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Hiraal Institute

Addressing Horn of Africa's Security Challenges

Security in Somalia: A Review of 2022

2022

SUMMARY

2022 was marked by the transition to a new administration in Somalia, the subsequent formation of a new government, and a civilian uprising against Al-Shabaab (AS) that began in Hiraan over the summer but took root in September. However, despite the widely reported offensive operations in support of the civilian uprising, it would seem this did not make a marked difference in the number of security incidents rather there was a massive increase in the number of casualties as a result of the fight against AS in 2022 compared to 2021.

The majority of security incidents increased dramatically in 2022, with some occurrences practically doubling compared to 2021. Al-Shabaab (AS) was very active during the end of the year, increasing the frequency of raids and IED attacks. Notably, the number of assassinations carried out by AS rose, as did the number of grenade attacks and ambushes, in comparison to 2021. AS increasingly targeted the majority of its perceived foes, such as regular and special Somali National Army (SNA) forces, officials or civil servants, elders or delegates, civilians, and Macawisley militias. With a few exceptions, the allied forces were unable to conduct a sufficient number of counter-operations in response to AS.

2022 saw AS conduct one of its most combined operations: 954, according to Hiraal's tally. While Hiraal cannot corroborate the government's assertion that 3000 AS fighters have been killed with an additional 3,700 AS fighters wounded – which would leave the AS with zero combatants according to Hiraal's last AS strength estimates - sources confirm that each side has lost at least 1,500.

Initially, the new government was focused on supporting local insurgencies in HirShabelle against AS. However, a fragmented response allowed AS to reorganise and adapt. Consequently, numerous subclans have now signed peace accords with AS, and the likelihood of widespread uprisings and the toppling of AS by local actors is diminishing.

TABLE 1 TYPE OF INCIDENTS

Incident	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	TOTAL
IED/AS	13	18	13	13	16	11	13	21	26	6	8	26	184
Raid/AS	23	30	32	58	13	11	33	10	32	5	8	53	308
Ambush/AS	3	4	5	4	4	4	5	5	13	1	5	5	58
Assassination/AS	16	27	24	25	21	18	14	18	11	18	17	15	224
Airstrike/US	0	1	1	0	0	1	2	4	2	3	2	3	19
SNA Special forces Raid	6	4	2	2	2	4	4	1	4	3	2	1	35
SNA Regular Raid	7	2	1	2	2	5	0	6	2	1	1	10	39
Raid/SNA & Macawisley	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	6	7	5	8	8	38
Grenade/AS	3	8	2	11	2	3	13	7	15	1	10	13	88
Security forces/Infighting	7	1	0	2	4	4	5	0	0	0	1	1	25
Violence/Clan	3	5	1	5	4	3	2	8	2	3	6	0	42
Assassination/Unknown	1	0	0	2	0	2	1	2	0	0	3	1	12
VBIED/AS	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	0	1	5
SVBIED/AS	2	2	2	0	2	0	0	3	0	8	6	0	25
Shelling/AS	2	4	6	7	4	3	4	8	7	2	0	2	49
FMS Forces Raid	1	2	3	3	1	2	2	3	1	1	1	3	23
Airstrike/Others	0	0	0	0	0	4	3	1	0	2	0	5	15
PBIED/AS	2	2	1	1	1	0	2	1	2	0	1	0	13
SPF Raid	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	3	2	0	0	8
NISA Forces Raid	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2	4	4	13
PSF Raid		0	2				2	0	0	0	0		4

NOTHING BUT

The year 2022 began with a noticeable decline in Al-Shabaab (AS) raids in Somalia. However, raids swiftly rose again in February, peaking in April, which coincided with the holy month of Ramadan. AS typically intensifies its activities leading up to Ramadan, and the first four months of 2022 were no exception. From May onwards, the number of AS raids fluctuated, with another surge occurring in December. The primary targets of AS were the Somali National Army (SNA) regular forces, followed by the African Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) troops and the Somali Police Forces (SPF).

In 2022, in response to AS, the SNA forces, in combination with the Macwisley militia, were the most active actors. Nevertheless, the total number of SNA operations decreased significantly from 2021 to 2022, with 39 operations compared to 59 in 2021. Between 2021 and 2022, American airstrikes were constant, with a modest uptick in the latter quarter of 2022. With one exception in November, when the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) targeted AS militants in their hideouts on the outskirts of Badhaadhe district in the Lower Juba region, ATMIS conducted no large-scale offensive operations against AS.

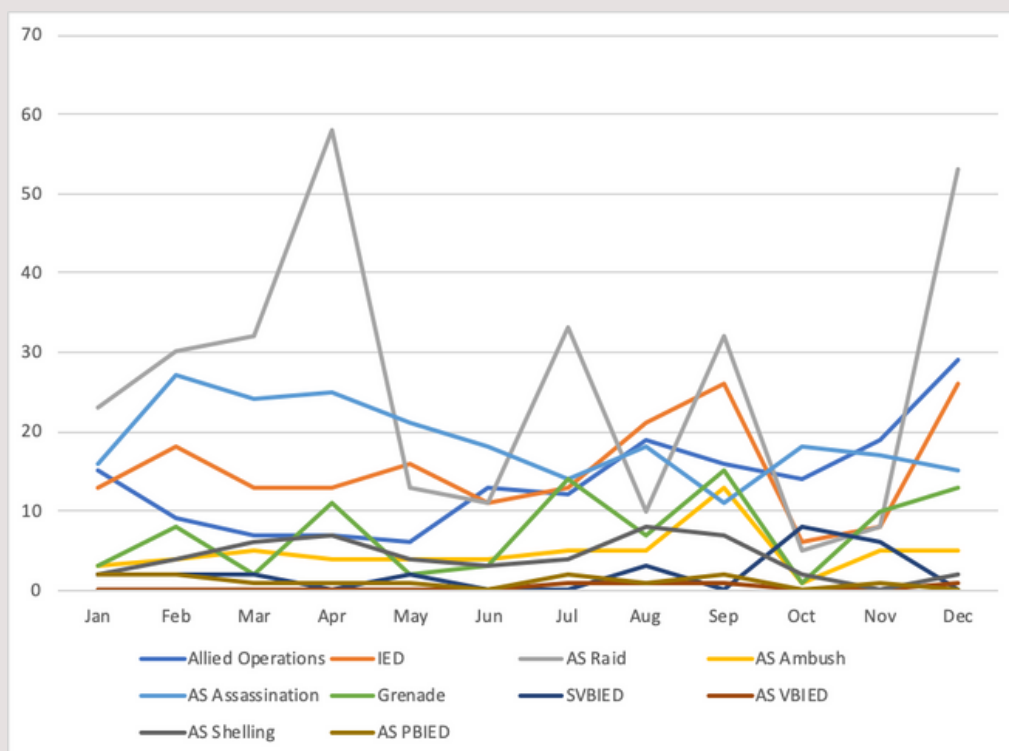
In 2022, the security situation in Somalia was marked by a dramatic increase in AS attacks that appeared unchecked by countermeasures taken by partner forces. AS maintained a consistent activity level throughout the year, with noteworthy surges in attacks leading up to Ramadan and at the year's close. Compared to 2021, several types of attacks, including vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs), person-borne improvised explosive devices (PBIEDs), and grenade attacks, exhibited varying degrees of change. AS altered its geographical focus throughout the year as it worked to quell uprisings and divert government attention. In addition, AS increasingly targeted civilians and specific groups, such as the regular and special forces of the Somali National Army (SNA), the Somali Police Forces (SPF), and the Macawisley militias, among others.

Despite considerable improvements in allied responses, particularly by SNA special forces and Federal Member States (FMS) counter-operations, the overall effectiveness of these measures remains limited. This analysis examines attack trends, the focus of AS operations, and the allied response to provide a thorough view of Somalia's security situation in 2022.

Trends in Attacks

AS attacks seemed to be uninfluenced by allied operations; they continued as usual and increased across the board. The group was most active in the first few months of 2022, especially in the run-up to Ramadan and towards the end of the year. On the contrary, the least active months for AS operations were October and November. The only exception to this was SVBIED attacks, which in these two months increased to 14 attacks - a vast majority of the annual total of 25 attacks. AS maintained low but stable numbers of PBIED attacks, ranging from 0 to 2 per month, a trend that has continued since 2021.

FIGURE 1 TREND OF ALL ATTACKS



Similar to 2021, the number of VBIED attacks remained low during the entire year of 2022. Compared to 2021, the number of shellings by AS was similar, albeit with a slight decrease. In 2022, though, AS increased its grenade attacks by more than double from 40 in 2021 to 88. This was prominent during the first half of the year, from January to May, then again between August and September, in stark contrast to July, when no grenade attacks were recorded.

Most notable is the significant increase in ambushes by AS in September. In September, thirteen incidents were recorded, compared to a maximum of five each month across all other months. September was also high in IED attacks, which almost doubled compared to the first few months of 2022. Finally, October and November had fewer raids compared to the entirety of 2022 and most of 2021. In December, however, the number of raids rocketed sharply to an almost all-time high.

AS began the year by focusing its attacks in Galgaduud and Mudug, where it extended its advance towards the western part of Galmudug State. However, after encountering an uprising in the Hiran region, it redirected its focus there in an attempt to quell the insurgency. It ultimately concentrated the majority of its attacks in Hiran and Middle Shabelle, where it faced a combined local and government offensive. Likewise, it intensified its attacks within Mogadishu in an attempt to divert government attention.

AS Focus

AS focused its lethal operations primarily on SNA regular forces, followed by the Somali Police forces and ATMIS troops. There has been a significant increase in attacks aimed at the SNA regarding both regular and special forces compared to 2021. While attacks on regular SNA troops went up from 174 attacks in 2021 to 260 attacks in 2022, attacks targetting SNA's special forces tripled between the two years. Attacks on the SPF remained high but constant compared to 2021.

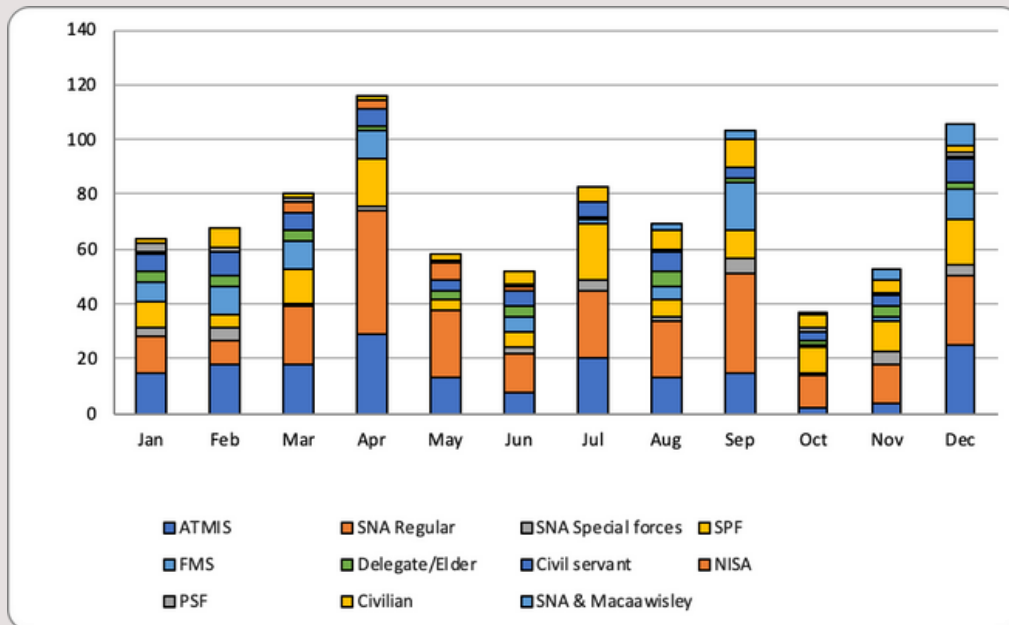


FIGURE 2 AS MONTHLY TARGETS

AS's increased focus on civilians, including officials, civil servants, elders and delegates, is concerning. In all these categories, the number of assaults increased, most notably against elders and delegates, where the figure more than tripled in 2022 compared to 2021. AS also had to react to Macawisley militias gaining momentum in 2022. AS launched 18 attacks against the militias in 2022 compared to only two in 2021.

As mentioned above, ATMIS troops have continued being tragically inactive in combatting AS. Nevertheless, they remained one of AS's main targets in 2022. This was the case, particularly in April and December – AS's two most active months of 2022. On the contrary, again corresponding to the above-mentioned, October and November were AS's least active months overall, including attacks on ATMIS.

Responding to AS

The allied response has been slightly improved since 2021, which can be illustrated by an increase in counter-AS operations, specifically of the SNA special forces and the Federal Member States (FMS) forces. The number of US airstrikes against AS in 2022 stayed consistent with 2021, oscillating between 0 and 3 every month. Operations of the SNA regular forces decreased in 2022; however, this could be a result of the SNA's increasing cooperation with the Macawisley and not a decrease in SNA activity.

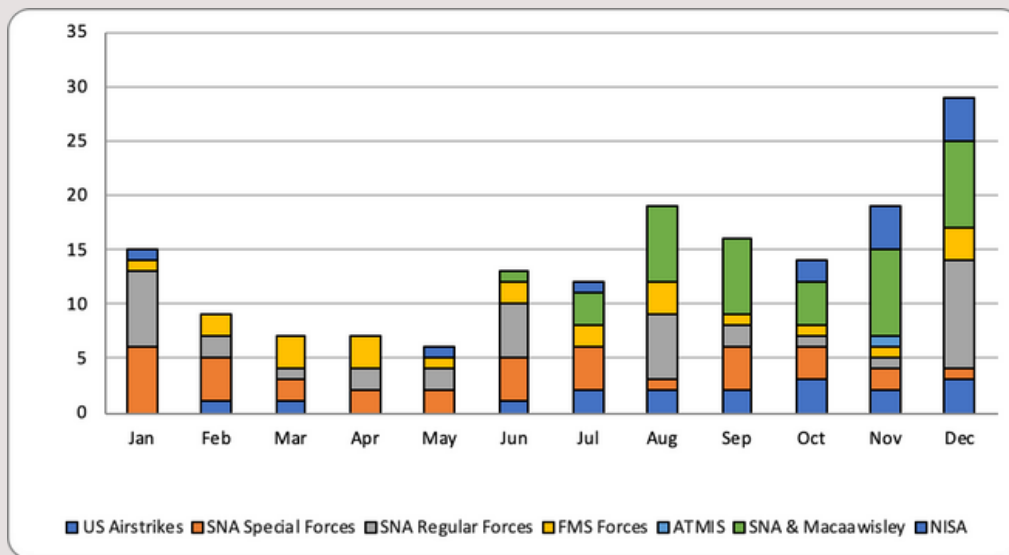


FIGURE 3 ALLIED ATTACKS, MONTHLY

In 2022, SNA's regular and special forces and Macawisley militias were responsible for over fifty percent of all operations against AS. The number of ATMIS operations remained consistently low throughout the year, culminating in a single operation in November. Notably, though, ATMIS has achieved a certain level of security in Somalia. Its primary objective is not to combat AS but rather to transfer security responsibilities to Somali troops by 2024.

Unfortunately, allied operations had minimal impact on AS assaults. After slowing down in October, the gang maintained its operations, adapting to allied attacks and strategies, as shown below.

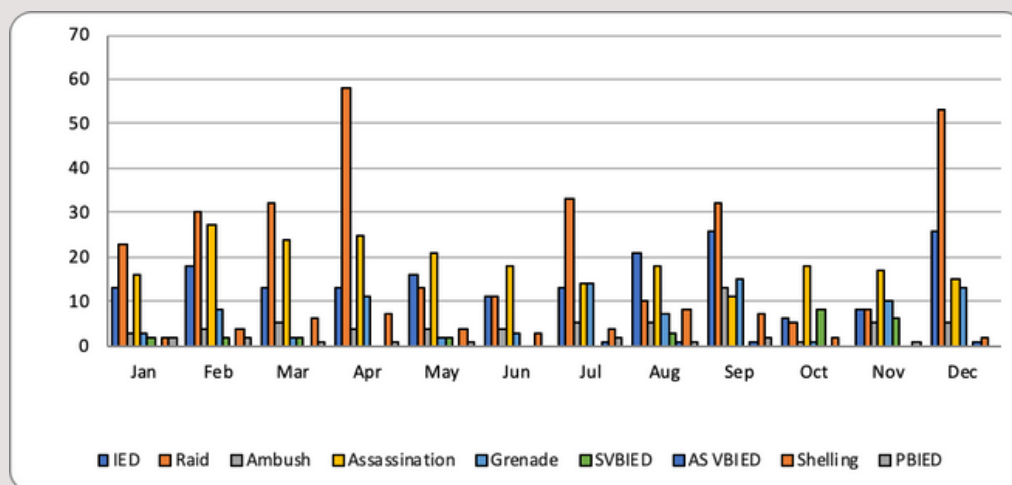


FIGURE 4 AS ATTACK TYPES, MONTHLY

CONCLUSION

The security situation in Somalia in 2022 demonstrated a persistent and concerning pattern of Al-Shabaab (AS) attacks, despite countermeasures by allied forces. AS continued to conduct attacks, concentrating on SNA regular forces, Somali Police forces, and ATMIS personnel in particular. The group's heightened targeting of civilians, including officials, civil servants, elders, and delegates, highlights a troubling escalation in its tactics.

AS demonstrated adaptability by shifting its focus across regions in response to local uprisings and government offensives. The group attempted to divert government attention by increasing attacks within Mogadishu, underscoring its ability to exploit security gaps. Trends in various attack types, such as VBIEDs, PBIEDs, and grenade attacks, suggest that AS is continually refining its strategies.

In response to AS, there has been some improvement in the allied response since 2021, particularly in the SNA special forces and Federal Member States (FMS) forces' counter-operations. However, the overall effectiveness of these efforts remains limited, as demonstrated by the persistently high levels of AS attacks throughout the year. The number of US airstrikes against AS remained stable, while regular SNA forces' operations emerged.

The outlook for 2023 is dire and can be surmised from the increased attacks in the first quarter of the year. The group has ramped up its attacks on SNA and FMS bases across the country and appears to be on control of the countryside surrounding the government-liberated settlements. We assess that this will continue to be the case, even if the group loses the major population centers.

ANNEX - OVERVIEW OF MAJOR INCIDENTS IN 2022

23-Mar-22: AS suicide bomber blew himself up targeting MP Amina Mohamed Mohamed Abdi. Another two SVBIEDs exploded in between Kamal hotel and Belet Weyne main hospital. More than 50 people were killed, including former MP and current candidate Amina Mohamed Abdi, former MP, soldiers, electoral delegates and 108 people were injured.

23-Mar-22: AS militants wearing military uniform carried an attack targeting Halane camp. Six people were killed, including five foreign nationals.

3-May-22: AS militants attacked ATMIS BNDF FOB at Ceel Baraf village in Jowhar district. The attack started with two SVBIED and followed by full raid. the group took over the base, and they also claimed killing at least 173 ATMIS forces and five SNA soldiers.

5-Aug-22: A SVBIED by AS militants went off targeting SNA special forces "Gor-gor" checkpoint in Kalabeyr village near Beled weyne district in Hiraan region. AS claimed killing 19 soldiers and injuring 23 others in the blast.

19-Aug-22: A suicide VBIED attack by AS militants detonated targeting civilians in Hayaat hotel in Wadajir district. The explosion was followed by full raid and heavy gunfire between AS fighters and security forces that continued for more than 30 hours. over 20 people, including police officers and civilians were killed.

4-Oct-22: Three AS suicide bombers each driving a vehicle full of explosive devices (SVBIEDs) detonated inside Lamagalay administration targeting Beledweyne district administration headquarters in the Beledweyne district. At least 64 people were killed, including soldiers, Hirshabelle authorities, civilians and the suiciders. more other people were injured. AS claimed responsibility for the attack.

19-Oct-22: AS suicide bomber driving rickshaw motorcycle loaded with IEDs detonated, targeting the SNA checkpoint at the main bridge of Bulo Burto district in the Hiran region. At least seven people were killed, including two soldiers and the suicide bomber. The explosion also damaged the bridge.

19-Oct-22: A SVBIED by AS suicide bomber detonated, targeting authorities of Jalalaqsi district administration as well as civilians at the headquarters of Jalalaqsi district in Jalalaqsi town. At least 15 people were killed, including the district commissioner. Nine others were injured.

23-Oct-22: Al-Shabab militants carried out a heavy raid targeting Tawakal Hotel in Calanley village in Kismayo town. The attack started with two suicide vehicle-borne IEDs (SVBIEDs) and was followed by a full raid after four AS fighters entered the hotel and started shooting security guards and civilians in the hotel. JSF and the police clashed with the militants. At least 13 people, including four AS members, were killed.

29-Oct-22: Atleast 221 people were killed and more than 300 others were injured after AS militants carried out twin suicide VBIEDs targeting the headquarters of education ministry in KM5 road in Hodan district in Mogadishu.

25-Nov-22: Two SVBIEDs detonated at an SNA and local militia base in Qaayib village in Dhuusamarreeb district in Galgaduud region. The explosions were followed by exchange of gunfire from both sides. The militants took temporary control of the village, SNA reinforcements from Dhuusamarreeb reached the area and forced Al Shabaab to retreat. At least 33 people were killed, including two AS suicide bombers. The group claimed to have killed 37 soldiers.

28-Nov-22: AS Suicider driving a vehicle born IED (SVBIED) detonated targeting government officials at Villa Rays hotel near the presidential palace in Bondhere district in Mogadishu. Somali special police forces & NISA soldiers clashed with the militants inside the Hotel. The government said six militants were killed in the operation. However, the group claimed to kill 52 people, including security forces and government officials.

PBIEDs:

16-Jan-22: AS suicide bomber wearing a suicide vest blew himself up targeting the spokesman of the office of the Prime Minister near Waberi Police station Waaberi district. The suicide bomber died in the blast and the victim was seriously injured.

18-Jan-22: Suspected AS suicide bomber detonated his explosives, targeting civilians inside a tea shop in Ex Nacnac factory in Wadajir district. Five people were killed including the suicide bomber, and 10 others were injured in the blast.

10-Feb-22: AS suicide bomber detonated targeting a mini-bus carrying electoral delegates participating the election of MPS from Somaliland at Ceel Gaabta Junction in Hamar Jabjab district. Six people were killed and 13 others were injured.

19-Feb-22: AS suicide bomber detonated targeting civilians, MP candidates, elders and local authorities at a restaurant in Beledweyne town. Atleast 18 people were killed and 20 others were injured in the blast.

22-Apr-22: AS suicide bomber blew himself up targeting civilians, security forces and senior government officials including Members of Parliament in Pescatore hotel in Mogadishu. Atleast six people were killed including the suicide bomber and seven others were injured.

11-May-22: An AS suicide bomber detonated targeting the NISA checkpoint of airport road in KM4. Five people were killed and eight others were injured.

27-Jul-22: AS suicide detonated his explosive vest targeting Merka district commissioner in a hotel in Marka town. At least 15 people were killed including the district commissioner of Marka and the suicide bomber.

29-Jul-22: AS suicide bomber wearing homemade explosive belt blew himself up targeting Southwest minister of justice at Wadajir village in Baidoa town. The minister, his son and the suicide bomber were killed and more than 10 others were injured.

10-Aug-22: AS suicide bomber blew himself up targeting SNA checkpoint near Hirshabelle Presidential Palace in Jowhar town. The suicide bomber was killed, and four others were injured in the blast.

25-Sep-22: AS suicide bomber wearing explosive belt detonated at General Dhega-badan training camp, Ex Xero Nacnac in Wadajir district where recruiting new people to join the military were going on. At least 16 people were killed, including civilians, soldiers and the suicide bomber, and more than 10 others were injured in the blast (Two times in one calendar year).



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