



The Social Roots of Jihadist Violence in Burkina Faso's North

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Executive Summary

Long spared by the Sahel's armed groups, Burkina Faso now faces increasingly frequent and lethal attacks in its north. Although this insecurity in large part is an extension of the Malian conflict, the crisis has strong local dynamics. Ansarul Islam, the group behind much of the violence, which often is portrayed as tied to jihadists elsewhere in the Sahel, is first and foremost a movement challenging the prevailing social order in Soum province, in Burkina's Sahel region. While military operations reasserted the state's control in the spring of 2017, the crisis is far from over. Ouagadougou and its foreign partners recognise that their response requires more than military offensives and that a definitive resolution of the crisis hinges in part on the situation in Mali. However, their approach needs to better take account of the local and social roots of the crisis, which are more profound than its religious and security dimensions.

In its early stages, Ansarul Islam, founded by Malam Ibrahim Dicko, a preacher from Soum, is a manifestation of widespread discontent at the province's social order. For years, Malam promoted equality between classes and questioned the dominance of traditional chiefs and the monopolisation of religious authority by marabout families – religious leaders – whom he accuses of enriching themselves at the population's expense. This rhetoric earned him a wide audience, especially among young people and socially disadvantaged sectors of the population. His turn to violence lost him many followers, but his movement retains enough support to continue a low-intensity insurgency against local and national authorities. Reports of his death during the spring 2017 military operations have not been confirmed and in any case would not end the crisis.

A product of local socio-political and cultural conditions, Ansarul Islam is at least as much a social uprising as it is a religious movement. It is less a group critical of modernity than a movement that rejects traditions it believes archaic. It expresses the grievances of a silent majority that holds neither political power nor religious authority. Ansarul Islam uses Islam to frame its opposition to an ossified social order that breeds widespread frustration. Nor is the movement primarily a self-defence group for Fulani, who are in the majority in the Sahel region. Ethnic and identity-based grievances for now assume a marginal role in its discourse.

The distant relationship between state and populations in Burkina's Sahel region also fuels the crisis. The contrast between the north's economic potential and its lack of infrastructure feeds a sense of abandonment amongst its population. As in central Mali, local communities see state representatives and security forces as foreigners trying to enrich themselves rather than state agents responsible for providing services. As a result, Soum inhabitants are reluctant to cooperate with security forces who are often from other provinces and whose behaviour is sometimes brutal.

The northern Burkina crisis is also more than a mere reflection of the situation in central Mali. Ansarul Islam uses Mali as a support base and similarities on both sides of the border exist. But the surge of violence supposedly committed in the name of jihad distracts from conflict's extremely local and social dimensions and

the ability of armed groups to exploit social divides. Insecurity in northern Burkina is due not only to the development deficit, the central state's failure to understand a territory in its peripheries, or the spillover from its neighbour's war. It is above all the result of a profound social crisis in the north. Divisions between masters and subjects, rulers and ruled, ancient and modern provide the base upon which Malam Dicko's popularity grew.

A definitive resolution of the crisis depends in part on Mali's stabilisation as well as the implementation of effective development plans by the government and its partners. More importantly, though, it requires devising a more balanced social order and for local communities to resolve their differences. In this context, the government's efforts to address the crisis should factor in the following points:

- ❑ **Formulate responses that take into account the social and local dimensions of the crisis.** While the local order continues to provoke frustration and conflict, ending the crisis will be hard. The scope for government action in this respect is limited: it should not seek to upend a centuries-old social order. The onus should be on local actors to devise solutions adapted to local circumstances. The government and its international partners can at best encourage intercommunal and inter-generational dialogue.
- ❑ **Reduce the gulf between security forces and authorities and the local population.** Several measures could help: improving intelligence and providing informants better protection; encouraging security forces and the civil service to recruit Fulani (without imposing quotas); boosting joint civil-military activities; prioritising the appointment of Fulani speakers as civil servants and security officials in the Sahel; and severely punishing abuses by officials.
- ❑ **Place greater emphasis in the Sahel region emergency program – the development component of the government's response – on promoting herding, improving justice provision and fighting corruption.** Supporting livestock breeding and addressing the dysfunction in the judicial system and the scourge of corruption in the administration would reduce negative perceptions of the state and show it can be useful to the public.
- ❑ **Work toward strengthening, in the long term, judicial and police cooperation between Mali and Burkina.** This would facilitate investigations that have ramifications in both countries and the management and prosecution of prisoners and suspects.

Ouagadougou/Dakar, 12 October 2017

The Social Roots of Jihadist Violence in Burkina Faso's North

I. Introduction

In 2015, Burkina joined the group of Sahel countries under attack from armed and criminal groups that are mainly based in Mali but that also operate from several countries in the region. The area most affected by these attacks is the Sahel region, in the north of the country, on the border with Mali and Niger. However, it was only after the attack on Nassoumbou, in Soum province in December 2016, that the Burkina authorities finally understood that the crisis was caused by local dynamics as well as by the crisis in neighbouring Mali.¹ This report focuses on the province of Soum, epicentre of the conflict and birthplace of the Ansarul Islam group led by Malam Ibrahim Dicko, but also examines the situation in other provinces in the Sahel region (Oudalan, Séno and Yagha) as well as along the country's other borders, which are also vulnerable.²

Soum is mainly populated by Fulani, Burkina's second largest ethnic group. According to the 2006 census, the figures from which need to be treated with caution, the mother tongue of 56 per cent of the Sahel region's population is Fulfulde, the Fulani language. Several interlocutors estimate that around 70 to 75 per cent of the population in the Sahel region is Fulani.³ The main subdivisions of this ethnic group are the noble classes and groups descended from slaves, called Rimaibé. The Rimaibé were originally indigenous population groups who were conquered and assimilated by the Fulani. Today, Fulani and Rimaibé are included in the same Fulani ethnic group. They share the same culture, the same language and often have identical family names. Nevertheless, there is still a clear divide. In the words of one Fulani representative: "Everybody knows their place".⁴ In Soum, the indigenous inhabitants, the Kurumba, also called the Fulsé, are in a minority. Some Mossi (Burkina's majority ethnic group) and members of other groups also live in the province.

¹ A counter-terrorism battalion of several hundred men is based at Nassoumbou.

² The northern part of Burkina is composed of two administrative regions: the North and the Sahel. The latter is divided into four provinces: Soum, Oudalan, Séno and Yagha. To avoid confusion, this report uses "Sahel region" to refer to this administrative region and "the Sahel" to refer to the area that stretches from Mauritania to Sudan. Similarly, it uses "the north" to refer to the northern part of the country and "the North region" to refer to the administrative region.

³ Crisis Group interviews, inhabitants of Soum, Ouagadougou, May 2017; local authorities, Djibo, May 2017. "Recensement général de la population et de l'habitation (RGPH) 2006. Analyse des résultats définitifs. Thème 2: Etat et structure de la population", Institut national de la statistique et de la démographie, October 2009 (www.bit.ly/2rVIK4D).

⁴ Crisis Group interview, Fulani representative, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

The Sahel region's precolonial history explains its current social and political organisation.⁵ Between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, Fulani herders from the Inner Niger Delta evicted sedentary farmers and established Fulani domination. The new social hierarchy included nobles and royal families, marabout (Muslim preacher) families, artisans, blacksmiths, weavers, griots (West African story tellers), slave descendants, etc.⁶ The Fulani never managed to establish a single political entity,⁷ but used Islam as a route to emancipation from animist sedentary peoples. This resembles the current situation in which groups with a Fulani majority are in armed conflict with a central government dominated by the Bambara in Mali and the Mossi in Burkina. The current social revolt in Soum is not therefore trying to restore the Massina Empire, of which they were never part, or the Kingdom of Jelgooji, which never existed as a unified political entity, but rather a continuation of past struggles using other methods and a reflection of the divisions that have troubled the province down through history.

This report, which continues Crisis Group's research into how to address the increase in violent extremism, analyses the root causes of the crisis, which has its origins in an ossified and unequal social order.⁸ It emphasises the need to provide a long-term response that is not only military and that takes account of the social dimensions of the crisis. It also evaluates the military response initiated at the beginning of 2017. Although these military operations have reasserted government control, the authorities and their partners have no grounds to adopt a triumphalist attitude. The attacks continue and even if Malam should die, the jihadist groups know how to adapt to the new situation better than the armies that fight them. This report is based on about 50 interviews with members of the security forces, local and national authorities, the government and the opposition, civil society, researchers and the population of Soum. These interviews were mainly conducted between January and May 2017 in Ouagadougou and Djibo.

⁵ See the work of Professor Hamidou Diallo, "Le foyer de Wuro-Saba au Jelgooji (Burkina Faso) et la quête d'une suprématie islamique (1858-2000)", in Muriel Gomez-Perez, *Islam politique au Sud du Sahara. Identités, discours et enjeux* (2009), p. 401; and "Naissance et évolution des pouvoirs peuls au Sahel burkinabè (Jelgooji, Liptako et Yaaga) du XVIII^e à la fin du XIX^e", in Hamidou Diallo, Moussa Willy Bantenga, *Le Burkina Faso passé et présent* (2015), pp. 97-114. Crisis Group interviews, historian, Ouagadougou, January and May 2017.

⁶ There are rivalries between the most important marabout families. The Cissé, considered to be the true and legitimate holders of religious authority and the Doukouré, Marka who came from Mali in the colonial period, belong to two rival branches of the Tijanyia brotherhood. Crisis Group interviews, historian, former senior civil servant, Ouagadougou, May 2017. Jean-Louis Triaud, David Robinson, *La Tijâniyya: une confrérie musulmane à la conquête de l'Afrique* (Paris, 2005).

⁷ The region was divided into the emirates of Liptako, Yagha and Jelgooji. The latter, which corresponds to the province of Soum, was itself divided into Djibo and Baraboulé *chefferies*.

⁸ For previous Crisis Group reports on jihadism, see the Crisis Group Special Report N°1, *Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State*, 14 March 2016.

II. The Social Roots of the Crisis

A. *Malam Ibrahim Dicko, from the Radio to Jihad*

The main protagonist of the crisis in Soum is the founder of Ansarul Islam, Malam Ibrahim Dicko. His real name is Boureima Dicko and he was born into a marabout family in a place called Soboulé, in the province of Soum. He is (or was) about 40 years old. Malam, who is in fragile health, studied at conventional and Koranic schools in Burkina and Mali, and went on to teach in Niger.⁹ In 2009, he began preaching in many villages in Soum, where he appointed local representatives,¹⁰ and on two popular radio stations, La Voix du Soum and La radio lutte contre la désertification (LRCD). He preached at a now-closed mosque in Djibo on Fridays.¹¹

In 2012, the authorities officially recognised his association, al-Irchad.¹² Malam's skill as an orator and anti-establishment discourse drew a large audience throughout the province (see section II.B.).¹³ He found it easy to fund the almost daily radio broadcasting of his sermons, apparently with external financial aid.¹⁴ Burkina's transition government blocked funding for the construction of several mosques, which fuelled the resentment of Malam and his followers toward the sons of marabouts and princes of Soum, whom they accused of using their influence in Ouagadougou to prevent the construction of mosques connected to al-Irchad.¹⁵

The radical nature of Malam's speeches led the local, traditional and religious authorities to ring alarm bells, but nobody took any genuine preventative action.¹⁶ For a while, Malam was reportedly placed under the surveillance of security services during Blaise Compaoré's regime, but they probably lost track of him following the destabilisation of the security apparatus caused by the fall of the regime.¹⁷ He was arrested by the French Operation Serval in September 2013 in Tessalit, northern

⁹ According to one of his former colleagues, Malam is frail, like a lost child and incapable of carrying out physical chores. He is also diabetic. "Malam" means "marabout" in the Hausa language. Crisis Group interviews, former elected representative, Fulani representative, security source, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

¹⁰ Crisis Group interview, former elected representative, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

¹¹ Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian worker, security source, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

¹² "Comment est né Ansarul Islam, premier groupe djihadiste de l'Histoire du Burkina Faso", *Le Monde*, 11 April 2017.

¹³ Crisis Group interviews, deputy, former elected representative, humanitarian worker, Fulani representative, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

¹⁴ Crisis Group interview, former elected representative, Ouagadougou, May 2017. Some Burkina commercial radio stations sell broadcasting slots.

¹⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Fulani representative, opposition member, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

¹⁶ Crisis Group interview, former official, Ouagadougou, January 2017; former elected representative, Ouagadougou, May 2017. A European Union report published in September 2016 mentions a certain "Malam Ibrahim", a well-known radical preacher in Soum. "Facteurs et acteurs de la radicalisation dans les zones frontalières au Burkina Faso", Regional European Union Programme for the Prevention of Violent Extremism in the Sahel and the Maghreb.

¹⁷ Crisis Group interview, official in the former regime, Ouagadougou, May 2017. Andrew McGregor, "Islamist Insurgency in Burkina Faso: A Profile of Malam Ibrahim Dicko", Aberfoyle International Security, 30 April 2017.

Mali, in possession of a large sum of euros, according to some sources.¹⁸ After a spell in prison in Bamako, he was released in 2015.¹⁹ In Mali, he is reported to have met his mentor Hamadoun Koufa, leader of the Macina Liberation Front, an armed group active in central Mali, during 2015.²⁰

At the beginning of 2016, the emir of Djibo and the grand imam, whose daughter Malam married, disowned him.²¹ He then repudiated his wife and took to the bush, losing most of his followers in the process. Only a close circle of loyal supporters followed him to Mali for training.²² From there, he tried to eliminate his former comrades.²³ Ansarul Islam has a strong tendency toward settling accounts, which led one locally elected representative to fear that a “cycle of vengeance” would be established in the long term.²⁴ The attack on the Nassoumbou military base on 16 December 2016, reportedly led by Ansarul Islam and the Islamic State in Greater Sahara (ISGS) cost the lives of twelve Burkina soldiers and made Ansarul Islam’s existence official.²⁵

In June 2017, the unauthenticated publication of a Facebook page claiming to be from Ansarul Islam said that Jafar Dicko, Malam’s younger brother, had succeeded him at the head of the movement. This information corroborated the feeling among Burkina security sources that Malam may have died of wounds sustained during the military offensives in the spring. In the absence of formal proof or the confirmation or otherwise by Ansarul Islam, doubts remain.

B. *The Challenge to an Ossified and Unequal Social Order*

Whether Malam is dead or alive, his ideas and dissent have swept the province and become firmly established. First, he denounces marabout families for enriching themselves by using their status of sole legitimate holders of religious authority to

¹⁸ “Qui est l’imam Ibrahim Dicko, la nouvelle terreur du nord du Burkina?”, *Jeune Afrique*, 9 January 2017. A security source mentioned the sum of €9,000. Crisis Group interviews, security source, Fulani representative, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

¹⁹ Several hypotheses are circulating about the reasons for his release: the Malian justice system was bribed; he was released because he was ill; influential political leaders intervened to secure his release. Crisis Group interviews, former official, Ouagadougou, January 2017; Fulani representative, security source, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

²⁰ Andrew McGregor, op. cit.

²¹ Crisis Group interviews, Fulani representative, humanitarian worker, security source, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

²² Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian worker, Ouagadougou, local elected representative, Djibo, May 2017. At the end of 2016, rumours circulated according to which Malam’s group proposed to pay its members CFA70,000 (€107) per week for training in Mali. The monthly minimum wage in Burkina Faso is CFA33,000 (€50). Crisis Group interview, Fulani representative, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

²³ He ordered the killing of his former right hand man, Hamadoun Tamboura, alias Hamadoun Boly. Crisis Group interviews, local elected representative, civil society representatives, Djibo, May 2017.

²⁴ Crisis Group interview, local elected representative, Djibo, May 2017.

²⁵ Officially given its seal of approval by the Islamic State at the end of 2016, the ISGS operates mainly in the so-called three borders zone (Mali, Burkina, Niger) known as Liptako-Gourma, and is led by Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahraoui, a former dissident member of al-Mourabitoun. His links with Ansarul Islam are unclear but security sources believe that the two groups organised the attack on Nassoumbou together.

extort money from the population. This reflected the division between the traditional marabout families, who have historic legitimacy and within which the imamate is passed down on a hereditary basis, and a new generation of Muslim scholars who believe that religious authority should no longer be the prerogative of a minority. Malam challenges the right of the imams from these families to be the only ones authorised to lead prayers or give opinions on religious matters, especially as they do not always have the required knowledge. Mastery of Arabic lends credibility to this new generation of scholars in the eyes of the population. Malam also denounces the all-powerful nature of traditional *chefferies* (traditional leaders).²⁶

This challenge to the social order drives the questioning of traditional practices that, according to Malam, are not prescribed by Islam, such as gifts of money to marabouts at ceremonies, dowries or the organisation of costly parties to celebrate marriages and baptisms. A marriage can cost as much as CFA500,000 (€760), ten times the urban monthly minimum wage.²⁷ This rhetoric prompts support from the most disadvantaged because it removes a financial burden. Malam also contests the hierarchical relationships between descendants of masters, the Fulani, and the descendants of slaves, the Rimaibé. Although slavery was abolished in the colonial period, there is still a marked division between these two groups.

Malam justifies his anti-establishment discourse by affirming it is in line with pure Islam and not perverted by tradition. For example, he says social inequalities are contrary to Islam. He uses Islam to challenge an ossified and unequal social order and practices that are no longer in line with the aspirations of the population. In this region, the Muslim religion is more of a tradition than a religious practice per se. It is not uncommon for princes to drink alcohol and it is forbidden to greet anyone by saying “salam aleikoum” in the courts of the chiefs.²⁸

Although Malam's movement is mainly composed of Fulani and Rimaibé, it is not strongly ethnic in character. His discourse certainly calls on the Fulani to defend themselves from the many humiliations to which they are subjected, although he does not openly say this in his sermons. But when he preaches equality between the Fulani and the Rimaibé, he is trying to reduce ethnic divisions.²⁹ Moreover, there are not only Fulani and Rimaibé in his movement.³⁰ Most of his followers are Fulani and Rimaibé because his sermons are in Fulfulde and most inhabitants of the Sahel region are from these communities, both of them Fulfulde-speaking. Malam also says “we are the Rimaibé of the whites”, revealing an unsurprising anti-Western dimension.³¹

²⁶ Crisis Group interviews, historian, former minister, inhabitant of Soum, Fulani representative, former elected representative, Ouagadougou, May 2017; local authorities, political representatives, Djibo, May 2017.

²⁷ Crisis Group interview, former elected representative, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

²⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Fulani representative, former senior official, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

²⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Fulani representative, former elected representative, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

³⁰ There are also reportedly Songhai, Mossi and Fulsé. A Fulani representative tells how assailants associated with Malam spoke in Mooré, a language that not many Fulani from the Sahel region can speak well. The teacher killed in March 2017, Salif Badini, a Fulsé, was a former member of Malam's group. Crisis Group interviews, journalist, diplomats, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

³¹ Crisis Group interview, Fulani representative, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

In 2009-2010, Malam's sermons had a considerable impact throughout Soum. A revealing anecdote illustrates his success: an old elected representative of the province tells how a party activist one day suggested postponing their meeting, because "Malam is on the radio".³² Malam lost most of his followers when he resorted to violence,³³ which suggests that although his discourse was successful, not many people believe that the armed struggle can provide a solution. Some of his ideas have taken hold in Soum. For example, it is now rare for a marriage to involve a party with dancing, flutes and drums as per the Fulani tradition.³⁴

His discourse has proved particularly attractive to young people and the more disadvantaged social sectors because he styles himself as a "defender of the poor" and a "liberator" who wants to lighten the weight of archaic and restrictive traditions.³⁵ The Rimaibé, the lowest social class in Fulani society in Soum, are naturally very receptive to his calls for equality.³⁶ His success reflects a generational division between older people, who are inclined to preserve tradition, and young people, who are ready to challenge the status quo as they seek to find a place for themselves in society. The same former elected representative tells how, during the Tabaski festival, a young follower of Malam criticised the practice according to which imams are the first to sacrifice their sheep. Those close to the imam belittled him and said he should not talk about the imam in this way.³⁷

While Malam was head of the al-Irchad association, it attracted support from government employees, especially teachers. Al-Irchad helped some of them to repay debts as contracting debt is contrary to Islam.³⁸ Some teachers were implicated in smuggling illegal goods, which would explain Ansarul Islam's wish to eliminate them and stop them from denouncing their former comrades.³⁹ This gives credence to the impression that Ansarul Islam is targeting schools. However, although some schools have been threatened (although there have been no claims of responsibility), the attacks on teachers seem to be reprisals against former comrades (and potential informants to the security forces) rather than a wish to attack Western schools.⁴⁰ The teacher killed at the beginning of March 2017, Salif Badini, was a former al-Irchad member and he had reportedly become an informer of the security forces.⁴¹

The Ansarul Islam phenomenon is therefore the product of socio-political and cultural realities in Soum. It expresses the grievances of the silent majority that holds neither political power nor religious authority. It is not so much an Islamist challenge

³² Crisis Group interview, former elected representative, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

³³ Crisis Group interviews, local authorities, political representatives, Djibo, former elected representative, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

³⁴ Crisis Group interviews, former elected representative, marabout, Fulani representative, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

³⁵ Crisis Group interviews, deputy, Fulani representative, former elected representative, marabout, Ouagadougou, local elected representative, Djibo, May 2017.

³⁶ Crisis Group interviews, local authorities, local elected representatives, Djibo, May 2017; Rimaibé marabouts, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

³⁷ Crisis Group interview, former elected representative, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

³⁸ Crisis Group interviews, local authority, local elected representative, civil servants, Djibo, May 2017.

³⁹ Crisis Group interview, senior civil servant, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

⁴⁰ Crisis Group interviews, senior civil servant, Ouagadougou, civil servant, Djibo, May 2017.

⁴¹ Crisis Group interviews, senior civil servant, journalist, diplomat, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

to modernity as a rejection of traditions that perpetuate an ossified society that breeds frustration. This phenomenon, which has deep local roots, seems to have attracted support from groups in neighbouring Mali, which gives it regional ramifications.

C. *A Distant Relationship with the Government*

Local perception of the government as being distant and incapable of providing services also explains the increasing support for Malam's movement. People feel that the government has abandoned the Sahel region and has not made the best of its economic potential. However, the Sahel region has the second lowest individual poverty rate in the country.⁴² It is more the contrast between the region's rich agricultural, pastoral and mining resources and its lack of development that causes frustration.

Poor infrastructure, especially the roads, a limited number of health centres and schools, lack of water and electricity supply make it seem that "all the indicators are in the red".⁴³ The drought and the low water tables hold back the region's main economic activities, which are agriculture and livestock farming.⁴⁴ Djibo, the province's administrative centre, is home to the country's biggest cattle market, but the town's roads have yet to be asphalted.⁴⁵ The mining boom showed how foreigners exploit the region's extensive subsoil resources with no benefits accruing to local people.⁴⁶ Reflecting the feeling of abandonment by the government, several interlocutors in Djibo called for the government to tackle Soum's remoteness by raising its administrative status from province to region.⁴⁷ These problems are aggravated by the humanitarian crisis caused by the increasing insecurity.

The population of the Sahel region has a negative view of the government. A former elected representative summarised it in this way: "People are really afraid of the authorities". They think the government is more inclined to look after itself

⁴² The Sahel region has a poverty rate of 21 per cent, compared to 40 per cent in the country as a whole. "Profil de pauvreté et d'inégalités. Enquête multisectorielle continue (EMC) 2014", Institut national de la statistique et de la démographie (INSD), November 2015, p. 30, <http://bit.ly/2qFvrSj>.

⁴³ Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian worker, Ouagadougou, economic operators, Djibo, May 2017. In 2014, the Sahel region came last in Burkina for access to basic services in less than 30 minutes. The primary school attendance rate is the lowest in the country (32.7 per cent), compared to 73.9 per cent in the country as a whole. "La région du Sahel en chiffres", Ministry of Economy and Finance, Sahel Region Department, 2015, www.cns.bf/IMG/pdf/sahel_en_chiffres_2014.pdf.

⁴⁴ Many livestock farmers feel they have to migrate, while others have lost their animals and are employed as herders. This represents a step backwards socially and causes frustration. Crisis Group interviews, security source, opposition member, Fulani representative, former minister, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

⁴⁵ The road is asphalted as far as Koungoussi. The bad condition of the road means it sometimes takes more than four hours to drive the 95km from Koungoussi to Djibo. Asphalting is under way and should be finished by the end of 2018. The funds for this work were reportedly misappropriated on several occasions. Crisis Group interview, local authority, Djibo, May 2017; Crisis Group email correspondence, Fulani representative, May 2017.

⁴⁶ Crisis Group interviews, deputy, Ouagadougou, June 2016; traditional authority, Djibo, May 2017.

⁴⁷ Crisis Group interviews, economic operators, political representatives, Djibo, May 2017.

rather than look after them and that is prepared to use force to do so.⁴⁸ Historically reluctant to send their children to “French” schools, the Fulani often find it more difficult to find their way around an administrative system that is based on the French model and to understand and demand their rights. Few members of the civil service and the security forces sent to the Sahel region have a good command of Fulfulde. The language barrier increases the gap between the administration and the public. Soum’s inhabitants stress the difficulty of obtaining civil status documents and the authorities’ inability to help herders retrieve their stolen livestock.⁴⁹ Although civil servants have long perceived the appointment to posts in the Burkina Sahel as punishment, many of them have become rich on the proceeds of trafficking, corruption and racketeering.⁵⁰

In the Sahel region and beyond, there is a sense of victimisation among the Fulani, who are present throughout Burkina. Some complain of under-representation among the political and administrative elite and deplore the fact that, in their eyes, state institutions (justice, administration, security forces) discriminate in favour of other communities whenever there is a dispute.⁵¹

This difficult Fulani relationship with the government complicates the fight against Ansarul Islam. From the start, the security forces found it difficult to secure the cooperation of the public, whether because some of them support the movement, while others refuse to inform on their own people, or because Ansarul Islam has established a climate of terror. The arrival of military reinforcements has gone some way to reassure the population and several interlocutors said that the population was slightly more inclined to help the security forces. For example, the security forces are trying to be more discreet when they contact their informants.⁵² Nevertheless, distrust remains, and Ansarul Islam is still said to have supporters in the villages. The security forces still complain of a lack of public support and cooperation.⁵³

People are worried about the way the security forces will behave and these fears may increase now that military reinforcements have arrived. Our interlocutors deplored the arbitrary arrest and ill-treatment of local people, which may strengthen the feeling of injustice and alienation.⁵⁴ The security forces say they sometimes arrest

⁴⁸ Crisis Group interview, former elected representative, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

⁴⁹ Crisis Group interviews, economic operators, Djibo, Fulani representative, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

⁵⁰ For example, a farmer who cuts down a single branch from a tree in a protected forest can incur a fine of CFA50,000 (€76). This money is usually pocketed by water and forest rangers. Crisis Group interviews, deputy, opposition member, Ouagadougou, civil society representatives, Djibo, May 2017.

⁵¹ Crisis Group interviews, security source, Ouagadougou, June 2016; Fulani representatives, Ouagadougou, October 2016; opposition member, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

⁵² Crisis Group interviews, local authorities, Djibo, former elected representative, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

⁵³ Crisis Group interviews, former elected representative, security source, marabout, Ouagadougou, local elected representative, Djibo, May 2017; telephone interview, security source, June 2017.

⁵⁴ Crisis Group interviews, former official, Ouagadougou, January 2017; Fulani representative, security source, humanitarian worker, diplomat, Ouagadougou, May 2017; local elected representative, religious leader, Djibo, May 2017. A Human Rights Watch report, which denounced human rights violations by the Malian and Burkina security forces in the fight against jihadism, confirmed these fears. “Mali: Unchecked Abuses in Military Operations”, Human Rights Watch, 8 September 2017.

an entire group to avoid the impression that those who are allowed to go free are informants and therefore stop them becoming targets for Ansarul Islam.⁵⁵ Whether or not that is true, it is nonetheless the case that the people of Soum feel stigmatised and this represents a real danger.

D. *An Especially Vulnerable Province on the Border with Mali*

In some respects, the situation in Soum resembles that in the central region of Mali, a country with which Burkina shares a border of more than 1,000km. The Islamist leader Hamadoun Kouffa and Malam Ibrahim Dicko, who know each other, have had similar careers and have a similar discourse. Both preached in villages and on the radio and criticised the social order, the local elites and the government.⁵⁶ However, the situation in Burkina is different to that in Mali. Radical groups in central Mali seem to have drawn their support more from free nomadic pastoralists than from the Rimaibé, and they seek to broaden their following by disseminating sermons in other languages as well as in Fulfulde. The crisis in Soum has so far remained at a low intensity. Although it has created a climate of terror, Ansarul Islam has not managed to plunge the entire province in violence. For the moment, the Soum population is generally not inclined to take up arms.

There have been several attempts to establish terrorist cells in Burkina. The Katiba Ansar Dine Sud tried, unsuccessfully, to create a cell in the West, in the area where the attack on Samorogouan (Hauts-Bassins region) took place in October 2015. To the East, members of al-Mourabitoun, a dissident group that split from al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar, reportedly tried to establish a base in the Tapoa Forest. They failed because they are not so much at home in the forest compared to the desert and because military cooperation between Niger and Burkina works better than between Mali and Burkina (see section III.C.). The failure was also due to the fact that, contrary to in Soum, the populations of eastern and western Burkina are more stable and not ready for war.⁵⁷

It would be wrong to interpret the situation in northern Burkina as an extension of the Malian conflict, even though that conflict increases the availability of weapons and provides a safe haven for Ansarul Islam's men. The crisis in Soum is not simply a mirror image of the situation in central Mali. It is mainly the result of acute local tensions. Several factors make it vulnerable and explain why this province is by far the most affected province in Burkina Faso.

⁵⁵ Crisis Group interview, local elected representative, Djibo, May 2017.

⁵⁶ For more on central Mali, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°238, *Central Mali: an Uprising in the Making*, 6 July 2016.

⁵⁷ Crisis Group interviews, security sources, Ouagadougou, January 2017. Al-Mourabitoun was the product of an alliance between the Brigade des Enturbannés, a dissident al-Qaeda group in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar, and part of the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa in 2013. At the end of 2015, al-Mourabitoun rejoined AQIM and in 2017, the two groups joined others to form the Group for Support of Islam and Muslims (GSIM). See Marc Mémier, "AQMI et Al-Mourabitoun, le djihad sahélien réunifié?", *Etudes de l'Institut Français des Relations Internationales (IFRI)*, January 2017.

The traditional and religious authorities of Soum are not particularly involved in the fight against radicalism.⁵⁸ Unlike the neighbouring province of Séno, Soum has fewer Muslim intellectuals and scholars capable of combating the ideas that encourage violence and intolerance.⁵⁹ The absence of a central traditional power, strong rivalries between the three *chefferies* of Djibo, Baraboulé and Tongomayel and their politicisation further complicate their role.⁶⁰ The lack of an alternative narrative and the weakening of religious and traditional leaders are allowing Malam's rhetoric to gain ground.

Soum suffers from a lack of development and infrastructure. In contrast, Dori, capital of Séno province, received more investment because it is the region's administrative centre and because the 11 December national holiday was held there in 2013. Dori houses the regional hospital, while the January 2016 abduction of Ken Elliot, a prominent local Australian-Burkina doctor, reduced health-care provision in Djibo.⁶¹ Finally, Djibo is closer to the Malian border (about 60km) than Dori (about 160km). Soum also lacks political leaders with a national profile, while Séno has long benefitted from the influence of the charismatic former mayor of Dori, the late Hama Arba Diallo.

Soum's vulnerability is also due to historical reasons. The division between the Fulani and the Rimaibé is more marked there than in the neighbouring provinces of Séno and Yagha. It is therefore logical that the challenge to social inequalities should find greater acceptance there. The emirates of Séno and Yagha were more homogeneous than that of Jelgooji (now Soum), which was affected by divisions between families and *chefferies*. In Séno and Yagha, the longer-standing spread of Islam allowed it to better resist external influences.⁶² Geographical factors also play a part, since it is more difficult to find cover on the great plains of Séno and Yagha than in the forest located between Djibo and the Malian border. Finally, animism prevails in eastern and western Burkina, while 95 per cent of the population in the Sahel region follows Islam. All this helps explain why Islamic discourse has had greater traction in the Sahel region.

⁵⁸ Crisis Group interviews, political representatives, Djibo, May 2017.

⁵⁹ Crisis Group interviews, historian, security source, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

⁶⁰ The emir of Djibo's brother is the town's deputy mayor, Oumarou Dicko. Crisis Group interviews, former official, historian, humanitarian worker, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

⁶¹ Crisis Group interviews, local authorities, Djibo, security source, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

⁶² Crisis Group interview, historian, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

III. A Considerable Military Effort

At the end of 2016 and the beginning of 2017, the number of attacks in Soum increased and it looked as though the government might lose control over parts of the North. In the spring of 2017, the security forces began to reassert control, but were unable to eradicate the threat, as shown by the persistence of targeted killings and the increasing number of attacks (see chronology in Appendix C). The slow and problematic reconstruction of the security apparatus following the fall of the Compaoré regime explains the difficulties in providing an adequate response. Strengthening regional cooperation is an essential component of this response.

A. *The Sahel Region under Threat*

In the spring of 2017, the government's decision to send military reinforcements to the North and undertake joint operations with Malian and French forces in Operation Barkhane allowed the Burkina army to gain the upper hand and go some way to reassuring the local population.⁶³ Visits by several ministers to the region sent a strong signal that the government would not withdraw. Even the opposition recognises the "progress in the fight against terrorism".⁶⁴ However, it is not clear to the security forces how they are going to maintain the pressure and ensure their long-term presence.⁶⁵ The rainy season, which makes roads unusable and isolates the population between July and October, has not brought the lull that some observers were expecting.

The capacity of jihadist groups to reform, replace an incapacitated leader and formulate new strategies and courses of action should not be underestimated.⁶⁶ Even if Ansarul Islam has been weakened, it might still be able to take advantage of this breeding ground for recruitment. The remaining members might be even more determined. The possible death of their founder could galvanise them and make them more violent and less inclined to compromise. In the words of one security source: "We need to pay attention to how we kill this monster".⁶⁷ The fear and the threat remain, as shown by the increase in the number of targeted killings and attacks that have used a weapon not seen before in Burkina: improvised explosive devices, used for the first time in August 2017.⁶⁸

⁶³ The *Groupement des forces anti-terroristes* (GFAT), which became the *Groupement des forces de sécurisation du Nord* (GFSN), has between 500 and 1,600 men. Operations Panga (Burkina, Mali, Barkhane) and Bayard (Barkhane) destroyed major logistical bases in Foularé Forest and led to arrests. Crisis Group interviews, diplomats, security sources, humanitarian worker, inhabitant of Soum, Ouagadougou, May 2017; local elected representative, religious leader, Djibo, May 2017. Operation Barkhane, which involved 4,000 French soldiers, followed Operation Serval in July 2014. Based in N'Djamena, Chad, it fights armed terrorist groups in the Sahara-Sahel Belt.

⁶⁴ Crisis Group interview, opposition member, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

⁶⁵ A security source said: "We will be in this quagmire for a long time", while another recognised that "there is a lot to do". Crisis Group interviews, security sources, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

⁶⁶ Crisis Group interview, security source, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

⁶⁷ Crisis Group interview, security source, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

⁶⁸ Some of the people killed in July were members of Ansarul Islam and sought by the security forces. "Meurtres dans le nord du Burkina: Ansarul Islam victime d'une guerre intestinale?", Radio

In addition, sending reinforcements to Soum reduces the number of soldiers available to protect other regions. Armed groups might therefore launch attacks elsewhere. The abduction of civil servants in May 2017 in Oudalan, the attacks on two gendarmerie posts in the West (Djibasso and Toéni) in September 2017, could indicate that the threat has moved to another area, or that new groups might take advantage of the focus on Soum and attack elsewhere.⁶⁹

Ansarul Islam is both a local movement and a group that has contacts, albeit problematic ones, with jihadists active in the Sahel. Although Malam is (or was) close to Hamadoun Kouffa, his links with the new coalition affiliated to al-Qaeda and led by Iyad ag Ghali, the Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin, (Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims, GSIM), are unclear. Some sources say he has disowned this alliance, while others think the GSIM is not interested in the contact because Malam is not powerful enough.⁷⁰ There are reportedly divergences between Kouffa and Malam. The former is reportedly jealous of the increasing power of his “young friend” and did not approve of the killing of Malam’s former comrades because of the prohibition of killing Muslims.⁷¹ The publication on 12 September 2017 of a Facebook page attributed to Ansarul Islam, in which the movement denounced the death of Muslims in the mid-August 2017 terrorist attack in Ouagadougou, suggests there are strong divergences between Ansarul Islam and GSIM. However, this information should be treated with caution, as the Facebook page has not been authenticated.

At the beginning of 2017, Malam seemed to be getting closer to the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and they reportedly carried out a joint attack on Nassoumbou.⁷² Ansarul Islam uses central Mali as a support base and must therefore have contact with groups that operate there.⁷³ Ansarul Islam may be plotting a middle course between two tendencies represented by the GSIM and the ISGS.

Ansarul Islam rarely claims responsibility for its actions and has no official channel of communication. It is difficult to blame the group for all the security incidents in the Sahel region. It does not have a monopoly of violence. Banditry and other criminal activities affect the region. Insecurity is exacerbated by the trafficking of light arms from Algeria, Libya and Mali, where Boulikessi, close to the border, is a staging post.⁷⁴ A Kalashnikov costs CFA300,000 or two heifers.⁷⁵

Another cause for concern is the presence of Koglweogo, civilian self-defence groups, in many places in the country. They defend their communities from criminals, insecurity and cattle theft. When they are composed of local villagers, their

France Internationale (RFI), 26 July 2017; “Burkina: Un véhicule de l’armée saute sur un engin explosif dans le Soum”, Burkina 24 (www.burkina24.com), 23 September 2017.

⁶⁹ The lack of troops will be eased by the return of the battalion deployed in Darfur (about 850 men). Crisis Group interviews, diplomats, security source, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

⁷⁰ Crisis Group interview, security source, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

⁷¹ Crisis Group interviews, security sources, diplomats, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

⁷² Crisis Group interviews, security sources, Ouagadougou, January and May 2017.

⁷³ Crisis Group interview, security source, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

⁷⁴ Crisis Group interview, former civil servant, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

⁷⁵ Crisis Group interviews, local elected representatives, Djibo, May 2017.

presence does not seem to pose a problem.⁷⁶ However, Koglweogo from other regions of Burkina were chased out of Kerboulé (a gold panning site 60km from Djibo) by armed men (possibly connected to Ansarul Islam).⁷⁷ Clashes between Koglweogo and other armed groups cannot be ruled out. The presence of Ruga, groups of Fulani herders armed with hunting guns and responsible for recovering lost or stolen herds, could further complicate the security equation, even though there is currently no evidence that they pose any kind of a risk.⁷⁸

B. *A Security Apparatus under Reconstruction*

The political unrest in Burkina since Blaise Compaoré's fall from power in October 2014 disrupted the security apparatus. Compaoré's diplomacy allowed him to keep many armed groups away from Burkina territory by displaying a benevolent attitude toward some of them. The intelligence service depended more on men and their networks than on institutions. Created in October 2015, the National Intelligence Agency (ANR) is a "big machine [that] has not really got off the ground yet", even though it had begun to centralise intelligence.⁷⁹ The dismantling of the Presidential Security Regiment (RSP), an elite army unit under Compaoré, also disrupted the security apparatus.⁸⁰

In the long term, the main challenge facing the Burkina security forces is adapting to new threats. The asymmetric war against non-state armed groups requires resources and strategies that are very different to those required in conventional warfare. The security forces have become accustomed to life in their barracks rather than going out to fight, as Burkina has never gone to war against another country (except for two brief armed conflicts with Mali in 1974 and 1985) and has not suffered a civil war. Promoting a culture of combat and sacrifice, the exact opposite of "a ceremonial army", is bound to take time.⁸¹ However, Burkina soldiers have had experience of combat during deployments in external operations in sometimes difficult terrain (Darfur, northern Mali).

Two elements that are lacking but are indispensable in the fight against armed groups are air power and intelligence. Unarmed Burkina reconnaissance planes are

⁷⁶ For example, the localities of Pobe Mengao, Aribinda and Tongomayel. Crisis Group interview, traditional authority, Djibo, May 2017. Created in the 1990s to protect the environment, the Koglweogo are now self-defence groups that combat insecurity, crime and banditry. Since 2015, they have become more numerous and spread particularly to the centre, the North region and southern and eastern Burkina.

⁷⁷ Crisis Group interviews, local authorities, local elected representative, Djibo, security source, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

⁷⁸ According to one security source, members of the Ruga were arrested during the operations conducted in spring 2017. Crisis Group telephone interview, security source, June 2017.

⁷⁹ Crisis Group interview, security source, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

⁸⁰ The arms held by the RSP have not always been appropriately redistributed. One security source says that at the time of the terrorist attack on Ouagadougou in January 2016, one of the reasons the Burkina security forces were not able to launch an attack on the Hotel Splendid was because they did not have night vision spectacles. Those held by the RSP were put into storage instead of being distributed to units that would need them. Crisis Group interview, security source, Ouagadougou, January 2016.

⁸¹ Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

only able to signal a threat: in a remote area, it would need several hours to drive to a given place. Combat helicopters are also necessary. But in addition to equipment, it is training that is really needed. The armed forces deployed in the North also lack the motorbikes they need to move around the bush as easily as their enemies. There is still no intelligence system. As long as the armed forces are not able to work among the local population like the jihadist groups do, the latter will have an advantage.⁸²

In addition, the security forces suffer from more deep-seated problems. The generation gap undermines cohesion. Ordinary soldiers, young and dissatisfied with their material conditions, believe the hierarchy still supports the old regime, does not have the motivation to leave their air-conditioned offices and is incapable of tackling the new threats. Young non-commissioned officers deplore the weakness of the general staff's communications and its limited use of new technologies, in a context in which communication is key to defeating terrorism.⁸³

Human resources management is another weakness: there are not enough administration officers, they do not have the necessary skills and this causes frustration especially with regard to promotion.⁸⁴ The army hierarchy is top-heavy with too many high-ranking colonels and not enough junior officers.⁸⁵ Finally, the historic rivalry between the police force and the gendarmerie undermines their effectiveness. These two corps are deployed in both urban and rural areas and their duties overlap.⁸⁶ All these weaknesses, which should be dealt with as part of security sector reform, partly explain why the security forces are finding it difficult to counter the threat posed by Ansarul Islam.

C. Regional and International Cooperation

Adapting to cross-border threats involves strengthening regional and international cooperation. While the Burkina military recognise that France's assistance is indispensable, they want "to sort things out themselves", because "nobody is going to die in [their] place".⁸⁷ One sector of public opinion does not trust France. Some people accuse it of playing a double game vis-à-vis armed groups, particularly with regard to the Tuareg of northern Mali. The result is a desire to diversify partnerships and get help from the United States, Germany, Russia and Eastern Europe.

Burkina has strengthened regional cooperation with Mali and Niger. They have finally formalised the right of hot pursuit but this can pose problems because of sometimes inefficient communications and the risk of clashes between armies.⁸⁸ The region's countries, encouraged by France, are trying to strengthen regional

⁸² Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian worker, security sources, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

⁸³ Crisis Group interview, security source, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

⁸⁴ Crisis Group interviews, security source, Ouagadougou, January and May 2017.

⁸⁵ Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

⁸⁶ Crisis Group interviews, security sources, Ouagadougou, January 2016, January and May 2017. The tension between police officers and gendarmes within the Republican Security and Protection Group, responsible for presidential security, illustrates this distrust. "Burkina Faso: tensions entre policiers et gendarmes de la garde présidentielle", *Africanews.fr*, 7 August 2017.

⁸⁷ Crisis Group interviews, security sources, Ouagadougou, January and May 2017.

⁸⁸ The unwritten rule states that a neighbouring army should not go more than 40km beyond the border. Crisis Group interviews, security sources, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

cooperation through a G5 Sahel (Burkina, Mali, Niger, Chad, Mauritania) joint force project. However, Burkina officers are not very enthusiastic about it. They view it as “an endless round of meetings”, according to one security source.⁸⁹ Burkina believes that Chad and Mauritania are too far away to be worried about the same threats.⁹⁰ Besides, funding of the G5 force has not yet been secured.⁹¹

The tripartite dynamic between Burkina, Mali and Niger that is emerging with the plan to deploy one of the three components of the G5 force in the three borders zone, known as Liptako-Gourma, provokes greater optimism. The Burkina leadership believes it is more effective to work in three rather than five. The force will be deployed in Liptako-Gourma but will not include Soum, which remains a Burkina-Mali problem.⁹²

The Burkina military are also sceptical about the effectiveness of the UN mission in Mali, MINUSMA. They feel its mandate is inadequate.⁹³ The creation of the G5 joint force raises the question of coordination with MINUSMA, which already has more than 15,000 soldiers and police officers and costs close to \$1 billion per year. Moreover, complex overlapping of remits runs the risk of undermining the force's effectiveness. Besides, the vagueness of the joint force's mandate, targeting “terrorist groups” and “other organised criminal groups”, further complicates the task.

Cooperation is not going as well with Mali as it is with Niger. Some sectors of the Burkina security apparatus are irritated with their Malian neighbour, whom they accuse of not being effective enough in the fight against the armed groups on their territory, leading to the conflict there spilling over into Burkina.⁹⁴ One security source deplored the presence of certain armed groups either close to or supported by Bamako along the border with Burkina.⁹⁵ The difficult relations between Burkina and Mali date from the Compaoré era, when members of Malian armed groups, starting with the leader of Ansar Dine, the Tuareg Iyad ag Ghali, were allowed to move freely in Ouagadougou. The Burkina military believe their Malian counterparts

⁸⁹ Crisis Group interview, security source, Ouagadougou, May 2017. The plan for a G5 Sahel joint force was officially announced at the Bamako summit at the start of February 2017. The aim would be to combat insecurity and terrorist armed groups in the Sahel. The five G5 countries were to each provide 1,000 men, deployed along three border zones: Mali-Mauritania, Mali-Burkina-Niger and Chad-Niger. The G5, which was formed in 2014, aims to provide a regional response to a regional problem and to “africanise” security.

⁹⁰ Crisis Group interviews, security sources, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

⁹¹ Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Ouagadougou, May 2017. The budget proposed for the joint force is €423 million, but this figure could be revised downwards. Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Paris, July 2017. The European Union has promised €50 million and G5 members have agreed to contribute €10 million each. In addition to operational and technical assistance, France has promised €8 million.

⁹² Crisis Group interviews, security sources, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

⁹³ Crisis Group interviews, security sources, Ouagadougou, September 2016, January and May 2017. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2359 (21 June 2017) supported the creation of a joint G5 force to improve security and enable MINUSMA to fulfil its mandate. Resolution 2364 (29 June 2017) prolonged MINUSMA's mandate and provided for cooperation, coordination and information sharing between the G5 force and the UN mission.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Crisis Group interview, security source, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

are “lazy” and joined the army to get an income and not to defend the country.⁹⁶ Conversely, they are well disposed toward Niger, because it deploys the resources necessary to prevent armed groups from proliferating on its territory. The Burkina military praise their Nigerien counterparts for their proactive approach and effectiveness.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Crisis Group interviews, security sources, Ouagadougou, January and May 2017.

⁹⁷ Crisis Group interviews, security sources, Ouagadougou, May 2017. The good understanding between Burkina and Niger is also based on the special relationship between the Nigerien president, Mahamadou Issoufou, and the president of the Burkina National Assembly, Salif Diallo, who died at the end of August 2017.

IV. Formulate a Global and Enduring Response

At the start of 2017, after months of denial, the Burkina authorities finally understood the need to go beyond military action and formulate a global response to the crisis. They launched an emergency development program for the Sahel region aimed at building infrastructure and reducing poverty. However, these development efforts will not be enough to resolve the crisis, the causes of which are local and deeply rooted in the structure of Fulani society in Soum. An understanding of the importance of the following measures could help to provide a more effective response.

Formulate responses that take into account the social and local dimensions of the crisis. Ansarul Islam's ideology is based on its challenge to a social order that breeds frustration and conflict. The government should not seek to disturb socio-cultural dynamics or to upend a centuries-old social order. It is perhaps better to focus on encouraging local actors to find solutions adapted to a crisis that is deeply rooted in local circumstances. The government and its international partners will not find solutions to questions that pertain to the private life of northern Burkina Faso's society. They can at best encourage intercommunal and inter-generational dialogue that may help them identify solutions to their own crisis.

Reduce the gulf between security forces and authorities and the local population. Strengthening the military presence will not be truly effective for as long as local people refuse to collaborate with the security forces. In the short term, the latter should prioritise the development of an intelligence system and gain access to the community, for example, by distributing mobile phones more generously to enable individuals and units to communicate more easily and by making a special effort to protect them.⁹⁸ Deploying Fulfulde-speaking troops and civil servants would also help to reduce the language barrier.

In the long term, distrust could be eased if more Fulani were recruited into the security forces and the civil service. It is not necessary to impose quotas or to adopt a policy of positive discrimination, which would give unwanted ethnic overtones to the initiative. However, for example, the government could encourage recruitment by making the entrance examinations more accessible, while remembering that the Fulani have not traditionally had a vocation for joining the security forces or the civil service.⁹⁹

Boosting the military's civic activities would help to show that the security forces can make a useful contribution and go some way to reducing public distrust in them.¹⁰⁰ Finally, arrests should be carried out according to due procedure and should respect human rights. Abusive behaviour by the security forces and civil servants – racketeering, intimidation, arbitrary arrests, physical abuse – must be punished more severely.

⁹⁸ Crisis Group interviews, security sources, Ouagadougou, January and May 2017.

⁹⁹ Crisis Group interview, security source, Ouagadougou, May 2017. A resident of Soum who wants to enter the entrance examinations for the army or the gendarmerie must go to Dori or Kaya respectively, both of which are located about 20km from Djibo.

¹⁰⁰ Crisis Group interview, security source, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

Regulate religious discourse to combat intolerant and hateful statements, an area where religious and traditional authorities could play a key role. There is a need to improve understanding of the religious landscape in order to fight against intolerant and hateful statements, give more support to Islamic education and invest in the training of imams and Muslim scholars in order to provide them with tools to combat ideas that encourage violence and intolerance. The legitimacy of religious and traditional leaders is sometimes challenged so this is also about ensuring they are sufficiently representative, avoiding any impression that they support the government or are in its pay and ensuring that young people feel they defend their interests. The authorities could prioritise the establishment in Djibo of a section of the Union Fraternelle des Croyants, an association based in Dori that promotes religious tolerance and dialogue.

Place greater emphasis in the emergency program for the Sahel region on promoting livestock breeding, improving justice provision and fighting corruption.¹⁰¹ The perception that the government is doing nothing to support livestock breeding, the region's main economic activity, increases alienation.¹⁰² As herders are mostly Fulani, this feeling could take on an ethnic connotation. For example, it should increase the size of grazing areas and the number of wells and improve cattle tracks.¹⁰³ Infrastructure should also be at the heart of development policies. For example, the construction of a regional hospital in Djibo, on the model of the one in Dori, would improve health care in the provincial capital. The failings of the judiciary and the corruption in the public administration are grievances often expressed by the public. Doing more to address these two issues would send a message that the government can have a useful and positive impact on the daily life of the inhabitants of the Sahel region.

Strengthen judicial and police cooperation between Mali and Burkina, so that the authorities of these countries can be informed when one of their nationals is arrested in another country.¹⁰⁴ It is not enough to arrest members of jihadist groups. It is also necessary to open investigations across several countries and then bring perpetrators to justice. This will prevent them exploiting the lack of coordination between countries and slipping through the net. Although police cooperation has improved, a lot remains to be done with regard to the judiciary.¹⁰⁵

Moreover, the security forces deployed in the North urgently need more motorbikes in order to move around the bush more easily and better means of communication to improve the circulation of information. The Burkina armed forces could also do more to improve their reporting to national public opinion about the progress they are making.

¹⁰¹ "Programme d'urgence pour le Sahel au Burkina Faso (PUS-BF), 2017-2020", final document, June 2017, copy supplied to Crisis Group.

¹⁰² There is a widespread feeling in Burkina (and in neighbouring countries) that herding is the poor relation of development policies even though it contributes a lot to GDP. Crisis Group interviews, Fulani representatives, Ouagadougou, October 2016.

¹⁰³ Crisis Group interview, religious leader, Djibo, May 2017.

¹⁰⁴ Crisis Group interviews, security sources, Ouagadougou, January and May 2017.

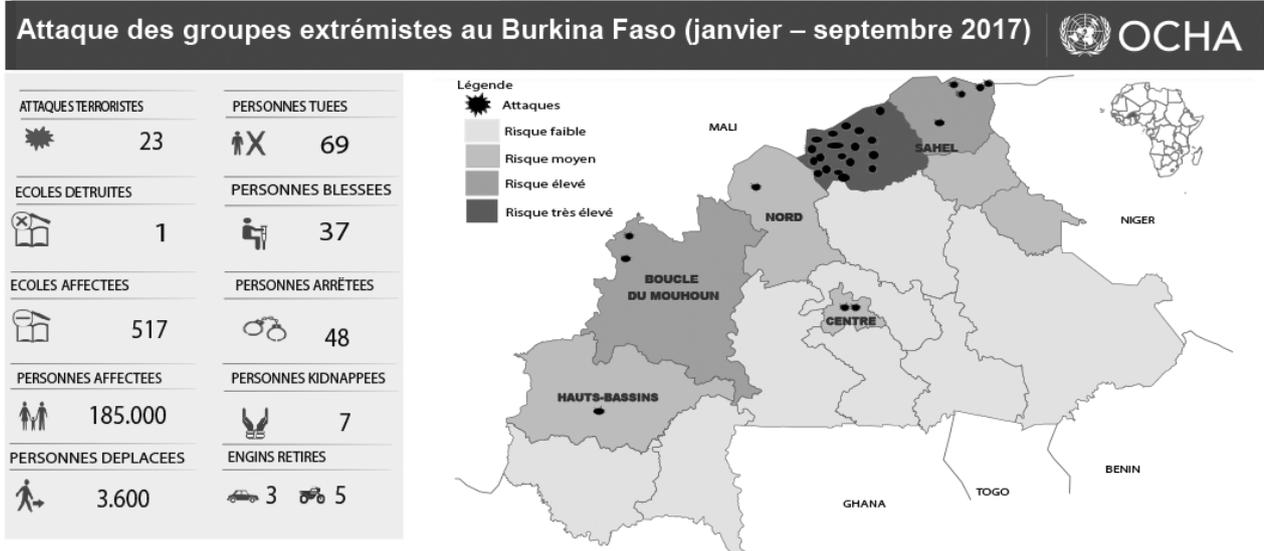
¹⁰⁵ Crisis Group interview, security source, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

V. Conclusion

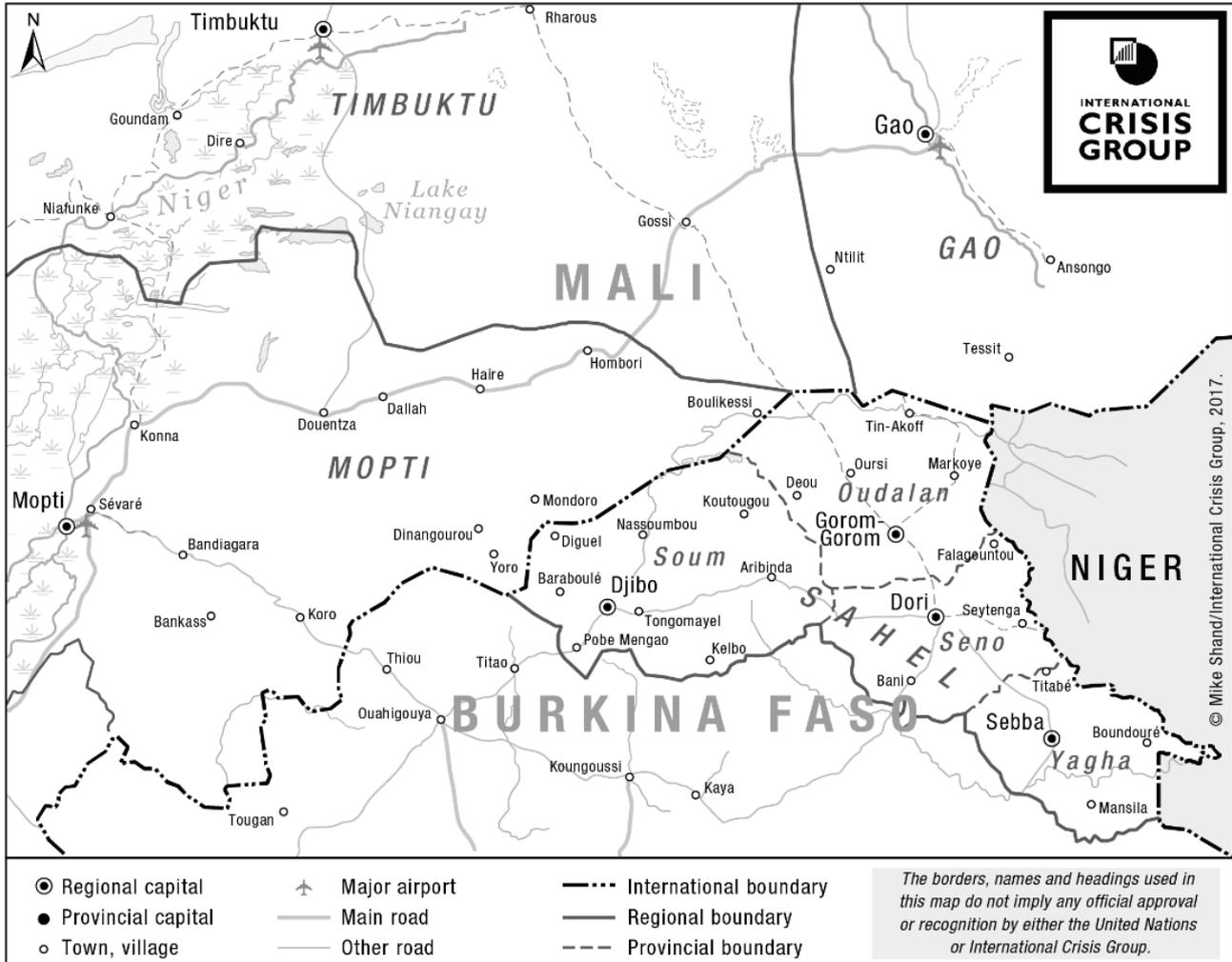
It is still too early to assess the long-term effectiveness of the government's response. But, already, the lull expected in the wake of the rainy season (July to October), which should have impeded movement and reduced attacks by Ansarul Islam, has not materialised. Several lethal attacks took place in northern Burkina in July, August and September. The weakening of this armed group or the death of its founder will not be enough to resolve the security and social crisis in northern Burkina. The crisis will last for as long as the deep roots that permitted its growth remain and could indeed spread to other provinces if nothing is done.

Ougadougou/Dakar, 12 October 2017

Appendix A: Map of Burkina Faso



Appendix B: Map of the Mali-Burkina Faso Border Zone



Appendix C: Chronology of Security Incidents in Burkina Faso since 2015

4 April 2015

Five masked attackers kidnapped a Romanian national at the Tambao mine in Oudalan province, Sahel region, wounding a gendarme and a security agent.

9 October 2015

A group of unidentified armed men attacked a gendarmerie station in Samorogouan, Kéné Dougou province, Hauts-Bassins region, killing three gendarmes and one civilian.

27 November 2015

Unidentified gunmen, possibly suspected jihadists, attacked an armoured van transporting money from Inata Gold Mine, Soum province, Sahel region, killing one security guard.

15 January 2016

Gunmen attacked a gendarmerie post in Tin-Akoff, Oudalan province, killing a police officer and a civilian. Unidentified men abducted an Australian couple in Djibo, Soum province, Sahel region. The wife was later released in February. AQIM claimed the kidnapping. The same day, a terrorist attack hit Ouagadougou city centre: armed men opened fire at customers in Splendid Hotel and Cappuccino coffee shop, killing 30 including several foreigners. AQIM and al-Mourabitoun claimed responsibility for the attack.

17 May 2016

Armed men attacked a police station in Koutougou, Soum province, Sahel region, killing two police officers.

31 May 2016

Armed men attacked a police station in Intangom, Oudalan province, Sahel region, killing three police officers.

1 September 2016

Gunmen attacked a customs office in Markoye, Oudalan province, killing a customs agent and wounding three civilians. The Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) claimed the attack.

12 October 2016

Armed men attacked a military outpost in Intangom, Oudalan province, killing four soldiers and a civilian. Security forces mistakenly killed two civilians. Attackers reportedly fled to Mali after the attack, later claimed by ISGS.

31 October 2016

Two municipal employees were murdered in Ariel, Soum province.

12 November 2016

A Muslim preacher was shot dead in Djibo, a municipal councillor was killed in Petega (30km from Djibo), and another councillor escaped a killing attempt in Soboulé (40km from Djibo).

16 December 2016

Gunmen launched an attack on a gendarmerie in Nassoumbou, Soum province, killing twelve soldiers. The attack was later claimed by Ansarul Islam through an unverified Facebook page.

January – February 2017

Gunmen stormed several village schools and threatened teachers. Some teachers fled and certain schools closed. Judges and court officers were also threatened.

1 January 2017

Unidentified attackers killed an imam in Sibé, Soum province. He was trying to convince youths to leave Ansarul Islam.

4 February 2017

Nassoumbou municipal councillor, who had received threats and sought refuge in neighbouring Loroum province, was killed with his five-year-old son in Yorsala village, Loroum province, North region.

28 February 2017

Ansarul Islam members attacked police stations in Baraboulé and Tongomayel, Soum province. Diguel prefecture and city hall were also ransacked.

3 March 2017

Salif Badini, school teacher in Soum province, was killed by unidentified gunmen.

27 March – 10 April 2017

Transborder Panga operation regrouping troops from Burkina Faso, Mali and France. The operation aimed at chasing out insurgents at the Mali/Burkina border and particularly around the Foularé forest. Two militants were killed and eight others arrested while several other suspects were delivered to the authorities.

27 April 2017

Two civil servants were abducted in Tin-Akoff, Oudalan province. They were released a few days later but the kidnappers kept their vehicle.

29-30 April 2017

Bayard Operation: Elements of the Barkhane force conducted a second counter-insurgency operation in the Foularé forest. Twenty militants were killed and a large quantity of material and weapons are seized.

13 May 2017

Gunmen afoot attacked the village of Djahoye, Oudalan Province, Sahel, killing one villager and wounding another.

27 May 2017

Armed men killed a former police officer and another individual in Djibo, Soum province.

11 June 2017

Gunmen killed a farmer and a village councillor – both alleged informants – in Basnéré, Nayala province, Boucle du Mouhoun region.

21 June 2017

The UN Security Council unanimously approved Resolution 2359 authorising the deployment of the future G5 Sahel joint force to fight violent extremism and organised crime in the region.

25 June 2017

Unidentified gunmen killed five people that were known to the authorities for violent extremism activities in Ndidja, Sibé and Neyba villages, Soum province.

27 June 2017

A Facebook page (not formally attributed to Ansarul Islam) announced Jafar Dicko to be the new leader of Ansarul Islam, suggesting the possible death of Malam Ibrahim Dicko.

27 July 2017

A municipal councillor, his brother and his son were killed in Takeo, Soum province; the assailants also stole cattle.

13 August 2017

Terrorist attack in Ouagadougou city center. Armed men opened fire at customers of the Aziz Instabul Café, killing nineteen people, half of them foreigners. The attack was not claimed although the modus operandi points to JNIM.

17 August 2017

A military vehicle patrolling the north hit an IED – the first time such incident takes place in Burkina – killing three Burkina soldiers.

29 August 2017

Armed individuals shot in the air in Damba, Soum province. They stole cell phones and motorbikes without causing casualties.

31 August 2017

Armed individuals attacked a gendarmerie outpost in Djibasso, Boucle du Mouhoun region, killing a customs officer.

3 September 2017

The Peace Corps decided to evacuate all its 124 volunteers amid the worsening security situation.

4 September 2017

Armed individuals attacked the town of Kourfadji, Soum province, kidnapping two individuals in order to exchange prisoners.

7 September 2017

Armed individuals attacked Diguel's town hall, Soum province, kidnapping a municipal worker and releasing him a few days later.

12 September 2017

A Facebook page not formally attributed to Ansarul Islam published a post condemning the death of Muslims during the August Ouagadougou attack, therefore distancing themselves from JNIM.

15 September 2017

A village chief, an imam as well as a third individual were killed in the Baraboulé area, Soum province.

23 September 2017

Unidentified attackers torched the police station in the Mentao refugee camp, causing important material damage but no casualties. A military vehicle was targeted by an IED near the police station, injuring seven officers. A man was also assassinated by armed men on motorbikes.

26 September 2017

Armed men ambushed a gendarmerie convoy near Tongomayel, Soum province, after it was hit by an IED. Two gendarmes were killed.

28 September 2017

Armed individuals attacked a gendarmerie outpost in Toéni, Boucle du Mouhoun region. In Djibo, Soum province, security forces killed a municipal councillor suspected to be linked with terror groups. In Touronata, Soum province, men in uniforms killed four men.

2 October 2017

Armed individuals attacked the gendarmerie outpost in Nassoumbou, Soum province, causing material damages but no casualties.

4 October 2017

Armed men attacked a gendarmerie post in Inata, Soum province, causing material damage and injuring a gendarme.

Appendix D: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 70 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lord Mark Malloch-Brown. Its Vice Chair is Ayo Obe, a Legal Practitioner, Columnist and TV Presenter in Nigeria.

Crisis Group's President & CEO, Jean-Marie Guéhenno, served as the UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations from 2000-2008, and in 2012, as Deputy Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States on Syria. He left his post as Deputy Joint Special Envoy to chair the commission that prepared the white paper on French defence and national security in 2013.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in ten other locations: Bishkek, Bogota, Dakar, Kabul, Islamabad, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Algiers, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Hong Kong, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Mexico City, New Delhi, Rabat, Sanaa, Tblisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

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Appendix E: Reports and Briefings on Africa since 2014

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Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, Special Report N°1, 14 March 2016 (also available in Arabic and French).

Seizing the Moment: From Early Warning to Early Action, Special Report N°2, 22 June 2016.

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