

Summary

The allies continue to maintain a shaky handle on AS this quarter, but the group is trying to bolster its urban terrorism campaign. Its IED campaign seems to be picking up, but its direct military attacks seemed to be stalling.

Introduction

As a result of the pressure brought to bear on AS and IS-Somalia by the FGS, the FMS forces, and the international forces, the gains made in 2019 have been maintained to some extent into 2020. For instance, assassinations this quarter were 47; it was 33 the same time last year and 39 during the last quarter of 2019. Similarly, there were 46 direct military attacks by AS this quarter while there were 41 during the same time last year; however, there were 50 direct military raids by AS during the last quarter. As for IED attacks, there were 37 attacks this quarter; 74 the same time last year, and 62 the last quarter of the previous year. This suggests that the allies continue to retain the initiative while AS is forced into a more-defensive posture. This increasingly forces the group to invest its resources into urban assassinations and IED attacks.

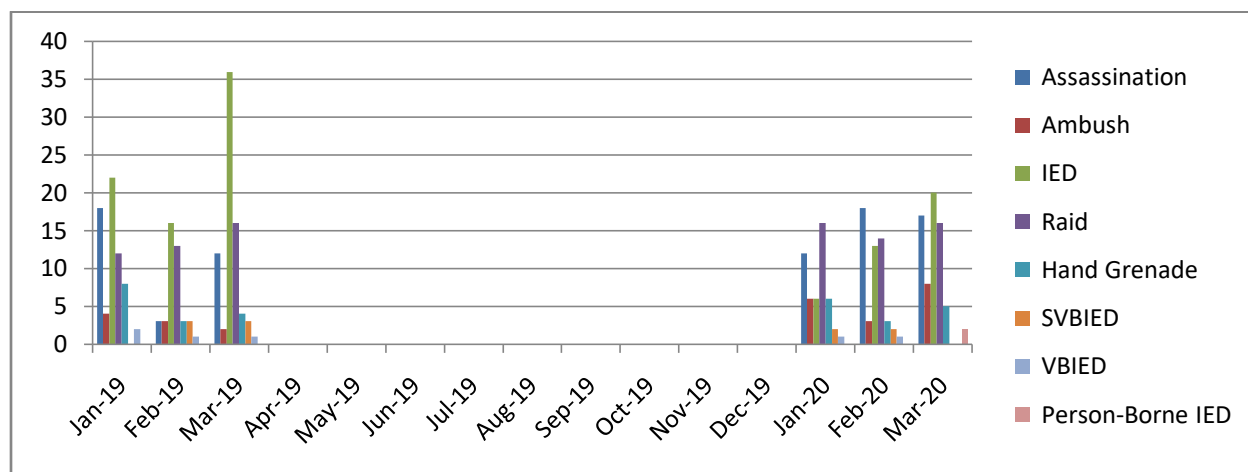


Figure 1 AS attacks in Q1 2020 and Q1 2019.

Incident	Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19
IED	5	13	19	22	16	36
Raid	16	14	16	12	13	16
Assassination	12	18	17	18	3	12
Hand Grenade	6	3	5	8	3	4
SVBIED	2	2	0	0	3	3
VBIED	1	1	0	2	1	1
Ambush	6	3	8	4	3	2

Mortar Attack	1	9	12	3	5	1
PB-IED	0	0	2	0	0	0
Failed SVBIED	0	0	2	0	1	0

Figure 2 Breakdown of AS attacks by quarter

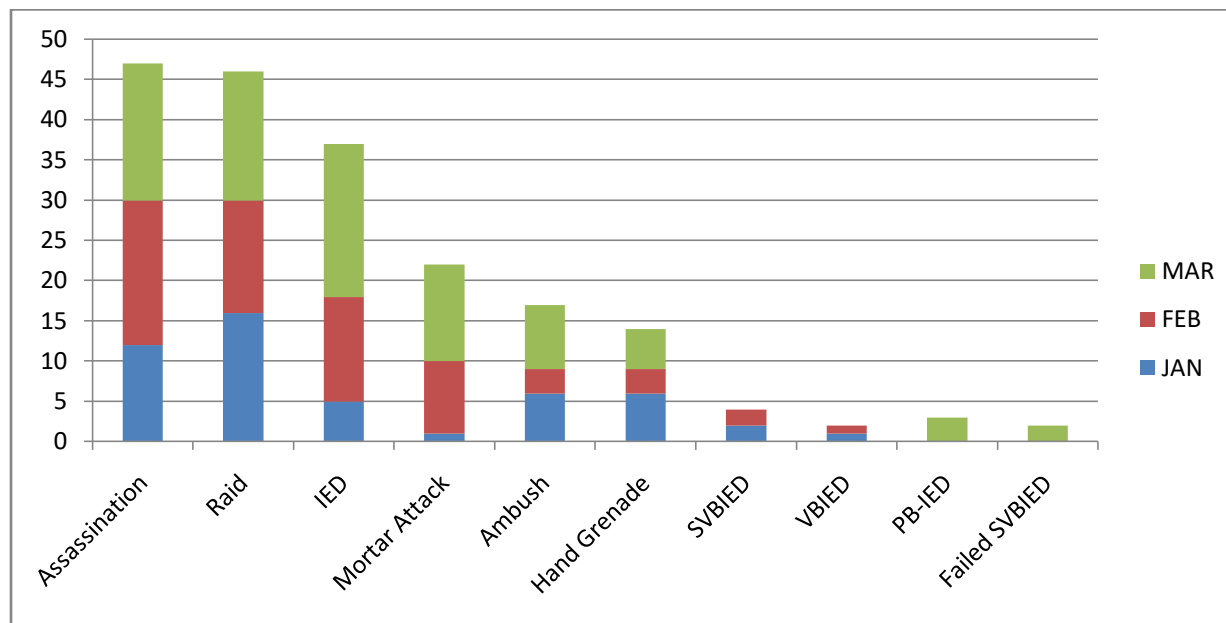


Figure 3: Type of Attacks by Month

Trend in attacks

Looking at the deadliest tactics employed by AS in the past 15 months, it is clear that this quarter was a slow one for the group's campaign. It briefly tried to revive its direct military campaign late last year, but was quickly forced to scale back in the face of lethal counterattacks by the allies. However, while it is still being kept in check, its urban tactics of using pistol assassinations and IED attacks appear to be set up for an increase. IED attacks dipped in January, only to start increasing in intensity in the following months.

As the environment and opportunity to conduct SVBIEDs are constrained, an emerging threat seems to be the use of personal IEDs (PBIED). So far this year, the group has conducted two such attacks in March alone. That number is equal to all the PBIED attacks it conducted in 2019. This suggests that the number of such attacks may be significantly higher this year than the last.

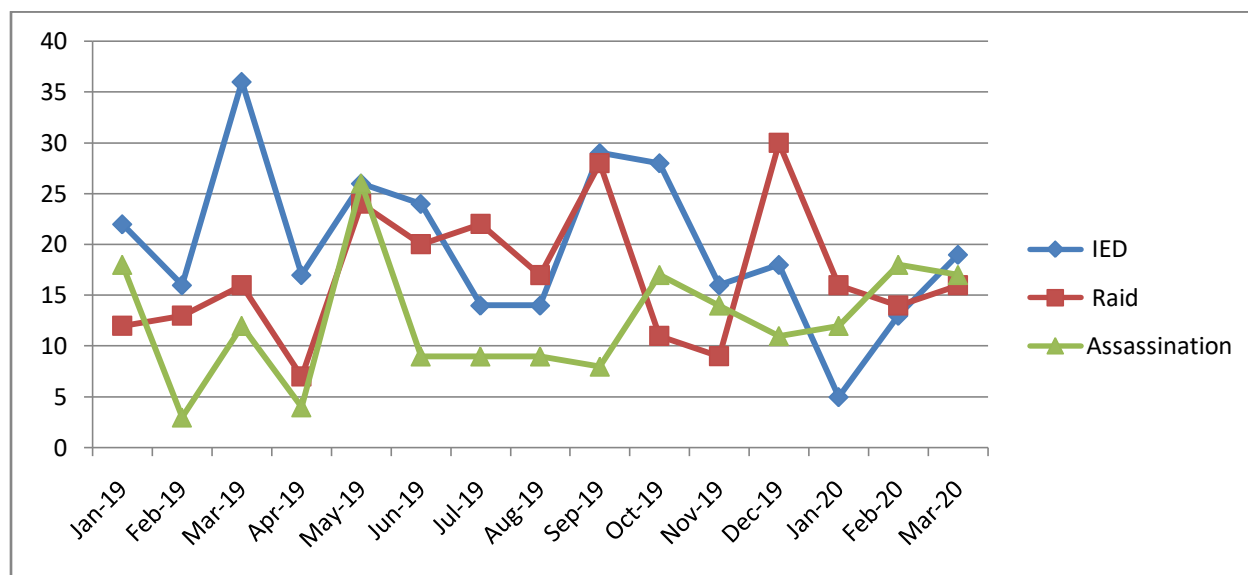


Figure 4 Trend in Attacks over the past 15 months

AS Focus

The group's main target continues to be the SNA and AMISOM. Its second priority is the Somali police force and civil servants working for the FGS and the FMSs. It also continues to target the elders that had refused to heed its amnesty offer. In the FMSs, its main target is Puntland where it has its strategic reserve in the Golis Mountains.

The police and civilians are targeted by pistol assassinations and sticky IEDs attached to their vehicles. While this tactic is also used in attacks against some lone SNA officers, it is the only methods used against targets in the urban areas. The intention seems to be to debilitate the state and enable AS free presence in the cities.

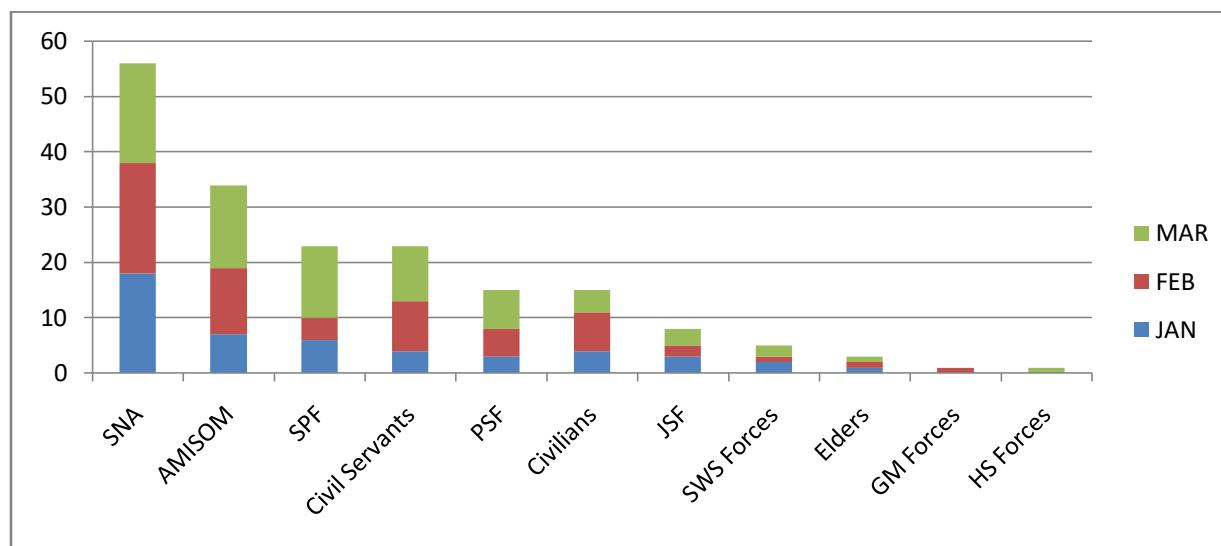


Figure 5 Entities targeted by AS, by month

Responding to AS

Attacks on the Shabab were mostly conducted by AFRICOM airstrikes and special operations attacks by Danab and Gorgor. Although it was the second most-targeted entity by al-Shabab, AMISOM was the least active in initiating attacks against the group.

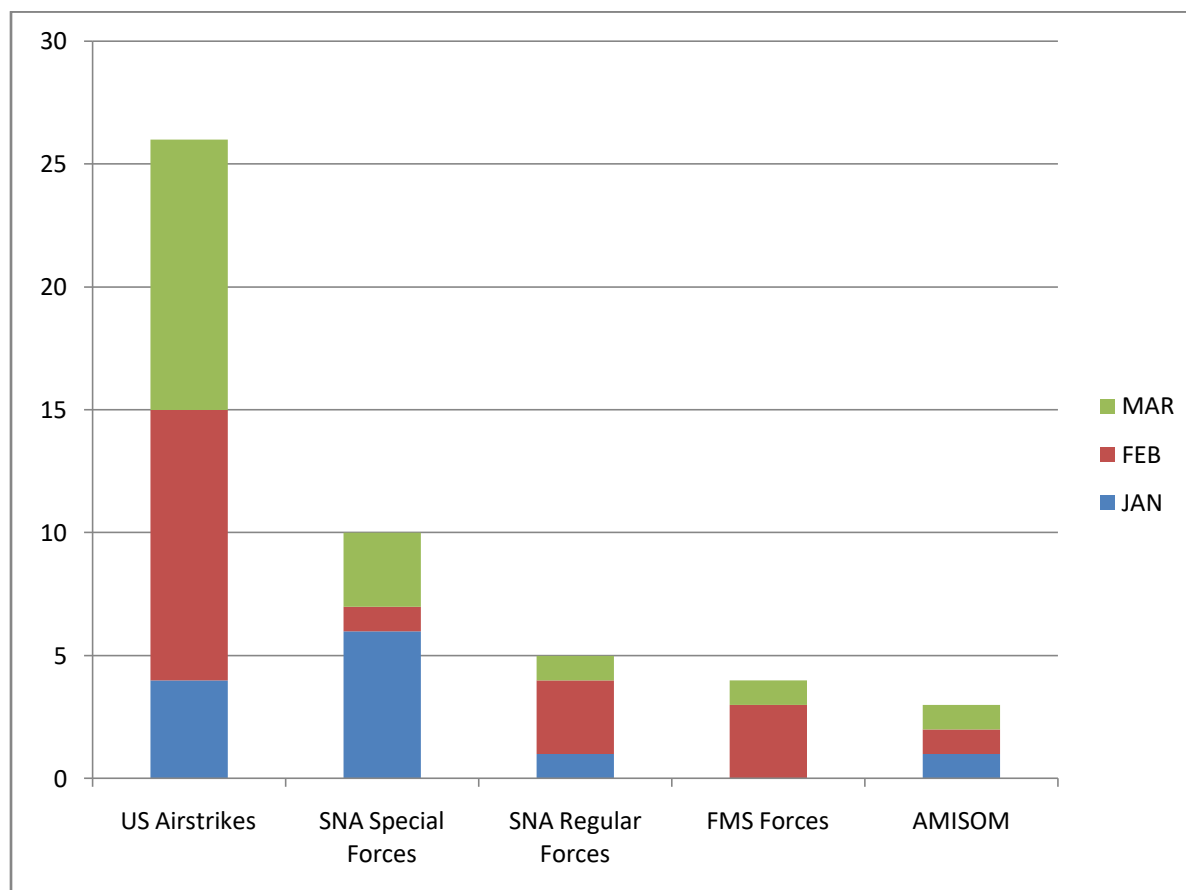


Figure 6 Allies attacks on AS

Incident	JAN	FEB	MAR
US Airstrikes	4	11	11
SNA Special Forces	6	1	3
SNA Regular Forces	1	3	1
FMS Forces	0	3	1
AMISOM	1	1	1

Figure 7 Breakdown of allied attacks on AS by month

Allied attacks had an effect on AS direct military attacks and S/VBIED attacks because of the disruptions caused to the group's control of access roads and towns. However, as can be seen from the trend graph below, assassinations and IED attacks do not seem to have been affected much by allied operations. This is because allied operations are focused in the rural areas; the group's attacks are increasing in the urban areas. In these areas, little is being done to protect pillars of state that the group is focused on undermining: the police and the civil service.

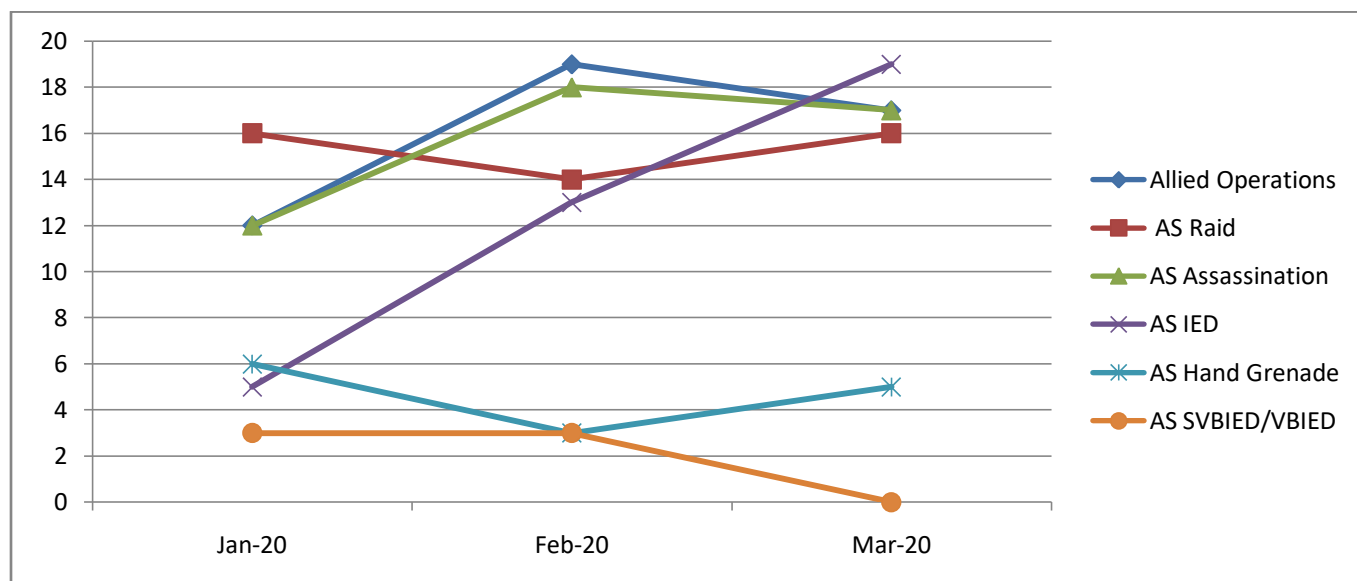


Figure 8 Effect of Allied Ops on AS Attacks

Conclusion

This quarter saw AS in the defensive, as it continued to lose riverine towns along the Shabelle. The loss impacted its ability to function in its main theatre of operation, Mogadishu. While victories in the rural areas will weaken the group in the long-term, not investing in combating it inside the capital may wipe off gains made outside the capital, as the group may gain a foothold in the periphery districts where it has weakened the local government and made it very dangerous to maintain police presence.