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# NORTHERN BURKINA FASO

A fertile ground for radicalisation and violent  
extremism?



## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**



Octave Bayili is a young researcher, Vice-President of the Pan-African Centre - Initiatives for the Sahel (PC-IS) and a member of the West African Expert Group of the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (Geneva). He holds a Master's degree in Crisis Prevention and Social Peace Management and a Master's degree in Governance and Regional Integration. He has worked on issues of transnational organised crime in West Africa, Refugee Protection in the Central African Republic (CAR), cultural and religious pluralism (Mali, Burkina Faso, Mauritania) and violent extremism in the Sahel region. He has also carried out work and internships at the National Commission for Refugees (Bangui-Central African Republic), the West Africa Civil Society Institute (Accra-Ghana), Dynamique Citoyenne (DC-Yaoundé-Cameroon) and Oxfam Burkina (Danida Project CVE/PVE). He has also participated in several youth leadership programmes including African University fellows, Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI-RLC-Accra-Ghana) and Next Generation Internship programme initiated by WACSI.

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- To generate debates and discussions on these issues;
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West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI)

No. 9 Bingo Street, East Legon

P.O. Box AT 1956, Achimota

Accra, Ghana

Email : [research@wacsi.org](mailto:research@wacsi.org)

Tel : +233 (0) 302 550 224

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## LISTE DES ABREVIATIONS, SIGLES ET ACRONYMES

AQIM	Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
NRC	National Revolution Council
DC	Dynamique Citoyenne
VE	Violent Extremism
SDF	Security and Defence Forces
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
OSIWA	Open Society Initiative for West Africa
PVE	Prevention against Violent Extremism
CAR	Central African Republic
PSR	Presidential Security Regiment
SSR	Security Sector Reform
WACSI	West Africa Civil Society Institute
YALI	Young African Leaders Initiative



# Introduction

On January 15, 2016, Burkina Faso underwent a major jihadist attack. This attack carried out by Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) killed 28 people and wounded about 50 civilians.<sup>1</sup> The country still faces terrorist threats after several years. Despite the response and counter-offensive measures announced by the highest authorities, recurrent terrorist incursions continue. These incursions are particularly significant in the extreme north of the country where they target security services. Attacks on the Samorogouan police station<sup>2</sup>, the Koutougou police station 135 km from Djibo<sup>3</sup>, the Markoye customs post in Oudalan<sup>4</sup> province or the terrorist attack in Bartiébougou<sup>5</sup>, can be cited as tangible examples.

There have also been kidnappings recorded in this region. The example of Arthur Eliot Kenneth and his wife Josephine, an Australian couple, kidnapped in the Baraboulé department, Soum province, Sahel region, on January 15, 2015, and that of Pastor Pierre Boena and members of his family as well as some faithful<sup>6</sup>, can be cited. It was said that, Hamadou Ag Khallini<sup>7</sup> was responsible for kidnapping the Australian couple. This abduction followed that of another expatriate of Romanian nationality occurred on April 4, 2015 in Tambao (extreme north).<sup>8</sup>

The precarious security situation in Burkina Faso, and precisely in the extreme north of the country, is an alarming sub-regional issue. As a matter of fact, its proximity to Mali

and Niger, countries affected by terrorism with grey areas<sup>9</sup>, makes the region vulnerable. Insecurity in the Burkina-Mali and Burkina-Niger border areas is a result of the crisis in northern Mali and the exploitation of local conflicts by terrorist groups, such as the conflict between the Dogon and the Fulani<sup>10</sup> (Burkina-Mali border).

There has been the development of tension and grey areas that are beyond the control of the state. Terrorist groups, through their cross-border ramifications and their connection to transnational organised criminal groups, scour the region and engage in trafficking of all kinds (weapons, drugs, etc.). The emergence of terrorist groups such as Ansarul Islam led by Malam Ibrahim Dicko in the Burkinabe Sahel, and the Islamic State in the Great Sahara (EIGS) led by Adnan Abu Walid Al-Sahraoui. In addition to this geopolitical situation, there are hotbeds of tension in the country.

<sup>1</sup> Discours à la Nation de son Excellence Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, Président du Burkina-Faso, Lefaso.net, 16/01/2016- <http://lefaso.net/spip.php?article69142>, consulté le 01 octobre 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Apollinaire Kam, Attaque de la gendarmerie de Samorogouan : Sept morts, dont trois pandores, 12/10/2015, <http://www.aib.bf/m-4201-attaque-de-la-gendarmerie-de-samorogouan-sept-morts-dont-trois-pandores.html>, consulté le 01 octobre 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Agence Internationale Burkinabe, Burkina : Deux blessés dans l'attaque d'un commissariat, <http://lefaso.net/spip.php?article71228>, consulté le mercredi 18 mai 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Yssoufou Sagnon, Attaque du poste de douane de Markoye : L'assistant André Kouraogo accompagné à sa dernière demeure, Journal Sidwaya, <http://www.sidwaya.bf/m-13030-attaque-du-poste-de-douane-de-markoye-l-assistant-andre-kouraogo-accompagne-a-sa-derniere-demeure.html>, consulté le 04 septembre 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Agence d'Information du Burkina, Burkina Faso – Axe Ouahigouya-Titao: six policiers tués dans l'explosion d'une mine, <https://netafrique.net/burkina-faso-axe-ouahigouya-titao-un-vehicule-de-police-avec-au-moins-6-crs-saute-sur-une-mine/consulte> le 05 octobre 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Abdou Sawadogo, Enlèvement du pasteur Boena : Confusion autour « d'une libération », <http://www.lobserveur.bf/index.php?option=com-k2&view=item&id=2767%3Aen%3C%A8vement-du-pasteur-boena-confusion-autour-%2C%AB-d-une-lib%3C%Aoration-%2C%BB&Itemid=112>

<sup>7</sup> Hamadou Ag Khallini est un des responsables du groupe terroriste Ansar-dine, il est l'auteur de plusieurs attaques terroristes au Mali, dont celui contre un camp de la mission de l'ONU au Mali (MINUSMA) le 28 novembre 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Radio France Internationale (RFI), Enlèvement d'un occidental au Burkina-Faso : la traque s'organise, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20150405-burkina-faso-enlevement-roumain-tambao-pan-africain-minerals-mali-niger-sahel>, consulté le 05 avril 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Pascal Le Pautremat defines the grey area as areas in which there is a situation of poverty or near destitution, a human distress that encourages a minority of those who suffer it to turn to parallel economic circuits.

<sup>10</sup> Dogons usually leave their locality (inter-season) for urban centres. We note the arrival in large numbers of men, women, girls and Dogon children from Douna (Mali) on the night of June 29, 2018 with Ouagadougou and other urban centres as their destination. We note the presence of armed men (firearms and knives), ready to fight with all unidentified people and/or the Fulani community. There will be no field work this year in this community (Source: Point focal Association SOS-SAHÉL).



## I- A SURGE OF RADICALISATION

The crisis in the northern Burkina Faso reveals an endogenous social dynamic (social protest and injustice). Al Irchad (Malam Dicko's association) which became Ansarul Islam in December 2016 is the product of local socio-political and cultural realities. The absence of the state, the abandonment of the Sahel region and the destitution of the population breed a fertile ground for the development of radicalisation of young people.

*"The absence of the state, the abandonment of the Sahel region and the destitution of the population breed a fertile ground for the development of radicalisation of young people."*

This region is home to a local terrorist cell. In December 2016, the "Ansarul Islam" group was created. Linked to Ançar Dine's Katiba Macina, this group operates in Mali and Burkina Faso and is led by the Burkinabe Malam Ibrahim Dicko, a radical Djibo preacher, and a "terror of the Burkinabe Sahel". This group has already carried out an attack on Nassoumbou in the northeast of the country, which caused the death of 12 Burkinabe soldiers, members of the country's anti-terrorist forces. In addition to punitive incursions against the security and defence forces, it carried out targeted killings against some local dignitaries and threatened to ban Western education. The creation of this group is the jihadist groups' strategy to set up a local jihadist cell able to carry out large-scale suicide bombing in Burkina Faso and in the sub-region.

The vulnerability of the populations in northern Burkina Faso, whose concerns are generally not considered in development programmes, makes the evolution of

fertile ground for radicalisation and violent extremism in this region plausible. The example of the incrustation of the terrorist threat in Mali is a real illustration of the jihadist strategy, which aims to play the card of generosity. Terrorist groups provide financial and medical assistance to abandoned populations living in extreme poverty.

Terrorist groups such as Ansarul Islam were able to take advantage of social exclusion to be embedded in the social fabric and to present to young people an alternative society programme based on Islamic justice. In addition, the lack of opportunities for young people and difficult humanitarian conditions such as food security and the massive influx of refugees are leading young people to make socio-economic rallies.

Moreover, it is important to note that the unclear game maintained by the former Burkinabe head of state Blaise Compaoré with rebel and terrorist groups in northern Mali is a significant factor in the exacerbation and progression of the jihadist threat in the Sahel in general and in Burkina Faso in particular<sup>11</sup>. Ouagadougou was a retreat point for narco-terrorists like Iyad Ag-Ghali, who received support and favours from the Burkinabe state. While it is a fact that terrorism is a global phenomenon, the persistence of terrorist groups against Burkina Faso after the fall of Blaise Compaoré raises a central question: are jihadists making Burkina Faso pay for a change regime?

The fundamentalist speech is growing in scope and audience uncontrollably in areas of the Sahel.

During the year 2016/2017, about 517 schools out of 1008 schools in the Sahel region were closed because of these terrorist groups, affecting more than 72584 students, or 54% of the total number of students in the region.

There is a risk of irredentism in this area. The birth of a Fulani militia in Mali<sup>12</sup> and the abuses and harassment committed against the Fulani ethnic group<sup>13</sup> could

<sup>11</sup> Fanny Pigeaud et Kalidou Sy, Burkina Faso: les terroristes étaient liés au président déchu Blaise Compaoré, <http://www.enqueteplus.com/content/terrorisme-burkina-faso-les-terroristes-%C3%A9taient-li%C3%A9s-au-pr%C3%A9sident-d%C3%A9chu-blaise-compaor%C3%A9>, consulté le 21 Mar 2018 - 08:16

<sup>12</sup> On 23 May 2018, we witness the birth of a Fulani militia composed of the Fulani of Mali and Burkina Faso whose objective is to protect the Fulani community against abuses. Their area of action extends between Djenne and Korogon.

<sup>13</sup> Like abuses and harassments committed against the Fulani communities, these facts were reported by the Fulani Djelobodji during the meeting organised by Tabital Pulakku International in Burkina Faso (October 2016)

have a spill-over effect in their sister communities in Burkina Faso, leading to the birth of self-defence or radical groups. On one hand, this previous possibility could be underpinned by the desire to defend and safeguard their identity, because one of Malam Dicko's ambitions is to reconstitute the territories of the Fula kingdom of Djeelgodji. It could be justified on the other hand by the trap of the alliance with some Jihadist movements because some communities perceive Malam Ibrahim Dicko and Hamadoun Koufa as heroes in the name of belonging to the same ethnic group (Fulani). It should be noted that terrorist groups in Mali have successfully exploited social, family and tribal or even matrimonial alliances to establish themselves in northern Mali.



## II- COUNTER-TERRORISM MEASURES

In the face of the risk of irredentism, the Burkinabe authorities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs), have developed a strategy to combat violent extremism. The strategy of the Burkinabe state is based on strengthening security cooperation at the sub-regional level (G5 Sahel) and initiatives such as the establishment of a mixed security force (Burkina-Mali-Niger) against terrorism. This has led to the strengthening of the Burkinabe military presence in the border areas with Mali and Niger. In addition, an emergency programme for the Sahel region was officially launched on 4 August 2017<sup>14</sup>, with the aim of strengthening the resilience of the population.

NGOs and CSOs alongside the central state have a joint contribution to make in preventing violent ex-

<sup>14</sup> Daouda Zongo, Programme d'urgence pour le sahel: la réponse du Burkina face aux menaces terroristes, <https://www.wakatsera.com/programme-durgence-pour-le-sahel-la-reponse-du-burkina-face-aux-menaces-terroristes/consulte> le 18 aout 2017

tremism. The awakening and engagement of civil society in the PVE seems very recent, fragmented and poorly coordinated. Operational management in the fight against terrorism, at the expense of structural management as a national strategy makes civil society action dependent and secondary.

CSOs aim at raising awareness among the population<sup>15</sup>, strengthening the civil-military pact<sup>16</sup>, and economic and social development projects<sup>17</sup>. Despite actions undertaken to curb violent extremism in Burkina Faso, it is important to note the resurgence of the phenomenon and pockets of radicalisation in border areas where marginalised communities live (Burkina-Mali, Burkina-Niger border). Many programmes (PVE) developed in the border areas of Liptako-Gourma do not have real citizen participation and involvement because they remain government concepts disconnected from the Sahelian land, rather than an endogenous emanation of the local populations.

Civil society participation in the PVE faces obstacles such as insecurity and state failure, low technicality in conducting PVE campaigns, lack or absence of financial resources at central and local level (decentralised authorities) for the PVE.

The 2nd High Level Meeting of Ministers in charge of religious and worship affairs of the G5 Sahel Member States held in Ouagadougou in April 2018, raised the need to support actions aimed at involving women and youth in the fight against radicalisation and violent extremism.

Consequently, all these factors combined make civil society the soft underbelly in the fight against terrorism in Burkina. Its action since the first major terrorist attack on January 15, 2016 has been much more demanding than participatory. The socio-political crisis in Burkina Faso, marked by the popular uprising of October 30 and 31, 2014, and the fierce popular resistance to the coup d'état of September 15, 2016, resulted in the politicisation of civil society and enormous social fractures

<sup>15</sup> Tambi Serge Pacôme Zongo, Union fraternelle des croyants de Dori (UFC-Dori) : Le projet « agir ensemble pour une coexistence pacifique dans un environnement mieux sécurisé au Sahel », officiellement lancé, <http://lefaso.net/spip.php?article82122>, consulté le 10 mars 2018

<sup>16</sup> We can cite the SOS Sahel association of the Emir Ezab Ag Alhour, chief of the Oudalan township, commonly known as the Emir of Gorom-Gorom, who travels through all the communes of the province (Deou, Gorom, Markoye, Oursi and Tin Akoff) to discuss security

<sup>17</sup> Oxfam Burkina with the project Strengthening Resilience of Vulnerable Communities in the Sahel and Northern Burkina Faso

which, undermined community life. In addition, it should be noted that civil society actions to strengthen cohabitation in Burkina Faso are confronted with the mistrust of state actors who do not consider CSOs as partners and prefer to place the fight against VE in the prism of “secret defence”. There is also no national strategic plan to combat the VE<sup>18</sup> that can guide the actions of CSOs and define the main points of their engagement with the state.

Finally, these explain why all the actions undertaken by CSOs unfortunately fail to achieve the expected results because they are sorely lacking in coordination, strategy and support by the state.

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### III- RECOMMENDATIONS

In the face of increasing radicalisation and violent extremism in Burkina Faso, appropriate measures must be taken to strengthen the resilience of the population.

First, *security sector reform (SSR) proves to be an imperative for optimum human security in Burkina*. SSR can be achieved through a frank collaboration or “civil-military pact” between civilian populations and the

<sup>18</sup> La formulation de la Stratégie nationale de Prévention de la radicalisation de lutte l'extrémisme violent (SN-PRCVE) avec le soutien de l'Agence américaine pour le développement international (USAID) est en cours d'élaboration, <http://lefaso.net/spip.php?article84039>

security and defence forces (SDF). The fight against violent extremism is not only a military issue. Civil society must play a leading role with the state because the statutory actors (security and defence forces) cannot single-handedly face this asymmetric threat. Civil society must understand the issue of human security, master the various aspects related to human security but also and above all the importance of civil-military collaboration with full involvement of the media in raising public awareness. By becoming a central actor in the new security architecture in Burkina, civil society would be able to participate in the definition of public security policies and consequently position itself as an intermediary between the state and the populations.

Secondly, we recommend *strengthening the observatory on radicalisation and violent extremism in Burkina Faso by setting up local offices*. This body will bring together statutory and non-statutory actors (kogl-wéogo<sup>19</sup>, civil society, religious and customary leaders, etc.). In addition to its monitoring, alerting and denunciation role, this body will work to de-radicalise youth and prevent violent extremism in Burkina. The underlying causes that lead individuals to radicalise and join violent extremist groups must be directly addressed. Repression as a solution in a global context of the fight against terrorism has shown its limits<sup>20</sup>. Isn't it said that an unspoken thought gets worse when it is repressed? The military repression of Mohamed Yussuf's movement in Borno and Bauchi in Nigeria proves the limits of terror as a weapon to contain terrorism. It is in this regard that the former Burkinabe Interior Minister, Simon Compaoré, declared that “in the face of violent extremism facing African states, governments must develop inclusive policies based on prevention”<sup>21</sup>. Hence, the need to gradually develop preventive approaches as a necessary complement to combat social and institutional causes of crime and violent extremism.

<sup>19</sup> The Kogl-wéogo are self-defence groups formed against insecurity.  
<sup>20</sup> Agence de Presse Africaine, La prévention de l'extrémisme violent au centre d'une concertation à Ouagadougou, <http://news.aouaga.com/h/98794.html> Consulté le 09/06/2016.  
<sup>21</sup> Agence d'information du Burkina(AIB), Lutte contre l'extrémisme violent : Simon Compaoré privilégie la prévention, <http://www.aib.bf/m-6421-lutte-contre-l-extremisme-violent-simon-compaore-privilegie-la-prevention.html> Consulté le 09/06/2016



*In addition, we recommend the establishment of a civil society network against VE in Burkina Faso.* This network may include all non-state actors (research Centre, CSOs, NGOs, technical and financial partners, etc.) involved in the VE. The aim is to establish a permanent space for dialogue between various actors, to strengthen coordination and pool various efforts. The establishment of this network will enable civil society to make its voice heard, to position itself as a key actor and a powerful force in the fight against VE.

Finally, we recommend *the introduction and strengthening of civic and moral education*<sup>22</sup> in the Burkinabe education system and the improvement of political governance in Burkina. This will enable schools to recover their moral essence to train competent and virtuous future managers. It is imperative to instil in the child from an early age values such as: courage, responsibility, respect, honesty, loyalty, fidelity, forgiveness and self-sacrifice. Civic and moral education is paramount in achieving peace. It prepares the child at an early age in the family unit to interact responsibly with his or her environment. Doctrinal deviations leading to radicalisation and then violent extremism among other things are due to the ignorance of religious doctrines (Islam, Christianity, etc.) which in reality are a source of peace. If this initiative is not developed, radical preachers will take over!

In addition, it is imperative to improve political governance. It must involve consolidating the democratic gains made by the Burkinabe people and building the rule of law. The rule of law cannot take place without social justice and an independent judiciary. In twenty-seven years of reign (1987-2014), the former Burkinabe President managed to establish a clan system atop the state and in all spheres of power (economy, politics and the army). Post-insurgency political governance in Burkina must be geared towards national reconciliation and inclusive development.

It is only at this price that Burkina Faso will once again become a haven of peace, a "safe country", free of all obscurantist ideologies and adventurers driven by evil

<sup>22</sup> *Cultivating Heart and Character-Education for Life's Most Essential Goals*-Tony Devine, JoonHoSeuk and Andrew Wilson-2000-Section 1. Promising Directions for Character Education

forces.

It is therefore mandatory to combine the fight against terrorism with development in the Sahel Burkina.

#### 4 Strategies to reinforce people's resilience against radicalisation and violent extremism in Burkina faso

1

Security Sector Reform (SSR) proves to be an imperative for optimum human security in Burkina Faso

2

Strengthening the observatory on radicalisation and violent extremism in Burkina Faso by setting up local offices.

3

The establishment of a civil society network against VE in Burkina Faso

4

The introduction and strengthening of civic and moral education

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