

Semi-annual Somalia Security Report

16 July 2020

Summary

The year 2020 had started with al-Shabab increasingly on the defensive but still very active offensively, as it had been subjected to a concerted effort by the allies conducting raids into the group's strongholds. By the first quarter of the year, the group had lost its main gateways into the capital and the places through which it used to collect taxes and adjudicate its affairs there. By the second quarter, while it managed to maintain its urban operations, it failed to match its previous successes in conducting complex and S/VBIED attacks. In order to mitigate that loss, it switched to IED attacks. Furthermore, it has used its limited SVBIED attacks to support military operations or to attempt to assassinate high profile threats, which suggests that it still has the capability but lacks opportunity and worthwhile targets.

Introduction

Al-Shabab operations the first half of 2020 are almost at the same level as the same time last year. However, the second quarter of 2020 shows a significant slowing of its tempo. For instance, assassinations this quarter were 47 -- the same number as the last quarter; however, in 2019, assassinations increased in the second quarter to 39, from 33 the previous quarter. Similarly, direct military attacks by AS against allied installations and positions were 46 this quarter, which is the same as last quarter. This itself is another indication of AS's slowing tempo, because it managed to increase its raids against the allies in the second quarter of 2019 to 51 from 41 the quarter before that, while its campaign is stalled this year. Likewise, there were 41 IED attacks the second quarter of 2020, up from 37 the last quarter. While this is a far cry from the 67 IED attacks conducted by the group the same time last year, it is a slight increase from the last quarter, and shows where the group is interested in maintaining the pressure. Nevertheless,

IED attacks this year are a fraction of what it was in the first six months of 2019 when 134 attacks occurred, compared to the 82 that occurred so far this year.

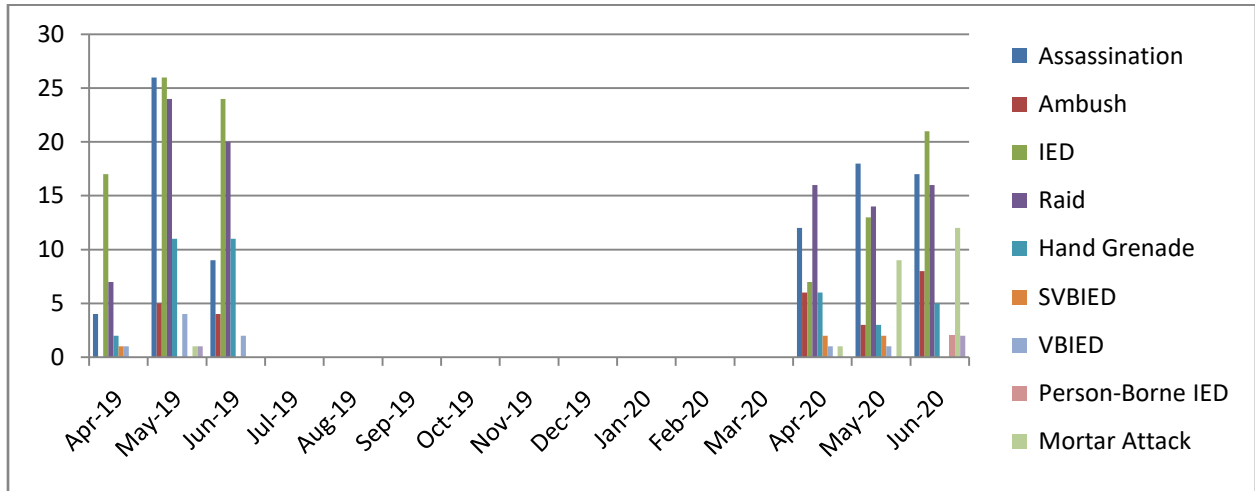


Figure 1 AS attacks in Q2 2020 and Q2 2019.

Incident	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19
Assassination	12	18	17	4	26	9
Ambush	6	3	8	0	5	4
IED	7	13	21	17	26	24
Raid	16	14	16	7	24	20
Hand Grenade	6	3	5	2	11	11
SVBIED	2	2	0	1	0	0
VBIED	1	1	0	1	4	2
Person-Borne IED	0	0	2	0	0	0
Mortar Attack	1	9	12	0	1	0
Failed SVBIED	0	0	2	0	1	0

Figure 2 Breakdown of AS attacks by quarter

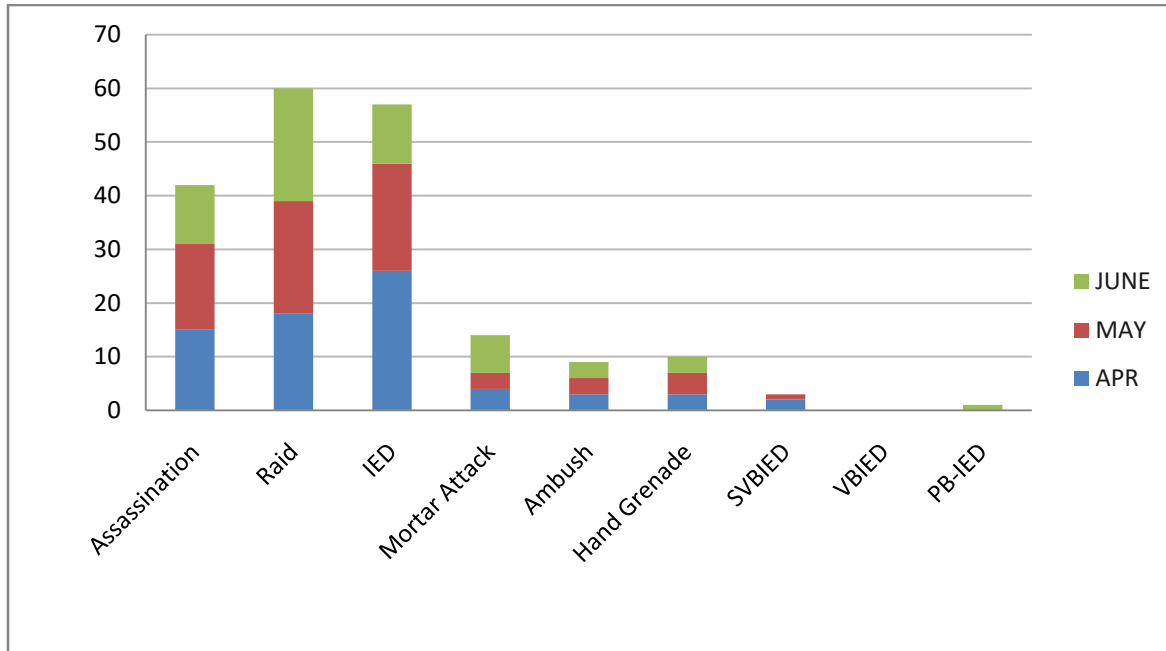


Figure 3: Type of Attacks by Month

Trend in attacks

AS continues its strategy of increasing its urban operations to make up for loss in the countryside, and decreasing attacks as allied attention turns to the cities. It raises and reduces its rate of attacks in alternate months. As can be seen from the group's activities over the past 18 months, as illustrated on Figure 4, IED attacks are sometimes reduced and increased by as much as 50% from the previous month. As the group increases its IED and assassination campaigns in urban areas, the allies respond with more focus there, and the group slows down on its attacks there; then, in order to make up for the slowing tempo in urban areas, it increases its direct military attacks in the rural areas. Allied operations in the rural areas seems to have the most effect on S/VBIED attacks in the urban areas, forcing AS to use them sparingly against strategic targets or in support of military operations. While this might make it seem like security in urban areas is slightly improving, there seems to be no understanding of -- and no strategy to deal with

-- AS's strategy of increasing and decreasing its urban operations. Without capturing or killing significant numbers of its urban operatives, any decrease in attacks is to be understood as a deliberate adaptive strategy by the group. Moreover, the effect of COVID-19 cannot be overlooked in reducing the number of targets for AS; many government offices were closed and staff encouraged to work from home. Reflective of AS's overall slow in operations is its Ramadan Offensive, which normally sees an uptick in attacks by the group every year. As can be seen from Figure 7 and 8, the group's Ramadan activities continue to be headed south. Most of its attack types have been reduced by more than a half from last Ramadan.

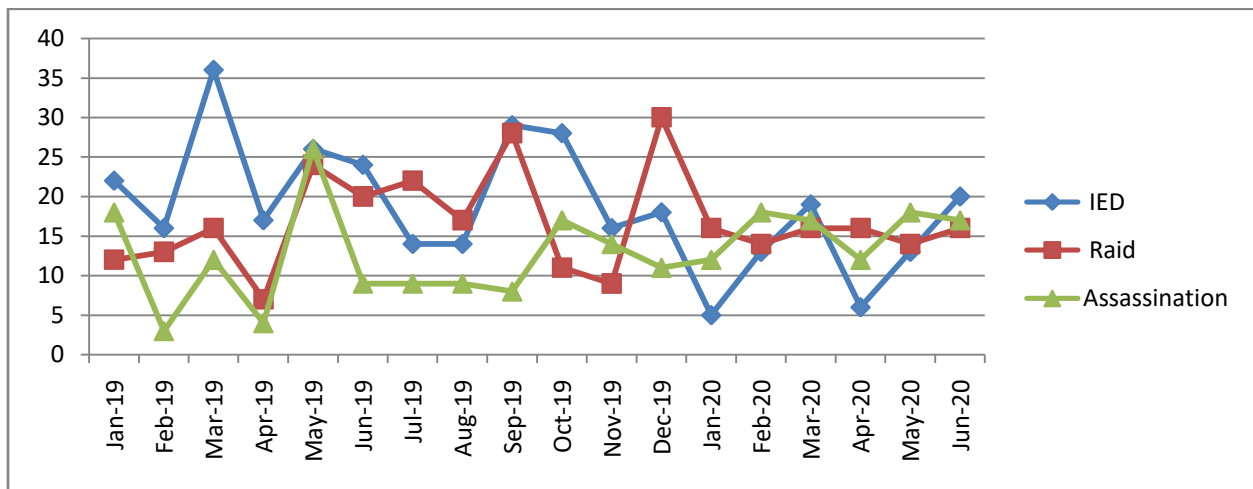


Figure 4 Trend in Attacks over the past 18 months

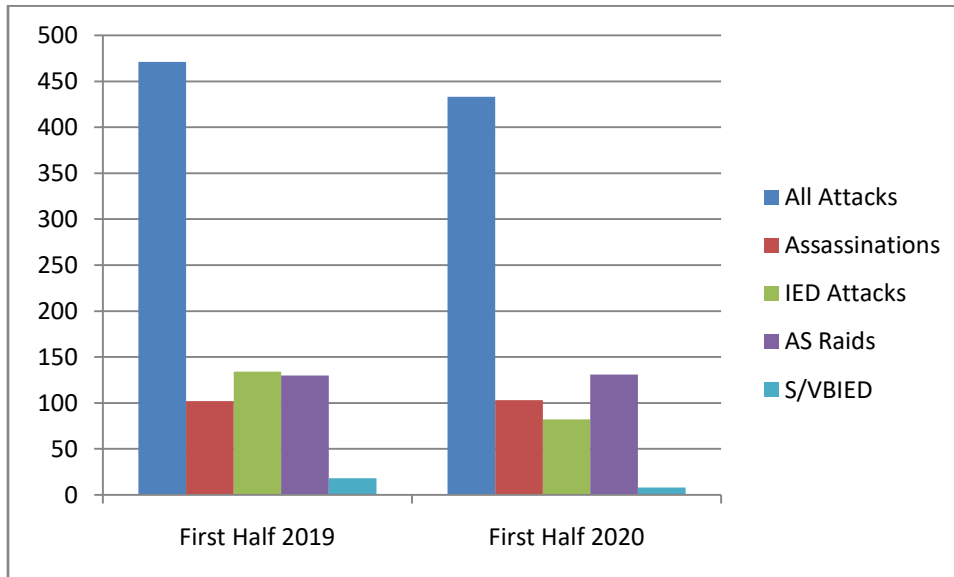


Figure 5 Semi-annual AS attacks, 2019 and 2020

Type of Attack	First Half 2019	First Half 2020
All Attacks	433	384
Assassinations	102	103
IED Attacks	134	82
AS Raids	130	131
S/VBIED	18	8
Mortar	10	36
Hand grenade	39	24

Figure 6 Semi-annual AS attacks

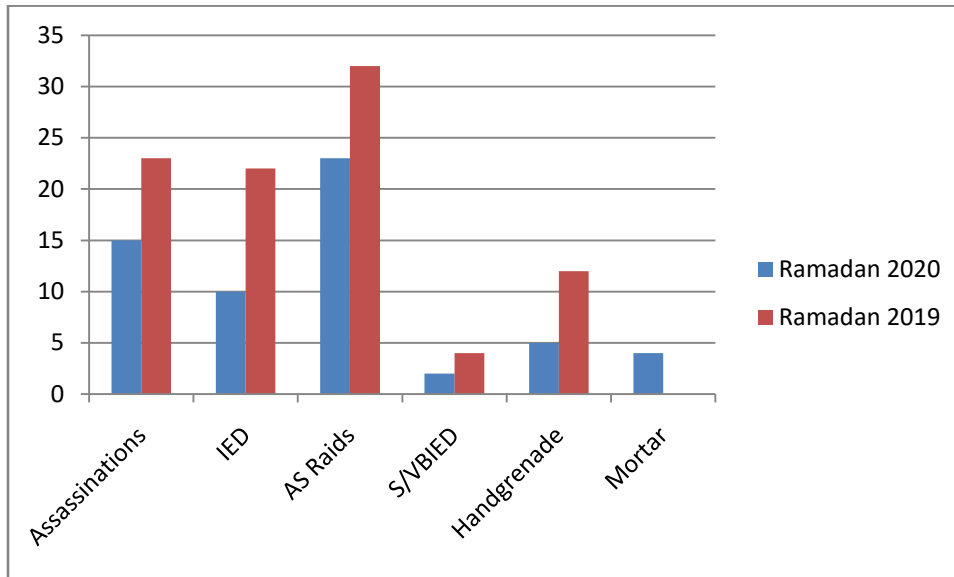


Figure 7 AS Attacks during Ramadan

Incident	Ramadan 2020	Ramadan 2019
Assassinations	15	23
IED	10	22
AS Raids	23	32
S/VBIED	2	4
Handgrenade	5	12
Mortar	4	0

Figure 8 Breakdown of AS Ramadan attacks

Active Days

There is a pattern to the attacks by AS each week¹: it tends to be most active just before the weekend and after the weekend in urban areas. In the rural areas, it is most active during midweek. The reason is that there are fewer targets during the weekend in the urban areas, as potential targets stay at home or change their schedule. Assassinations are lowest during the weekends and highest on Saturdays, the first day of the week, as targets make their way to and

¹ In Somalia, the week starts on Saturday; Thursday and Friday are the weekend.

from work. While the same general trend applies to IED and S/VBIED attacks, these seem to have a spike on Fridays. This is because of two main reasons: the first is that it is when the group normally attacks mass gatherings of its targets in urban areas, and the second is that it uses SVBIED and IED attacks to bolster its attacks on remote military outposts.

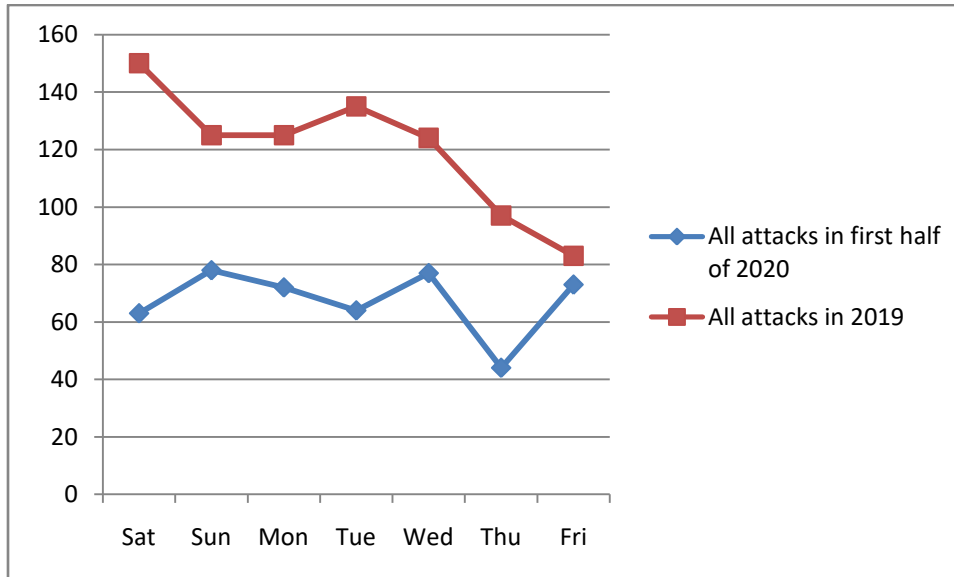


Figure 9 Attacks by Day, 2019 and first 6 months of 2020

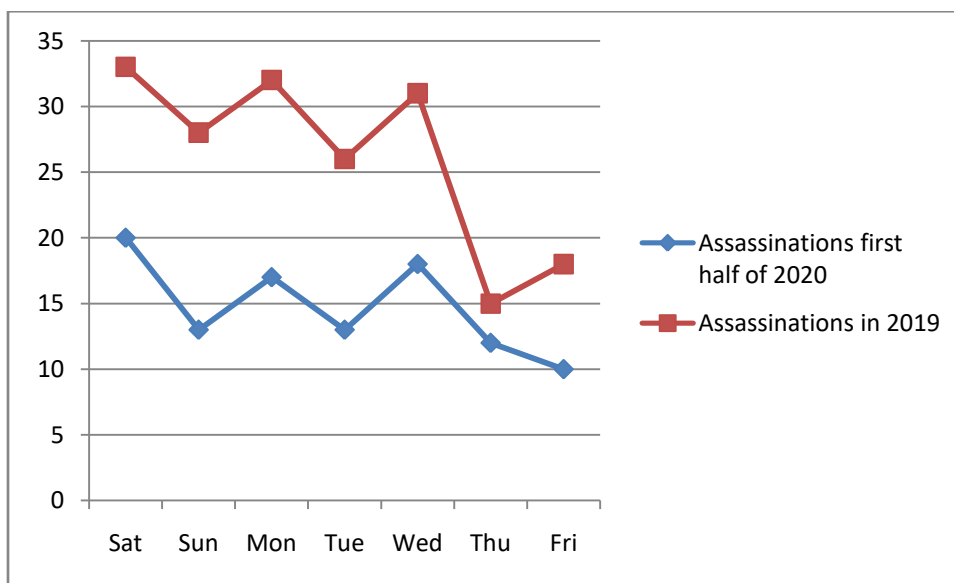


Figure 10 Assassinations each day of the week

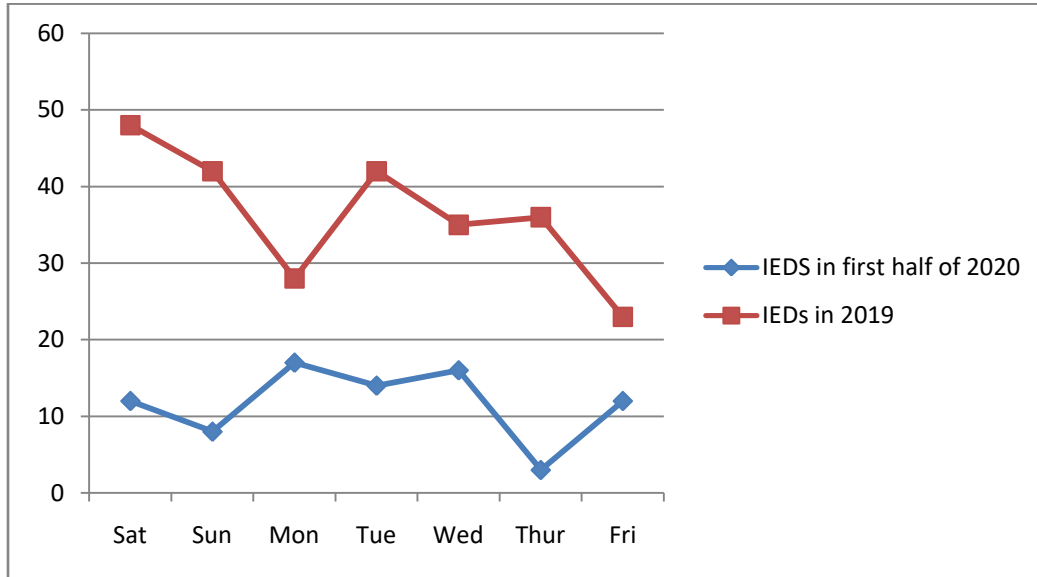


Figure 11 IED attacks by day of the week

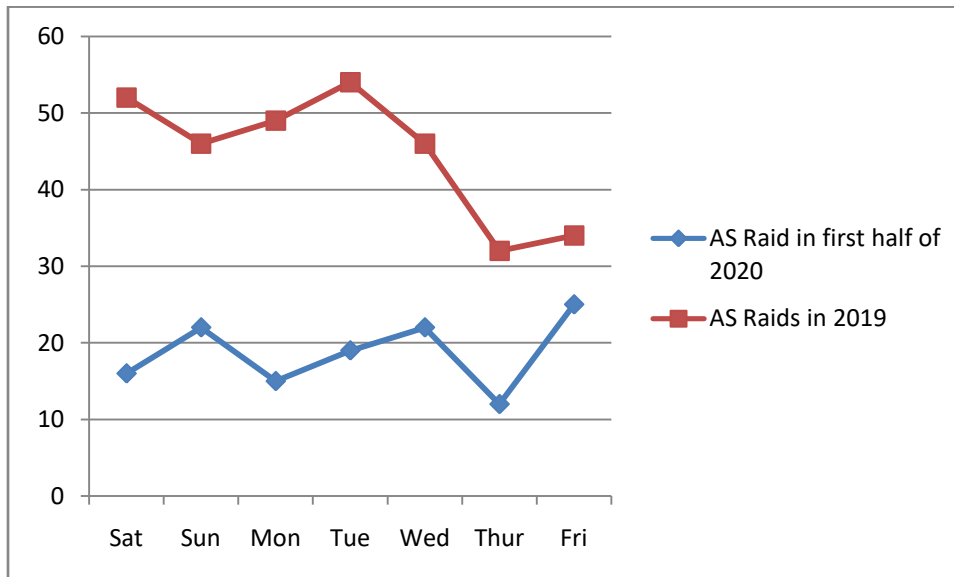


Figure 12 Direct military attacks by AS

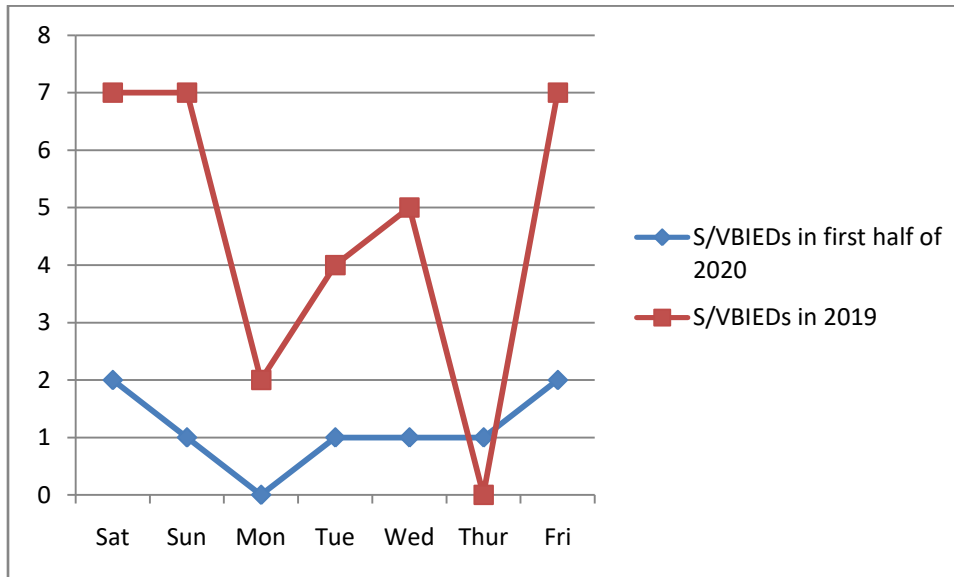


Figure 13 S/VBIED attacks by day

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. Its main focus among the FMSs is Jubaland, where it increased its attacks, trying to capitalise on that FMS's worsening relations with the FGS and Ethiopia. AS seems to have exploited the reduction in Ethiopian operations in support of Jubaland to bolster its forces in the region and increase its pressure on the forces of that FMS. It also continues to target the elders that had refused to heed its amnesty offer.

The police and civilians are targeted by pistol assassinations and sticky IEDs attached to their vehicles. Lone SNA officers are also assassinated in this manner, although the main targets of this campaign seem to be civil servants and police officers.

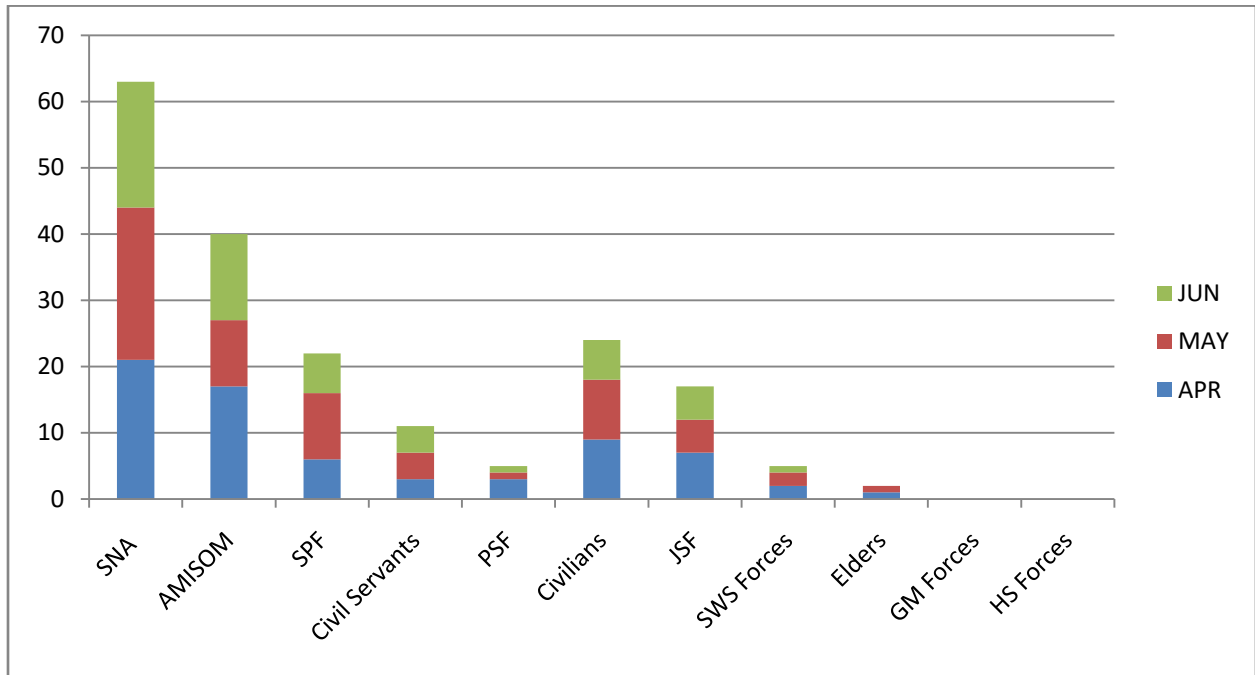


Figure 14 Entities targeted by AS, by month

Responding to AS

As shown by Figure 15, 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. This is exactly as it was last quarter.

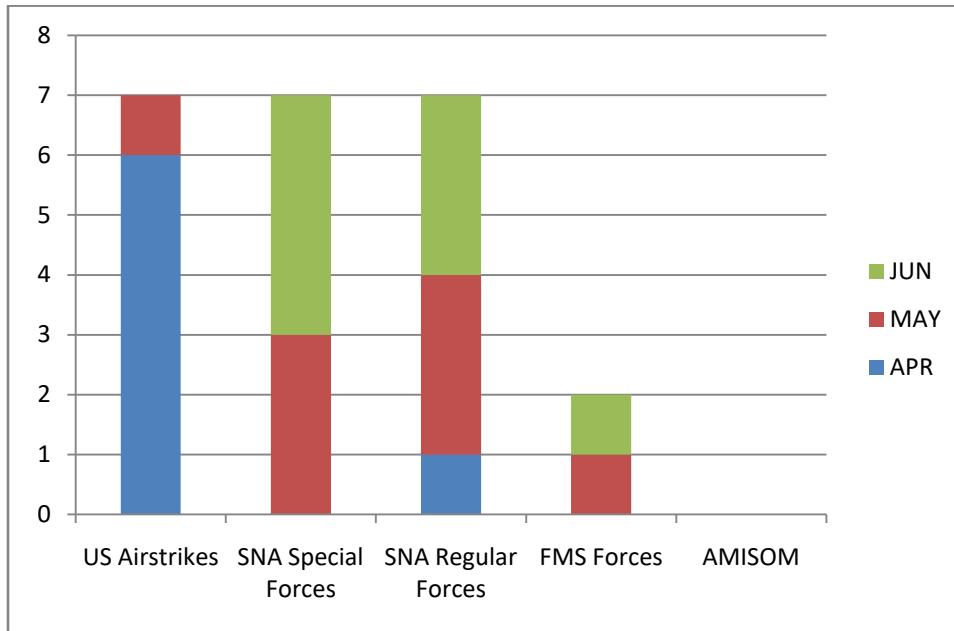


Figure 15 Allies attacks on AS

Incident	APR	MAY	JUN
US Airstrikes	6	1	0
SNA Special Forces	0	3	4
SNA Regular Forces	1	3	3
FMS Forces	0	1	1
AMISOM	0	0	0

Figure 16 Breakdown of allied attacks on AS by month

Allied attacks continue to have the most effect on AS' rural operations and S/VBIED attacks, which originate from the rural areas. These attacks decrease with increased allied attacks. However, urban AS attacks are unaffected by airstrikes and Special Operations attacks; the group reduces them for operational considerations. In fact, urban attacks by AS increase with increased rural operations by the government. This is both an attempt to help remove pressure off its rural strongholds, and also to exploit the allies' change of focus.

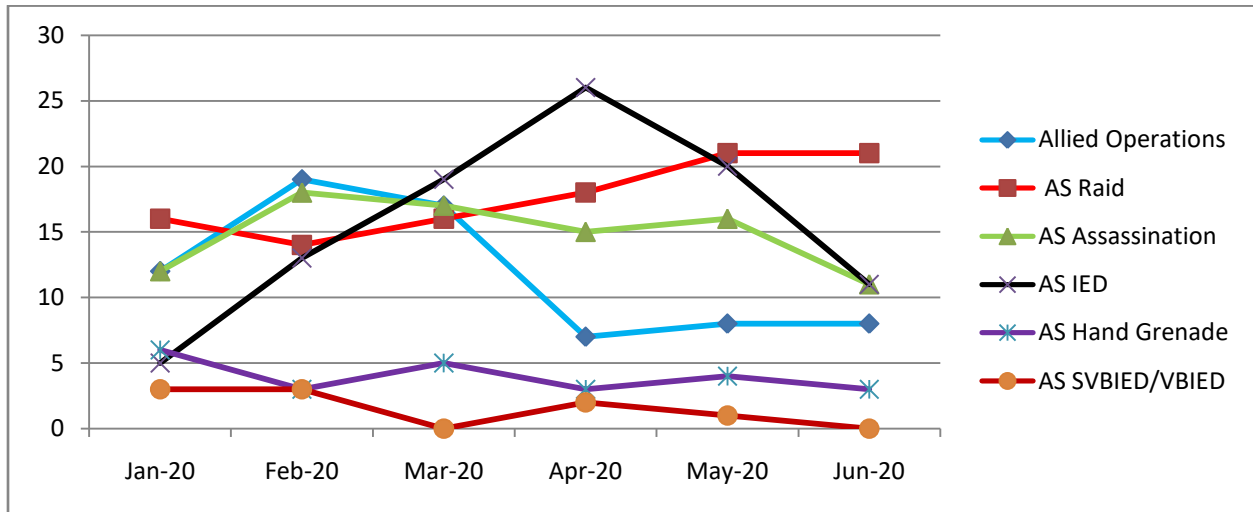


Figure 17 Effects of Allied Ops on AS Attacks

Conclusion

The first half of this year saw the tempo of AS operations stalled, but continuing steady on its deadly path. Unfortunately, this slow in tempo may not continue past the return of government workers to fulltime work following the social distancing that necessitated many of them to work from home. With increased movement of potential targets, the group may get the opportunity to continue its deadly urban campaign. As noted in our last quarterly report, the group is pivoting towards more usage of suicide bombers using explosive vests in urban areas, and away from SVBIED attacks. As such, it has conducted one such attack this quarter. There is a heightened risk of such attacks during the rest of the year.