

SUMMARY & ASSESSMENT

AOG attack volumes have decreased by 43% in comparison to Q1 2011 providing the first reliable indicator that the conflict may be entering a period of regression after years of sustained, and compounded, growth by all actors in the field. Despite this, one must still consider them an ascendant power, as they themselves clearly do, and a key question remains as to whether this lack of activity is a deliberate act and if so, why. As last year was characterised by AOG doing more earlier; this year has begun with them doing less later.

Of course, the same could be said for all actors in the field, as this years comprehensive incident volumes are 32% lower than Q1 2011, suggesting a level of synergy between the various parties to the conflict. An exception to this would be the ANSF, who are increasingly shouldering a heavier burden as the ISAF presence wanes, all part of the ongoing processes of withdrawal and transition. There are hints that this fundamental shift in responsibility may result in positive developments, particularly at the tactical level. This apparent willingness between the remaining players to reach local agreements may ultimately result in a broader space within which the NGO community is able to operate, as the volume of actively contested space shrinks.

However, it may be some time for this to be fully realised as current NGO incident volumes remain aligned to long term rate trends, though the authors of those incidents have shifted into line with present dynamics, as criminality had the greatest impact this quarter. In the majority of such cases, this criminality was financially motivated at both the individual and group levels, an early indicator that competition over the diminishing pool of resources ahead of 2014 may come to have a significant impact on the NGO safety context.

While some dynamics from this period should be met with cautious optimism, this must be tempered by close analysis of others that came into play last year, for example the upsurge in criminality, which continue into this period and provide early warning signs of new troubles on the horizon. The proliferation of irregular militias, an element that may be feeding into this trouble, continues to further complicate an already complex operational environment. At best it disrupts existing, and at times fragile, power sharing agreements at the local level and at worst, it results in open conflict that impacts NGO accessibility due to road insecurity and a lack of clarity of who to engage.

Ultimately, the first quarter of this year raises more questions than it answers by providing numerous indicators of the increasingly fluid nature of the conflict. A new phase in the evolution of the context is being realised, though how this will play out in the coming months, and years, is unclear and only with further analysis of the interplay between the various groups will this new reality become apparent.

Nathan Ronaldson, ANSO Director

Kabul, Afghanistan, 2012

The views expressed in this report remain the sole responsibility of the author.

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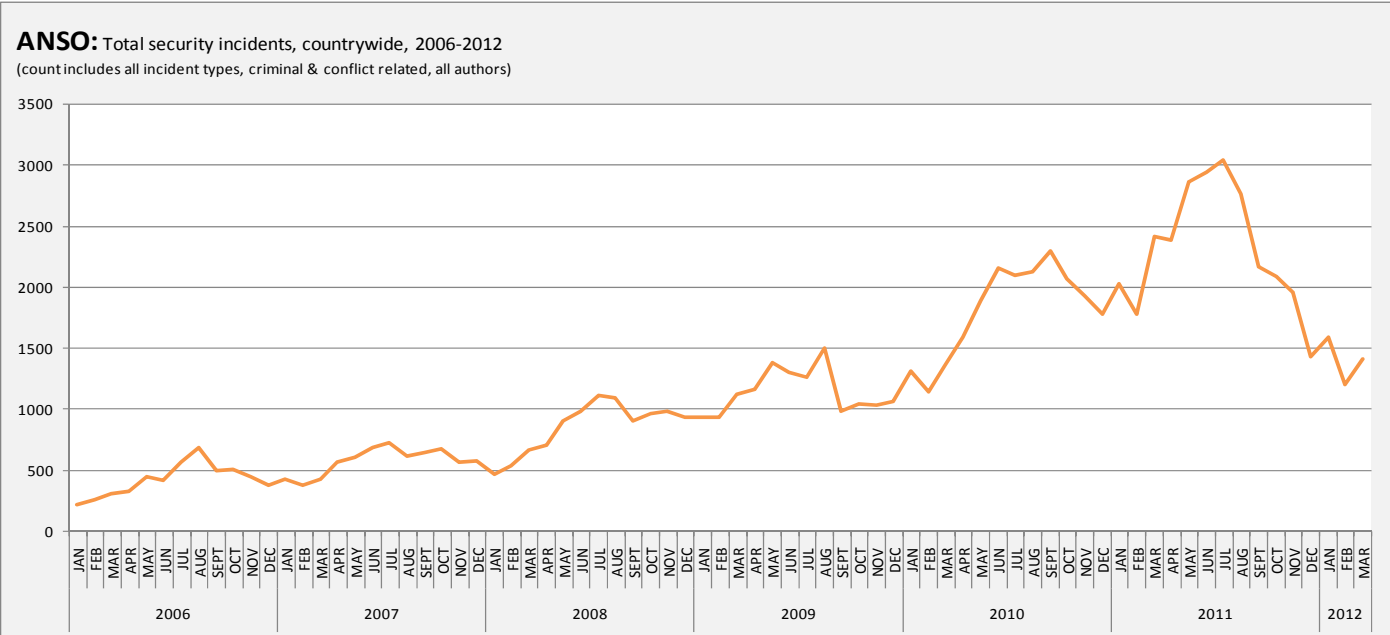


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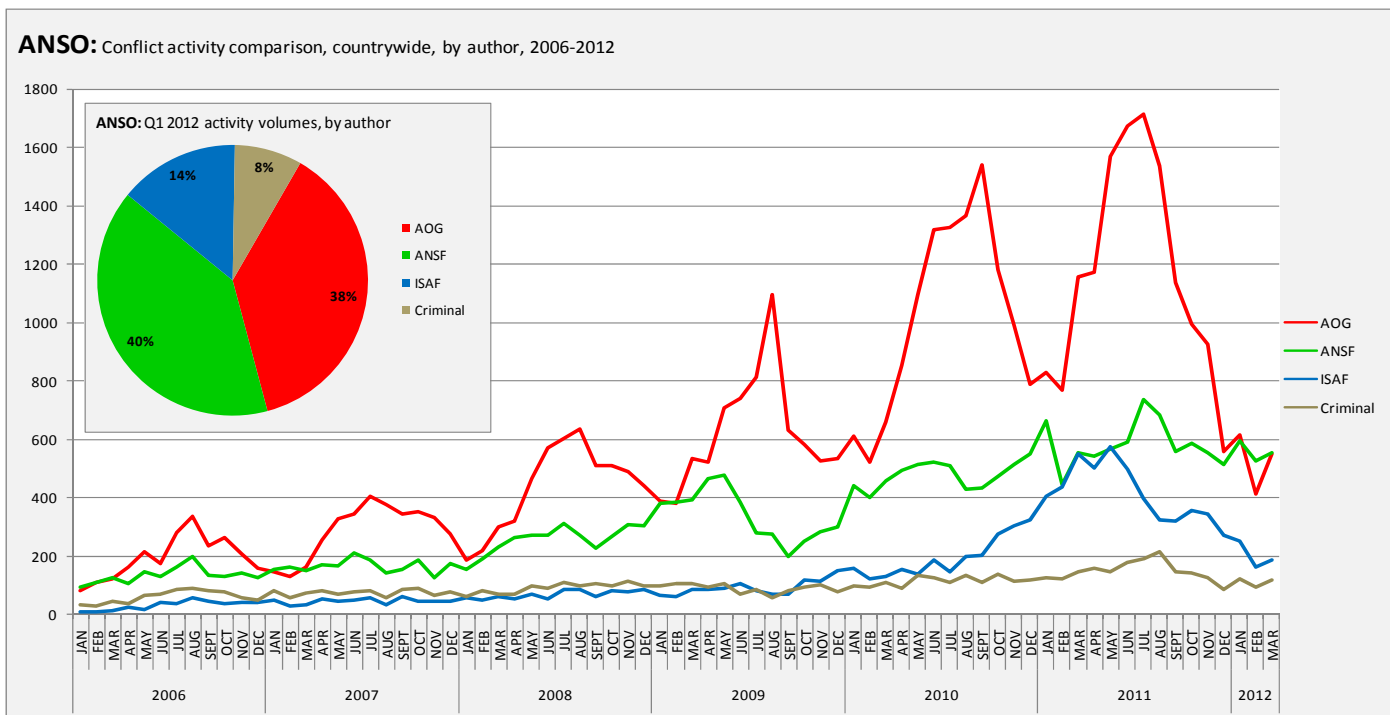
Part 1.

Context Overview

1.1 Context Overview



The graph above is meant to provide a holistic view of the context in which the humanitarian community finds themselves working in as of 2012. The further disaggregation of this data in the graph below provides a clear indicator that, at least until recently, the momentum and initiative of the conflict remained firmly in the hands of the opposition, and that for all sides last year was the most vigorous on record. In this quarter however, it would appear that *all actors*, with the possible exception of the ANSF (*insert chart below*), appear to be taking an operational pause. However, the reality is that the interplay of an increasing number of competing armed actors, irrespective of their mandate or purpose, has resulted in a progressively more complex and volatile environment for NGOs to navigate.



1.2 Incident Distribution & Comparison

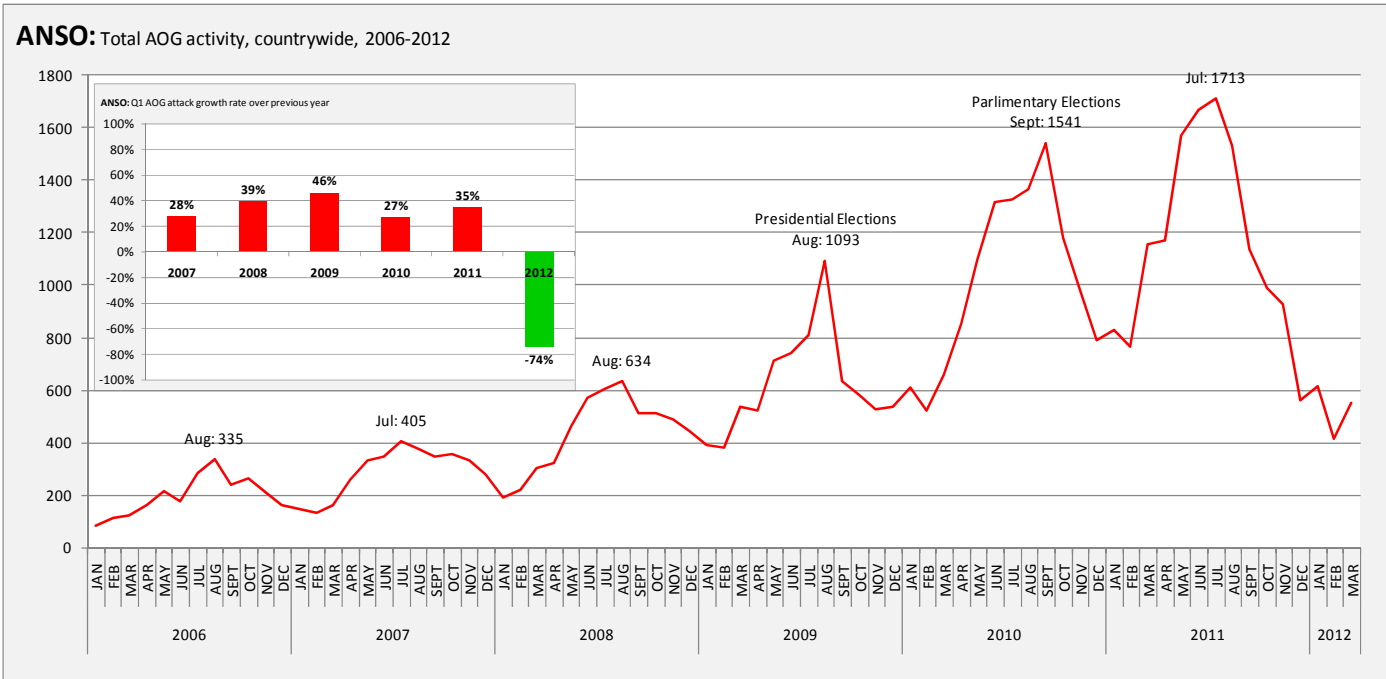
This table provides a comparison of the various actors activity levels, expressed as a percentage of the total, which itself is a complete accounting of *all incidents* recorded per province in Q1. When using this for analysis, readers are encouraged to take into account the Incident Total column as this will provide a better understanding regarding the actors relative activity levels. While some sectors could be viewed as having a positive/negative impact on security, the data provides an overview of how ‘contested’ certain areas are; not surprisingly those areas in the top 2 categories account for almost 80% of the NGO incident total this quarter. However, this chart should not be used alone, as an analysis of local dynamics and atmospherics must also be taken into consideration when assessing NGO safety and accessibility.

PROVINCE	NGO INCIDENTS	INCIDENT TOTAL	%AOG	%IMF	%ANSF	%Crime	
Khost	4	490	38%	26%	29%	7%	>200 Incidents
Kandahar	1	438	37%	7%	52%	4%	
Nangarhar	5	419	32%	14%	43%	11%	
Helmand	0	394	36%	28%	35%	1%	
Kunar	0	310	82%	6%	9%	3%	
Herat	3	214	19%	1%	67%	13%	
Ghazni	0	186	52%	27%	18%	3%	100-199 Incidents
Kabul	3	182	1%	3%	79%	17%	
Paktika	0	159	56%	22%	20%	2%	
Uruzgan	0	156	42%	8%	48%	2%	
Farah	0	154	46%	3%	46%	5%	
Badghis	0	135	54%	4%	35%	7%	
Faryab	3	116	49%	4%	26%	21%	50-99 Incidents
Zabul	0	108	20%	26%	54%	0%	
Balkh	0	85	19%	1%	46%	34%	
Kunduz	0	84	15%	11%	57%	17%	
Laghman	1	80	52%	9%	28%	11%	
Logar	1	69	29%	29%	36%	6%	
Paktya	1	66	24%	40%	27%	9%	< 50 Incidents
Kapisa	0	65	59%	12%	26%	3%	
Baghlan	0	62	24%	11%	49%	16%	
Wardak	1	60	25%	28%	42%	5%	
Takhar	0	39	10%	3%	67%	20%	
Nimroz	0	38	26%	16%	47%	11%	
Jawzjan	1	37	32%	11%	35%	22%	< 50 Incidents
Parwan	0	27	18%	4%	52%	26%	
Badakhshan	0	26	30%	9%	39%	22%	
Ghor	0	24	29%	4%	34%	33%	
Nuristan	0	21	76%	5%	19%	0%	
Samangan	0	21	10%	0%	52%	38%	
Sar-e Pul	0	20	50%	10%	15%	25%	
Daykundi	0	10	10%	10%	30%	50%	
Bamyan	0	5	40%	0%	60%	0%	
Panjshir	0	2	0%	0%	50%	50%	

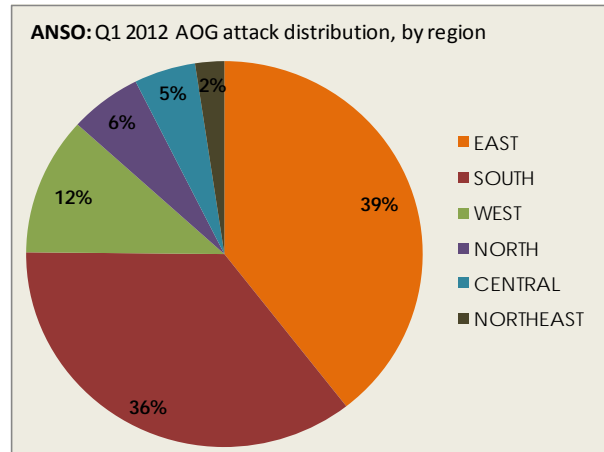
Part 2.

State of the Conflict

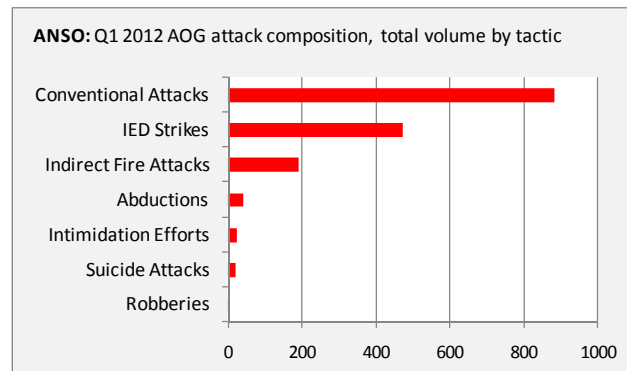
2.1 Armed Opposition Group (AOG) Activity



For the first time in 6 years the AOG attack growth rate marked a period of regression, for a considerable 74% decrease this quarter (*insert chart above*). This breaks the established trend in which opposition groups built on their gains, in both geography and capacity, year on year. With last year marking a watershed for the conflict as all actors had their most active on record (see section 1.1), it may be the case that efforts applied by security forces are now having an effect on AOG tactical capacity. However, one must also factor into the analysis that this winter was the harshest in many years, a reality that clearly impacted all sides ability to operate, particularly when considering opposition supply lines. Of course, there could also be an element of unwillingness to commit resources on a fight that is all but over. The final piece of this puzzle is the reality that the conflict is slowly taking on a more political structure as dialogue and talks begin to feature more heavily ahead of 2014. The primary question at present is if this regression has been chosen or forced, a question that will only be fully answered as the year progresses.



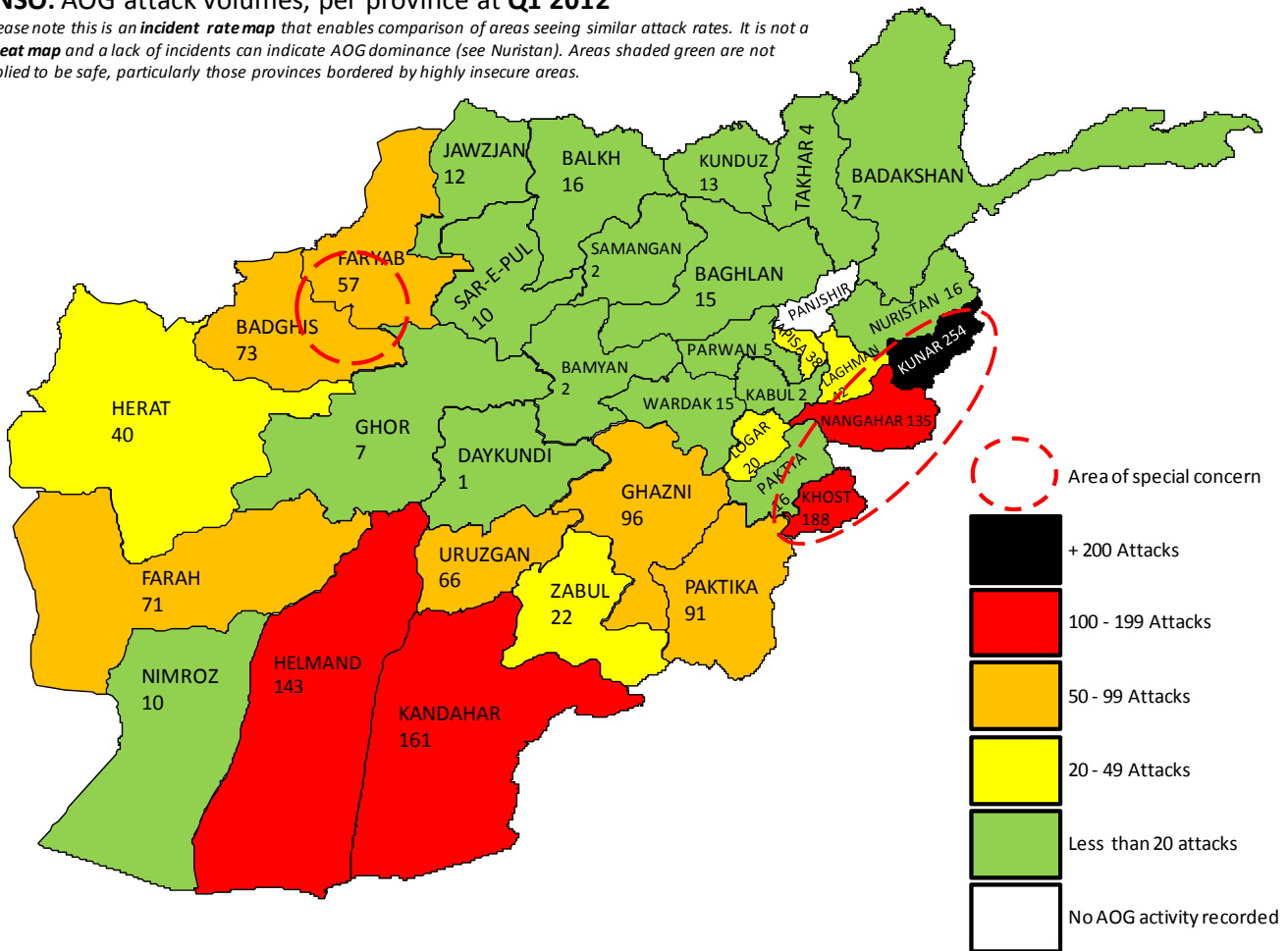
Despite the downturn the tactical portfolio has remained relatively consistent, as opposition attack volumes expand and contract seasonally while the composition remains consistent in regards to the percentage by tactic. As such, conventional attacks (SAF, RPG, etc) continue to be the key expression at a tactical level, followed by IED and indirect fire attacks (*chart right*).



2.2 AOG Attack Rate Mapping

ANSO: AOG attack volumes, per province at Q1 2012

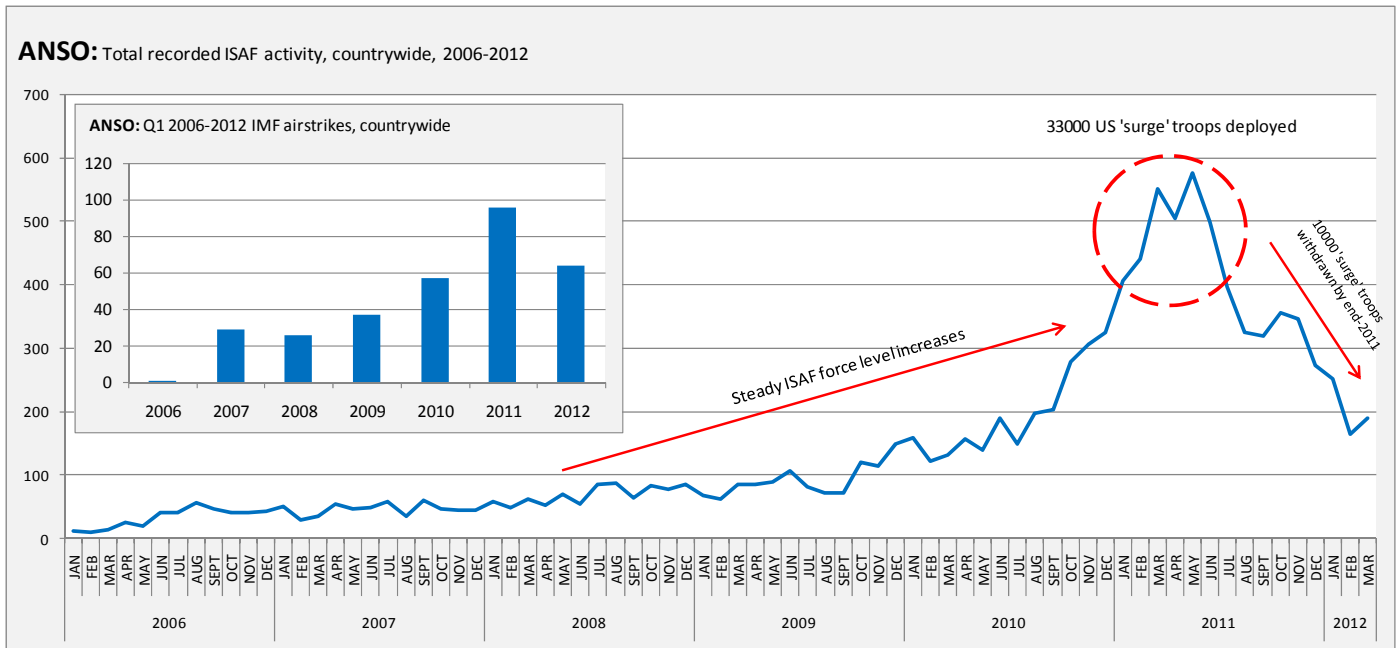
*(Please note this is an **incident rate map** that enables comparison of areas seeing similar attack rates. It is not a **threat map** and a lack of incidents can indicate AOG dominance (see Nuristan). Areas shaded green are not implied to be safe, particularly those provinces bordered by highly insecure areas.)*



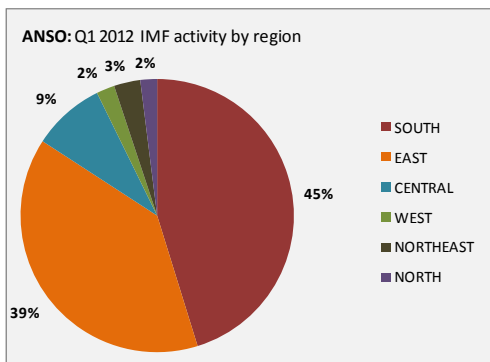
This map shows the AOG initiated attack count, per province, as of the end of the first quarter. As with the retraction in the growth rate countrywide, one can also see a clear downturn in AOG activity in those areas where their operational footprint, and support base, has been limited in the past. This is particularly true for the northern ‘beachhead’ of Kunduz & Baghlan, which are reporting their lowest quarterly volume in years. The opposite to this would be in Faryab, which when taken along with Badghis, note a contiguous and active operational area and the ‘3rd front’ for this period.

Not unlike the 1st quarter of last year, the ‘2nd front’ of Loya Paktya/Ghazni continues to factor heavily into the conflict, with Khost accounting for both the second highest AOG and NGO incident volumes (see 4.2). The border lands in the East account for the most heavily contested terrain in the country at present, and while this can be partly explained by seasonal limitations, it may also be the result of the planned ‘quarantine’ of these areas by ISAF forces last year. Ostensibly, security forces act as a dam, keeping AOG contained into a limited battle space, which would appear to explain why incident volumes drop precipitously in their neighboring provinces. As the South represents the most mature theatre in the conflict (the ‘1st front’), it continues to report generous incident levels, though the suicide attack campaign in Kandahar City this quarter represents the most significant manifestation there.

2.3 International Military Forces (IMF)



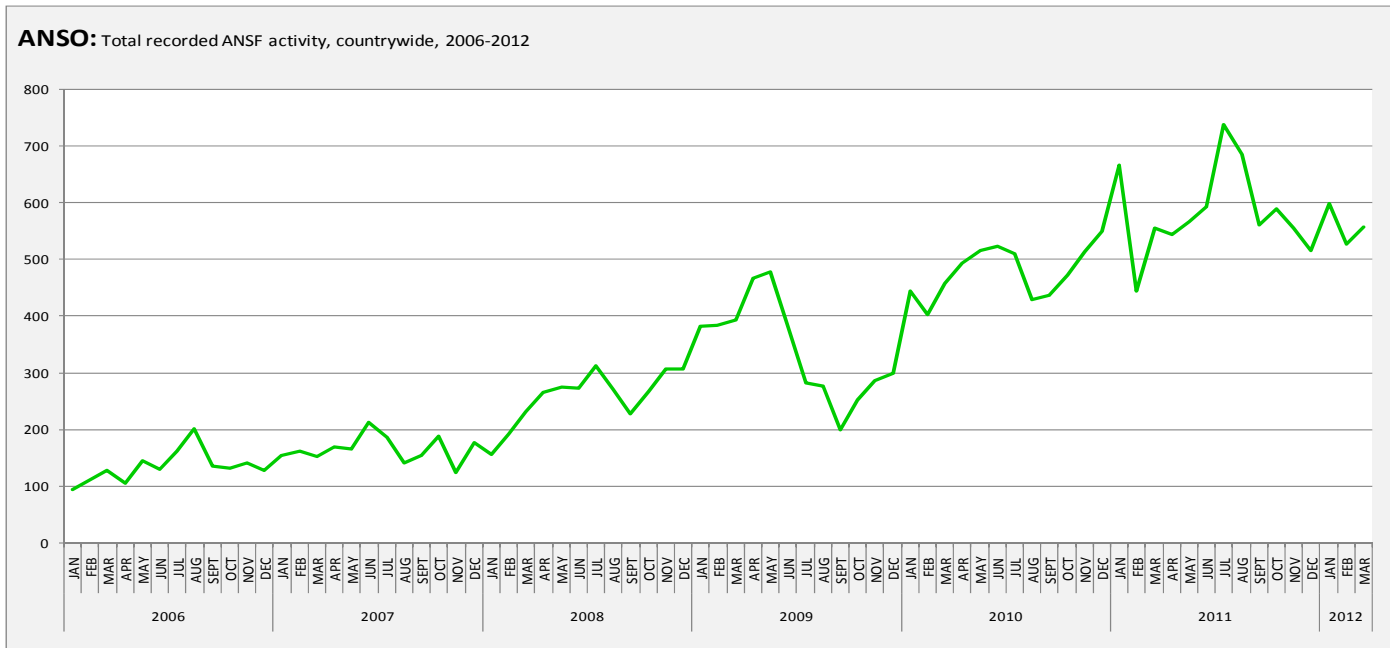
Accepting that ANSO data is not as comprehensive at the tactical level as other sources, it nonetheless provides insight on broader and longer term trends in regards to IMF activity (*graph above*). While this quarter is the first to identify a significant reduction in AOG attack levels, contrary to the aggressive ISAF messaging campaign of last year, the sustainability and purpose of this reduction remains in question. The progression of this year will note a shrinking ISAF footprint, with transition Tranche II completed this quarter and the third to be announced shortly. From a practical perspective, this means that the IMF ability to prosecute the conflict at a tactical level will decrease considerably this year and will ultimately become more focused as a result. In addition, a key element of this will involve a shifting focus to special operations (such as night raids), and to some extent airstrikes (*insert chart above*), as these will become the key force multipliers provided to the ever expanding role of the ANSF. However, despite this ongoing reduction, NGO incidents attributed to international forces were an issue throughout last year, particularly in the East, particularly clinic searches (presumably by special forces) and collateral damage being during armed clashes.



The chart left identifies where recorded IMF activity took place this period, and when taken along with the map in 2.2, one can gain insight as to the shape of the conflict as the year progresses; clearly focused in the East and South. That Central accounts for the third highest volume is telling, indicating that ISAF is putting a clear effort in minimizing the conflict’s impact in and around the capital. It is also likely that the most volatile areas at present will be the last to transition, though as the international military withdraws, so too

does the key impetus for AOG momentum. As IEA messaging identifies, it is the presence of these forces which has been a key driver of the conflict, so this year will be critical for assessing the evolution of the context in regards to the interplay between these two actors.

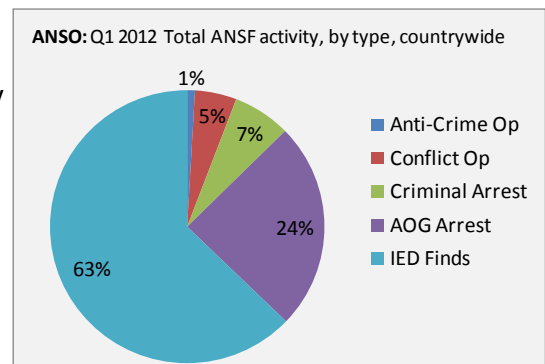
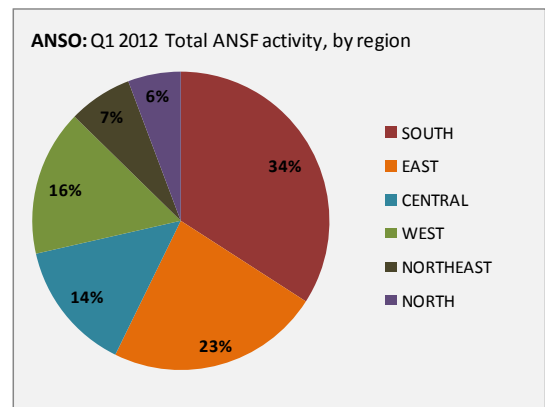
2.4 Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)



The trend line in the above graph, which includes incidents attributed to regular police (all types) and army units along with ALP, gives a clear indicator the impact transition and withdrawal is having on the ANSF operational tempo, with Tranche II of transition completed by the conclusion of this quarter. As national forces become responsible for an ever increasing amount of terrain, their international counterparts continue to downsize, and the ALP program continues to expand, the disparity between ISAF/ANSF activity levels is likely to increase through this year.

Unlike the IMF footprint, the ANSF one is a bit more diffused, though it nonetheless appears greatest in those areas most affected by the conflict (*chart right*). This broader distribution can be partially explained by the pervasive presence of the ANP (who account for 75% of all recorded ANSF activity) as well the ever increasing presence of irregular militias (incl. ALP), which factor heavily into the transition/withdrawal process. Due to the limited understanding of these forces, particularly regarding presence, allegiance and oversight, their impact on the context cannot be clearly assessed. However, it is understood that their impact is not always a positive one, as illustrated by cases of local resistance to their deployment, generally because of poorly defined control mechanisms and disruptions they have on existing power dynamics.

As ANSF (thus ANP) efforts are consumed by the conflict, their ability to manage criminality is degraded, a dynamic which is further explored in Part 3 (*chart right*).



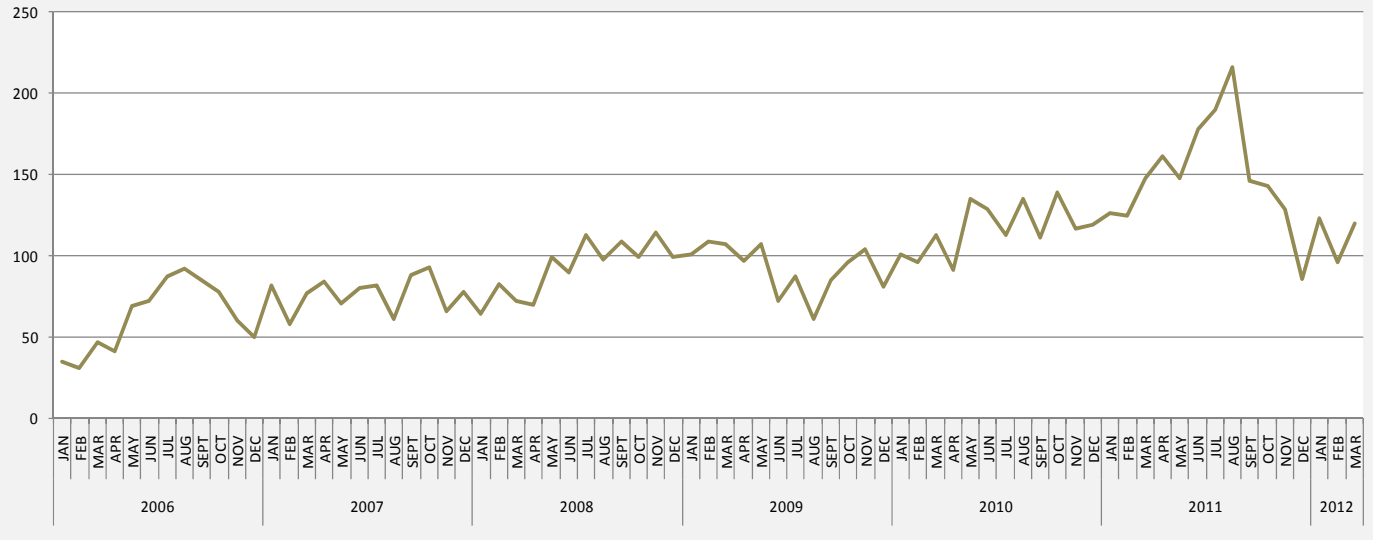
Part 3.

Criminality

3.1 Criminology: Overview

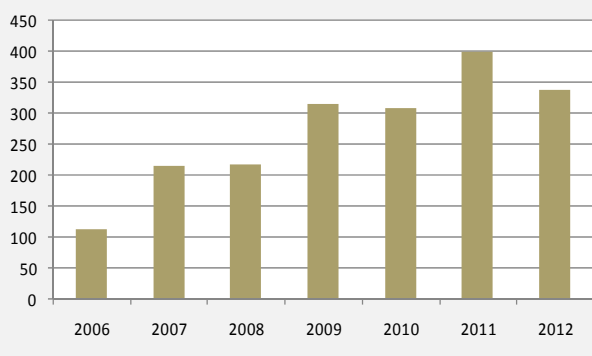
ANSO: Total recorded criminal ctivity, countrywide, 2006-2012

(Count includes all forms of criminal acts such as theft, murder, abduction and internecline fighting)



Through to 2009 overall levels of criminality noted stable and steady growth (roughly 15% per year), albeit limited in relation to the expanding state of the conflict. However, in late 2010 criminal activity grew substantially until the peak recorded in August 2011 (*graph above*); a dynamic in line with the considerable growth of the conflict during that period as well. Some drivers of this growth included protracted internecline conflict in the East, banditry along many roads in the North, and a leavening of opportunistic elements taking advantage of prevailing instability; as police forces were clearly focused on conflict related matters during that time.

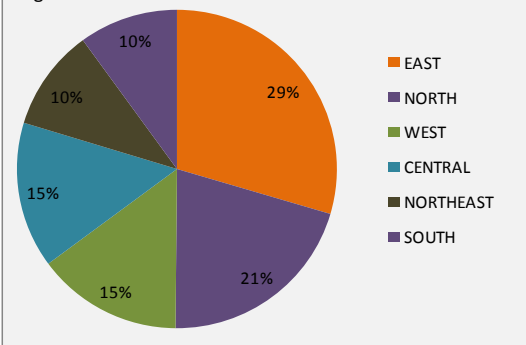
ANSO: 2006-2012 Q1 Criminal incident volume comparison



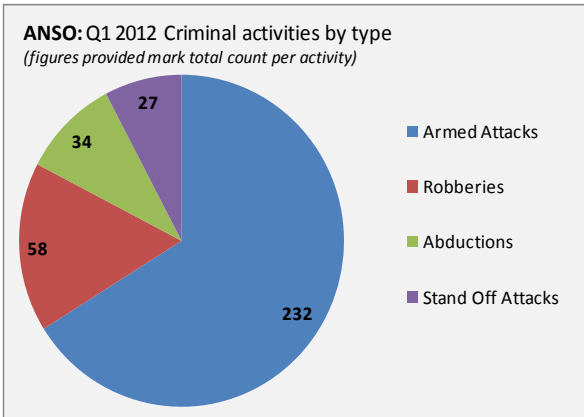
The above is suggestive of a correlation between the conflict and criminality, as is the reduction noted in criminal activity between this quarter and Q1 2011 (*chart left*). However, this 15% reduction in criminal activity could be explained by the relative stability in such places as Kabul, where security forces have been afforded the space to conduct traditional policing activities as a result of the limited conflict imprint there.

However, when comparing where criminality is occurring the relationship is less clear as the East and North accounted for the highest regional volumes (*chart right*), with the former greatly affected by the conflict and the latter to a much lesser degree this quarter. Criminal rates in the South are undoubtedly affected by the pervasive IEA presence outside of population centers, as they are able to directly enforce their brand of justice and keep criminal behaviors in check.

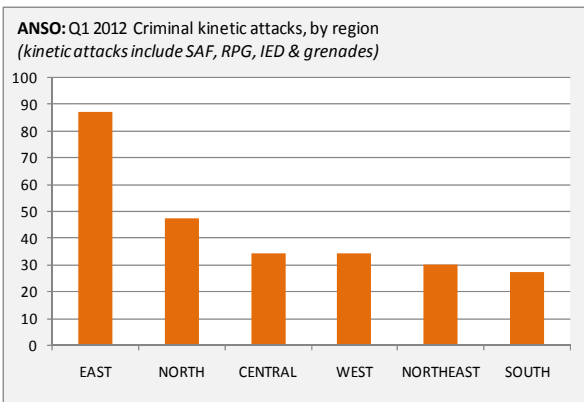
ANSO: Q1 2012 Criminal activity volumes, all types, by region



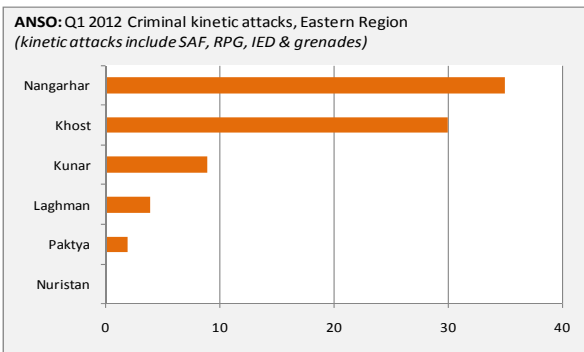
3.2 Criminality: Category & Geography



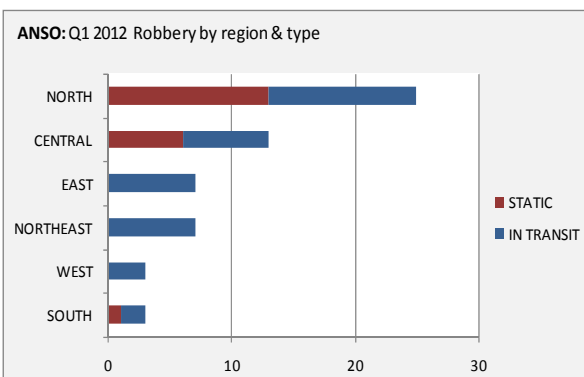
From a tactical perspective direct attacks (including SAF & RPG) featured heavily this period (1st chart left), primarily involving the use of small arms to settle interpersonal disputes. These actions resulted in the substantial death toll of 196 civilians countrywide. Such disputes were also the leading cause of most stand off attacks (including grenades & IEDs), though such actions were also undertaken to settle economic disagreements; a dynamic particularly prevalent in the East (2nd chart left).



As the East and North factor heavily in overall criminal activity rates this quarter it is not surprising that this remains the case when looking at the combined volume of criminal kinetic attacks by region. However, as noted above, the East is most affected due to a mix of long standing tribal disputes, honor related actions, and both local and cross-border economic dynamics. In the North, the inclusion of a political dynamic into such attacks is common as a result of various power brokers vying for dominance.



Looking deeper into the East, the provinces of Nangarhar and Khost combined (both heavily affected by the conflict this period) accounted for a full quarter of the countrywide total for criminal attacks this period (3rd chart left). As noted, these involved a large amount of kinetic activity, including 80% of the IEDs used by criminals this quarter, 3 of which directly impacted NGOs.

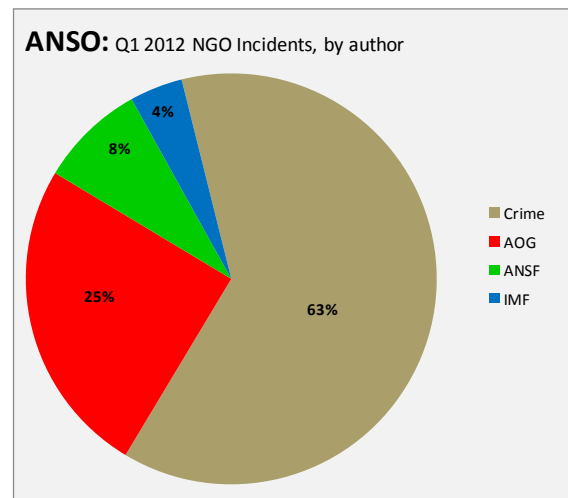
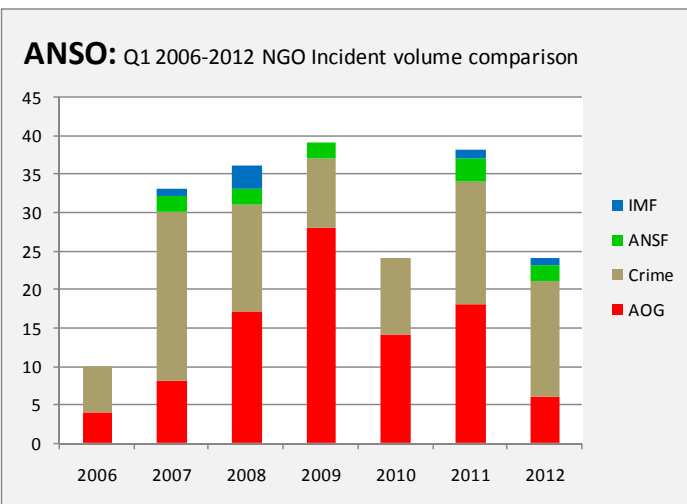
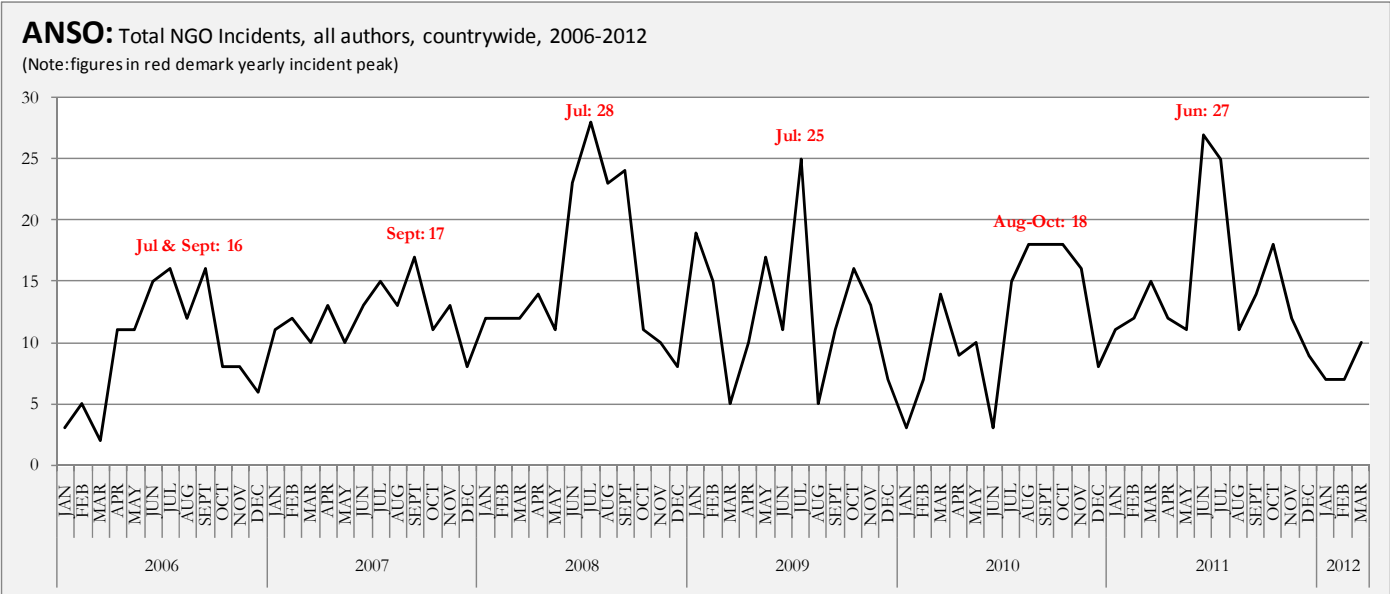


Robberies rounded out the criminal portfolio, with banditry and theft during travel accounting for 57% of that total, an element affecting the North greatest (4th chart left). It is highly likely that all types of economically driven activity, be they direct attacks or theft, will continue into this year and beyond as groups compete for an ever diminishing pool of resources ahead of 2014.

Part 4.

NGO Trends

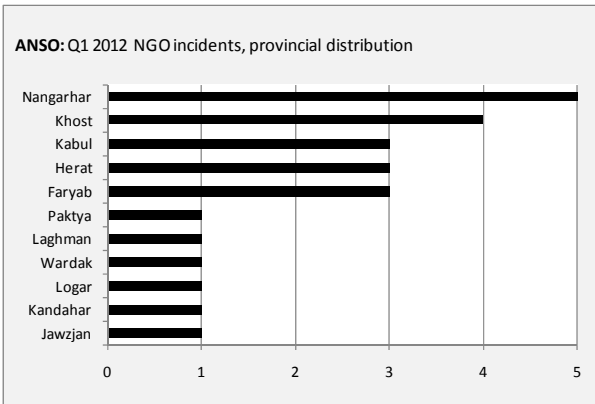
4.1 General NGO Incident Trends



The total of 24 NGO incidents this quarter represents a decrease of 37% in comparison to this period in 2011, for a volume comparative with 2010 (*chart above left*). With criminal acts dominating, for over 60% of the total recorded (*chart above right*), it would be easy to conclude that criminality was having a greater impact on the NGO community. However, closer evaluation of the data reveals it is the relatively limited number of AOG incidents this period which is resulting in this dynamic. The opposition typically accounts for an average 44% of the total NGO incidents during the first quarter, with this year accounting for 25%, likely related to the overall downturn in opposition activity. Though accounting for a higher percentage, the actual number of criminal incidents impacting NGOs this period is in line with longer term trends.

While the numbers have fluctuated over the years, it is clear that all actors are capable of impacting organisations in the field, as attested by the inclusion of IMF and ANSF attributed incidents this period in proportions similar to those recorded in previous years. However, it is worth noting that their impact is limited to specific areas and incident types, such as clinic searches in the volatile provinces in the East and portions of Central.

4.2 NGO Incidents: Geography & Type

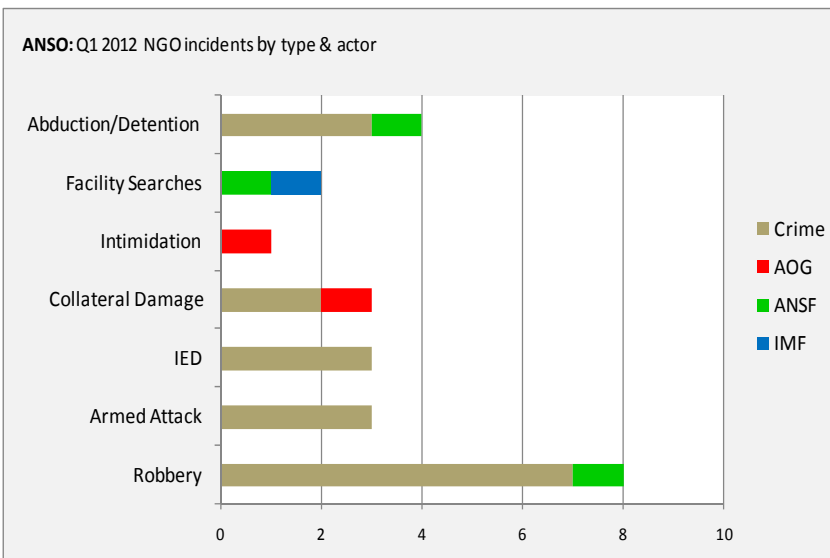


From a location perspective, a significant change this quarter is the absence of incidents reported from Ghor and Balkh which had reported the 1st and 4th highest incidents rates by the close of 2011. However, as with much of the overall activity recorded this period, NGO incident volumes were highest in the East, for over 45% of the total (*chart left*). Nangarhar continues to account for high volumes, finishing 2011 with the 2nd highest volume countrywide and the highest by the close of this quarter.

There were 5 NGO staff casualties this period. The sole NGO staff fatality, along with the 4 wounded, were all the result of criminal actions and are assessed as being unrelated to their employment. As was the case last year, national staff continue to suffer the highest casualty rates likely related to exposure due to volume and presence; though fortunately this year accounts for the lowest Q1 casualty rate since 2009.

As noted, the criminal sphere impacted NGOs greatest this period reflecting the reality that national staff members are subject to the same risks that face the rest of civil society, though an NGOs higher profile, and their perceived wealth, plays a part in this as well. As seen in the graph below, robberies accounted for the greatest number of incidents when grouped by type, for a total similar to that reported in Q1 2011. As noted in Section 3.2, instances of theft are most likely to happen during travel and in line with this, 80% of robberies involving NGOs this quarter occurred in transit.

Furthering analysis of the data provided in the chart below, the use of IEDs was used exclusively by criminal elements, primarily as a method of intimidation with all instances occurring in the East (Khost-2, Nangarhar-1). It would appear that a key driver behind these attacks is the perceived impact some NGOs operations can have on livelihoods, for example the lucrative medical sector in this region.



Abduction rates are also down this period which fits with the lower than normal volume of AOG attributed incidents, as they typically account for the highest number of NGO staff abductions and detentions.

Overall, historical trends show that NGO incidents are not always intimately associated to the state of the conflict so how present dynamics impact the state of NGO affairs this years remains a key question to be answered.

Acronyms:

AOG - Armed Opposition Groups specifically Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Taliban); Haqqani Network and Hezb-i-Islami Gulbiddin (HIG)

IEA - Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Taliban)

ALP - Afghan Local Police (militias)

IMF - International Military Forces (specifically ISAF, USFOR-A, PRTs and SOF)

ANSF - Afghan National Security Forces (mostly Police & Army)

IED - Improvised Explosive Device (home made bomb)

IDF - Indirect Fire (rockets, mortars)

CAS - Close Air Support (airstrike)

SAF - Small Arms Fire (from a machine gun such as AK-47)

ANSO REGIONS

For the purposes of this report, please note the following breakdown of provinces for the various ANSO Regions:

CENTRAL: Bamyan, Daykundi, Kabul, Kapisa, Logar, Panjshir, Parwan, Wardak

EAST: Khost, Kunar, Laghman, Nangarhar, Nuristan, Paktya

SOUTH: Ghazni, Helmand, Kandahar, Nimroz, Paktika, Uruzgan, Zabul

NORTH: Balkh, Faryab, Jawzjan, Samangan, Sar-e Pul

NORTHEAST: Badakhshan, Baghlan, Takhar, Kunduz

REPORT ENDS

For further information
director.afg@ngosafety.org

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