

Current Trends in CBRNE Threats: Spotlight on Roadside IEDs, Islamic State activity and Public Safety in Somalia

WRITTEN BY JOHANNES KRAUSE

Image credits: <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/1688441/20th-cbrne-units-participate-warfighter-exercise>



Despite the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, other threats to public safety remain persistent. Perilous threats are grouped under the label of chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosive (CBRNE) events. These events are observed and prepared by various military and civilian organisations, such as the NATO's Joint Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Defence Centre of Excellence (JCBRN Defence COE); or the EU's Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC). Likewise, most of the world's military forces have within their ranks specialised command structures, such as the US-American 20th CBRNE Command. However, training and defence preparations do not eliminate the threat posed by CBRNE events, which raises the question: How often do CBRNE events occur? The Italian Observatory on Security and CBRNE defence (OSDIFE) publishes a monthly report to shed some light on this issue. The OSDIFE's report compiles CBRNE event-related reports worldwide and further supplements this collection with reports about counterterrorism, terrorism, and innovations in defence technology.

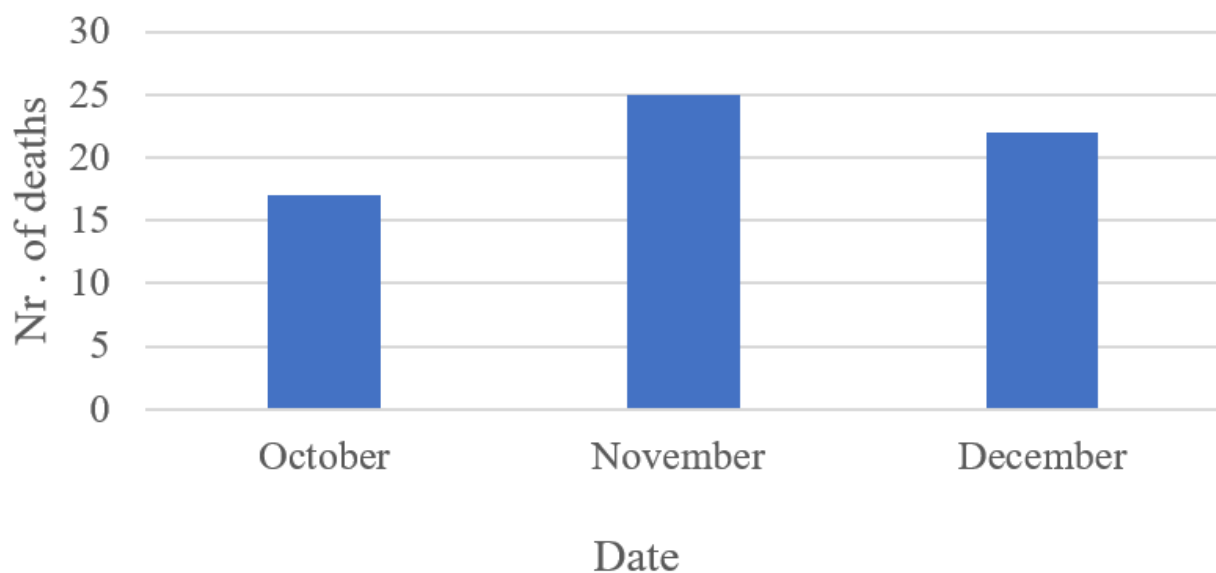
The publication of the most recent OSDIFE report, which covers the time frame of October to December of 2021, is an excellent opportunity to discuss the global persistence of CBRNE events and terrorist activity. Given Finabel's special interest in defence and security problems, this article will focus on and discuss three key issues: 1) Roadside IED events, 2) Islamic State (IS) activity, and 3) a special spotlight on Somalia. These three issues demand discussion due to the high levels of casualties involved and their relative absence from global headlines. Even though what might be termed the 'boots-on-the-ground' era of the global 'War on Terror' seems to be behind us, roadside IEDs, a major issue of the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, persist in being a formidable challenge to the safety of both civilians and military actors in the global south. Similarly, the terrorist activities of IS remnants and the counter-terrorist responses from governments that they engender are underreported issues. Lastly, Somalia and its ongoing struggles with public safety have also become out-of-focus.

Global incidents of roadside IED explosions

IED explosions, particularly roadside IEDs, became a key concern of military planners in the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq. It is estimated that IEDs have caused up to 21,000 casualties to US-American forces in Iraq (Wilson, 2011, p. 578). In particular, roadside IEDs have been responsible for the "majority of U.S. casualties" in Iraq (Shell, 2017). Consequently, roadside IEDs were designated as the coalition forces' "number one threat" (Guardia, 2013, p. 5). Of further relevance is the large amount of money that U.S. policymakers devoted to largely unsuccessful technical schemes intended to resolve the issue of IED attacks, namely \$14.5 billion by 2008 (Shell, 2017). However, roadside IEDs do not only target military personnel but also civilians. In Afghanistan, civilians were particularly vulnerable to roadside IED attacks during the years of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) presence in the country (Zürcher, 2019, p. 203). Given this tragic history, it is even more refreshing to be informed, by the OSDIFE's report, that the Italian army now has access to specialised medium protective vehicles (MPV) with anti-IED capabilities. These novel MPVs named Orso are furnished with "sensors and equipment for the search and removal of [...] [IEDs] commonly used on road routes against military convoys in motion." (OSDIFE, 2021, p. 248).

Generally, the integration of MPV's with anti-IED capabilities into the Italian army is of great importance. Global incidents of roadside IED explosions have not disappeared since their most high-profile usage during the Iraq Insurgency (2003–2011). The London-based charity Action on Armed Violence (AOAV) estimates that “between October 2010 and the end September 2020, there have been 28,729 incidents of explosive violence, resulting in 357,619 casualties” (Overton, 2020). Moreover, data compiled from the OSDIFE report demonstrates that between October and December 2021, there have been 35 incidents of roadside IED events, which caused 64 deaths (see Fig.1). Of those 35 explosive events, 28 were targeted at combatants, while seven were intended to inflict violence on civilians.

Fig.1 Global deaths caused by roadside IEDs from October to December 2021



More specifically, the integration of MPV's with anti-IED capabilities into the Italian army is of note for two key reasons. First, the development of the MPV Orso represents an important step towards the broader proliferation of Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicle technology. The US-American armed forces had already acquired MRAP vehicles, such as the Cougar TTe and the Buffalo A2, during the years of the Iraq Insurgency (Guardia, 2013, p. 36-41). However, the integration of MRAP vehicles into European armed forces had been long confined to coalition partners active in Iraq, such as the UK (Dean, 2021). Other European countries have only recently begun acquiring much-needed MRAP vehicles (Adamowski, 2021).

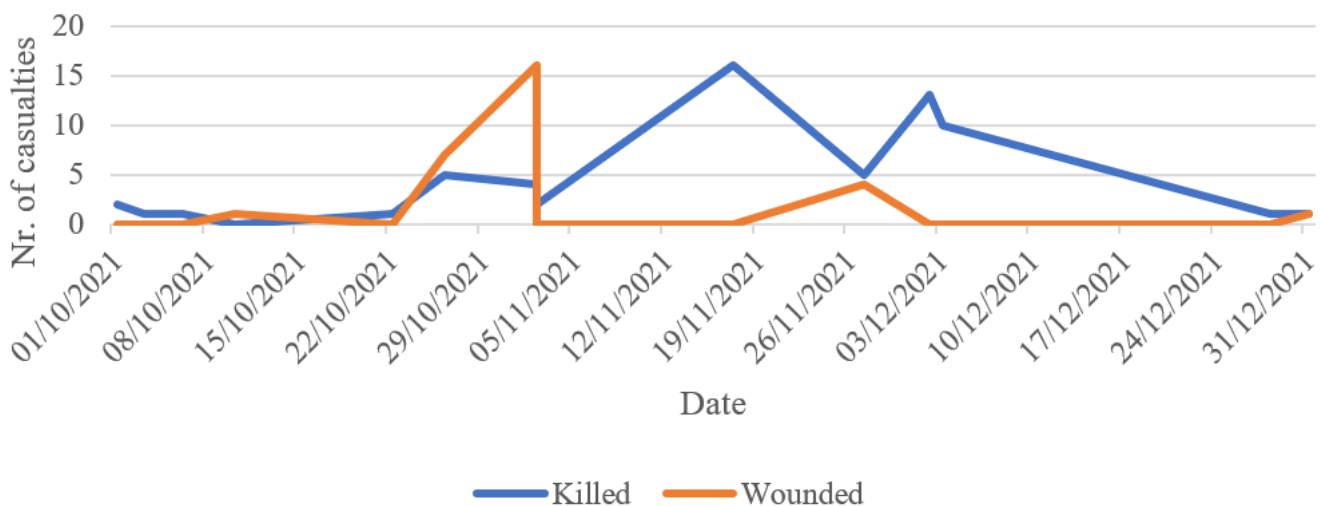
Secondly, Orso's development also has important operational implications for the Italian armed forces. Italy is among the top 25 contributors to UN Peacekeeping missions. In 2021, Italy devoted 914 uniformed personnel to UN missions (UN Peacekeeping, 2021). Furthermore, Italy has long been the "top troop contributor to UN Peacekeeping operations from the 'Western European and Others Group'" (Terovich, 2016, p. 681). To many UN Peacekeeping missions, roadside IED attacks "are the largest single threat" as they frequently rely on "unarmoured pick-up trucks that are highly vulnerable to IEDs" (UNODA, 2022). This vulnerability has severe implications on the missions' effectiveness as it diminishes the Peacekeepers' ability to "patrol rural areas," which in turn "allows insurgents to establish and maintain control over territory." Thus, the development of the MPV Orso has the potential of allowing Italian forces, when operating as UN Peacekeepers, to maintain control more effectively over rural territory as they now have the capability of seeking out and removing roadside IEDs.

In conclusion, while witnessing a high amount of progress, many variables are still to be discussed. It is safe to say that we may be finding answers to them quite rapidly, given the long way we have come. Contemporary warfare has already entered a new phase, whatever the case may be.

Islamic State Activity

Starting in 2014, IS gained an ominous reputation as an arbiter of global terror and unimaginable violence. At its zenith of power, IS "held about a third of Syria and 40 per cent of Iraq" (Glenn, 2019). However, the group's fortune reversed in 2017 as it lost 95% of its territory. Then, in 2019, some even declared the organisation "defeated" (BBC, 2019). In retrospect, such pronouncements of victory seem overly optimistic, or at least premature. Data compiled from the OSDIFE's report suggests that IS militants and affiliates are still highly active throughout the globe (see Fig. 4 in Appendix). From October to December 2021, 62 people were killed and 29 wounded by IS militants and affiliates (see Fig. 2). Additionally, IS remains a global threat: 50 distinct IS-related events have been reported in Asia, Africa, and Europe. The majority of events were reported in Iraq, where 28 occurred (56%) — followed by Syria, where 13 occurred (26%).

Fig. 2 Global casualties of IS from October to December 2021



From October to December 2021, 19 IS militants and affiliates were killed in counterterrorism operations. It seems a stunningly low number in comparison to the 62 people killed by IS. However, the actual number of slain IS militants and affiliates, as opposed to the 19 derived from an analysis of the OSDIFE's report, is likely to be much larger. This discrepancy can be attributed to two interlocked causes arising from the methodology employed by OSDIFE's report. Firstly, the OSDIFE report relies almost exclusively on news reports. Omissions are, thus, unavoidable. Secondly, news providers often do not report casualty numbers or death counts. Specifically, five reports on counterterrorism operations against IS refrain from reporting on the number of killed or wounded IS militants or affiliates. Unfortunately, many of these events are likely to be high casualty events as they are reports of airstrikes or large-scale military operations conducted by national governments. As a result, one cannot establish a good overview of how many casualties IS has suffered in the time frame covered by the report. Nevertheless, OSDIFE's report allows us to determine that IS remains a global threat capable of inflicting violence on combatants and civilians, albeit on a smaller scale as compared to 2014-2017. Therefore, the report serves a crucial function, which this Info Flash is intended to amplify, namely that IS, unfortunately, remains a threat to public safety on a global scale.

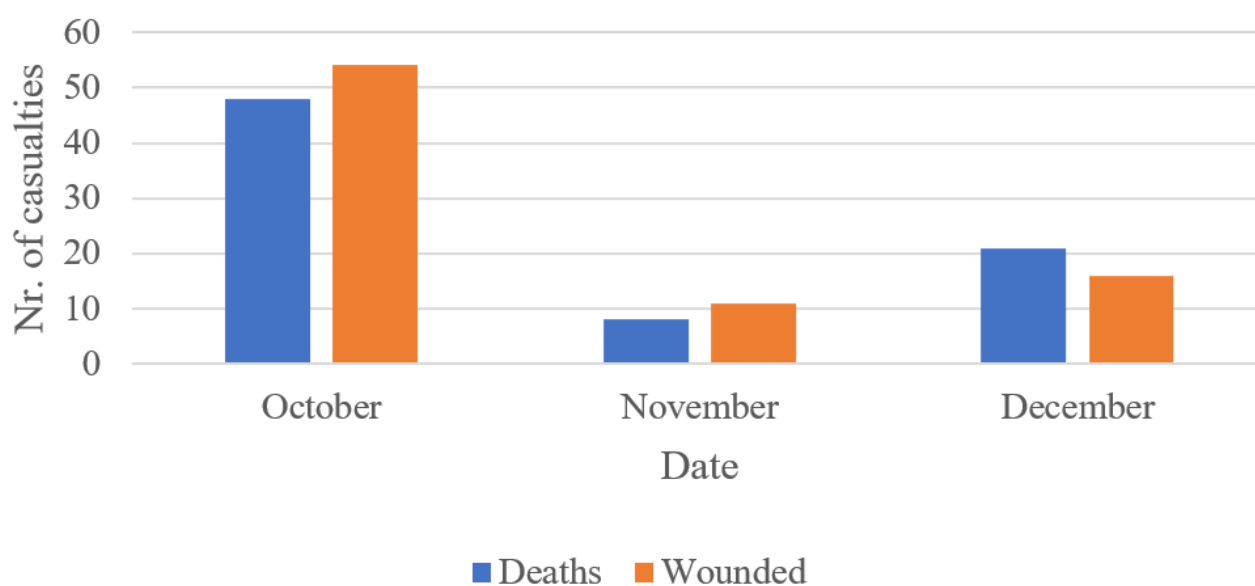
Public Safety in Somalia

Lastly, this report wants to remind the reader of the ongoing security struggles and threats to public safety experienced by both civilians and combatants in Somalia. Since the Somali Civil War, which started in 1991, and the Battle of Mogadishu in 1993, the East African country, has become synonymous with violent chaos. Many observers had described Somalia as a 'failed state.' Indeed, for much of its recent history, no governmental structure in Somalia was able to comply with the standard Weberian definition of a state as being the only organisation that "(successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory" (Weber, trans, 1946, p. 77). However, the situation in Somalia has improved in recent years. In 2015, Somalia's status was officially upgraded by the UN from 'failed state' to 'fragile state,' and according to a UN press release from 2021, Somalia seems to continue towards a stable future (Guardian, 2015; UN News, 2021).

Nevertheless, Somalia remains very much a 'fragile state.' The annually compiled Fragile States Index, which a US-American non-governmental organisation publishes, lists Somalia as the second most fragile state in the world (Fragile State Index, 2021). A key reason for this fragility is the armed violence that plagues Somalia. The OSDIFE report helpfully sheds some light on the quality and frequency of this violence. The leading source of insecurity in Somalia falls under the rubric of explosive events. Between October and December 2021, Somalia experienced 21 distinct explosive incidents (see Fig. 5 in Appendix). Together with several terrorist and counterterrorist activities, these explosive events caused the deaths of 77 people and wounded 81 others (see Fig.3).

Nevertheless, Somalia remains very much a ‘fragile state.’ The annually compiled Fragile States Index, which a US-American non-governmental organisation publishes, lists Somalia as the second most fragile state in the world (Fragile State Index, 2021). A key reason for this fragility is the armed violence that plagues Somalia. The OSDIFE report helpfully sheds some light on the quality and frequency of this violence. The leading source of insecurity in Somalia falls under the rubric of explosive events. Between October and December 2021, Somalia experienced 21 distinct explosive incidents (see Fig. 5 in Appendix). Together with several terrorist and counterterrorist activities, these explosive events caused the deaths of 77 people and wounded 81 others (see Fig.3).

Fig. 3 Casualties of explosive incidents, counterterrorism and terrorist activities in Somalia from October to December 2021



Of those killed, 22 were civilians, and further victims include 9 government soldiers, 6 African Union Soldiers, 3 police officers, one prominent journalist, one mayor, 17 al Shabab militants, and a further 17 Ahlu Sunna Waljama'a (ASWJ) 17 militants. Of those wounded, 19 were civilians. However, as with the number of dead IS militants and affiliates discussed above, the figure is likely to be substantially larger as the OSDIFE report lists several news stories on IED explosions that give an unspecified number of wounded civilians. Further casualties include three lawmakers, two government officials, four police officers, 23 government soldiers, and 23 ASWJ militants. Strikingly, 23 of the 77 total deaths in the relevant period stem from roadside IED explosions, which means that at least 65.7% of global deaths related to roadside IED incidents have taken place on Somali soil. Given these stark numbers, it seems appropriate to end this Info Flash on a more positive note: the Somali army engaged in counter-IED training between October and December 2021 and has completed several successful counterterrorism operations (OSDIFE, 2021, 28, p. 236).

Bibliography

Adamowksi, Jaroslaw. 'Poland to acquire 300 used Cougar MRAPs from the US.' Defense News. (2021) [online] Available at: <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2021/11/12/poland-to-acquire-300-used-cougar-mraps-from-the-us/> [Accessed 10 February, 2022].

BBC News. 'Islamic State group defeated as final territory lost, US-backed forces say.' BBC. (2019) [online] Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-47678157> [Accessed 11 February, 2022].

Dean, Sidney E. 'MRAP: Origins, Requirements, Future.' European Security & Defence. (2021) [online] Available at: <https://euro-sd.com/2021/02/articles/exclusive/20598/mrap-origins-requirements-future/> [Accessed 10 February, 2022].

Fragile States Index. 'Somalia.' Fund for Peace. (2021). [online.] <https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/> [Accessed 11 February, 2022].

Glenn, Cameron, Mattisan Rowan, John Caves, and Garrett Nada. 'Timeline: the Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State.' Wilson Center. (2019) [online] Available at: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/timeline-the-rise-spread-and-fall-the-islamic-state> [Accessed 11 February, 2022].

Guardia, Mike. US Army and Marine Corps MRAPs: Mine Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicles. Oxford: Osprey, 2013.

Guardian. 'Somalia no longer a failed state, just a fragile one, says UN.' Guardian. (2015) [online] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/23/somalia-no-longer-a-failed-state-just-a-fragile-one-says-un> [Accessed 11 February, 2022].

OSDIFE. (2021). CBRNE events in the World. Report no. 9 OSDIFE, Rome.

Bibliography

Overton, Ian. 'A decade of global IED harm reviewed.' AOAV. (2020) [online]. Available at: <https://aoav.org.uk/2020/a-decade-of-global-ied-harm-reviewed/> [Accessed: 10 February, 2022].

Shell, Jason. 'How the IED Won: Dispelling the Myth of Tactical Success and Innovation,' War on the Rocks. (2017) [online] Available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2017/05/how-the-ied-won-dispelling-the-myth-of-tactical-success-and-innovation/> [Accessed: 10 February, 2022].

Terovich, Giulia. "Italy and UN peacekeeping: constant transformation." International Peacekeeping 23, no. 5 (2016): 681-701. [online] Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2016.1235094> [Accessed 10 February, 2022].

UN News. 'Former 'failed State' Somalia on fragile path to progress.' UN News. (2021) [online] Available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/12/1108302#:~:text=Afflicted%20by%20decades%20of%20conflict,people%20is%20second%20to%20none> [Accessed 11 February, 2022].

United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. 'Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) Publication.' (2022) [online] Available at: <https://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/ieds2/> [Accessed February, 2022].

United Nations Peacekeeping. 'Uniformed Personnel Contributing Countries by Ranking.' (2021) [online] Available at: https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/02_country_ranking_44_nov_2021.pdf [Accessed 10 February, 2021].

Weber, Max. "Politics as a Vocation." In From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, translated and edited by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, Pages, 77-128. New York: Oxford University Press, 1946.

Bibliography

Wilson, Isaiah, and James Forrest. Handbook of Defence Politics: International and Comparative Perspectives. New York: Taylor & Francis, 2011.

Zürcher, Christoph. "Nonviolent Communal Strategies in Insurgencies: Case Study on Afghanistan." In Civil Action and the Dynamics of Violence, edited by Deborah Avant and Marie E. Berry, Pages, 203-228, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Appendix

Fig. 4 Overview of global IS and related counterterrorism activities from October to December 2021

Event	Date	Location	Casualties
IS attack on civilians	01.10.2021	Syria	2 civilians killed
IS attack on soldiers	03.10.2021	Iraq	1 Iraqi soldier killed
IS leader arrested	05.10.2021	Iraq	/
IS attack on soldiers	06.10.2021	Iraq	1 Iraqi soldier killed
IS militants killed	06.10.2021	Iraq	3 IS militants killed
IS militants arrested	08.10.2021	Morocco	/
IS militants killed	09.10.2021	Iraq	Not reported
IS attack on public building	10.10.2021	Iraq	1 police officer wounded
IS leader arrested	12.10.2021	Turkey	/
IS militants arrested	15.10.2021	Iraq	/
IS affiliates arrested	16.10.2021	Spain	/
IS militants arrested	16.10.2021	Iraq	/
IS militants arrested	20.10.2021	Iraq	/
IS equipment found	21.10.2021	Iraq	/
IS attack on rival militia	22.10.2021	Syria	1 militia leader killed
Drone attack on IS	25.10.2021	Syria	1 IS leader killed
IS attack on civilians	26.10.2021	Iraq	5 civilians killed and 7 wounded
IS leader arrested	29.10.2021	Iraq	/
IS militants arrested	02.11.2021	Syria	/
IS attack on public building	02.11.2021	Afghanistan	7 killed (including 3 Taliban combatants and 3 IS fighters) and 16 wounded
IS attack on soldiers	02.11.2021	Syria	2 Syrian government soldiers killed
IS militants killed	03.11.2021	Iraq	Not reported
IS affiliates arrested	03.11.2021	Iraq	/
IS leader arrested	03.11.2021	Iraq	/
IS militants killed	08.11.2021	Iraq	2 IS militants killed
IS militants arrested	08.11.2021	Iraq	/
IS affiliates deported	08.11.2021	Turkey	/
IS militants killed	09.11.2021	Iraq	Not reported
IS militants arrested	09.11.2021	Syria	/
IS militants arrested	14.11.2021	Iraq	/
IS attack on public building	17.11.2021	Uganda	
IS attack on rival militia	17.11.2021	Syria	16 militia members killed
IS affiliate arrested	17.11.2021	Italy	/
IS affiliates arrested	20.11.2021	Uganda	5 IS affiliates killed
IS militants arrested	23.11.2021	Syria	/
IS leader arrested	23.11.2021	Iraq	/
IS militants arrested	23.11.2021	Iraq	/
Launch of operation to arrest IS remnants	25.11.2021	Iraq	/
IS attack on rival militia	27.11.2021	Iraq	5 rival militia members killed and 4 injured
IS attack on soldiers	02.12.2021	Syria	10 Syrian government soldiers and 3 civilians killed
IS leader arrested	02.12.2021	Iraq	/
IS attack on rival militia	03.12.2021	Iraq	7 militia members and 3 civilians killed
IS attack on civilians	05.12.2021	Iraq	not reported
IS militants arrested	07.12.2021	Syria	/
IS militants killed	13.12.2021	Syria	5 IS militants killed
IS attack prevented	16.12.2021	Iraq	Not reported
IS militants arrested	16.12.2021	Iraq	/
IS attack on rival militia	28.12.2021	Syria	1 militia leader killed
IS militants arrested	30.12.2021	Iraq	/
IS affiliates arrested	30.12.2021	Pakistan	Not reported
IS attack on rival militia	31.12.2021	Syria	1 militia member killed and 1 wounded

Appendix

Fig. 5 Overview of explosive incidents, counterterrorism, and terrorist activities in Somalia from October to December 2021.

Event	Date	Nr. of deaths	Nr. of wounded
IED	03.10.2021	1 civilian	5 civilians and 1 government official
Grenade	06.10.2021	/	2 regional lawmakers
IED	10.10.2021	/	/
Grenade	10.10.2021	3 civilians	/
PBIED	12.10.2021	3 civilians	/
UXO	16.10.2021	2 police officers	4 police officers
Mine	16.10.2021	1 mayor and 1 police officer	2 civilians
Roadside IED	30.10.2021	10 al-Shabab militants	/
IED	06.11.2021	2 civilians	/
IED	08.11.2021	2 government soldiers	10 government soldiers
Roadside IED	01.12.2021	5 civilians	Unspecified number of civilians
IED	05.12.2021	5 civilians	7 civilians
UXO	06.12.2021	2 civilians	3 civilians
IED	11.12.2021	1 civilian	2 civilians and 1 lawmaker
Roadside IED	12.12.2021	4 African Union soldiers	/
Roadside IED	27.12.2021	4 soldiers	3 soldiers
Counterterrorism	04.10.2021	7 al-Shabab	/
Terrorism	23.10.2021	17 <u>Ahlu Sunna Waljama'a</u> rebels and 3 government soldiers	10 government soldiers and 30 <u>Ahlu Sunna Waljama'a</u>
Suicide Bomber	11.11.2021	2 African Union soldier; 1 suicide bomber	Unspecified number of civilians
Suicide Bomber	20.11.2021	1 prominent journalist	Unspecified number of civilians and 1 government official
Counterterrorism	29.11.2021	Not reported	Not reported