



WEST AFRICA SPEED NOTE | SECURITY

AUGUST 2020

UPSURGE IN DEADLY VIOLENCE IN THE SAHEL

The security crisis in the Sahel is spiralling as unprecedented waves of violence surge across the region. The United Nations figures have revealed a fivefold increase in the number of attacks in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger since 2016. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, the UN's envoy for the fragile region on the southern rim of the Sahara, said it had experienced “a devastating surge in terrorist attacks against civilian and military targets”. Amidst intense efforts by National Governments, Regional Governments and International Governments, violence ranging from political, religious to communal and persistent attacks have continued to undermine peace and security across the West African Region.

POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND CONFLICT

Since the beginning of the year, many West African countries have been busy with elections. Some countries have already held their legislative and parliamentary elections while others such as Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Ghana and Niger are still getting set. A prominent trend observed in the preparations of these elections is the attempt of some leaders to evade their term limits, which has resulted in political clashes between the ruling parties and the oppositions, armed conflict between the citizens and security forces, etc.

Noticeably, there is a strong link between governance and security in Africa. This is because some countries are either confronting or emerging from conflict and crises sparked from previous exclusive power structures such as the ongoing conflict in Mali and Ghana. In Mali, series of

demonstrations and protests are on-going following the outcome of the March-April legislative elections and calling for the resignation of certain political leaders.

In Ghana, allegations are being made against President Nana Akufo and his abusive use of the military. Mr John Dramani Mahama accused President Akufo-Addo of “using military and party thugs to stop people from exercising their right to register and vote in the upcoming December elections”, an act which he describes as “dangerous and unacceptable”. Furthermore, a case has been filed at the United Nations against the ruling government on the grounds of ethnic profiling and discrimination and the use of military to prevent citizens from exercising their constitutional rights.

INTER-COMMUNAL, RELIGIOUS OR TERRORIST ATTACKS

In addition to the on-going politically sparked crises and conflicts, seeming terrorist, religious or inter-communal attacks are being launched on security forces and civilians alike, resulting in the displacement or people, loss of lives and properties.

Recently in Burkina Faso, the government reported an attack on a cattle market in eastern Burkina Faso by some unidentified gunmen during which about 20 people were killed. Similarly, about 25 people were also killed in an attack on another cattle market in the eastern village of Kompienga in May. These incessant killings raised ethnic and religious tensions in the country.

In the same vein, the murder of 8 people by armed men on motorcycles in the region of Kouré, East of Niamey, capital of Niger has been reported. As revealed by Agence France-Presse, six were French nationals and confirmed staff members of ACTED a French humanitarian non-governmental organization; while two were Nigeriens, a driver and Khadri - a local guide and the president of the Kouré Giraffe Guides Association. According to a humanitarian aid worker, they were not tourists but rather expatriates who had gone to explore the region for the day in a vehicle of the organization, one of the few authorized trips outside the capital.

Although the origin of the armed men is still under speculations as there is presently no reliable information, RFI reports that the scenario may in some ways be reminiscent of what happened in Pendjari Park in northern Benin, a few hundred kilometres away, in 2019, when according to RFI, two Frenchmen were abducted and their guide killed. An area that at the time was also orange on the map of the French government, and has since turned red.

Similarly, there has been new waves of deadly communal attacks in Kaduna State, Nigeria. Kaduna State straddles the country's ethnic and religious divide. The relations between Hausa-Fulani and communities in southern Kaduna have tense, majorly due to competition over resources, land, and political control. These tensions have often led to deadly ethnic and sectarian violence in the past and despite deployment of various military security. Between January 1 and August 5, militant herdsmen killed over 184 persons across various local governments within the region. Also, more than 9,000 villagers have been displaced. Following this, the state government imposed a 24-hour curfew in affected local governments due to the increased tension. There have been numerous protests against the deadly killings including a protest by women in the region calling for justice while lamenting about becoming refugees in their own land. The inability of the government to prosecute perpetrators in the circle of killings has increased tension and fractured genuine commitment to finding lasting peace in the troubled area.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There have been regional efforts to battle the surge of violence within the West African region. Several international partners have also participated in the fight against violence by supporting with military troops, like the French troops in Burkina Faso. Even citizens have also volunteered to fight against militants, risking their lives and families.

National Governments have opened investigations, declared state of emergency to curtail the violence as well as restrict access to some locations. International Governments have also marked some locations "orange", signifying "not recommended except for imperative reasons". However, in our opinion, we urge the National Governments, regional governments and organizations, as well as international partners:

- to remain committed to working together in promoting and building respect for human rights and enhancing community resilience and good governance.
- to promote regional initiatives that would increase investment in border regions.
- to organize trainings for volunteer groups and self-defence militias for protection and sustenance.

FURTHER READING

- **Gunmen kill more than a dozen in attack in eastern Burkina Faso**
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/08/gunmen-kill-dozen-attack-eastern-burkina-faso-200807182812117.html>
- **Assessing Africa's 2020 Elections**
<https://africacenter.org/spotlight/highlights-africa-2020-elections/>
- **Intercommunal violence, terrorist attacks inflame tensions in West Africa**
<https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/07/1068071>
- **Niger : après l'attaque, l'état d'urgence élargi à Kouré**
<https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1027638/politique/niger-apres-lattaque-letat-durgence-elargi-a-kou>
- **Niger : pourquoi les terroristes ont frappé à Kouré**
<https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1027341/politique/niger-pourquoi-les-terroristes-ont-frappe-a-kour>
- **Update: Islamist Terrorist Attack in Niger Leaves 8 Dead**
<https://www.africanews.com/2020/08/10/update-islamist-terrorist-attack-in-niger-leaves-8-dead/>