



Vates Corp Special Report: Analysis of Mogadishu VBIED Attacks Jan 01 2017 - Apr 08 2019

The security state in Mogadishu, Somalia has deteriorated over recent months. Al-Qaida aligned al-Shabaab, and to a much lesser extent ISIS militants, are responsible for an increased tempo of terrorist attacks including murders/ assassinations, grenade and direct attacks against security forces checkpoints and outposts, indirect fire attacks, and attacks involving multiple types of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). Militant groups have successfully proven their intent and capability to breach protective security measures in Mogadishu, and to launch high profile and complex attacks targeting areas considered some of the most secure in the capital. This analysis examines data of Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device (VBIED) attacks¹ in Mogadishu for the 27-month period from Jan 01 2017 - Apr 08 2019, which have proven to be the most deadly tool in the militants' arsenal.

Our analytical approach utilises our internal incident database as a building block along with other sources to identify relationships between key variables, which enables our analysts to gauge potential future threats and security risks. While past incidents alone are not necessarily a reliable indicator of what may occur in the future, we have focused our assessment on Mogadishu VBIED attacks/ incidents, including targets, timings and militant tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) to analyse current and historical trends, and assess how they may impact our clients' operations. Details from tracked incidents are based on those reported through a number of different sources, and particularly with regards to casualty figures, should be viewed as minimums with the total number possibly higher.²

The number of IED incidents Vates analysts tracked in Mogadishu occurring in the 27 month period between Jan 01 2017 - Apr 08 2019 spiked at a record high during the month of Mar 2019 with (28)³ incidents/ attacks, of which al-Shabaab was responsible in all but one incident.⁴ As militants increased the tempo of IED attacks, we have extrapolated data from (45) separate Mogadishu VBIED incidents/ attacks which occurred since Jan 01 2017, all of which al-Shabaab either directly claimed, or was assessed as having been responsible for undertaking.⁵ While some Mogadishu complex attacks involved multiple VBIEDs, our methodology for this analysis, outlined in the *Incident Details* section below, classifies VBIED attacks as a single incident when they occurred in close proximity to the attack site, and relative to timing of the incident. As such, we have tracked and analysed a total of (54) separate VBIEDs detonations in the (45) incidents/ attacks which occurred during the period.

Al-Shabaab SVBIED Tactics, Techniques and Procedures

The (45) VBIED incidents/ attacks resulted in a total number of casualties of at least (1,063) victims killed and (1,068) victims injured. Based on these figures, an average of 23.62 victims were killed per attack/ incident, with 23.73 victims wounded. Notwithstanding that al-Shabaab is known to utilise networks and facilitators to assist in attacks, these 45 attacks analysed were assessed as involving a minimum of 83 attackers, with a kill ratio of at least 12.81 victims killed per attacker.⁶ The Oct 14 2017, Zobe Truck Bombing was the most deadly incident during the period, after the driver detonated a large Suicide Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device (SVBIED) in a heavily populated urban area, recording the highest number of casualties in a single incident in Mogadishu to date, with at least 587 victims killed and at least 316 victims wounded.⁷ While al-Shabaab did not take credit for this incident, it was almost certainly responsible, and likely refrained from claiming the attack as the driver of the SVBIED was fleeing from a checkpoint when the militant detonated in a heavily populated urban area killing and injuring mostly civilians.

¹ When generally describing VBIED attacks in the assessment, this should be understood to also include Suicide Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (SVBIEDs).

² Vates Corp makes every attempt to identify all incidents and exact details, however, even with our extensive local networks the nature of reporting in Somalia makes this virtually impossible.

³ Number in brackets indicates number of incidents.

⁴ On Mar 14 2019, an IED incident in Hawlwadaag district was claimed by ISIS, with no injuries reported in the blast.

⁵ ISIS militants were not responsible for any VBIED incidents/ attacks during the period.

⁶ At least 63 militants were killed during attacks, plus vehicles staged by attacker or arrests - Incident Details section Ser's: 1,2,4,5,7,8,9x2,22,24,27,28,30,31,34,35,36,37,42,43.

⁷ Hirran Online. (2018, Mar 05). Committee: 587 dead in Oct 14 terror attack. Retrieved Apr 02, 2019, from https://www.hirraan.com/news4/2018/Mar/157047/committee_587_dead_in_oct_14_terror_attack.aspx

Al-Shabaab VBIED Targeting

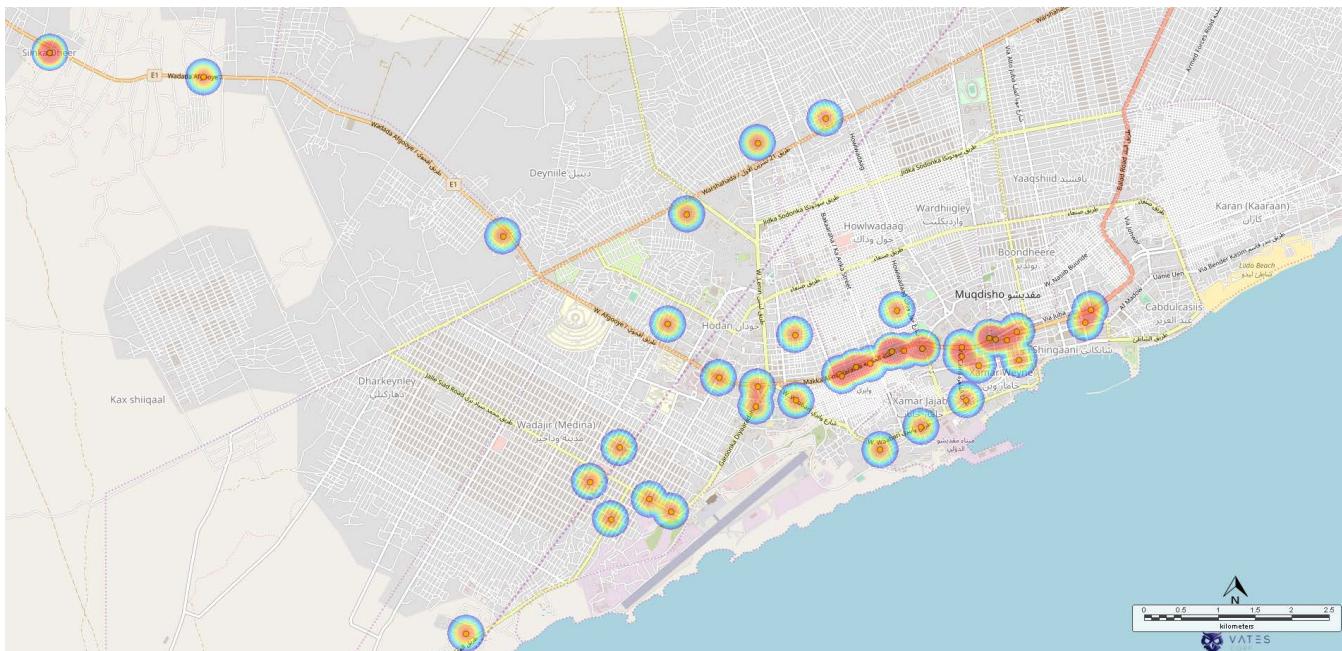


Figure 1 Jan 01 2017 - Apr 08 2019 Mogadishu VBIED Heatmap/ 45 VBIED incidents/ attacks

Based on our analysis of Mogadishu VBIED incidents/ attacks which occurred during the period, we assess that at least 31.11 per cent of attacks (14 of 45) were complex in nature, involving multiple VBIEDs and other methods of attack.⁸ There were (6) additional VBIEDs that based on the timings and locations we assess were likely intended to be utilised as part of a coordinated or complex attack.⁹ Drivers of Suicide Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (SVBIEDs) were present in 55.56 per cent (30 of 54 VBIEDs) of the incidents/ attacks.¹⁰ VBIEDs detonated in the vicinity of (IVO) government or allied forces sites and assets in 53.33 per cent (24 of 45) of attacks,¹¹ with (7) of these devices detonating after detection at checkpoints or during attempts to disable the device.¹² Three of these VBIEDs (3 of 45/ 6.67 per cent) detonated IVO government or allied forces sites and assets involved SVBIEDs attempted to ram security forces convoys, with all three missing their intended target.¹³ VBIEDs detonated IVO civilian sites or areas in 46.67 per cent (21 of 45) incidents/ attacks,¹⁴ with (4) of these VBIEDs detonating after detection, in pursuit or prior to attempts to disable the device.¹⁵ VBIEDs detonating near civilian sites or areas resulted in at least (876) victims killed, representing 82.41 per cent of (876 of 1,063) the total victims killed, and (798) victims wounded representing 74.72 percent (798 of 1,068) the total victims wounded during the period.

Analyst Comments When further analysing al-Shabaab VBIED targeting by year, in 2017 (20) VBIED incidents/ attacks, (9/ 45 per cent) detonated IVO government or allied forces sites and assets, and (11/ 55 per cent) detonated IVO civilian sites or areas. Of the 2018 (17) VBIED attacks, (13/ 76.47 per cent) detonated IVO government or allied forces sites and assets, and (4/ 23.53 per cent) detonated IVO civilian sites or areas. Already in 2019, al-Shabaab

⁸ Incident Details section: Ser's 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 16, 17, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 44, 45.

⁹ Incident Details section: Ser 18: Apr 06 2018, 1245hrs VBIED detonated IVO NISA CP 1, Waaberi and Ser 17: Apr 06 2018, 1410hrs VBIED detonated IVO Sei Biano CP; Ser 19: Mar 25 2018, 1555hrs SVBIED detonated IVO Ministry of Interior CP and Ser 20: Mar 25 2018, 1210hrs SVBIED detonated IVO Siinka Dheer CP; Ser 41: Mar 03 2017, 0800 hrs VBIED detonated IVO Jazeera Training Camp CP and Ser 40: Mar 03 2017, 1010 hrs SVBIED detonated IVO Weheliye Hotel.

¹⁰ Incident Details section: Ser 5: Sources report the driver of the VBIED may have parked and left the vehicle prior to the Feb 28 2019, Makka Al Mukarama detonation, however, this has not been definitively proven and for this analysis we have classified this as an SVBIED attack.

¹¹ Incident Details section: Ser's 1,3,9,11,12,13,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,23,25,26,30,32,33,35,39,40,42,45.

¹² Incident Details section: Ser's 15,18,19,20,21,23,35.

¹³ Incident Details section: Ser 10: Oct 01 2018, SVBIED targeting EUTM Convoy IVO Jaale Siyad Military Academy; Ser 25: Nov 14 2017, SVBIED targeting AMISOM Convoy IVO KM 13; Ser 38: Apr 09 2017, SVBIED targeting Commander SNA Convoy IVO MOD HQ.

¹⁴ Incident Details section: Ser's 2,4,5,6,7,8,10,14,22,24,27,28,29,31,34,36,37,38,41,43,44.

¹⁵ Incident Details section: Ser's 28,29,30,36.

has conducted (8) VBIED attacks (2/ 25 per cent) detonating IVO government sites, and (6/ 75 per cent) detonating IVO civilian sites or areas.

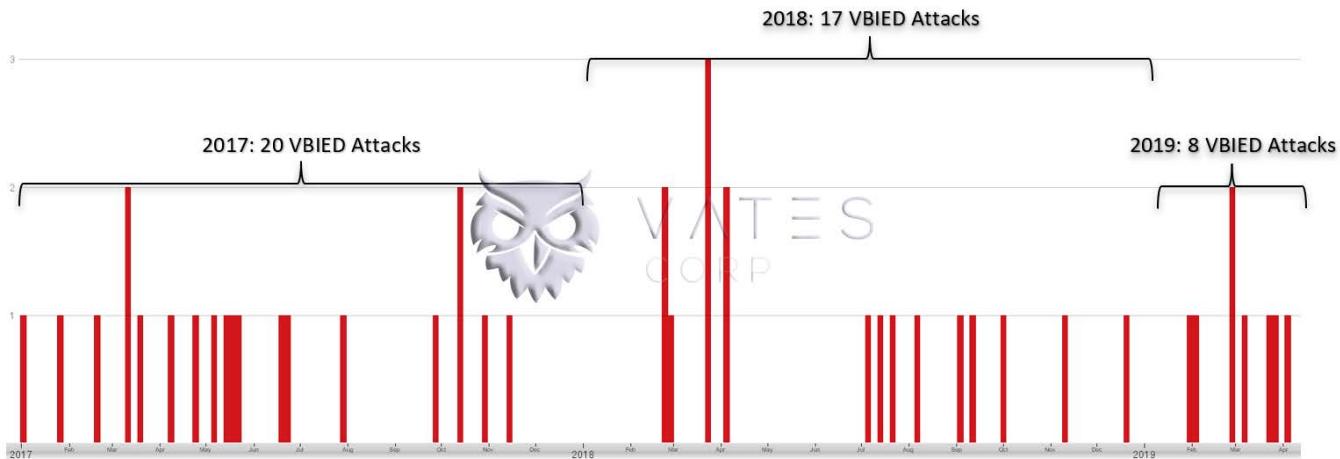


Figure 2 Jan 01 2017 - Apr 08 2019 Mogadishu VBIED Timeline/ (45) VBIED incidents/ attacks

While al-Shabaab has repeatedly sought to justify the targeting of civilian venues such as hotels and restaurants in Mogadishu,¹⁶ it is highly likely that the group temporarily altered its targeting methodology following the Oct 14 2017 Zobe attack, as many in the public condemned the group following this tragedy. This likely explains al-Shabaab VBIED attacks mostly targeting government or allied forces sites and assets in 2018. However on Nov 09 2018, the group launched a high profile complex attack against the Sahafi Hotel utilising 3 x SVBIEDs and gunmen, and while militants were unsuccessful in taking control of the hotel, the attack resulted in at least (52) victims killed, and at least (100) victims injured, mostly civilians. Following this attack, we noted in our analysis that considering the limited public outcry against al-Shabaab following the loss of over 50 persons, who were mostly civilian, this may signal a renewed campaign and further targeting of luxury hotels and civilian areas of the capital.¹⁷ In fact since Nov 09 2018, 66.67 per cent (6 of 9) of VBIED attacks in Mogadishu have detonated IVO civilian sites or areas. Nevertheless, when analysing only the total (24) VBIED incidents/ attacks which detonated IVO government or allied forces sites and assets since Jan 01 2017, 41.67 per cent (10 of 24) detonated between KM 4 and KM 0 and within approximately 250 metres of Maka Al Mukarama Road.¹⁸ Similarly, 61.91 per cent (13 of 21) VBIED incidents/ attacks which detonated IVO civilian sites or areas during the period occurred in this same area,¹⁹ which is also the commercial centre of the capital. The combined total (23 of 45) VBIED incidents/ attacks that occurred IVO Maka al Mukarama Rd accounts for 51.11 per cent of all VBIEDs, which is considered the most heavily protected central business district of the capital. This is likely attributed to a number of factors which may include Mogadishu luxury hotels and restaurants being co-located near government ministries and sites, attacks against upscale restaurants and hotels where individuals with possible links to the government may frequent or reside, and attacks against businesses that refuse or are unable to pay al-Shabaab taxes. It is also likely that some of the attacks occurring in central areas of Mogadishu involved mistakes by militants who were frightened or backed out of attacks and abandoned VBIEDs in the Mogadishu central business district.²⁰ However, al-Shabaab almost always attempts to justify VBIEDs utilised against civilian sites as having targeted or killed senior officials, which is often false or by chance, considering that at any given time most upscale hotels or restaurants in the capital will host guests who may have some links to the government.

¹⁶ On Feb 28 2016, al-Shabaab released a propaganda statement in Arabic, entitled "The Hotel Facts", where it claimed there were at least ten heavily fortified hotels in which 'Mogadishu apostates take refuge'. It asserted that on more than one occasion, al-Shabaab had advised Muslims to stay away from those hotels to avoid being affected by targeted attacks. The statement claimed the government was seeking to describe hotels as civilian targets to discredit al-Shabaab but it stressed they were in fact government targets. On Mar 30, following the Mar 28 Maka al Mukarama hotel attack, in an audio release al-Shabaab spokesman, Sheik Ali Dheere repeated many of these same claims.

¹⁷ See 20190117 Vates Corp – Somalia HOA SA.

¹⁸ Incident Details section: Ser's 3,9,16,17,19,20,25,31,32,40.

¹⁹ Incident Details section: Ser's 2,4,5,8,10,14,22,24,27,30,37,41.

²⁰ Two recent examples include Ser 4, Feb 28 2019, 21st October VBIED which was abandoned and detonated as part of the Maka Al Mukarama Hotel complex attack; Ser 7, Jan 29 2019, Café Italia Petrol Station VBIED which was abandoned and detonated near the café with no apparent targets, or report of threats against the owner by al-Shabaab.



Al-Shabaab VBIED Attack Timing

While there were sometimes multiple incidents during a month, some months were without VBIED incident, as noted in the timeline at *Figure 2* above. Between Jan 01 2017 - and Apr 08 2019, Mogadishu VBIED incidents/ attacks have occurred at a rate of 1 per 18.40 days. Since Jan 01 2019 Mogadishu VBIED attacks have occurred at a rate of 1 per 12.25 days, and if left undeterred, al-Shabaab is on track to surpass the frequency of VBIED incidents of previous years.

When examining data from all (45) Jan 01 2017 - Apr 08 2019 Mogadishu VBIED incidents/ attacks by month of year at *Figure 3*, results demonstrate that Mar (10) recorded the highest number of incidents/ attacks, followed by Feb (6), Apr (5), May (4), Jul (4), Oct (4), Jan (3), Sep (3), Jun (2), Nov (2), Aug (1), and Dec (1). During the period, the highest number of incidents/ attacks by day of week at *Figure 4*, results demonstrate that Sun (9) and Thurs (9) recorded the highest number of incidents/ attacks, followed by Sat (8), Mon (7), Fri (5), Tues (4), and Wed (3).

2017 Mogadishu (20) VBIED incidents/ attacks by month of year at *Figure 5*, results demonstrate that May (4) recorded the highest number of incidents/ attacks, followed by Mar (3), Oct (3), Jan (2), Apr (2), Jun (2), Feb (1), Jul (1), Sep (1), and Nov (1). During the period, the highest number of incidents/ attacks by day of week at *Figure 6*, results demonstrate that Sun (5) recorded the highest number of incidents/ attacks, followed by Mon (4), Tues (3), Wed (3), Sat (3), and Thurs (2).

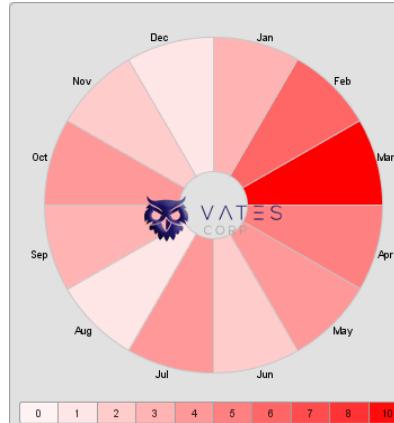


Figure 3 Jan 01 2017 - Apr 08 2019
Mogadishu VBIEDs (45) Month of Year

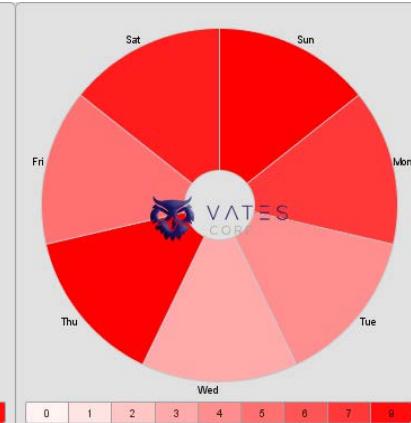


Figure 4 Jan 01 2017 - Apr 08 2019 Mogadishu
VBIEDs (45) Day of Week

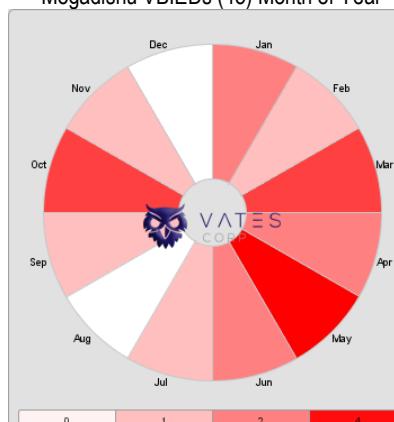


Figure 5 2017 Mogadishu VBIEDs (20) Month
of Year

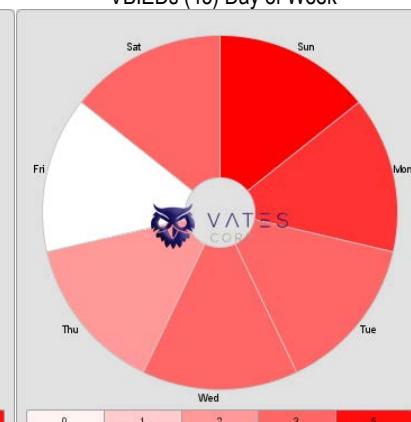


Figure 6 2017 Mogadishu VBIEDs (20) Day
of Week

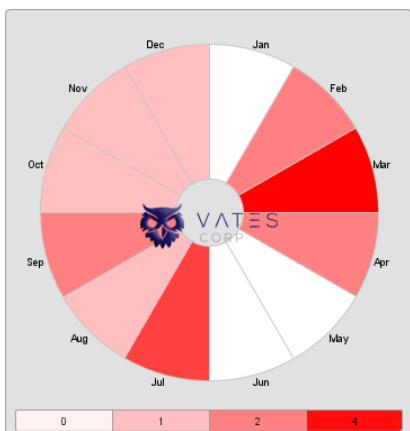


Figure 7 2018 Mogadishu VBIEDs (17) Month
of Year

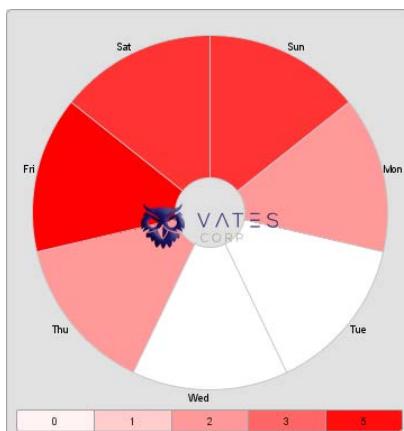


Figure 8 2018 Mogadishu VBIEDs (17) Day of
Week

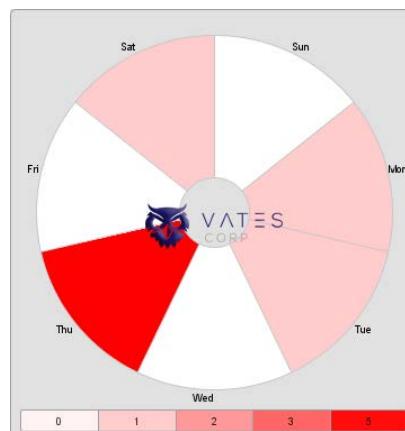


Figure 9 2019 Mogadishu VBIEDs (8) Day of
Week

2018 Mogadishu VBIED incidents/ attacks by month of year at *Figure 7* above, results demonstrate that Mar (4) recorded the highest number of incidents/ attacks, followed by Jul (3), Feb (2), Apr (2), Sep (2), Aug (1), Oct (1), Nov (1), and Dec (1). During the period, the highest number of incidents/ attacks by day of week at *Figure 8* above show that Fri (5) recorded the highest number of incidents/ attacks, followed by Sat (4), Sun (4), Mon (2), and Thurs (2). In 2019 Jan - Apr Mogadishu VBIED incidents/ attacks by day of week at *Figure 9* above, results demonstrate that the highest number of incidents/ attacks occurred on Thurs (5), followed by Mon (1), Tues (1), and Sat (1). While Ramadan is a period when al-Shabaab has threatened to step up attacks and has been associated with a heightened threat in Mogadishu, based on the data analysis, we can see that in 2017 the May/Jun timeframe experienced a high number of VBIED attacks, while the Ramadan period for 2018 did not experience any VBIED attacks.²¹

While the patterns and timing of all al-Shabaab VBIED incidents/ attacks during the period are important tools to understanding the group's targeting methodology, we have broken down the incidents/ attacks down further below by target type to assist in tactical planning. The first dataset below details al-Shabaab Jan 01 2017 - Apr 08 2019 VBIED incidents/ attacks against government targets.

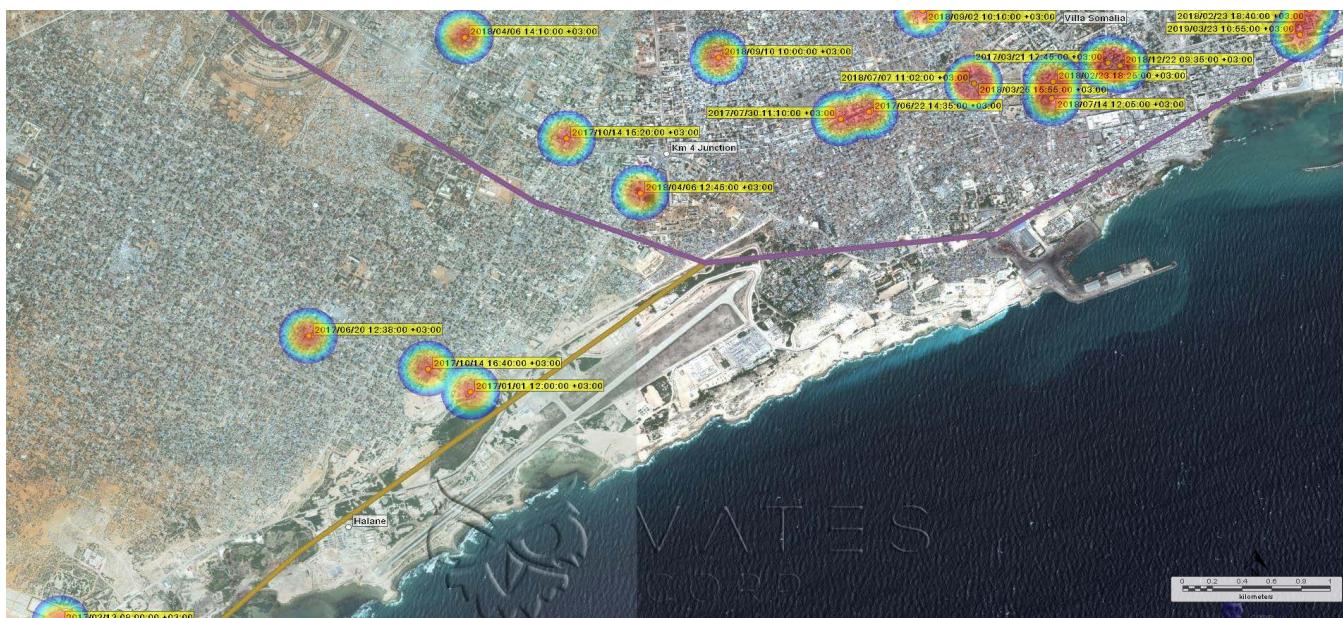


Figure 10 Jan 01 2017 - Apr 08 2019 Select Mogadishu VBIEDs Govt Targets (20)

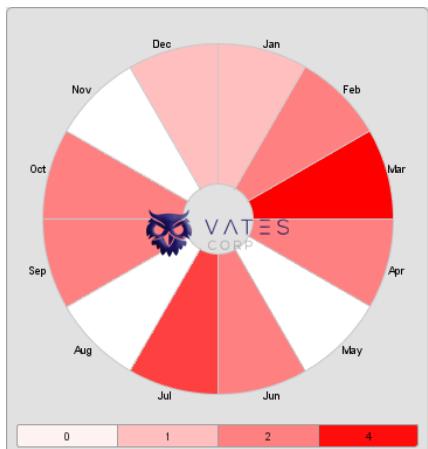


Figure 11 2017 - Apr 2019 Select Mogadishu VBIEDs Govt Targets (20) Month of Year

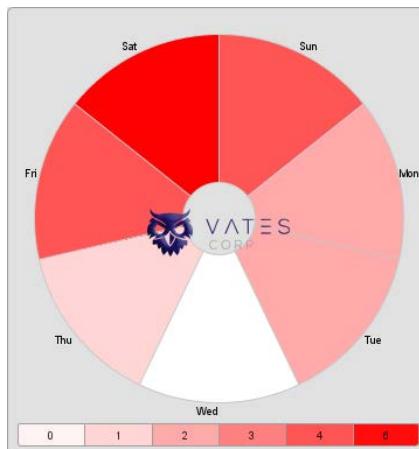


Figure 12 2017 - Apr 2019 Select Mogadishu VBIEDs Govt Targets (20) Day of Week

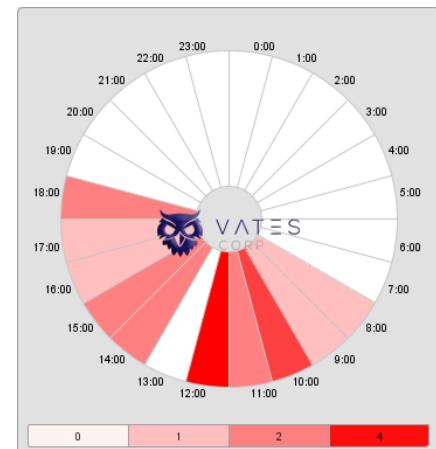


Figure 13 2017 - Apr 2019 Select Mogadishu VBIEDs Govt Targets (20) Hour of Day

²¹ Ramadan 2017 May 26 – Jun 24; Ramadan 2018 May 16 – Jun 14; Ramadan 2019 May 05 – Jun 04* approximate dates.

Analyst Comment For the purpose of this section of analysis, we have excluded VBIED attacks that occurred after detection by security forces near checkpoints, and incidents/ attacks that occurred on the Afgoye corridor where militants or facilitators may have been staging devices in Mogadishu for a later attack. Furthermore, while detonations such as serial 27 and 28 Danwadaagaha/ Zobe occurred in civilian areas (see *Incident Details table* below), we have included data from these attacks in the government section of this analysis as prior to detonation both vehicles were detected by security forces, and we assess the attackers were likely enroute to attack Halane, or another government or allied forces site.²² Based on these parameters in the period Jan 01 2017 to April 08 2019, (20) selected VBIED incidents/ attacks in Mogadishu targeted government or allied forces sites and assets. In this dataset by month of year at *Figure 11* above, results demonstrate that Mar (4) recorded the highest number of incidents/ attacks, followed by Apr (3), Jul (3), Feb (2), Jun (2), Sep (2), Oct (2), Jan (1), and Dec (1). In this dataset, the highest number of incidents/ attacks by day of week at *Figure 12* above demonstrate that Sat (6) recorded the highest number of incidents/ attacks, followed by Sun (4), Fri (4), Mon (2), Tues (2), and Thurs (2). Of note, the (4) Fri attacks against government or allied forces sites targeted Airport road in the vicinity of Halane and Villa Somalia as most other government sites would have been closed.²³

Jan 01 2017 – Apr 08 2019 incidents/ attacks against government or allied forces sites in this dataset by time of day at *Figure 13* above demonstrate that the highest number of incidents/ attacks occurred between 1200 - 1300hrs (4), followed by 1000 - 1100hrs (3), 1100 - 1200hrs (2), 1400 - 1500hrs (2), 1500 - 1600hrs (2), 1800 - 1900hrs (2), 0800 - 0900hrs (1), 0900 - 1000hrs (1), 1600 - 1700hrs (1), and 1700 - 1800hrs (1), 1900hrs - 2000hrs (1).

The second dataset below details al-Shabaab Jan 01 2017 - Apr 08 2019 (15) VBIED incidents/ attacks against civilian cities or areas. For the purpose of this analysis, we have excluded one VBIED detonation that occurred after detection by security forces, one that prematurely detonated, and one that detonated following impact with the parked VBIED.²⁴

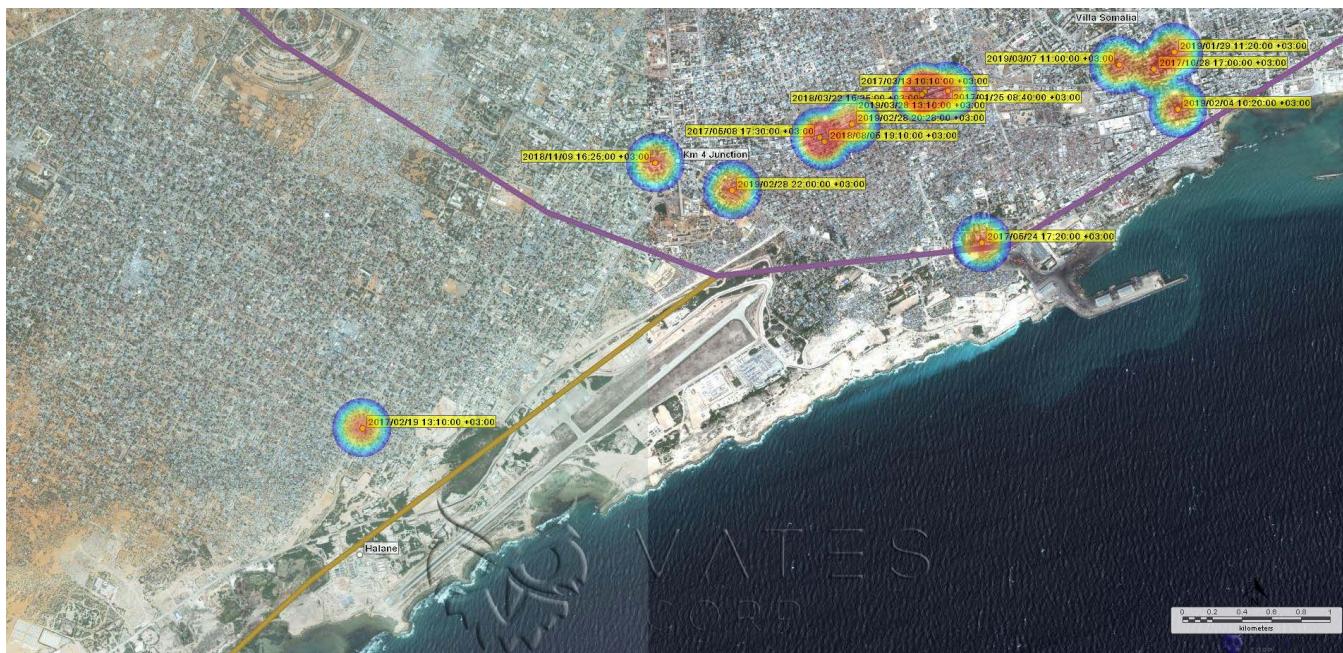


Figure 14 Jan 01 2017 - Apr 08 2019 Mogadishu VBIEDs Civilian Targets (15)

²² Government dataset analysis includes Ser's 1, 2, 8, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 23, 24, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32, 39, 41, 44. We did not include detection Ser's 14, 22, 34. Additionally, we did not include analysis in this dataset on the (3) SVBIEDs targeting mobile convoys discussed in Footnote 9.

²³ Incident Details section: Ser 1 Gen Kahiye Police Academy; Ser 17 Sei Biano CP/ Ser 18 NISA CP 1, Airport Road; Ser 23 Doorbin Hotel/ Ser 24 Villa Somalia ECP.

²⁴ Incident Details section: Civilian dataset analysis includes Ser's 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 13, 21, 26, 33, 36, 40, 42, 43. We did not include analysis if this dataset for premature detonation and detections Ser's 29, 35, 37.

Based on these parameters, we have selected (15) Mogadishu VBIED incidents/ attacks targeting civilian sites or areas in this dataset for the period Jan 01 2017 - Apr 08 2019 by month of year at *Figure 15* below. The results demonstrate that Mar (4) and Feb (4) recorded the highest number of VBIED incidents/ attacks, followed by Jan (2), May (2), Aug (1), Oct (1), and Nov (1). In this dataset, the highest number of incidents/ attacks by day of week at *Figure 16* below, results demonstrate that Thurs (5) recorded the highest number of VBIED incidents/ attacks, followed by Mon (3), Sun (2), Wed (2), Tues (1), Fri (1), and Sat (1).

Jan 01 2017 - Apr 08 2019 attacks targeting civilian sites or areas in this dataset by time of day at *Figure 17* below, demonstrate that the highest number of incidents/ attacks occurred between 1700 - 1800hrs (3), followed by 1000 - 1100hrs (2), 1100 - 1200hrs (2), 1300 - 1400hrs (2), 1600 - 1700hrs (2), 0800 - 0900hrs (1), 1900 - 2000hrs (1), 2000 - 2100hrs (1), and 2200 - 2300hrs (1).

With this dataset, we also analysed the (4) complex attacks utilising VBIEDs which occurred during the period targeting civilian hotels at *Figure 6*.²⁵ The Jan 2017, Dayah Hotel attack was a departure from typical TTPs utilised by al-Shabaab during complex hotel attacks involving VBIEDs and gunmen,²⁶ as it occurred in the morning hours, at approximately 0840hrs. The Oct 28 2017, attack on the Nasa Hablood II occurred at approximately 1700hrs; the Nov 09 2018, Sahafi Hotel attack occurred at approximately 1625hrs; the Feb 28 2019, Makka Al Mukarama Hotel attack occurred at approximately 2028hrs; a fifth VBIED which was part of the Makka Al Mukarama complex attack detonated approximately 1.4km from the hotel, at approximately 2200hrs after the driver abandoned the vehicle. The attacks occurred between Wed and Sat, with no attacks occurring between Sun and Tues. All four attacks involved multiple VBIEDs, with gunmen often arriving in a VBIED that detonated after the gunmen had entered the attack site. All attacks were reportedly initiated by SVBIEDs detonating prior to gunmen attempting to enter the hotel. For the Makka Al Mukarama attack on Feb 28 2019, there remain questions on exactly how the gunmen arrived at the site, and while they failed to enter the hotel, and took shelter and held positions overnight in a residential building next to the hotel, it is possible the gunmen arrived at the attack site and exited the VBIED prior to its detonation near the café next to Makka Al Mukarama Hotel.²⁷

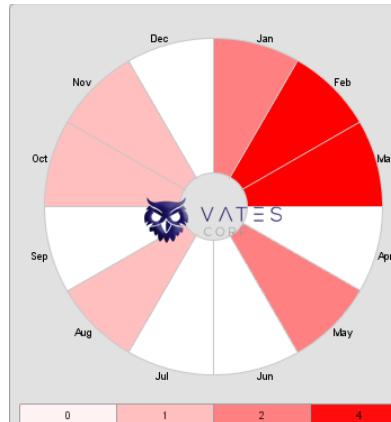


Figure 15 2017 - Apr 2019 Select Mogadishu VBIEDs Civilian Targets (15) Month of Year

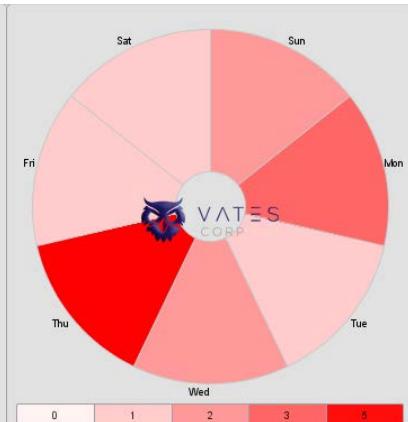


Figure 16 2017 - Apr 2019 Select Mogadishu VBIEDs Civilian Targets (15) Day of Week

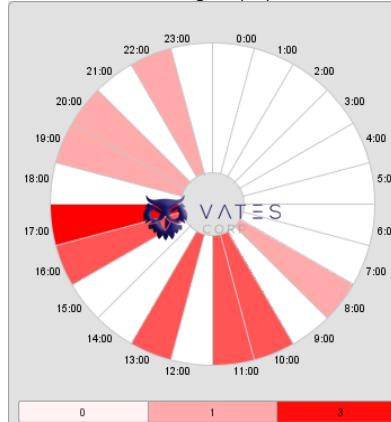


Figure 17 2017 - Apr 2019 Select Mogadishu VBIEDs Civilian Targets (15) Hour of Day

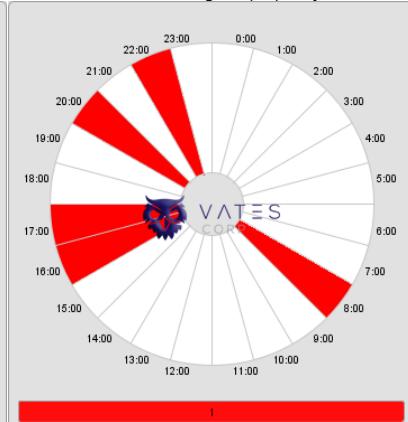


Figure 18 2017 - Apr 2019 Select Complex VBIEDs Civilian Targets (15) Hour of Day

²⁵ Incident Details section: Ser's 4, 5, 9, 26, 43.

²⁶ For additional details on al-Shabaab TTPs for Mogadishu Hotel attacks see 20160908 Vates Corp - Al-Shabaab Jan 2015 – Aug 2016 Mogadishu Hotel Attacks <https://vatescorp.com/index.php/blog/item/26-special-report-20160908-al-shabaab-jan-2015-aug-2016-mogadishu-hotel-attacks>

²⁷ There are conflicting accounts on Ser 5, with some sources indicating the driver of the VBIED may have parked close to the café next to Makka Al Mukarama Hotel where it detonated, and may not have been driving which is why it did not detonate in front of the hotel. See 20190314 Vates Corp - Somalia HOA SA for additional details.

Analysis During the period Jan 01 2017 – Apr 08 2019, 46.66 per cent (21 of 45) of Mogadishu VBIED attacks occurred between Feb - Apr, which may point to a planning and attack cycle in addition to the partial year data of 2019. As demonstrated following the Oct 14 2017 Zobe attack, al-Shabaab appeared to effectively weather the public outrage and adjusted its targeting methodology directing attacks towards government or allied forces sites and assets through much of 2018, proving the group's capability to adapt. However, on the part of the government following the Zobe attack, it failed to capitalise on public outrage, did not follow through with offensive operations against al-Shabaab, and public sentiment is beginning to turn against the government. Al-Shabaab is also known to seek to exploit political tensions, and is well adept at striking during times of political uncertainty. With Mogadishu experiencing an increased tempo of all forms of IED incidents/ attacks since Nov 2018, and (6 of 8) 2019 VBIED attacks in the capital targeting civilian sites or areas, the group appears to be effectively mounting a campaign intended to undermine public trust in the government.

The Jan 01 2017 - Apr 08 2019 dataset above on select Mogadishu (20) VBIED incidents/ attacks provides insight into al-Shabaab targeting methodology against government or allied forces sites and assets during the period. With the Somali government work week running from Sat - Wed, half day work on Thurs and Fri off, it is very likely al-Shabaab has planned attacks on days and times when government offices would be occupied, with 50 per cent of incidents/ attacks occurring at the start of the work week (10 of 20/ Sat (6), Sun (4)). Additionally, the highest number of incidents/ attacks in this dataset occurred between 1200 - 1300hrs (4), followed by 1000 - 1100hrs (3), which is also considered to be a time when government offices would be most likely at highest occupancy.

Similarly, the Jan 01 2017 - Apr 08 2019 dataset above on select Mogadishu (15) incidents/ attacks provides insight into al-Shabaab targeting methodology on attacks targeting civilian sites or areas. At the end of the work week, and when civilian sites and areas would most likely be occupied, 33.33 per cent of attacks occurred on Thurs (5), with 53.33 per cent (8 of 15) of incidents/ attacks occurring between 1600hrs - 2300hrs.

The timing of all (45) 2017 - Apr 2019 Mogadishu VBIED incidents/ attacks²⁸ also demonstrates that 31.11 per cent (14 of 45) occurred between 0700hrs - 1200hrs; 53.33 per cent (24 of 45) occurred between 1200hrs - 1800hrs; and 15.56 per cent (7 of 45) occurred between 1800hrs - 2300hrs. With 68.89 per cent (31 of 45) occurring after 1200hrs, al-Shabaab are likely attempting to launch high profile VBIED attacks with the understanding that security forces are often more relaxed in the afternoon, including a potential that some may have begun chewing miraa (khat), and that the profile at security forces checkpoints may be more relaxed. It is also likely that high profile complex attacks are often launched later into the afternoon to maximise casualties, and with the understanding that only a few specialised units have night vision capabilities, training and experience required to mount a coordinated response. As such, if militants are able to hold or extend a siege throughout the night, and into the next day, as recently seen during the Feb 28 2019 Makka Al Mukarama Hotel attack, the group gains additional international media coverage, which adds to the propaganda value of the attack.

A lack of coordination between AMISOM contingents undertaking limited offensive engagements, domestic political disputes between the government and federal member states, funding issues, and different donor priorities have seen the security transition plan slow and have resulted in minimal pressure on al-Shabaab. This inaction has enabled the militant group to strengthen its presence in areas of the country, including Lower and Middle Shabelle, which is almost certainly contributing to deteriorating security in the capital.

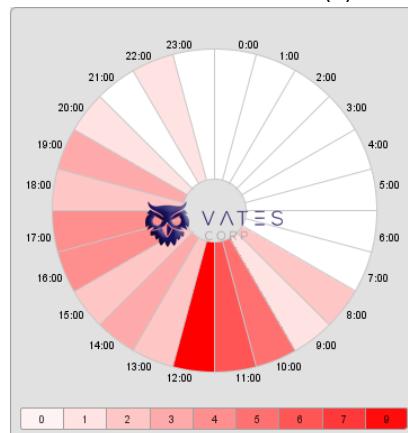


Figure 19 2017 - Apr 2019 (45) Mogadishu VBIED incidents/ attacks

²⁸ 0800 - 0900hrs (2), 0900 - 1000hrs (1), 1000 - 1100hrs (5), 1100 - 1200hrs (6), 1200 - 1300hrs (9), 1300 - 1400hrs (2), 1400 - 1500hrs (3), 1500 - 1600hrs (2), 1600 - 1700hrs (4), 1700 - 1800hrs (4), 1800 - 1900hrs (2), 1900 - 2000hrs (3), 2000 - 2100hrs (1), 2200 - 2300hrs (1).

The lax security posture in Mogadishu over recent months is also likely contributing to increased attacks. However, security operations and measures put in place since early Apr 2019, if sustained, may have some impact and could potentially delay militants planning and attack cycles. Indeed, on Apr 06 2019, government intelligence and security forces, with information from the public, successfully interdicted a large cache of explosives and IED components on the outskirts of Mogadishu near Elasha Biyaha, which was almost certainly intended to be utilised in future Mogadishu attacks²⁹. Nevertheless, al-Shabaab is well entrenched in the capital with facilitation and targeting networks and has proven its intent and capability to routinely mount high profile and complex attacks against the most secure areas of the Mogadishu and against well defended strategic targets.

While there is a perception by some that al-Shabaab has reoriented its targeting methodology toward government targets, the data indicates that al-Shabaab may have adopted this approach for a period in the aftermath of the 2017 Zobe mass casualties attack that killed at least 587 persons, but has pivoted back to the targeting of government and civilian targets in equal measure, and is using its justification of government officials frequenting civilian locations for attacks on soft targets. As stated earlier, there is a notable difference in al-Shabaab attack timing based on whether it is targeting a government or civilian site, with attacks at the beginning of the Somali working week (Sat-Mon) for government sites, with the exception of sites around Airport Rd and Villa Somalia, and towards the end of the week for civilian sites and areas, with Thurs recording the highest number of VBIED incidents. In addition, we assess that al-Shabaab is likely to continue to launch high profile complex attacks later into the afternoon when there is peak occupancy at these venues, a more lax security posture, and the knowledge of limited security force capabilities during evening hours and that extending a siege into the next day is more likely to attract international media attention.

Based on our available data for the 27-month period of analysis, we assess al-Shabaab will seek to continue to target both government and civilian targets aimed at undermining the government and capitalising on political tensions set to continue with just two years left of the tenure of the current administration.

With the current tempo of VBIED incidents since Jan 01 2019 in Mogadishu that have occurred at a rate of 1 per 12.25 days, al-Shabaab is on track to surpass the frequency of VBIED incidents of previous years unless there is a coordinated effort by the Federal Government of Somalia and allied forces to degrade al-Shabaab's capabilities. Looking forward, defensive security measures and lockdowns may deter high profile attacks for a limited period of time. However, on its own, militants are likely to adapt, and in time the public is almost certain to protest.

While the world has fixated on Islamic State in recent years, al-Shabaab utilises the same harsh tactics under a separate al-Qaida banner. No matter the justification, the worst atrocities committed by the group often involve VBIEDs, many of which are directed against innocent Somali civilians. As such, the Federal Government must reclaim the narrative. However, a culture of incompetence without accountability and rhetoric without action is likely to test the patience and resilience of the Somali people, as well as international donors. Therefore, the Federal Government, with assistance from international partners must make tangible progress in security sector reform and begin fielding national security forces for offensive activities, and to hold and secure areas retaken in joint SOF operations. Furthermore, success against al-Shabaab must be measured by actions and the ability of allied forces to degrade rather than displace the enemy, and leaders must demonstrate commitment to national security through their actions rather than words. **End**

²⁹ Goobjoog News (Apr 07, 2019). Somali Police forces invade explosive devices materials at the outskirts of Mogadishu. Retrieved Apr 07, 2019, from <http://goobjoog.com/english/somali-police-forces-seize-explosive-devices-materials-at-the-outskirts-of-mogadishu/>

Incident Details

Ser	DTG	Incident Detail/ Target	Target Type	Complex Attack	Device Type 1	Device Type 2	Device Type 3	FKIA	FWIA
1	04/04/2019 19:04:00	Gen Kahiye Police Academy	Government/ Police Site	No	VBIED	N/A	N/A	1	7
2	28/03/2019 13:10:00	Filsan Restaurant	Civilian	No	VBIED	N/A	N/A	15	17
3	23/03/2019 10:55:00	Ministry of Labour	Government/ Ministry	Yes	SVBIED	VBIED	N/A	15	15
4	07/03/2019 11:00:00	Blue Sky Restaurant	Civilian/ Restaurant	No	VBIED	N/A	N/A	7	7
5	28/02/2019 22:00:00	21 st October Junction	Civilian (VBIED abandoned)	Yes	VBIED	N/A	N/A	0	0
6	28/02/2019 20:28:00	Makka Al Mukarama Hotel/ Gunmen stormed civilian apartments	Civilian/ Hotel & Apartments	Yes	SVBIED (Sources report the driver left the vehicle prior to detonation)	N/A	N/A	29	131
7	04/02/2019 10:20:00	Mogadishu Mall	Civilian/ Commercial	No	VBIED	N/A	N/A	13	10
8	29/01/2019 11:20:00	Café Italia Petrol Station	Civilian/ Restaurant	No	VBIED	N/A	N/A	2	2
9	22/12/2018 09:35:00	National Theatre/ Hawo Tako Monument	Government/ CP	Yes	VBIED	VBIED	N/A	30	54
10	09/11/2018 16:25:00	Sahafi Hotel	Civilian/ Hotel	Yes	SVBIED	SVBIED	SVBIED	52	100
11	01/10/2018 12:00:00	Jaale Siyaad Military Academy	Allied Forces/ EUTM Convoy	No	SVBIED	N/A	N/A	3	4
12	10/09/2018 10:00:00	Hodan DC HQ	Government/ District HQ	No	SVBIED	N/A	N/A	12	22
13	02/09/2018 10:10:00	Hawladaag DC HQ	Government/ District HQ	No	SVBIED	N/A	N/A	6	14
14	05/08/2018 19:10:00	Bar Italia Restaurant	Civilian/ Restaurant	No	SVBIED	N/A	N/A	5	19

Ser	DTG	Incident Detail/ Target	Target Type	Complex Attack	Device Type 1	Device Type 2	Device Type 3	FKIA	FWIA
15	21/07/2018 11:40:00	Sarkuusta	Government CP/ VBIED identified and detonated at CP following pursuit	No	SVBIED	N/A	N/A	3	2
16	14/07/2018 12:05:00	Beerta Nabaada/ SYL Monument CPs	Government CPs	Yes	SVBIED	SVBIED	N/A	2	3
17	07/07/2018 11:02:00	Ministry of Interior	Government/ Ministry	Yes	SVBIED	VBIED	N/A	12	20
18	06/04/2018 14:10:00	Sei Biano CP	Government CP (VBIED identified and detonated)	Likely linked to/ coordinated w/Apr 06, 2018 NISA CP 1 incident.	SVBIED	N/A	N/A	3	4
19	06/04/2018 12:45:00	NISA CP 1, Waaberi	Government CP (VBIED identified and detonated)	Likely linked to/ coordinated w/Apr 06, 2018 Sey Biano CP incident.	SVBIED	N/A	N/A	0	3
20	25/03/2018 15:55:00	Ministry of Interior CP	Government/ Ministry CP	Likely linked to/ coordinated w/Mar 25 2018 Siinka Dheer CP incident.	SVBIED	N/A	N/A	4	4
21	25/03/2018 12:10:00	Siinka Dheer CP	Government CP (VBIED identified and detonated)	Likely linked to/ coordinated w/Mar 25 2018 Ministry of Interior CP incident.	SVBIED	N/A	N/A	0	1
22	22/03/2018 16:35:00	Weheliye Hotel	Civilian/ Hotel	No	VBIED	N/A	N/A	17	15
23	01/03/2018 12:00:00	Siinka Dheer CP	Government CP (VBIED identified and detonated)	No	SVBIED	N/A	N/A	2	3
24	23/02/2018 18:40:00	Doorbin Hotel Parking	Civilian	Yes	VBIED	N/A	N/A	18	18

Ser	DTG	Incident Detail/ Target	Target Type	Complex Attack	Device Type 1	Device Type 2	Device Type 3	FKIA	FWIA
25	23/02/2018 18:25:00	Villa Somalia ECP	Government CP	Yes	SVBIED	N/A	N/A	25	18
26	14/11/2017 12:55:00	KM 13	AMISOM Convoy (VBIED missed target)	No	SVBIED	N/A	N/A	0	5
27	28/10/2017 17:00:00	Nasa Hablood 2/ Daljirka Dahsoon	Civilian/ Hotel	Yes	SVBIED	VBIED	N/A	29	30
28	14/10/2017 16:40:00	Danwadaagaha CP	Government CP (VBIED identified and detonated)	Yes	VBIED	N/A	N/A	0	0
29	14/10/2017 15:20:00	Zobe Junction	Civilian (VBIED identified at CP, detonated following pursuit)	Yes	SVBIED	N/A	N/A	587	316
30	28/09/2017 16:45:00	Ceel Gaab Junction	Civilian (VBIED parked, detonated after accident/ collision)	No	VBIED	N/A	N/A	7	7
31	30/07/2017 11:10:00	Maka Al Mukarama Rd CP	Government CP/ Waberi Police Station	No	VBIED	N/A	N/A	6	13
32	22/06/2017 14:35:00	Waberi Police Station	Government	No	SVBIED	N/A	N/A	9	10
33	20/06/2017 12:38:00	Wadajir DC Office/ Medina Market	Government/ District HQ - Civilian	No	SVBIED	N/A	N/A	15	23
34	24/05/2017 17:20:00	Café Restaurant/ Somali Fruits	Civilian	No	VBIED	N/A	N/A	8	13

Ser	DTG	Incident Detail/ Target	Target Type	Complex Attack	Device Type 1	Device Type 2	Device Type 3	FKIA	FWIA
35	17/05/2017 11:15:00	Medina Police Station	Government CP (VBIED identified and detonated while dismantling)	No	VBIED	N/A	N/A	3	2
36	15/05/2017 14:10:00	Beco Office/ Via Roma	Civilian (VBIED identified and detonated)	No	VBIED	N/A	N/A	0	0
37	08/05/2017 17:30:00	Café Italia/ Maka Al Mukarama Rd	Civilian	No	VBIED	N/A	N/A	6	10
38	23/04/2017 19:50:00	Ex Cigarette & Match Factory	Civilian (VBIED detonated prematurely)	No	VBIED	N/A	N/A	0	1
39	09/04/2017 12:30:00	Ministry of Defence	Military Convoy/ SNA Commander	No	SVBIED	N/A	N/A	15	9
40	21/03/2017 17:45:00	National Theatre CP	Government CP	No	SVBIED	N/A	N/A	10	15
41	13/03/2017 10:10:00	Weheliye Hotel	Civilian	Likely linked to/ coordinated w/Mar 13, 2017 Jazeera incident	SVBIED	N/A	N/A	13	5
42	13/03/2017 08:00:00	Jazeera Training Camp CP	Government CP	Likely linked to/ coordinated w/Mar 13, 2017 Weheliye incident	VBIED	N/A	N/A	2	1
43	19/02/2017 13:10:00	Kawa Godey Khat Market	Civilian	No	VBIED	N/A	N/A	39	46
44	25/01/2017 08:40:00	Dayah Hotel	Civilian	Yes	SVBIED	VBIED	N/A	29	51
45	02/01/2017 12:00:00	NISA CP/ Peace Hotel 1	Government CP - Civilian (MIA Medina Gate likely target)	Yes	SVBIED	SVBIED	N/A	9	18