

Burkina burns

Burkina Faso, once a peaceful country, has been caught in the eye of the terrorist storm as wave after wave of terror is unleashed on it. From isolated attacks, the country is now living under multiple, well co-ordinated attacks on all fronts with devastating impacts, loss of lives, both of civilians and security forces, writes ***Arsene Kabore**.



The first terror strike in Burkina Faso : Le Cappuccino Restaurant, Ouagadougou

On January 15, 2016, at around 7:00 p.m., a group of three unidentified men, equipped with automatic weapons, opened fire on the terrace of, Le Cappuccino, a restaurant in Ouagadougou, frequented by many Westerners. Burkina Faso had never experienced a terrorist attack of this magnitude. Not long after that the Splendid Hotel which is in front of Le Cappuccino, was on fire.

Fifty men, Burkinabe and French,

took part in the assault on the Splendid Hotel and Le Cappuccino. In total, the attack killed 30 people, all of them dead outside, Le Cappuccino. The attack inside the Splendid injured several people, but none was killed. This was the beginning of a story of terrorist attacks that will haunt Burkina Faso for years.

On August 13, 2017, a year and a half later, the nightmare started again a few hundred meters from the Cappuccino and Splendid Hotel. This time, it was

the Hallal Aziz Istanbul café and restaurant, located on the main avenue of the capital, targeted by two terrorists who came by motorbikes, fired on the seated customers, killing 19 people and injuring about 20 others. Nobody has claimed responsibility for the attacks since then.

Earlier in January 2017, unidentified gunmen killed an imam in the rural commune of Tongomayel, and teachers were ordered to leave their posts.

February 2017, a cache of terrorist

weapons was discovered in northern Burkina Faso

A month later, two people, including the headmaster of Kourfayel Primary School, were shot dead by unidentified gunmen, and a school in Baraboulé in Soum burned down.

In response to all these, Operation Panga, a joint cross-border military operation between the armed forces of Mali, Burkina Faso and France (Barkhane), took place from 27 March to 10 April 2017 to combat armed terrorist groups. More than 1,200 men, 200 vehicles and a dozen helicopters, Mirage 2000 fighter-bombers and Reaper drones conducted checks, control and excavation operations, village after village, for more than two weeks in a 2500 km² in the Fhero forest, a cross-border area between Burkina Faso and Mali. It is this area that serves as a rear base for terrorists in northern Burkina Faso.

The result of the operation? Two terrorists killed, eight others captured as well as a dozen suspects handed over to the Burkinabe authorities, and two civil servants captured by unidentified armed men were rescued.

The operation did not scare the terrorists as of the 13 regions of Burkina Faso, 7 will from then on experience the daily attacks of the terrorists. Among these are the Eastern Region, the Central East, the Boucle du Mouhoun, the Hauts Bassins, the Northern region, the Central North, the Sahel and the Cascades.

On Friday, March 2, 2018, attacks targeted the French embassy in Ouagadougou, the capital, as well as the army. The government reported eight dead among Burkinabe forces with more than 80 wounded.

On 19 August 2018, the army reported that “the military detachment of Koutougou, Soum Province, in the Sahel region, had been the target of a major attack perpetrated by armed terrorist groups” in which more than a dozen soldiers were killed and several wounded.

As a result of the continuous killings of both the military and civilians in the villages of Burkina Faso, the terrorists have managed to put a wedge between the communities which now distrust each other.



Burkinabe President Roch Kabore

Since January 1, 2019, five days after the attack on Toeni that killed 10 of the security forces, a state of emergency was declared by presidential decree for several parts of the country.

The extension of the state of emergency, after the initial six months, was duly done by Parliament on July 11, 2019, for a further six months, to allow the operations of the security forces to continue unabated.

On February 3, 2019, the Burkinabe army in a counterattack, engaged the terrorists in battles in KAIN, Yatenga province, North region, BANH, Lorum province, North region and BOMBORO, Kossi province, Boucle du Mouhoun region. In a communiqué after the operations on national television (RTB), the army commander disclosed that the combined 3 operations allowed the defence and security forces to kill 146 jihadists. The army chief called on the people to collaborate with the army to help them secure the entire nation.

On May 12, 2019, Catholic priest Simon Yampa and five of his parishioners were killed during mass celebration in Dablo by unidentified gunmen. President Roch Marc Christian Kabore cautioned the people not to fall for the attempts by the terrorists to play the ethnic card and divide the Burkinabe: “First they have tried to set ethnic groups against each other. Then, now, it is the religious communities. By all means, the

enemy will try to push us towards chaos. By all means, standing up, as one man, I invite you, my compatriots to remain united and supportive, as our ancestors have always lived together as one people. We will not sink. We must make this fight against terrorism a collective and individual struggle at all times”.

Opposition leader, Zephirin Diabre in support of the President also said, “The new tactic of our common enemy is to divide us, to oppose us and fight us better. So it is up to us to avoid this trap by working to reinforce the legendary tolerance and active solidarity that has always characterized the relations between all the religious denominations in our country”.

On the same day, four Catholic faithful, were killed in the afternoon on their return from a procession with the statue of the Virgin Mary in Zimtenga Commune, Bam province, North Center region. According to Emile Bayala, the director of communications of the Northern region, upon the return of the worshipers, they were intercepted by unidentified gunmen who shot and killed four adults, spared the children and completely destroyed the statue of the Virgin Mary.

Reacting to the tragedies Cardinal Philippe Ouedrago, Archbishop of Ouagadougou called on the citizenry to remain united, “One finger does not pick up the flour. It is together and in synergy

that we will overcome. The people will win. The Lord is here with us, we will win. “

The Federation of Islamic Associations of Burkina Faso, whose members have not been spared in the attacks, through their president El Hadj Bou-bacar Yugo bemoaned the attack on the religious and in a communique said, “The Federation of Islamic Associations of Burkina (FAIB) has learned with dismay once again, the cowardly attack of members of a parish on Sunday May 12, 2019 in Dablo, in the province of San-matenga, killing six of our compatriots including the parish priest of the said church. These massacres and a spate of others recently in Sirgadji against another church resulting in the death of the pastor and five other people as well as one in Arbinda against the local imam and several other terrorist acts against imams are uncalled for. Despite the ignominy and the depth of the pain, the FAIB, calls on all Burkinabe without exception, religious or ethnic to unite against terrorism which kills without faith”.

Extrajudicial killings

The army's operations have not gone without accusations of extrajudicial killings by civil society groups. On March 14, 2019, The Burkinabè Movement for Human and Peoples' Rights (MBDHP) revealed in a survey carried out following the 146 alleged terrorists killed last February by the security forces that extrajudicial executions of civilian populations (men and women) took place in Kain and surrounding villages.

There were 60 victims who were thus summarily executed in cold blood in the localities of Kain, Sunam, Tiabéwal, Guingui, Daybara, and Somme according to MBDHP President, Chrysogone Zougmore.

According to Zougmore, during the month of February and the first week of March, the investigative team carried out investigations in the localities and listened to 65 victims, relatives of victims and witnesses of the events in the communes and villages of Kain, Sounam, Tiabéwal, Guingui, Daybara, Somme, Ouahigouya and Ouagadougou.

“The information gathered was

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cross-checked with various sources,” said Zougmore, who added that there is strong evidence that there was no fighting between elements of the security forces and the alleged terrorists. Some of the bullets collected, were near the victims' houses.

The human rights organization has therefore condemned the practice of extrajudicial executions, which paves the way for all possible abuses, ranging from settling scores to planned and targeted killings on a large scale.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) also claims in a 63-page report published on March 22, 2019, that Burkina Faso's security forces have summarily executed more than 115 civilians since the middle of last year during operations against armed Islamists, who killed more than 40 people under the same conditions.

The organization reports that it collected information on “the execution by the Burkina security forces of more than 115 men accused of supporting or harboring armed Islamists”, as well as the execution by jihadists of 42 people that they suspected of cooperating with the government.

All these notwithstanding, Burkina Faso has seen a sharp upsurge in Islamist attacks over the last three months as ji-

hadist organizations seek to expand their influence in the Sahel.

These accusations and the increase in terrorists attacks have not stopped the security forces from carrying out their operations though. After Operation Otapuanu (“Thunder” in Gulmacéma language), from March 7 to April 12, which the army described as very successful in the eastern and central-eastern regions, the armed forces launched a new operation called Ndofofou (“Uprooting” in fulfulde language) in the Sahel and the Northern regions. Operation Otapuanu had enabled the security forces to capture hundreds of terrorists including the influential Diallo Oumarou, alias Diaw Oumarou. Seven members of the security forces elements died during the operation.

Internally displaced people

Apart from the disruption of their lives that comes with insecurity, fear and loss of livelihoods, running away from the constant danger under which they live has led to many internally displaced peoples. On October 1, 2019, the Haut Commissaire of Bam province, Ambrose Ouédraogo said that the city of Kongoussi had taken in between 17,000 and 19,000 displaced people in the 72 hours following the latest deadly attacks in the municipalities of Zimtenga and Bourzanga. He was speaking on the sidelines of a crisis meeting of the Provincial Emergency Relief Committee (COPROSUR) to review the humanitarian situation of the displaced and propose a response.

The mayor of the municipality of Zimtenga, Salifou Macaire Ouédraogo, corroborated the report by saying that people from 30 villages out of 41 in the municipality have moved to Kongoussi, abandoning their villages.

Burkina Faso is faced with an overwhelming tragic situation which seems endless. Lives needlessly being lost, livelihoods disrupted, perpetual fear among the people and scarce resources that should go towards the provision of development infrastructure for the people being expended on securing the country by fighting terror.

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