyan wonks are also trying to reconcile Madobe and his erstwhile opponents to ensure peaceful election, Kenya the region's 'shining city upon the hill', is walking a tightrope in Jubaland trying to balance its own national interests and its relations with Villa Somalia.

But the Kenya-Somali maritime dispute is a windfall in Farmaajo's re-election strategy and Kenya needs to stay the course and continue acting with ingenuity and flexibility to survive beyond Jubaland election.

However, Kenya has the responsibility to whip Somali nationalism to a fever-pitch to divert the public from internal failures and hopefully win hotly contested elections in 2021.

Even more critical, Kenya stands to benefit from a stable neighbour as it is likely to ease the burden

of the refugees and the phenomenon of terror in the country.

Kenya must therefore be in the frontline of engaging with the neighbour towards reconstruction and stability.

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

With calls for free, fair and transparent elections. Realistically, a fabulous myth in Jubaland conditions but a worthy aspiration, Western powers are silent playing below the radar.

They seek to control Somalia's oil, gas and minerals wealth, with the intension of edging Russia and China away from those natural resources.

Sadly, the Igad and AU are not as supportive as they should to secure a fragile democracy.

Nevertheless, writing on behalf of Un-Somalia, the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (Igad), Kenya, African Union Mission in Somalia (Amisom), Austria, Belgium, Italy, Denmark, the European Union, the Netherlands, the UK and US; the United Nations representative to Somalia James Swan warned the opposition against undermining the state's constitution. He said that the law ought to be followed.

"We will continue to reiterate the need for a single, agreed process according to the Jubaland constitution and consistent with the federal provisional constitution, and the need to avoid interference or intimidation of any kind,"

GULF STATES

With the current scramble for Jubaland, spillover effects of geopolitical rivalry in the Gulf region between Qatar and Turkey on one hand and United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia on the other.

Some gulf countries are said to have taken opposing sides in the polls, signifying the importance of the election to the region.

With Mogadishu appearing willing to use its geopolitical bargaining card, neither Ethiopia, Eritrea, Turkey nor any of the other Gulf States that villa Somalia is trying to entice with Jubaland for narrow interests, will benefit from the fallout that such an action is likely to cause, with reverberations across the whole the region. In conclusion, a democratic Jubaland gives hope of a peaceful region free of terrorism.

The election, therefore, is an opportunity to grant the voices of the people to be heard. It offers the international community an opportunity to help build institutions of governance that guarantee stability and peace to the federal state.

The international community should therefore leverage on the Jubaland election as a curtain raiser for stability in Somalia.

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