



Burkina Faso: Stopping the Spiral of Violence

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Principal Findings

What's new? In Burkina Faso, violence is intensifying as a result of a multi-faceted rural crisis. Armed groups are proliferating, including bandits, jihadists and self-defence movements. In 2019, Burkina Faso suffered more jihadist attacks than any other Sahelian country.

Why does it matter? The country is locked in a perilous downward spiral. Jihadists are gaining ground by exploiting rural communities' frustrations. In turn, the government's largely military response often entails abuses by security forces and self-defence groups that fuel local, community-based violence that provides a fertile recruiting ground for diverse armed groups.

What should be done? The government should limit both its use of force and the role of self-defence groups in its counter-insurgency efforts, and develop a more integrated approach to security. In the longer term, resolving land disputes that often drive local conflicts is a priority in tackling the crisis in the Burkina countryside.

Executive Summary

In Burkina Faso, violence is escalating amid a governance crisis across rural areas. Jihadists returning from neighbouring Mali, most of whom are Burkinabè, gained a foothold in 2016 by exploiting the frustration and anger of rural communities. Self-defence groups that villagers began forming in 2014 have fuelled local community-based violence, especially since 2019 in the Centre-Nord and Soum regions. The state's recent call for volunteers to fight militants could amplify this phenomenon. The government's largely military response, including the use of self-defence groups over which it exercises limited control, has often led to abuses that pushes those targeted into jihadists' arms. To stop the downward spiral, the authorities should limit the role of vigilantes in counter-insurgency efforts, introduce better checks to guard against abuses and develop an integrated approach to security. In the longer term, resolving land disputes that often underpin rural conflicts is a priority.

The Burkina countryside is undergoing a multifaceted crisis. Following former President Blaise Compaoré's ouster in October 2014, the state's already limited capacity to maintain order in rural areas has further weakened. Villagers increasingly distrust elites, both local and urban. The absence of any form of regulation across much of the countryside has led to a rise in banditry and land disputes, as well as the emergence of self-defence groups, notably the Koglweogo ("guardians of the bush" in the local Mossi language).

In this context, Islamist militants have expanded their footprint across rural areas. In 2019, Burkina Faso suffered more jihadist attacks than any other Sahelian country. Militants are a motley crowd of insurgents motivated by local concerns around a small core of ideologues. They include farmers and herders who are victims of land-related injustices or racketeering, bandits who bring experience in weaponry and fighting, gold miners seeking protection, and stigmatised populations. Militants extend their reach notably by exploiting local conflicts that are linked to the multifaceted rural crisis and often involve self-defence groups.

The state's response thus far has fallen short and even contributed to the deteriorating security environment. The authorities have been too quick to blame the former ruling elites' supposed manoeuvrings for the crisis and too slow to recognise its endogenous nature and sheer scale. Unprepared to deal with the challenge, they have largely resorted to military force, with some limited support from French troops. Counter-terrorism operations have often generated abuse against civilians and led to the killing rather than arrest of suspects. The authorities have reportedly thwarted several attacks since December 2019, but overall have not curbed the threat. Their response has pushed those who feel unjustly victimised by state violence, particularly within the Fulani ethnic group, to join jihadist groups.

To compensate for the security forces' shortcomings, particularly in terms of territorial coverage, the Burkina authorities have encouraged the establishment of community-based self-defence groups and, more recently, announced they would recruit "homeland defence volunteers". Such measures could prove counterproductive if the arming of civilians, which is always difficult to supervise, aggravates local divisions and gives rise to further violence.

The attempt to reconcile security and development through the Sahel Emergency Plan (Plan d'urgence Sahel, PUS), launched by the government in 2017 to boost economic and social development in the area, in itself is unlikely to be sufficient or address the political causes of Burkina Faso's insurgencies. Yet thus far neither the government nor the country's international partners have offered any alternatives.

The Burkinabè authorities should integrate military action into a more comprehensive approach aimed at addressing the political roots of the crisis. The state could safeguard social cohesion in the countryside, which currently risks being torn apart, by combating the stigmatisation of certain communities, promoting local conflict resolution – including community-based peace making and negotiation with some militants – and by demonstrating the value of its presence.

- ❑ In the short term, the authorities should limit the use of force and the involvement of self-defence groups in counter-insurgency operations. They should ease prison overcrowding and revitalise the penal system. This would rebuild confidence among the security forces in the justice system's ability to bring suspects to justice and reduce their tendency to kill rather than arrest alleged jihadists. Burkina Faso's partners should encourage its security forces to strengthen and enforce internal control mechanisms to limit the abuses that play to jihadists' advantage.
- ❑ In the medium term, the authorities should set up a public body to design and implement a security strategy throughout the country that combines prevention, mitigation and post-crisis stabilisation, with precise measures tailored to each local context. Such a body would balance out the state's crisis management approach by offering a range of non-military responses which it would coordinate with military action, which remains essential. The body could react quickly and overcome what are often inefficient responses by individual ministries. It should report directly to the president so as to benefit from strong political support. Its director should sit on the National Security Council and coordinate different aspects of the state's response. International partners should support the creation of such a body.
- ❑ In the longer term, the government should initiate structural reforms to heal rural divides. Notably, it should revise the 2009 Rural Land Law to better reconcile different populations' interests and ease tensions between so-called indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. It should also review its policy on protected areas, so that it better benefits local communities. Finally, it should review the governance of nomadic areas, particularly with an eye to promoting Fulanis' social and political inclusion.

Dakar/Brussels, 24 February 2020

Burkina Faso: Stopping the Spiral of Violence

I. Introduction

Violence has engulfed Burkina Faso in the past four years. Since the first attack claimed by a jihadist group in the country's western region in October 2015, various armed groups (either jihadist or not) have been responsible for a further 553 acts of violence against civilians and self-defence groups.¹ The situation is worsening despite the counter-insurgency efforts of the Burkinabè state and its partners: 66 per cent of the violent incidents took place in 2019.² In October 2017, Crisis Group published its first report on the uprising in northern Burkina Faso, mainly in Soum, in connection with the Malian crisis.³ Over the following two years, violence has plagued the Sahel, East and Centre-North regions and is now spreading elsewhere, particularly in the North and the Boucle du Mouhoun regions.⁴

The Burkinabè authorities have tended to underestimate the threat. For many years, they considered the problem to be rooted exclusively in Libya and then Mali. They also claimed that it was abetted by networks close to the country's ousted president, Blaise Compaoré, who has been exiled in Côte d'Ivoire since 2014. The former ruling clique certainly did act as intermediaries with these jihadist groups, which protected it in return.⁵ In that period, however, the small jihadist groups specialised in kidnappings, a far cry from today's rebellions that are spreading across the sub-region. In August 2014, after Compaoré had committed Burkina Faso to the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the jihadists began launching attacks on the Burkinabè peacekeeping contingent.⁶

Faced with outbreaks of violence across an unprecedentedly wide geographical area, the authorities have only just become aware that Burkinabè fighters form the nucleus of jihadist groups, which are therefore an endogenous rather than an exter-

¹ "Burkina Faso: trois gendarmes tués lors d'une attaque près de la frontière malienne", *Jeune Afrique*, 9 October 2015. The number of attacks on civilians and defence and security forces is escalating rapidly: one in 2015, 38 in 2016, 66 in 2017, 173 in 2018 and 349 in 2019. Data retrieved from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) website on 29 January 2020.

² Data from ACLED's website.

³ See Crisis Group Africa Report N°254, *The Social Roots of Jihadist Violence in Burkina Faso's North*, 12 October 2017.

⁴ Burkina Faso is divided into thirteen regions, 45 provinces and 351 departments.

⁵ Members of Compaoré's inner circle admit to holding regular discussions with jihadist groups, at least up to the launch of Operation Serval, which killed many of their interlocutors. Crisis Group interview, former adviser to President Compaoré, December 2019. Ibrahim X, a former Al-Mourabitoun militant, also stated that Burkinabè authorities under Compaoré supported his movement. Record of the Malian police interview of Ibrahim X, June 2015, consulted by Crisis Group.

⁶ "Deux morts et des blessés parmi les soldats burkinabè de la Minusma suite à une attaque suicide", press release, army director of communications and public relations, 17 August 2014.

nal phenomenon.⁷ The authorities continue to believe, however, that there has been meddling behind the scenes, particularly in the run-up to the 2020 presidential and legislative elections.⁸

The jihadist threat is more the consequence of the country's problems than the cause. This report examines how the multifaceted crisis in Burkina Faso's rural areas has contributed to the spread of armed conflict. It continues Crisis Group's series of reports on Burkina Faso and the evolution of jihadist movements in the central Sahel region.⁹ The analysis is based on interviews conducted between July and October 2019 with government officials, politicians, civil society representatives, members of the security forces and Koglweogo self-defence groups, experts, diplomats and Burkina Faso's various international partners.

⁷ The state has twice distributed a "list of individuals under investigation for participating in a terrorist plot". Judging by the places of birth and residence of those listed, most are Burkinabè. Documents consulted by Crisis Group.

⁸ The ruling party's acting president stated in November 2019: "We know some of the names of those who attacked us today. We know that these people lived in our country, in local hotels, and have connections with certain officials. Some come from here but others aren't from Burkina Faso". Interview with Simon Compaoré on 3TV, 16 November 2019.

⁹ See Crisis Group Africa Report N°238, *Central Mali: An Uprising in the Making?*, 6 July 2016; and Crisis Group Commentary, "Forced out of Towns in the Sahel, Africa's Jihadists Go Rural", 11 January 2017. This crisis was outlined in Crisis Group Report, *The Social Roots of Jihadist Violence in Burkina Faso's North*, op. cit.

II. Post-insurgency Challenges for a Weakened State

The Burkinabé state's authority is under extreme pressure, partly due to the gradual disintegration of the political system put in place by Compaoré (1987-2014). Following the popular uprising that ousted him from power in 2014, a section of the population is challenging – not for the first time – the legitimacy of the country's elites and its institutions.¹⁰ Although it is perceived as an essentially urban phenomenon, this insurgency has also laid bare internal divisions in rural Burkina, helping jihadist groups gain a foothold in these areas. These groups initially appeared to pose a threat from across the border in Mali, but they have now found a new breeding ground in Burkina Faso.

The 2014 uprising remains incomplete, according to some.¹¹ It may have brought an end to Compaoré's rule, but the political class and its methods of governance remain largely unchanged. Most of today's government officials already held their positions under Compaoré, whose semi-authoritarian power structure left little room for opposition. The uprising signalled a strong repudiation of the political elites in Burkina Faso, and those currently in government have failed to dispel this sentiment.¹² According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), an NGO that collects and analyses data about armed conflict, Burkina Faso has seen 442 protests and strikes since November 2015, compared to 244 such incidents between 2000 and 2013.¹³ Public-sector unions in urban areas are constantly active, putting the government under sustained pressure.¹⁴ Although President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré was elected with 53 per cent of the vote at the end of 2015, his honeymoon seems to be almost over.¹⁵ Citizens are increasingly frustrated with the government and official institutions.¹⁶

The October 2014 insurgency also had a generational component. The young people who spearheaded the movement still identify themselves as guardians of "the spirit of the insurgency". This association with the Sankarist tradition gives greater resonance to their protests.¹⁷ Although these young people struggle to maintain unity,

¹⁰ Other instances of Burkina Faso's population rejecting the rulers' legitimacy include the 1966 uprising against President Maurice Yaméogo and the 1983 Sankarist Revolution.

¹¹ Bruno Jaffré, *L'insurrection inachevée. Burkina Faso 2014* (Paris, 2019).

¹² After the journalist Norbert Zongo was killed in December 1998, there have been regular periods of social tension, especially in urban areas. The crisis that hit the country in 2010 and 2011 revealed the discontent among politicians, economic actors and security officials. See Crisis Group Africa Report N°205, *Burkina Faso: With or Without Compaoré, Times of Uncertainty*, 22 July 2013.

¹³ Data from ACLED's website.

¹⁴ Unions have always been politically influential in Burkina Faso, but the current intensity of civil protests and tensions is unprecedented. See Crisis Group Commentary, "Tackling Burkina Faso's Insurgencies and Unrest", 28 January 2019.

¹⁵ Zéphirin Diabré, the runner-up in the election, received just 29.65 per cent of the vote.

¹⁶ In June 2019, trust in government (30 per cent), the National Assembly (30 per cent) and political parties (18 per cent) had fallen compared to June 2018, according to a survey by the Centre for Democratic Governance (Centre pour la gouvernance démocratique, CGD). "Sondage 'Présimètre': Ce que les Burkinabè pensent de la gouvernance nationale", Lefaso.net, 15 June 2019.

¹⁷ Sankarism revives the spirit of the "democratic and popular revolution" led in 1983 by Thomas Sankara. This movement sought to give power back to the people through participatory democracy. The youth organisations that joined the 2014 uprising include Balai citoyen, Front de résistance ci-

they no longer accept being excluded from decision-making and apply relentless pressure on the ruling class.

President Compaoré controlled the countryside through a web of personal alliances, enabling him to neutralise threats to his authority and to defuse underlying community-based tensions. Different sectors of the local elite – elected officials and members of the ruling party at the time, the Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP), traditional chiefs, and economic actors – preserved the political status quo by alternately repressing and co-opting dissidents, in direct contact with the central authorities.¹⁸ While it was accompanied by investments in rural infrastructure, this strategy maintained the illusion of social cohesion and rural stability. In March 2012, the exclusion of key government figures (suspected of overshadowing the president's younger brother) weakened these networks and diminished the state's capacity to ease tensions in outlying areas.¹⁹

The 2014 uprising undermined this system and further fragmented the state's presence in rural areas. In November 2014, special delegations replaced the municipal and regional councils that were instrumental in managing land-related issues. The insurgency brought to the surface festering rural discontent with the state and its local representatives (71 per cent of the country's population live in rural areas). People openly accuse these government representatives and even some traditional and municipal authorities of exploiting their positions, and sometimes colluding in the buying and selling of land.²⁰ Increasingly sidelined, these important figures who used to control access to land and resolve land disputes at a local and state level are now less able to act as arbiters.²¹ The emergence of the Koglweogo self-defence groups at the same time has further eroded their influence.²² State authority in the countryside is dwindling just as tensions are becoming increasingly violent.²³

The government often chooses to ignore that the country's problems are home-grown. It interprets them in light of the political crisis that boiled over in 2014 but continues to simmer despite the reconciliation process under way. Since 2016, the authorities have blamed the former ruling party, the CDP, for the unrest in the coun-

toyenne and Organisation démocratique de la jeunesse. See Sten Hagberg, "Thousands of New San-karas: Resistance and Struggle in Burkina Faso", *Africa Spectrum*, vol. 50, no. 3 (2015).

¹⁸ Crisis Group interviews, prominent figures from various regions of the country, Ouagadougou, July and September 2019.

¹⁹ Salif Diallo, Compaoré's former minister and adviser, and subsequently president of the National Assembly (2016-2017), maintained a network of influential contacts across Burkina who could help defuse tensions when needed. See Alex Thurston, "Escalating Conflicts in Burkina Faso", Rosa Luxembourg Stiftung, 25 September 2019. François Compaoré has enjoyed greater political and economic power in the shadow of his brother Blaise, leading to a dispute with Diallo. See "François Compaoré, le 'petit président' du Burkina Faso", *Le Monde*, 4 December 2017.

²⁰ See Nana Patiende Pascal, "Du groupe à l'individu : dynamique de la gestion foncière en pays gouin (sud-ouest du Burkina Faso)", *Belgeo*, no. 2 (2018).

²¹ "Enquête au Burkina", *Afrobaromètre*, 2017. See also Mathieu Hilgers and Augustin Loada, "Tensions et protestations dans un régime semi-autoritaire : croissance des révoltes populaires et maintien du pouvoir au Burkina Faso", *Politique africaine*, no. 131 (2013).

²² See section III.B.

²³ Land disputes accounted for 76 per cent of the conflicts in Burkina Faso on the eve of the 2014 uprising. "Etat des lieux des conflits communautaires au Burkina Faso", minister of justice, human rights and citizen participation, 2015.

try.²⁴ They accuse previous members of government of sabotaging their efforts in a bid to return to power. The current government also worries about the CDP's network of well-established elected representatives in the country's most sensitive areas, including in the West region. It is therefore focusing on a potential political threat whereas the uprisings are mainly caused by seething conflicts in rural areas. The establishment of the National Observatory for Preventing and Resolving Conflicts in 2015 shows that the state is aware of the significance of the rural tensions, which take different forms depending on the region in question.²⁵

²⁴ Crisis Group interviews, prominent figures from various regions, security sources, Ouagadougou, July and September 2019.

²⁵ Decree N°2015-1645 of 28 December 2015, setting up the National Observatory for Preventing and Resolving Conflicts.

III. Conflicts in Rural Areas

Tensions were latent in Burkina Faso's rural areas when the uprising began in 2014. Land disputes have evolved into full-scale conflicts that could escalate into community-based violence.²⁶ The Koglweogo and other civilian self-defence groups are progressively taking over the state's law-and-order role outside the towns, upsetting local equilibriums and creating new problems.

A. *Disputes over Access to Land*

Competition over land and natural resources in Burkina Faso has escalated to unprecedented levels owing to several factors: population growth that is causing internal migration of farmers; a changing climate that is degrading soils in some parts of the country; in places, poorly planned land development using irrigation; and land speculation.

The privatisation of protected areas and hunting reserves met with resistance in eastern Burkina in the 1990s. There was also widespread opposition to the increasingly restricted access to these lands after the 1997 Forestry Law was passed.²⁷ This privatisation has sometimes led to the eviction of local communities, or else limited their access to these important spaces.²⁸ This policy has been detrimental to the livelihoods of farmers, herders, fishermen and hunters alike; many hunters have become poachers, and some of all these people have turned to banditry.²⁹ Jihadist groups have taken advantage of this situation by promising to restore locals' access to these lands.³⁰

In Burkina's Sahel, West and Centre-North regions, and to a lesser extent in the eastern part of the country, the increasing migration of farmers has intensified land pressures, especially among the Mossi (Burkina Faso's main ethnic group) from the Yatenga province (North region) and from the Plateau-Central region. In the early twentieth century, indigenous communities needed labour and were willing to let migrants work their lands, but in recent decades this migration has caused spiralling tensions.³¹ Indigenous populations question previous agreements when they see land values rise.³² The 2009 Rural Land Law has worsened this situation by undermining these populations' property rights and by encouraging private land sales.³³ For example, the law assigns land to migrant farmers who have occupied it continuously

²⁶ Seventy per cent of those interviewed in 2015 acknowledged the existence of community-based conflicts in their areas. "Etat des lieux des conflits communautaires au Burkina Faso", op. cit.

²⁷ Alexis Kaboré, *Brousse des uns, aire protégée des autres* (Geneva, 2010). In this sense, community hunting lands (*Zones villageoises d'intérêt cynégétiques*) are exceptional in Burkina Faso.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Crisis Group interviews, civil society actors based in eastern Burkina, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Peter Hochet, *La terre, l'étranger et le citoyen : les relations sociales et politiques à propos de la terre dans un village bwa* (Paris, 2012).

³² "Revue du secteur foncier – Burkina Faso", World Bank, 2019.

³³ The Rural Land Law 034-2009/AN was passed in June 2009. This legislation defines the applicable regime for private and state-owned rural land, and enshrines the principles of land security tenure for everyone involved in rural land issues. Crisis Group analyst's interview in a former capacity, representative of the Confédération paysanne du Faso, Ouagadougou, May 2019.

for 30 years, prompting some owners to recover their lands. In both rural and urban areas, municipal authorities commit abuses when handling land subdivisions, leading to expropriations that in turn stir up animosity.³⁴

Land disputes are creating intercommunal tensions. Indigenous groups complain about the financial and political clout of the new arrivals.³⁵ And indeed, other communities often give the Mossi privileged access to government and therefore important political leverage.³⁶ The increasing demographic weight of migrant Mossi communities offers them special influence over the election of mayors, municipal councillors and village chiefs, particularly in many districts of the Centre-North and West regions, where they are relative newcomers.³⁷ In areas where elective offices are instrumental in access to land, the growing influence of non-indigenous people is creating community-based tensions, which have nevertheless remained local for the time being.

Burkinabè pastoralists, meanwhile, are facing major difficulties. Security forces are extorting herders, who are struggling to assert their rights over pastoral lands.³⁸ They are particularly affected by the shrinking size of these lands due to agricultural developments and land speculation; by dwindling feed and water supplies; by obstruction of seasonal migration routes; and by the non-application of legislation, in particular the 2020 Pastoral Law.³⁹ Before the 2014 crisis, 49 per cent of the conflicts reported in Burkina Faso were between farmers and herders.⁴⁰ This situation has spawned a number of self-defence groups. In 2012, the Rouga set up a union of “herder representatives” to protect herds in eastern Burkina.⁴¹

In some pastoral zones these conflicts have escalated to a community level since 2015, pitting Fulani herders against sedentary groups. As a result of these tensions, local authorities chased Gourmantché and Mossi farmers away from pastoral lands in Kounkounfouanou (Kabonga commune) in 2015.⁴² Their steady return has fuelled resentment among Fulani herders.⁴³ Similar disputes have arisen around Fada N’Gourma in eastern Burkina, and in Barani in the Boucle du Mouhoun region. They are widening social rifts, particularly in the Sahel, East and Boucle du Mouhoun regions.

³⁴ The parliamentary commission on urban land issues, established in 2016, has revealed various irregularities in land subdivisions. The government reacted by suspending any further subdivisions until March 2018. “Commission d’enquête parlementaire sur le foncier urbain au Burkina Faso”, executive summary, September 2016. “Revue du secteur foncier – Burkina Faso”, World Bank, 2019.

³⁵ Crisis Group interviews, prominent figures from Boucle du Mouhoun and Karankasso-Vigué, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

³⁶ Neither the Mossi community nor their traditional *chefferie* represent a homogenous group. Marriages between members of different Burkina communities are also commonplace. Crisis Group interviews, prominent Mossi figures, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

³⁷ Crisis Group interviews, traditional Mossi chief and prominent figures from various regions, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

³⁸ See “Pastoralism and Security in West Africa and the Sahel”, UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel, August 2018.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ “Etat des lieux des conflits communautaires au Burkina Faso”, op. cit.

⁴¹ Crisis Group interview, secretary general of the Rouga’s National Union, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

⁴² “Kounkounfouanou, un village rasé”, Lefaso.net, 6 July 2015.

⁴³ Crisis Group interview, representative of eastern herders, Ouagadougou, September 2019.

Mining has also caused frequent clashes across Burkina Faso, often between miners and local residents.⁴⁴ For many years, Compaoré's associates controlled artisanal gold mining, which directly or indirectly provides a source of income for around two million people.⁴⁵ This sector, which began to disintegrate after 2014, is now attracting new players, even state actors, who covet this resource and some of whom have armed groups at their disposal to seize control of the artisanal mining sites.⁴⁶ The Koglweogo self-defence forces in particular are filling the security void left by the state.

B. *The Koglweogo: New Lords of the Bush*

Rural areas have become increasingly dangerous over the course of the 2000s throughout Burkina Faso, particularly in the East and Centre-North regions where many cattle rustling gangs and highway robbers are active. Banditry is now so widespread that certain main roads, notably in the eastern region, are no longer used. Some locals claim that they can look after their own security.

The challenge of rural banditry has caught the state off guard. The security forces (the army and gendarmerie) are ill-equipped to deal with the problem, and rampant corruption in the security and judicial sectors has also reduced the effectiveness of law enforcement operations that previously were led by the Presidential Security Regiment (Régiment de la sécurité présidentielle, RSP).⁴⁷ The 2011 riots also weakened the state's ability to fight crime.⁴⁸ Aware of these limitations, authorities have encouraged the implementation of community policing strategies since 2003, which evolved into local security initiatives in 2010, tasked with passing on information to police and the gendarmerie.⁴⁹ Red tape, budgetary limitations, and the 2014 popular uprising combined to stall this project, however.⁵⁰ The people of Bogandé (East region) protested in March 2014, calling for re-establishment of local security committees as a liaison between the security forces and the population.⁵¹

Communities responded to the state's weakness by taking it upon themselves to fight crime by forming a self-defence group called Koglweogo ("guardians of the bush"

⁴⁴ "Attaque d'une mine d'or turque au Burkina Faso : décryptage d'une cohabitation difficile", France 24, 15 August 2019.

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interviews, actors in the artisanal gold mining sector, Ouagadougou, May 2019.

⁴⁶ See Crisis Group Africa Report N°282, *Getting a Grip on Central Sahel's Gold Rush*, 13 November 2019.

⁴⁷ "Shortly after a bandit was arrested, he'd be seen walking free", a soldier said. Crisis Group interview, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

⁴⁸ "Vers une réforme du système de sécurité burkinabé ?", Fondation pour la recherche stratégique, September 2017.

⁴⁹ Decree N°2010-315 of 17 June 2010 on the adoption of a national security strategy 2011-2020. Decree N°2016-1052 modified the types of citizen participation in the implementation of community policing, transforming local security initiatives into local community-based security structures. These exist within the framework set out by local security units established by the same decree.

⁵⁰ Crisis Group interviews, authorities in charge of community policing prior to 2015, Ouagadougou, May 2017.

⁵¹ In a follow-up to National Security Law N°032-2003 which puts the launch of the community police force on an official footing, Decree N°2005-245 of 12 May 2005 sets up and defines the scope and membership of the local security committees.

in the local Mossi language) in 2014.⁵² In the villages, these vigilante groups do not constitute a unified movement but exist alongside local structures. The authority held by the national leader and founder of the first Koglweogo group in Kombissiri (Centre-South region) remains limited.⁵³ Nevertheless, close ties exist between these structures that are expanding through a system of patronage between neighbouring villages. They have now spread across the Centre, Plateau-Central, Centre-North, Centre-East and East regions, with the support of traditional local authorities.⁵⁴ According to some estimates, Burkina Faso had 4,500 Koglweogo groups in 2018, with a total membership of around 45,000.⁵⁵ The Koglweogo, who are generally armed with hunting rifles, have gained the support of most local people by restoring security.⁵⁶ Their brutal punishments of suspected criminals often meet with indifference or even approval from a population keen to find effective forms of mob justice.⁵⁷

Emboldened by this popular legitimacy, the Koglweogo are progressively assuming new prerogatives, even encroaching on the state's traditional control of taxation, justice, policing and army operations. They preside over trials, levy taxes and impose fines. These former "guardians" have become "lords of the bush". While some traditional authorities are happy to endorse and profit from them, others are forced to deal with them.

Depending on the location, the vigilantes' relationship with the state fluctuates between collaboration and autonomy. Collaboration has been close in several regions, particularly in eastern Burkina, in order to shore up the 2014-2015 transition, including from an electoral perspective.⁵⁸ In Boulsa (Centre-North), the Koglweogo group's autonomy perhaps explains the arrest of its leader in December 2019.⁵⁹ State authorities have also called on them to confront the Dozo – a brotherhood of some 5,000 hunters that plays a similar self-defence role, especially in western Burkina – suspected of maintaining ties with the former president, Compaoré.⁶⁰

By indebting itself to the Koglweogo, the state is effectively giving these groups free rein. Authorities have not enforced a 2016 decree designed to regulate their activities due to lack of resources and resolve.⁶¹ The government struggles to oppose these groups directly since they enjoy widespread support in the ruling party's elec-

⁵² Prototypes of the Koglweogo appeared in the Yatenga (North) and Mané (Centre-North) regions in the mid-1990s.

⁵³ The first Koglweogo was set up in Rassam Kandé (Kombissiri) by the village's traditional leader. See Tanguy Quidelleur, "Sécurité, Etat et recompositions sociopolitiques en Afrique de l'Ouest : l'exemple des groupes d'autodéfense Koglweogo au Burkina Faso", master's thesis, Université de Paris Nanterre, 2017.

⁵⁴ Crisis Group interview, journalist specialising in the Koglweogo, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

⁵⁵ Crisis Group interviews, police commissioner, Ouagadougou, 2018; Koglweogo leader, Saaba, 2018.

⁵⁶ "Rapport d'enquête sur la sécurité pilotée par les communautés au Burkina Faso : les Koglweogo", Action pour la sécurité humaine en Afrique, October 2018. Since April 2016, particularly in the East region, the Koglweogo have arrested several bandits. Crisis Group interviews, prominent figures from various regions and Koglweogo, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

⁵⁷ Crisis Group interviews, journalist and Koglweogo specialists, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Crisis Group email interview, civil society actor in Kaya, December 2019.

⁶⁰ Crisis Group telephone interview, notable Burkinabè political figure, August 2019.

⁶¹ Decree 2016-1052 of 5 October 2016 defines the types of civilian participation in the implementation of community policing.

toral strongholds. The Koglweogo, with popular backing, has used violence on the rare occasions when arrests have affected its interests. In 2018, they surrounded the courthouse in Kaya to secure a member's release.⁶²

The “community” aspect of Koglweogo groups also stirs up tensions among communities suffering from the rural crisis. The Koglweogo mainly recruit members from the Mossi, the community that represents almost 50 per cent of the population.⁶³ In the East region, their ranks are usually filled with Gourmantché, the majority group in that area of Burkina Faso.⁶⁴ Some communities, especially in the West region, see this development as the armed front of what they call “Mossi expansionism”.⁶⁵ In the Hauts-Bassins region, for example, the Mossi's attempts since 2015 to set up Koglweogo groups have provoked fierce resistance from the Dozo, and occasional clashes such as in Solenzo and Karankasso-Vigué.⁶⁶ In the Sahel and Centre-North regions, the arrival of the Koglweogo phenomenon has exacerbated community-based violence.⁶⁷

Bandits and self-defence groups are two faces of the same security crisis in many rural parts of the country. Although the Koglweogo may fight crime effectively, they are also symptomatic of a fundamental lack of rule of law in rural Burkina Faso. Some Koglweogo members are even reformed bandits.⁶⁸ Recently, jihadist groups have emerged as new “lords of the bush”.

⁶² Crisis Group interview, local elected figure from Kaya, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

⁶³ See “Sécurité, Etat et recompositions sociopolitiques en Afrique de l'Ouest : l'exemple des groupes d'autodéfense Koglweogo au Burkina Faso”, op. cit.

⁶⁴ Crisis Group interviews, prominent figures from various regions and Koglweogo, Ouagadougou, July and September 2019.

⁶⁵ This formula refers less to an objective reality than a fairly widespread local feeling. It is important that certain kinds of injustice, whether they actually exist or not, are perceived to exist. Ibid.

⁶⁶ Sten Hagberg, “Performing Tradition While Doing Politics: A Comparative Study of the Dozo and Koglweogo Self-defence in Burkina Faso”, *African Studies Review*, vol. 62, no. 1 (2019).

⁶⁷ See Appendix D.

⁶⁸ Crisis Group interviews, journalist and Koglweogo specialists, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

IV. Jihadism in Burkina: A Endogenous Phenomenon

Burkina Faso has become the main theatre for jihadist operations in the Sahel. Some members of government remain convinced that the former ruling elite has had a hand in creating this situation. But even were this claim to hold some truth, the principal cause of the crisis is to be found elsewhere. Jihadist groups have exploited the multi-faceted crisis of rural Burkina in order to expand their presence. A fractured countryside has allowed them to recruit fighters from among the victims of land disputes and highway banditry.

A. Jihadist Groups in Burkina Faso

Long spared jihadist attacks, Burkina Faso now finds itself in the crosshairs, especially since October 2015.⁶⁹ Although most activities have been concentrated in Soum since the Nassoumbou attack, which killed twelve soldiers in December 2016, other areas have also been affected: the East, Boucle du Mouhoun, North and Centre-North regions, and the capital Ouagadougou, have all been hit.⁷⁰ Jihadists seem to be enlarging their networks, and the growing number of insurgencies has added to the sense that Burkina's capital is under siege.

Three jihadist groups have been active in Burkinabè territory since 2015-2016: the local group, Ansarul Islam, and two groups from Mali, the Islamic State in West Africa Province, ISWAP) and the Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims, or JNIM).

Originally founded as an autonomous Burkinabè movement in late 2016, Ansarul Islam later merged with JNIM, a group linked to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and mainly operating in central and northern Mali. Ansarul Islam is active in Soum and the western part of the Centre-North region (the Bam province and the western part of the Sanmatenga province). In 2017, the movement was weakened by the disappearance of the movement's leader, Malam Dicko.⁷¹ Malam's brother Jafar Dicko took over control, but one wing of the movement objected to his autocratic leadership style.⁷² In October 2019, messages began to spread on social media networks claiming he had been killed, though many local sources still deny these reports.⁷³ The group seems to have become a "unit" (*markaz*) of the brigades (*katiba*) operating in

⁶⁹ To understand why Burkina Faso was spared jihadist violence for so many years, see Crisis Group Report, *The Social Roots of Jihadist Violence in Burkina Faso's North*, op. cit. Jihadism existed in Burkina Faso's more distant past. As in other parts of the Sahel and West Africa, many jihadist attacks took place in the nineteenth century in Fulani and Marka communities. See H. Diallo and A. Degorce, "La notion de Jihad en contexte", in A. Degorce, L. Kibora and K. Langewiesche, *Rencontres religieuses et dynamiques sociales au Burkina Faso* (Dakar, 2019).

⁷⁰ On the attack in Nassoumbou, see "Burkina : douze militaires tués dans une attaque dans le nord du pays", *Jeune Afrique*, 16 December 2016.

⁷¹ Malam Dicko was killed during Operation Bayard, led jointly by the Burkinabè armed forces and the French forces composing Operation Barkhane in the north, in April 2017. Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian worker, notable Soum figures, public security sources, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

⁷² Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian worker, notable Soum figures, public security sources, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

⁷³ Crisis Group email interviews, civil society actors in Soum, October 2019 and January 2020.

central Mali: the Katiba Serma from 2017 to 2018, and mainly the Katiba Macina led by Hamadoun Kouffa.⁷⁴ JNIM now claims responsibility for Ansarul Islam's attacks.

JNIM has not only recruited Ansarul Islam fighters active in the Soum region, but it has also been operating in western Burkina since 2016. In 2018, the jihadists opened a second front in eastern Burkina,⁷⁵ where the group has claimed responsibility for several attacks, and until recently it seems to have been more active than ISWAP in that area. It is confirmed or highly probable that the groups currently comprising JNIM – Ansar Eddine, Al-Mourabitoun and AQIM – were responsible for the Samorogouan (October 2015), Ouagadougou (January 2016) and Nassoumbou (December 2016) attacks.⁷⁶ JNIM has influence in this area due to the presence of a group of Burkinabè fighters from the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA) and from Ansar Eddine in AQIM units in Mali since 2012.⁷⁷ Along with the Ansarul Islam units based in Soum, they have been the driving force of the group's expansion in eastern Burkina.

ISWAP is active over a larger geographical area of Burkina Faso than JNIM.⁷⁸ Its base of operations was initially in the Oudalan province (in Burkina's northern Sahel region), bordering the Ansongo *cercle* in Mali, an area already under the movement's influence. This area was the site of its first attack in Burkina Faso, when, in September 2016, it targeted a customs post in Markoye.⁷⁹ It has gradually expanded its activities in the eastern part of the Soum region and in two provinces of the Centre-North region, Namentenga, and eastern Sanmatenga. At the same time, in the Sahel region, it has also established a presence in the south of Oudalan, the north of the Seno province and the north east of the Yagha province. ISWAP fighters have also gained a foothold in eastern Burkina, forming sleeper cells in 2016 that mobilised two years later.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ On this subject, see Crisis Group Report, *The Social Roots of Jihadist Violence in Burkina Faso's North*, op. cit. The Katiba Serma group – a name used by some observers more than the group's members themselves, called after a forest in the Malian Gourma – was led by an Imghad Touareg, Al-Mansour Ag Alkassim, who was killed in late 2018 by Barkhane forces. The group now appears weakened.

⁷⁵ Before 2018, Malam Dicko's emissaries were active in the East and the first cells identified in 2018 relayed Hamadoun Kouffa's sermons. Crisis Group interview, civil society actor based in the East, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

⁷⁶ Crisis Group interview, security sources, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

⁷⁷ One of the main jihadist leaders operating in the east, Oumarou Diallo, fought for JNIM in Mali before 2018. Crisis Group interview, security source, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

⁷⁸ Previously called Islamic State in the Grand Sahara, this local branch that rallied to the cause of the Islamic State has been acknowledged as an integral part of ISWAP since 2019 by the organisation's central branch. It appears, however, that although the ISWAP branch located around the Lake Chad basin is closely connected to the one in central Sahel (Mali, Burkina Faso, western Niger), it has a separate chain of command.

⁷⁹ "L'organisation État islamique revendique sa première attaque en Afrique", Alakhbar.info, 3 September 2016.

⁸⁰ Crisis Group interviews, security sources based in the East, Ouagadougou, July and September 2019.

In Burkina and the wider Sahel region, JNIM and ISWAP are joining forces against France (whose soldiers they dub “crusaders”) and its allies.⁸¹ In some areas where both groups have a presence, such as in eastern Soum and Burkina’s East region, they work together closely. For example, Ansarul Islam is thought to have provided logistical support for the Koutougou attack of 19 August, which was claimed by ISWAP.⁸²

The two organisations also differ in some ways, particularly with regard to civilians and religious minorities. All the attacks on Christian places of worship have taken place in areas under ISWAP’s control; Hamadoun Kouffa, by contrast, has never authorised such attacks.⁸³ With a few exceptions, ISWAP’s local branch has also been blamed for the jihadist attacks on Burkina Faso’s civilian population, which began to intensify in late 2019.⁸⁴ JNIM remains opposed to targeting civilians, apart from prominent figures who speak out against them and army informers.⁸⁵ Rivalries also exist despite this cooperation, as shown by the defection of fighters from one group to the other. In early 2019, a band of about twenty Ansarul Islam fighters stated their allegiance to the Islamic State.⁸⁶ Relations between the two groups could also sour due to the increasing tensions and occasional clashes between JNIM and ISWAP in Mali since late 2019.

Although the jihadist groups mainly recruit their fighters locally, they maintain close ties to parts of Mali that lay beyond the state’s reach.⁸⁷ Ansarul Islam has support bases in Mali’s Gourma region, while local ISWAP units depend on their main bases along the route between Soum and Mali’s Gourma region. The Katiba Macina and Katiba Serma groups support Ansarul Islam financially as well as operationally by providing manpower and logistical expertise, especially in the use of weapons. In 2019, Ansarul Islam reportedly sent several fighters to Mopti (Mali) for training exercises in a flooded area.⁸⁸ ISWAP’s Burkinabè units appear less dependent on their parent organisation, which encourages autonomy.⁸⁹

B. *A Breeding Ground for Jihadism*

Religious fervour is not the motivation for most fighters and unit commanders, who are usually Burkinabè and have other priorities. Jihadist groups have used the state’s weakness to their advantage and exploited rural tensions to establish themselves in Burkina Faso. Most jihadist fighters and commanders are Burkinabè with a set of mainly local interests. A handful of local ideologues are influential; preachers from

⁸¹ JNIM and ISWAP began to team up in early 2017 when the G5 Sahel Joint Force was set up. Crisis Group interview, Malian security source, Bamako, June 2018.

⁸² Crisis Group telephone interview, security sources, August 2019.

⁸³ Crisis Group email interviews, Mopti humanitarian actors, July 2019.

⁸⁴ See “Burkina Faso: Armed Islamist Atrocities Surge”, Human Rights Watch, 6 January 2020.

⁸⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Soum humanitarian worker, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

⁸⁶ More recently, a unit commander of Ansarul Islam and many of his relatives joined ISWAP after condemning the kidnapping of a prominent Fulani suspected of colluding with the Malian army in Boulikessi, Mali. Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian workers in Soum, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

⁸⁷ The Malian territory is also a safe zone for Burkinabè units that have taken hostages in Burkina Faso. Crisis Group interviews, Malian and Nigerien security sources, Niamey and Bamako, 2019.

⁸⁸ Crisis Group interview, humanitarian worker based in Soum, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

⁸⁹ ISWAP therefore applies a more flexible form of Islamic law in the funding of the Katiba. Crisis Group interview, civil society actors based in Soum, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

the areas in question (such as Malam and Jafar Dicko in Soum) often give sermons that launch new jihadist activities. But jihadist fighters and commanders in Burkina are local, and they generally lack religious instruction, as in the case of Adama Gari-bou, an ISWAP officer who probably was killed during an attack in August 2019.⁹⁰

For their recruitment drives, jihadists exploit injustices frequently linked to land disputes and coupled with political and community-based issues. Certain situations are conducive to the enlistment of individuals or entire groups; new recruits have no “typical” profile but may be civilians struggling to assert their rights over land, gold miners facing restricted access to mines, or bandits seeking more powerful allies. In the village of Béléhédé (in the Soum commune of Tongomayel), the development of lands as part of a rice-growing project has been attracting Mossi and Fulsé migrants since 2013. Several dozen Fulanis have had their lands expropriated with no compensation. Financially powerful non-indigenous (mainly Fulsé) migrants have questioned the authority of Tongomayel’s Fulani emir and appointed their own village leaders instead.⁹¹ As early as 2016, jihadist groups have taken advantage of the Fulanis’ financial and socio-political grievances to start recruiting from within their communities and particularly by approaching expropriated individuals.⁹²

Jihadists also recruit elsewhere. The supposed predominance of Fulani jihadists is less a reflection of this community’s support for global jihad than of the particular exposure of Fulani herders and landowners to injustices and their relative under-representation in state institutions, starting from their presence in public education. But Ansar Eddine’s Khalid Ben Walid Katiba, which led the first attack in Burkina, was led by Mossis and a Malinké. Ansarul Islam made its first incursions into the Centre-North region with Mossi support: in 2016, in Pissila (a province of Sanmatenga), the jihadist movement benefited from the support of a Mossi group involved in a land dispute with the authorities.⁹³ In eastern Burkina, jihadist preachers have targeted their sermons at different communities (mainly Gourmantché and Fulani) deprived of access to water, gold deposits, pastures, hunting and fishing grounds.⁹⁴

Jihadists also recruit from groups familiar with handling weapons. In Burkina Faso, a country that has seen no rebellions, these people include former soldiers, whether discharged or deserters, and highway robbers. Bandits are increasingly enlisting as jihadists in Burkina and, to various degrees, throughout the Sahel. Some join out of conviction, but many are simply seeking revenge on the state and self-defence groups.⁹⁵ Jihadists are keen to tap into the know-how of these groups that were routed by the Koglweogo in 2015 and 2016. In Burkina Faso’s eastern region, many robbers from Bogandé – a hotbed of banditry – have been identified among

⁹⁰ Crisis Group email interview, humanitarian worker in Soum, August 2019.

⁹¹ The Fulsé, also known as Kurumba, are an essentially agrarian Burkina community.

⁹² Crisis Group interview, Béléhédé political actor, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

⁹³ Crisis Group interview, civil society leader in the Centre-North region, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

⁹⁴ Crisis Group interviews, notable figures from the East region, and an expert in security issues, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

⁹⁵ In the 2000s, the Burkinabè military’s operations to combat banditry led to abuses that have fuelled resentments. The Burkinabè Movement for Human and Peoples’ Rights (Mouvement burkinabè des droits de l’Homme et des peuples) expressed its outrage in a press release, issued in 2002 about the collateral damages of its operations on civil populations. “Polémique sur des exécutions extrajudiciaires”, RFI, 6 February 2002.

the jihadist fighters, and one of them, a Gourmantché, was a unit commander.⁹⁶ But cooperation between these two types of fighter is not always smooth; they do not have the same agenda or the same sense of discipline.⁹⁷

C. *Jihadists: Linking Global and Local Agendas*

In 2016, Malian jihadists made an incursion into Burkinabè territory to challenge the French military and to search for new fallback locations.⁹⁸ Their ambitions have since grown: Burkina Faso has become a theatre of combat where the aim is to expel government forces from rural areas and to impose Islamic law.⁹⁹ This ambition is not necessarily shared by fighters and supporters, however, most of whom are more interested in local issues.

Jihadist leaders in Burkina Faso seek to articulate local grievances with reference to their movement's global agenda – the imposition of their version of Islam as the sole source of law and governing authority. Jihadist sermons connect the protests against local injustices to religious precepts.¹⁰⁰ Religious leaders from a given group maintain links between local cells and leaders, ensuring that they obey the movement's rules (particularly with regard to their application of Islamic law and their attitude toward the civilian population). That said, they are willing to relax their discipline in order to accommodate those who join their ranks for more prosaic reasons.¹⁰¹

The autonomy enjoyed by Burkina Faso's jihadist groups gives room for the fighters to satisfy their local (or even personal) interests.¹⁰² These groups are free to pick their fights, provided that they do not directly contravene the jihad's global principles. Ultimately, they remain under the command of leaders mainly based in Mali when needed for larger-scale operations. This autonomy seems more firmly ingrained in ISWAP than in JNIM. ISWAP's unit commanders sometimes launch attacks for personal motives of revenge or profit, although these reasons overlap with the jihadist leaders' aim of expanding their territory. For example, violence targeting Fulsé civilians and elected representatives in Arbinda followed the killing of Gas-kindé's Fulani leader, the nephew of ISWAP's top commander in Burkina Faso. The desire for revenge complemented the organisation's intention of expanding its operations in eastern Soum.¹⁰³

This same autonomy can also prove troublesome for certain jihadist groups since it can provoke violent clashes between communities. On one hand, by allowing their

⁹⁶ Crisis Group email interviews, security sources in the east, March 2019.

⁹⁷ Bandits are one of the jihadists' four targets, along with infidels, apostates and rebels. M.T. Urvoy, "Guerre et paix", in M.A. Amir-Moezzi (ed.), *Dictionnaire du Coran* (Paris, 2007), pp. 372-377.

⁹⁸ Crisis Group interviews, security and humanitarian organisation sources, Ouagadougou and Bamako, 2017-2019.

⁹⁹ See the press release claiming responsibility for the Nassoumbou and Baraboulé attacks, JNIM, 16 September 2019.

¹⁰⁰ Crisis Group Report, *The Social Roots of Jihadist Violence in Burkina Faso's North*, op. cit.

¹⁰¹ This pragmatism can also be observed in central Mali. See Crisis Group Africa Report N°276, *Speaking with the "Bad Guys": Toward Dialogue with Central Mali's Jihadists*, 28 May 2019.

¹⁰² This general autonomy is enjoyed globally by both the JNIM and ISWAP, but it is particularly relevant in Burkina Faso where these groups have limited means of controlling their units' activities.

¹⁰³ Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian and security sources from Soum, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

fighters to become involved in these conflicts, jihadists (from ISWAP in particular) satisfy the ambitions of a section of their membership – in this case mainly consisting of Fulanis – who are keen to protect and/or seek revenge on behalf of their community. On the other, by supporting a local group, jihadists are encouraging *fitna* (tribal divisions) and compromising their project of unifying the community of Muslim believers.¹⁰⁴ Internal disagreements exist over the right path to take. To date, JNIM has been reticent to exploit community-based tensions, unlike ISWAP.¹⁰⁵

Jihadism could continue to spread in Burkina and create new trouble-spots in the country, perhaps even opening up a corridor to West Africa's coastal nations.¹⁰⁶ The jihadists' ability to establish a presence in Burkina can be explained by various factors that are common to different parts of the country: land disputes, competition over mining, rural banditry, and even the increasing stigmatisation of communities supposedly with close ties to the jihadists, like Fulani herders.¹⁰⁷ Armed groups are highly mobile and can, when required, withdraw to areas beyond the reach of the military.¹⁰⁸ Land and community conflicts in the country's West region are particularly worrying. Clashes between the Fulani and Dozo threaten to intensify and to expose parts of the Boucle du Mouhoun region to outbreaks of community-based violence.¹⁰⁹ More isolated incidents erupting elsewhere, particularly in the South-West region, point to the jihadists' aim of expanding their presence beyond the country's northern areas.¹¹⁰

Far from representing a global jihad guided by a religious agenda, jihadist groups in Burkina above all consist of Burkinabè insurgents, and the reason for the shift toward violence has local origins. Seen in this context, a primarily military response fails to address the root causes of the problem.

¹⁰⁴ Crisis Group email interview, specialist in jihadist groups, July 2019.

¹⁰⁵ "Les violences armées au Sahara : du djihadisme aux insurrections ?", Institut français des relations internationales, December 2019.

¹⁰⁶ See Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°149, *The Risk of Jihadist Contagion in West Africa*, 20 December 2019.

¹⁰⁷ The Fulani community is targeted in several regions around the country. For instance, the killing in the Centre-East region on 23 February 2019 of three Fulani civilians by the Koglweogo in Bittou (a Sawenga village) is likely to give rise to frustrations that could prepare the ground for jihadists to develop a presence there.

¹⁰⁸ In the Centre-South, three security incidents in July and August 2019 (one targeting two park rangers in Ponasi, the other two involving attacks on the gendarmerie in Pô) show that poorly identified armed groups are active in this area.

¹⁰⁹ These confrontations are not only imported from Mali, but they are also motivated by land disputes, particularly in the area around the Barani pastoral reserve.

¹¹⁰ Crisis Group interview, researcher specialising in the South-Ouest region, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

V. Insufficient and Counterproductive State Responses

Burkinabè authorities have thus far been unable to limit the spread of jihadist groups, despite some notable successes recorded since the end of 2019, including the repelled attacks in Arbinda on 24 December and in Inata on 3 January 2020.¹¹¹ While the responses are largely military, the armed forces are ill-prepared for an unprecedented asymmetric threat. Until August 2014, the Compaoré government appeared to be protected by its relations with jihadist groups, whose capacities were then much more limited.¹¹² The upheavals experienced by the armed forces during the 2014-2015 transition have limited their ability to adapt. Faced with these difficulties, it is highly tempting to turn to non-state armed groups, whether the Koglweogo or other volunteers.

A. *The Shortcomings of the Security Apparatus*

The defence and security forces' lack of human and material resources is an obstacle in the fight against insurgency. Examples include the lack of special units trained in asymmetric conflicts and the weakness of air assets. The security network is frail: Burkinabè forces are completely absent from 30 per cent of the territory and unevenly distributed over another third (with only the army or gendarmerie present); only 18 per cent of the forces are on the "front line" (exposed to combat situations).¹¹³ Jihadist groups were able to establish themselves quickly in the east of the country in particular, because this sparsely populated region had the lowest coverage rate by defence and security forces until 2018.¹¹⁴

Burkinabè forces are also experiencing internal fractures and weaknesses with deep-rooted origins. Compaoré confined the army and the gendarmerie to secondary roles by limiting their equipment for the benefit of the Presidential Security Regiment (RSP), a praetorian guard reporting to the presidency.¹¹⁵ This trend was accentuated after army and police mutinies in 2011. Heavy and sophisticated weapons were transported to the RSP headquarters, gunpowder magazines were emptied, and a large part of the army was deprived of ammunition and training from the second

¹¹¹ "Attaque au Burkina : 7 soldats, 35 civils, et 80 terroristes tués", *Le Figaro*, 25 December 2019; "Une attaque repoussée à Inata", Burkina 24, 3 January 2020.

¹¹² The former power played an intermediary role with these jihadist groups, which spared it in return. On several occasions, AQIM and JNIM have expressed nostalgia for the time of Compaoré. According to a press release from JNIM on 5 September: "Burkina Faso would have stayed away from and avoided this war had it not been for the government of the coup supported by France". This alliance may well have faced challenges since 2013-2014, however. Burkina Faso made its commitment to MINUSMA under Compaoré, and the Burkinabè contingent was attacked for the first time in August 2014. "Two dead and more wounded among MINUSMA's Burkinabè soldiers following a suicide attack", press release from the armed forces communications and public relations director, 17 August 2014.

¹¹³ This data comes from a report funded by the Belgian Development Cooperation as part of a EU project for the benefit of the Ministry of Security. Crisis Group interview, European aid worker, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

¹¹⁴ Crisis Group interview, security sources, Ouagadougou, March 2019.

¹¹⁵ "Burkina : RSP, garde à vous !", *Jeune Afrique*, 18 June 2015.

half of 2011.¹¹⁶ The mutinies signalled a deep fracture between senior officers and the troops amid accusations of corruption and favouritism.¹¹⁷

The 2014 insurgency and its aftermath heightened distrust between politicians and men in uniform, further weakening the security apparatus. After the fall of Compaoré and the coup in September 2015, the government dissolved the RSP, which greatly reduced the country's military capabilities.¹¹⁸ With its 1,300 men, this unit accounted for almost 10 per cent of the military; it constituted an elite body and above all the core of an extremely efficient intelligence service, relying not on an institution but on Compaoré's right-hand man, Gilbert Diendéré.¹¹⁹ After the mutinies of 2011, senior officers had already been arrested or dismissed and 566 members of the security apparatus had been fired. Today, the Burkinabè army lacks both seasoned soldiers and officers who can occupy intermediate positions.¹²⁰

For the new government, rebuilding an intelligence architecture on the rubble of the RSP constitutes a major challenge. The National Intelligence Agency (Agence nationale du renseignement, ANR) was created in 2015 but faces several obstacles, including rivalries between services and longstanding antagonisms between the police and gendarmerie.¹²¹ The apparatus under construction is struggling to gather intelligence.¹²² Human intelligence remains fallible, often reflecting the bias of local informers, and is actually declining as informants are executed by jihadists.¹²³ Burkinabè forces also tend to consider any individual in contact with jihadists their accomplice, since they are unable to determine their level of involvement.¹²⁴ Reconstructing a full network of reliable informants will take years, and to analyse intelligence, a young generation of experts will have to be trained for a new kind of threat.¹²⁵

The 2014-2015 transition sparked ongoing rivalries between the gendarmes and the military. The gendarmes occupy strategic positions around Kaboré; the commander of the Special Intervention Unit of the National Gendarmerie (USIGN) is said to have the president's ear, and the ANR director is one of his childhood friends. Conversely, the president seems wary of an army that he wishes to "depoliticise".¹²⁶ He proscribed the appointment of military personnel to the rank of minister, includ-

¹¹⁶ "Vers une réforme du système de sécurité burkinabé ?", op. cit.

¹¹⁷ Crisis Group Report, *Burkina Faso: With or Without Compaoré, Times of Uncertainty*, op. cit. The national police had similar problems. In 2017, after policemen demonstrated denouncing the opacity of "paid private services" to companies, an internal investigation uncovered systemic corruption in the national police. "Services payés de la police nationale : un rapport accablant", *L'Economiste du Faso*, 29 May 2017.

¹¹⁸ "Burkina Faso government disbands elite unit behind coup", Reuters, 25 September 2015.

¹¹⁹ Crisis Group interviews, security sources, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

¹²⁰ Crisis Group interview, internal security attaché of a diplomatic office, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

¹²¹ The army is said to share little information with an agency headed by a gendarme. Ibid.

¹²² Several Burkinabè political and military officials have deplored the lack of intelligence support from partners, starting with France. Crisis Group interviews, political and military actors, Ouagadougou, July and September 2019.

¹²³ Crisis Group interviews, actors from security and civil spheres, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

¹²⁴ For the authorities, a jihadist is any individual in contact (including by telephone) with an alleged jihadist, if only to sell him food, or anyone refusing to collaborate with the defence and security forces. Crisis Group interviews, Burkinabè security sources, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

¹²⁵ Crisis Group interview, Burkinabè intelligence officer, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

¹²⁶ "Le Burkina veut dépolitiser son armée", AFP, 5 February 2016.

ing for the defence portfolio.¹²⁷ Since 2015, rumours of a coup have been circulating, leading to the arrest of the former minister of security and pillar of the transition, Colonel Auguste Denise Barry, a figure close to former Prime Minister Yacouba Isaac Zida, who was second in command of the RSP under Compaoré and is currently in exile in Canada.¹²⁸ The army's discontent is all the stronger since gendarmerie units are the ones entrusted with fighting terrorism.¹²⁹

In this context, there appears to be a real risk of mutiny or even a coup. Many soldiers deployed against jihadist groups reportedly challenge the way operations are conducted and denounce the lack of support.¹³⁰ Discouraged and deprived of resources, they claim that they are increasingly less mobile and reduced to a defensive position.¹³¹ The counter-terrorism strategy relies on recently created special units, mainly from the gendarmerie, deployed from Ouagadougou for special operations that rarely involve the conventional forces already present on the ground.¹³² Burkinabè intelligence services are closely monitoring the rumours of unrest within the barracks, to the detriment of their other responsibilities.¹³³

Between December 2018 and February 2019, President Kaboré carried out a major reshuffle of the military hierarchy, in the hope of preserving calm within the units and generating new anti-terrorist momentum. He also replaced the ministers of defence and security.¹³⁴ But this reorganisation did not have the desired effect, and the shifts in mood have persisted. In August 2019, after the attack on Koutougou, the deadliest since 2016, the regiment in charge of the Koutougou detachment blocked access to Camp Guillaume, where the regiment that manages the Koutougou detachment is stationed.¹³⁵ A month later, soldiers from a Dédougou regiment succeeded in replacing their commanding officer, accusing him of "being in contact" with jihadists; it appears that an internal investigation has since cleared him.¹³⁶ Such incidents may well escalate if defence and security forces continue to suffer major setbacks. Nevertheless, these grievances were quieted, at least temporarily, by the successes recorded by the forces since December 2019.¹³⁷

¹²⁷ Crisis Group interview, Ministry of Defence official, Ouagadougou, September 2019.

¹²⁸ "Burkina Faso : qui est le colonel Barry, le bras droit de Zida ?", *Jeune Afrique*, 9 December 2014.

¹²⁹ Crisis Group interview, security officials, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

¹³⁰ Crisis Group interviews, diplomatic sources, Ouagadougou, July and September 2019.

¹³¹ Ibid. "C'est l'abattoir: face aux attaques terroristes, la colère monte chez les militaires burkinabés", *Le Monde*, 2 October 2019.

¹³² Crisis Group interviews, security sources, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

¹³³ Crisis Group interviews, international NGO officials and former senior official, Ouagadougou, February 2019.

¹³⁴ "Roch, acte II : un remaniement avec la présidentielle en ligne de mire", *Jeune Afrique*, 6 February 2019.

¹³⁵ "La colère de certains militaires après l'attaque de Koutougou", RFI, 24 August 2019. The attack on Koutougou resulted in the death of at least 24 soldiers.

¹³⁶ "23^{ème} RIC : Les non-dits du limogeage du chef de corps", *L'évènement*, 10 October 2019.

¹³⁷ Several recent attacks have been repelled, including in Arbinda, Inata, Pissila and Barani.

B. *A Disproportionate Use of Force*

Since the end of 2018, a rise in insecurity has led authorities to intensify their military response. This impetus was the appointment in January 2019 of the new defence minister, Chérif Sy, a figure known for his intransigence.¹³⁸ Special gendarmerie units and conventional military forces have carried out larger operations than before.¹³⁹ In parallel, the army – deemed a barracks-based army and not deployed in major operations since the brief war with Mali in December 1985 – conducted two large-scale operations in the East and Sahel regions (Operation Otapuanu and Operation N dof u respectively) between March and May 2019.¹⁴⁰

These military interventions have produced few results. In the East region, Operation Otapuanu repelled and somewhat disrupted jihadist groups. Since September 2019, the long-term deployment of nearly 2,000 men has maintained order in a precarious balance.¹⁴¹ While the number of large-scale attacks decreased in the region after the end of the operation in April, targeted assassinations, kidnappings and harassment of the population have persisted: between May and November 2019, more than 80 criminal acts were recorded.¹⁴² On 6 November, the attack in Boungou on an escorted convoy belonging to Semafo, a Canadian mining company, demonstrated that jihadist groups are still able to carry out ambitious attacks in rural areas. Far from being an isolated incident, it reflects renewed jihadist activity in the region.¹⁴³

Elsewhere, particularly in the Sahel region, military operations have not reduced the threat and may even have aggravated the situation. In the first eight months of 2019, 416 violent incidents were recorded in the region, causing 927 deaths, compared to 330 violent events in which 287 were killed from 2016 to 2018.¹⁴⁴ Since early 2019, Burkinabè armed forces have allegedly carried out summary executions of individuals suspected of cooperating with jihadists in several localities, notably in Kain and Banh, Titao and Barani.¹⁴⁵ Human rights organisations estimate that at least 200 people have been victims of such executions, and question their links with jihadist

¹³⁸ The son of General Baba Sy, Chérif Sy is a journalist by profession. He was president of the National Transitional Council in 2015 before becoming high representative of the head of state in 2017.

¹³⁹ The special gendarmerie units (mainly the USIGN and the mobile gendarmerie squadron) have been at the forefront of the anti-terrorist response since President Kaboré came to power. The mobile squadron, sometimes referred to as “death squad” due to its participation in operations which allegedly targeted civilians, remains an obscure unit. According to its critics, it has no legal existence since no decree was issued to create it. Crisis Group interviews, security sources, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

¹⁴⁰ Crisis Group interview, former soldier, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

¹⁴¹ The army benefited from the return of a 850-man battalion deployed in Mali as part of MINUSMA. Crisis Group interview, secretary general of the Ministry of Defence, Ouagadougou, September 2019.

¹⁴² Survey carried out by a humanitarian worker in Burkina Faso and consulted by Crisis Group.

¹⁴³ Crisis Group email interviews, humanitarian worker and local elected officials based in the East region, November 2019.

¹⁴⁴ Data from the ACLED database.

¹⁴⁵ For Kain, see “Que s’est-il passé à Kain-Ouro et environnants le 4 février 2019 ?”, Burkinabè Movement for Human and Peoples’ Rights (MBDHP), March 2019. For Titao, see “Memento sur les exécutions sommaires du 12 mai dans la province du Lorum, région du Nord”, Kisal, 15 May 2019. For Barani, Crisis Group interviews, prominent figures from the Boucle du Mouhoun, Ouagadougou, July 2019. “‘We found their bodies later that day’: Atrocities by armed islamists and security forces in Burkina Faso’s Sahel region”, Human Rights Watch, March 2019.

groups.¹⁴⁶ In March and April 2019, two other military operations at artisanal gold sites in Tchiembolo and Filio, near Inata, reportedly resulted in dozens of deaths.¹⁴⁷ Other summary executions are said to have taken place in the East region, in the Boucle du Mouhoun or in the North, and, at the end of 2019, in several localities in Soum.¹⁴⁸ Western chanceries are concerned about this phenomenon.¹⁴⁹

Authorities recognise that civilians may have been collateral victims of military operations, but formally contest the extent of the abuses denounced by human rights organisations.¹⁵⁰ They specify that all operations stem from precise intelligence and respect the principle of “gradation of force”.¹⁵¹ Behind the scenes, officials point out that the government, which is “at war with terrorism”, has no option but to use force to deter civilians from collaborating with the enemy and to reassure public opinion with quantifiable results.¹⁵² A significant section of public opinion in the capital also seems convinced that civilian casualties are inevitable.¹⁵³

Extrajudicial executions are doubly counterproductive.¹⁵⁴ Authorities lose out on intelligence by executing suspects rather than interrogating them, which also feeds the resentment of their relatives, some of whom are then tempted to join the jihadists.¹⁵⁵ Burkinabè forces often assess the degree an individual’s militancy based on his real or supposed connections with jihadists. Yet many villages under jihadist threat have no other option but to submit to their authority. This conflation works like a self-fulfilling prophecy: those close to the identified individuals end up going to jihadists for protection or revenge. Since the beginning of 2019, the scale of the violence perpetrated by the army against civilians (often Fulani) has prompted entire

¹⁴⁶ Civil society organisations that investigated the above-mentioned cases, such as the MBDHP, the Collective against Impunity and Stigmatisation of Communities, Kisal and Human Rights Watch doubt the real involvement of civilians in jihadism. Crisis Group interviews, civil society leaders, 2019.

¹⁴⁷ Estimates of the number of deaths vary between 40 and 200. Crisis Group interviews, inhabitants of Soum Province, Ouagadougou, July 2019. The authorities have not communicated on this matter and several Burkinabè officials say they are unaware of these events or have knowledge of them but cannot confirm them. Crisis Group interviews, Burkinabè officials, Ouagadougou, July and September 2019.

¹⁴⁸ “Dans le nord du Burkina Faso, les exactions de l’armée contrarient la lutte antiterroriste”, *Le Monde*, 12 May 2018. Crisis Group email interviews, humanitarian workers and civil society actors in Soum, 8 January 2020.

¹⁴⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Western diplomats, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

¹⁵⁰ In an interview, the defence minister criticised these organisations. “I question France’s motives”, *Mail and Guardian*, 4 June 2019. Several Burkinabè military officials met by Crisis Group reflect this view. The army chief of staff publicly acknowledged these blunders in the context of Operation Otapuanu. See “Opération Otapuanu : plusieurs présumés terroristes neutralisés, une centaine interpellée”, *Sidwaya*, 14 April 2019.

¹⁵¹ Crisis Group interview, military official, Ouagadougou, September 2019.

¹⁵² Crisis Group interview, Burkinabè politician, Ouagadougou, September 2019.

¹⁵³ Crisis Group interview, opinion leaders, Ouagadougou, September 2019.

¹⁵⁴ They also contravene the Geneva Conventions to which Burkina Faso is a signatory.

¹⁵⁵ The children of three prominent figures who were executed in villages in the Centre-North and Soum joined the jihadist groups. Similar stories abound. Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian workers and civil society actors based in the Sahel and Centre-North regions, Ouagadougou, July and September 2019.

villages to side with the jihadists.¹⁵⁶ A prominent figure from the Sahel region sums up the situation as follows: “Operation Ndofo (‘uprooting’ in Mossi) did not uproot jihadism, but sowed it instead”.¹⁵⁷

The army’s abuses appear to be sustained by problems in the justice system, notably prison congestion and backlogs in courts responsible for trying suspects. Last March, over 700 individuals suspected of belonging to a terrorist group were being detained in prisons across the country.¹⁵⁸ The courts have tried no such detainee since 2015, while the counter-terrorism division, created in 2017 and in charge of most of these cases, is only now operational.¹⁵⁹ With merely 24 people on its staff, it cannot absorb such a large number of cases. In this context, part of the security apparatus seems to consider it illusory to rely on the rule of law.¹⁶⁰ This state of mind opens the way for summary executions, which the authorities deem to be acts of war, in defiance of the Geneva Conventions.¹⁶¹

C. *The Danger of Relying on Self-defence Groups*

On 7 November 2019, President Kaboré called for the mobilisation of “volunteers for the defence of Faso” to fight “terrorists”. This project sounded like an avowal by defence and security forces of their inability to secure the territory on their own.¹⁶² The law adopted on 21 January 2020 provides that all volunteers hired as “back-up for the defence of their village or sector of residence” receive training lasting fourteen days, without specifying the nature of the weaponry they will have access to. It also stipulates that they must “obey military authority”.¹⁶³ This appeal harks back to the citizen involvement during the Sankarist revolution, an important phase in Burkina Faso’s history.¹⁶⁴ It also responds to the desire of part of the population to fight terrorism.¹⁶⁵

This strategy aims to rapidly strengthen the armed forces’ capacity, but it may prove counterproductive if volunteers are not fully supervised in accordance with the new law. The Burkinabè state has thus far been unable to manage the Koglweogo. We can therefore question the capacity of its already understaffed army to effectively supervise volunteers, especially since many of them will likely come from the Koglweogo. The experience of Burkina Faso’s neighbours should urge caution: in Mali

¹⁵⁶ At the start of Operation Ndofo, some villages in Soum province moved to Mali to seek jihadist groups’ protection.

¹⁵⁷ Crisis Group interview, prominent figure in the Sahel region, Ouagadougou, September 2019.

¹⁵⁸ “Burkina Faso : environ 700 terroristes présumés détenus dans des prisons de haute sécurité (gouvernement)”, Xinhua, 15 March 2019.

¹⁵⁹ This division is supported by the new Special Counter-Terrorism Investigation Brigade (BSIAT), the head of which was only appointed in March 2019. The twenty judicial police officers (from the gendarmerie and police force) who make up the brigade are in training. Crisis Group interviews, Burkinabè judicial actors, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

¹⁶⁰ Crisis Group interviews, military officials, Ouagadougou, September 2019.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² “Kaboré appelle à la mobilisation générale contre le terrorisme”, VOA Afrique, 8 November 2019.

¹⁶³ Law establishing the patriotic defence volunteer status, consulted by Crisis Group.

¹⁶⁴ This recourse to volunteers will take place in a very different context from the 1980s: it will not be a question of flushing out the conservative and neocolonial forces within Burkinabè society, but of confronting heavily armed and determined insurgents.

¹⁶⁵ Crisis Group interviews, civil society actors, Ouagadougou, July and September 2019.

as in Niger, the use of non-state armed groups against jihadists has never been an effective tool in the fight against insurgency; what is more, it has resulted in violence against civilians.¹⁶⁶ In Burkina Faso's Centre-North region, the Koglweogo's commitment to fighting terrorism has paradoxically been one of the main drivers of jihadist insurgencies since early 2019 (see Appendix D).

The Koglweogo, who recruit mainly from among the Fulse and Mossi, have upset the balance between communities in the Centre-North. By taking on police and security prerogatives, they either wilfully or unwittingly became accomplices in settling scores, often concerning land disputes and to the detriment of the Fulani community. In 2017, the Koglweogo of Boulsa (Centre-North) became engaged in fighting terrorism to the overt indifference of authorities. The Fulani community then became their primary targets and sought the protection of the Rouga, Fulani groups charged with protecting herds, who were in turn perceived by the Koglweogo as "jihadists in disguise".¹⁶⁷ Thus, the counter-terrorism project merged with the settling of personal and, by extension, communal scores.

This climate of mutual distrust and strong stigmatisation of the Fulani set the scene for two massacres. On the night of 31 December 2018 to 1 January 2019, unidentified gunmen killed six people in Yirgou, including the Mossi village chief and his son. In retaliation, and supported by the largely Mossi population, the Koglweogo killed between one hundred and two hundred Fulani civilians.¹⁶⁸ In March, a second massacre was perpetrated by Fulse individuals against the Fulani in Arbinda (Soum), bordering the Centre-North.¹⁶⁹

The massacres perpetrated by the Koglweogo with the support of some local communities produce the same effect as the atrocities committed by defence and security forces: the Fulani approach jihadists to exact revenge or seek protection. In some cases, the atrocities that the Fulani have suffered have finally brought them over to the jihadists' line of thought. The latter have largely profited from the deteriorating situation in the Centre-Nord to extend their influence. Several dozen Koglweogo were also killed, and many others fled the fighting or the justice system.¹⁷⁰

The call for "volunteers" raises fears that similar scenarios could occur in other regions of Burkina Faso. This call is resonating within existing local security initiatives, in particular the Koglweogo, who are overwhelmingly Mossi. By taking part in counter-terrorism operations for which they are not trained, the Koglweogo risk targeting simple civilians whom they conflate with jihadists, in particular those from the Fulani community. They are also at risk of becoming the victims of growing violence against civilians displayed by the local branch of ISIS. The leader of the political opposition has even evoked the risk of "civil war".¹⁷¹ This prospect cannot be discounted

¹⁶⁶ "We Used to Be Brothers", Human Rights Watch, 7 December 2018.

¹⁶⁷ See Appendix D. Crisis Group interviews, civil society actors and Koglweogo from Boulsa, Ouagadougou, July and September 2019.

¹⁶⁸ "Au moins 210 morts lors du massacre du 1er janvier", VOA, 4 February 2019.

¹⁶⁹ "Au moins 62 personnes ont été tuées à Arbinda", VOA, 4 April 2019.

¹⁷⁰ The arrest of Koglweogo involved in the Yirgou massacre in early August 2019 accelerated their demobilisation, since many feared that they, too, would be arrested.

¹⁷¹ Meeting of the Consultation Framework of the Leader of the Opposition (known as the Chef de file de l'opposition politique, CFOP), held on 12 November 2019.

when the Fulani community is the second largest in the country (8.4 per cent of the population) and when violence targeting civilians is on the rise.¹⁷² In 2019, 934 civilians were killed by armed groups, compared to 157 from 2015 to 2018.¹⁷³

According to many observers, strengthening local security groups reflects electoral aims, in addition to security objectives.¹⁷⁴ In reality, the president's call seems to have validated what has existed inconspicuously since the summer of 2019: the arming, equipping and financing of the Koglweogo.¹⁷⁵ Some fear that the Koglweogo and/or the new "volunteers" will be exploited by the hardline wing of the ruling party, the People's Movement for Progress (MPP), in the run-up to the 2020 election.¹⁷⁶ In this context, the arrest, which lasted a few weeks in early 2020, of the Boulsa Koglweogo leader Boureima Nadbanka, for his supposed role in the Yirgou massacre, may have been partly motivated by the fact that he was not aligned with the authorities' political objectives on several occasions.¹⁷⁷ Should the hardliners in fact enlist vigilantes for their purposes, it would in turn encourage the opposition to seek the support of other local groups, in particular the Dozo, rivals of the Koglweogo in the West. With ongoing tensions between the government and supporters of former President Compaoré, militias in the service of politicians' agendas could start to spread across the country.

The president's announcement – likely precipitated by the attack in Boungou, which shocked the country – pre-empted the necessary efforts to define methods for supervising volunteers. In the following days, abuses of Fulani civilians started being reported in the North, Centre-North and East regions.¹⁷⁸ On 15 October, the former secretary general of the CDRs warned of the danger of self-defence groups lacking oversight.¹⁷⁹ There is an urgent need to halt a potential escalation of violence from which nobody stands to gain.

¹⁷² "Demographic and Health Survey 2010", Institut national de la statistique et de la démographie, 2010.

¹⁷³ Data consulted on the ACLED website.

¹⁷⁴ The CFOP press release of 12 November 2019 highlights fears that these "volunteers" will be politically exploited. Back in July, a meeting was held at the Ministry of Security to discuss the role of the Koglweogo in securing the 2020 election. Crisis Group telephone interviews, Burkinabè political observers, November 2019.

¹⁷⁵ Crisis Group interviews, former soldier and diplomat, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

¹⁷⁶ This hardline wing is embodied in the figure of Simon Compaoré. The former mayor of Ouagadougou and cabinet director for Blaise Compaoré (to whom he is not related) during the Sankara era, he supervises the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs). He is a notable figure within the MPP. The current that he embodies believes that the dignitaries of the old regime are fostering instability to sabotage the elections. The president's speech of 7 November was also preceded by a press release from the MPP which called for a "patriotic surge with the support of populations and self-defence and security militias". MPP press release, 7 November 2019. Concerning Simon Compaoré, see "Burkina Faso : Simon Compaoré, toujours prêt", *Jeune Afrique*, 9 May 2018. Crisis Group telephone interviews, observers and political actors in Burkina Faso, November 2019.

¹⁷⁷ Crisis Group telephone interviews, civil society actors based in the Centre-North, January 2020.

¹⁷⁸ Crisis Group telephone interviews, civil society actors and analysts in different regions of the country, November 2019.

¹⁷⁹ The CDRs, set up throughout the country during the Sankarist revolution in August 1983, were responsible for maintaining both security and the spirit of the revolution. As such, they became tools of political control. Concerning the volunteers, Pierre Ouédraogo insists on the need to "control armament, its use and ammunition, to make sure that there are no wayward trends and that the

D. *The (Complex) Construction of the Security-Development Nexus*

Both the government and its international partners present the “security-development nexus” as the cornerstone of their response to the crisis in Burkina Faso.¹⁸⁰ So far, this approach has struggled to produce concrete results and is based on a vision that reduces security to a military response, neglecting the political dimension of the crisis.

The Sahel Emergency Plan (Plan d’urgence pour le Sahel, PUS), adopted in July 2017, is the authorities’ main non-military response. The government designed it as a matter of urgency, basing it on a socio-economic pillar and a governance pillar that includes security issues. This plan essentially incorporates the guidelines of the National Program for Economic and Social Development (Plan national de développement économique et social, PNDES), designed in peacetime, applying them only to the Nord and Sahel regions.¹⁸¹ A coordinating unit reporting to the Ministry of Finance ensures the coordination of PUS projects and programs (that often predate the PUS), but with simplified procurement procedures to speed up their implementation.

The PUS remains poorly adapted to an unstable security environment that requires flexibility and responsiveness. Its implementation is hampered by excessive bureaucracy, since the actions of nine ministries must be coordinated. It has also suffered from a deteriorating security situation: only 51 per cent of planned activities were carried out in 2018, and 49 per cent in 2017.¹⁸² In addition, jihadists have destroyed infrastructure (schools and wells) built within the framework of the PUS, as they symbolise the state’s return, which they deem unacceptable. Its hasty launch led to communication problems with local authorities and beneficiaries.¹⁸³ Authorities recognise that this action does not suffice, without knowing how to improve upon it.¹⁸⁴

According to PUS advocates, poverty and underdevelopment are the root cause of violence. This precept explains why priority is given to developing basic infrastructure.¹⁸⁵ In reality, however, the violence is part of more complex governance crises in rural areas, where local conflicts over access to resources are worsening. Building infrastructure is not only insufficient in the face of these challenges, but it may even prove counterproductive in some cases. Digging a well in an area disputed between

resources are used to defend the country and not to settle local conflicts, community disputes, or personal scores”. “Burkina : ‘Contre les jihadistes, la résistance populaire’ (Pierre Ouédraogo)”, RFI, 15 October 2019.

¹⁸⁰ This nexus is often summed up by the idea that there would be no development without security, and no security without development.

¹⁸¹ Adopted in 2016, the PNDES is a national plan to combat poverty, with a budget of €23.5 billion over five years (2016-2020).

¹⁸² PUS Annual Activity Reports for 2017 and 2018, Ministry of the Economy, Finance and Development, May 2018 and March 2019.

¹⁸³ When the PUS’s achievements were presented at Dori in June 2018, mayors contested the results reported by the national authorities. This failing was nevertheless corrected by integrating community action plans into the PUS from 2018. Crisis Group interview, PUS coordinator, Ouagadougou, September 2019.

¹⁸⁴ Crisis Group interviews, state officials, Ouagadougou, July and September 2019.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

farmers and herders can thus lead to conflicts over its use if no one consults the populations beforehand.¹⁸⁶

The authorities also have a narrow concept of security, essentially based on military tools. Operation Otapuanu, launched in March 2019, is a good example. As part of its civil-military component, military doctors treated civilians and state services issued several thousand identity documents to those who lacked them.¹⁸⁷ But the operation did not give rise to dialogue between the army and the populations. Nor did it jump-start labour-intensive or income-generating projects, which could have helped restore confidence within local communities. Military authorities recognise that the operation was planned as a matter of urgency and without involving the technical ministries or partners who could have capitalised on its success.¹⁸⁸

It seems that some government officials are becoming aware of the limits of a military-focused approach, but the authorities are sending mixed signals. The national security policy being drafted under the Ministry of Security's leadership must outline an approach that is centred on securing the population rather than just the state.¹⁸⁹ Such an approach to security involves preventing conflict and addressing the weaknesses that fuel violence as a priority. But authorities seem divided as to how to achieve this balancing act, all the more since the 2020 electoral agenda and the unstable situation are pushing the MPP's hardline wing toward a military escalation. Rivalries between the Defence and Security Ministries also complicate the design and implementation of such an integrated approach.

This new approach could open the way to complementary solutions to the use of force, with options including community mediation, socio-political inclusion of systematically excluded populations, and even political dialogue with certain jihadists. Burkinabè authorities are informally exploring this path – much like in Mali and especially in Niger – but are hesitant to embark upon it.¹⁹⁰ In 2017, they authorised NGOs specialising in mediation to establish contacts with the jihadists, but no concrete progress has yet been recorded.¹⁹¹ With a deteriorating security situation, the state is struggling to identify potential intermediaries: many no longer seem to want to get involved or have even joined jihadist groups following events in the Centre-

¹⁸⁶ The PUS's second phase includes "social cohesion" actions, but these remain largely inadequate in view of the challenges facing the country. "Stratégie d'extension du programme d'urgence pour le Sahel 2019-2021", June 2019.

¹⁸⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Burkinabè soldiers, Ouagadougou, September 2019.

¹⁸⁸ Crisis Group interview, military official, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

¹⁸⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Burkinabè officials and drafting committee member, Ouagadougou, September 2019.

¹⁹⁰ Crisis Group Report, *Speaking with the "Bad Guys": Toward Dialogue with Central Mali's Jihadists?*, op. cit. See also Crisis Group Africa Report N°261, *The Niger-Mali Border: Subordinating Military Action to a Political Strategy*, 12 June 2018. In 2017, a former Malian jihadist from the Mopti region approached Ansarul Islam, saying he was acting on behalf of Burkinabè authorities, but military operations by Barkhane and G5 forces on the border with Mali brutally interrupted this timid start to dialogue. Crisis Group interview, former MUJAO member, Bamako, 2017.

¹⁹¹ In July 2018, the ANR invited traditional leaders from the Sahel region to Ouagadougou to reflect on such an approach, but some believe that certain actors are discredited in the eyes of the jihadists and therefore cannot be helpful in initiating a dialogue. Crisis Group analyst's interview in a previous capacity, traditional leader, Ouagadougou, July 2018.

North and Soum since early 2019.¹⁹² The army generally remains opposed to this solution, which dissuades many potential intermediaries from approaching jihadists for fear of being conflated with them.¹⁹³ Without a consensus between state actors, the dialogue option seems inconceivable in the short term.

¹⁹² Crisis Group interviews, figures involved in these attempts at dialogue and representative of civil society in Soum, Ouagadougou, July and September 2019.

¹⁹³ Crisis Group interviews, military officials and figures involved in the dialogue attempts, Ouagadougou, July and September 2019.

VI. Ending Violence

Faced with a multidimensional security, social and political crisis that threatens national stability and cohesion, the largely military response is proving ineffective and the threat is growing. While some senior state officials are considering a shift in strategy, others remain tempted by military escalation.¹⁹⁴ Considering that crucial electoral deadlines are barely one year away, this temptation is understandable, but it could jeopardise the country's future. Faced with the unprecedented rise in violence perpetrated by jihadists and certain self-defence groups since the beginning of 2019, a change of course is necessary.

With the support of international partners, Burkinabè authorities could plan a series of actions for the short, medium and long term. The security tool will remain a fundamental part of their response, but authorities should take care to minimise the counterproductive effects of military operations and the militarisation of local security initiatives. To contain the jihadist threat, they will have to prevent the local community-based violence that nourishes it. Finally, the state must respond to the structural challenges which largely explain the increase in violence in rural areas, and of which jihadism is only one expression.

A. *Limiting and Overseeing Civilian Involvement in Counter-insurgency Operations*

By calling on volunteers to take up arms against terrorism, the government is formally encouraging civilians to get involved in the fight against insurgency. It is thus responding to pressure from part of the population and to understaffed Burkinabè forces. The initiative has the merit of showing that Burkinabè authorities want to supervise – and encourage – a trend that already existed informally. While civilian involvement in counter-insurgency operations may prove to be useful, it also risks further exacerbating local community-based tensions. The role of civilians, volunteers and self-defence groups should therefore be limited to auxiliary security tasks (securing buildings for example) or to surveillance and intelligence gathering, and they should only be equipped with light weapons.¹⁹⁵ Those wishing to participate in offensive operations should join the regular army, especially since it is launching major recruitment drives between February and May 2020.¹⁹⁶

The Ministry of Security should also better supervise the actions of the Koglweogo and Dozo, while clearly distinguishing them from the volunteers. The revised 2016 decree regulating these structures should take into account the risks of local community-based violence resulting from their actions. Authorities could set up local community control mechanisms to prevent abuse, including representatives of dif-

¹⁹⁴ Crisis Group interviews, senior state officials, Ouagadougou, July and September 2019.

¹⁹⁵ When the law was passed in plenary session, the defence minister sought to reassure citizens by stating that volunteers would be armed only with light weapons. But the law does not specify the nature of the arms and the draft bill mentioned the possibility of equipping them with military-grade weapons. “L’armée burkinabè va former des civils volontaires pour défendre le pays”, RFI, 22 January 2020.

¹⁹⁶ Press release from the National Defence Ministry, 27 January 2020.

ferent sedentary and nomadic communities that share the same space. To limit the prerogatives of the Koglweogo (to a protection and intelligence role, for example), they could be placed under the authority of the national police, the body closest to them on the ground and the least engaged in counter-insurgency operations.¹⁹⁷ The Koglweogo would thus be less involved in direct operations against insurgent groups, which would limit the risk of creating tensions with other communities. Ultimately, authorities will have to regain control over these local armed groups and stop tolerating the abuses they have perpetrated.

Civil society organisations that are concerned about violence against civilians should encourage traditional, religious and community leaders to speak out about the risk of community-based violence.¹⁹⁸ The moral authority represented by traditional and religious elites might help forestall large-scale conflict between communities. This effort should primarily target the Fulani ethnic group, whose members struggle to be heard by other communities, and many of whom feel stigmatised.¹⁹⁹ If respected figures from Fulani communities rise to the occasion, they will be able to make their voices heard by other traditional leaders, including the Mossi, who can influence the Koglweogo's actions.

Political actors of all stripes should refrain from hiring men with guns, either directly or indirectly, in the run-up to and during the 2020 presidential election. The government and the opposition should open discussions on the subject, and both should pledge not to use such actors for electoral purposes.

B. *A More Effective and Proportionate Military Response*

In parallel, authorities should devise a more effective and more proportionate military response, consisting of the following: improving conditions for front-line troops; building a more reliable intelligence system to better distinguish civilians from insurgents; and investing in the judicial system to reduce summary executions.

The excessive use of force during counter-insurgency operations is not inevitable in the Sahel. It is largely linked to the conditions in which troops are fighting. The politicisation of the armed forces and the fear of a mutiny among their ranks dissuade the government from enhancing the resources of a service that has long suffered from insufficient training and equipment. Soldiers therefore operate in fear, which is conducive to abuses. Improving the living and operating conditions of troops at the front (with better equipment, shorter shifts, increased food rations and bonuses, psychosocial monitoring, provision of interpreters and medical evacuations) would limit the risk of abuses, as would improved training, an area in which the country's partners could play a significant role. The deployment of European missions – now

¹⁹⁷ Many among the national authorities and international partners believe that the 2016 decree carries risks. Placing these groups under the authority of mayors could give rise to local political militias. Crisis Group interviews, Security Ministry and Presidency of the Republic, Ouagadougou, September 2019.

¹⁹⁸ The Democratic Youth Organisation, the Collective against Impunity and Stigmatisation of Communities and the MBDHP.

¹⁹⁹ An initiative already under way within the Fulani community must open the door to meetings with other communities, in particular the Mossi and Gourmantché, to participate in drafting this call for volunteers.

under discussion in the EU – within the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) would be useful provided that lessons are learned from the limitations of such efforts in neighbouring Mali and Niger.²⁰⁰

The propensity for abuse is also linked to the difficulty the military faces in distinguishing civilians from insurgents. A more reliable intelligence system would reduce the risk of error. The creation of the National Intelligence Council, provided for by Act 026/2018 on general intelligence regulation in Burkina Faso, is a first step toward improving communication between services and cross-checking data. Such cooperation requires overcoming rivalries between the police, army and gendarmerie. Burkinabè authorities would also like their better-equipped international partners to share information, starting with France and the U.S., which could indeed help address shortcomings in this area.²⁰¹ This contribution would not, however, exempt Burkinabè authorities from improving their own intelligence measures.

To prevent summary executions from becoming an integral part of the counter-insurgency strategy, it is crucial to place the penal system at the heart of the state's response. By bringing alleged terrorists to justice, the specialised anti-terrorism division also helps tackle prison overcrowding. Its means are clearly insufficient, given the large number of cases and the difficulty of investigating in high-risk zones. The government should considerably increase the resources of this division, both for investigating offices and the judicial police.²⁰² International partners should come together in support of this new division and the country's special anti-terrorism unit (Brigade spéciale des investigations antiterroristes, BSIAT), which plays an essential role in conducting investigations that allow for a fair trial. With a similar context and staffing figures, Niger was able to ease its prison overcrowding thanks to such backing.²⁰³

Authorities should finally increase control over deployed units, even if they must do so with tact and caution given recurring discontent among troops. By concretely improving conditions on the front, the government could gain leverage to demand exemplary behaviour from its soldiers. International partners could help in this area. Thus, the UN compliance framework – of which the G5 Sahel Joint Force is part and which is struggling to obtain the authorisation of Burkina Faso's authorities for its implementation – supports this effort to strengthen transparency and accountability among deployed units.²⁰⁴ With the help of partners, these internal control mechanisms, which for the moment only benefit Joint Force battalions, could be applied to

²⁰⁰ For an analysis of these limitations, see the European Court of Auditors report, "Strengthening the capacity of the internal security forces in Niger and Mali: only limited and slow progress", 2018.

²⁰¹ Crisis Group interviews, senior Burkinabè state representatives, Ouagadougou, September 2019.

²⁰² Crisis Group interview, justice system actor, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

²⁰³ "Niger : un millier de membres présumés de Boko Haram jugés à huis clos", *Jeune Afrique*, 10 March 2017.

²⁰⁴ UN Resolution 2391 (2017) calls upon the G5 Sahel States to establish a "compliance framework" aimed at preventing and adequately dealing with all cases of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in relation to the Joint Force. In particular, it supports the establishment of an internal monitoring system based on the integration of provost marshals in the Joint Force battalions, an internal investigation mechanism, and a monitoring cell for incidents involving civilians and soldiers.

all troops engaged in counter-insurgency operations.²⁰⁵ Training paralegals and supporting early warning mechanisms in local communities could also limit the risk of abuse by defence and security forces.

C. In the Medium Term: Redeploying the State and Regaining the Confidence of Populations

Although essential, the use of force cannot be the only response to the crisis facing the country. Beyond the counterproductive effects of certain military operations, the Burkinabè forces' limited human and material resources mean that other solutions must be considered. The security response would be much more effective as part of a more comprehensive and integrated approach, including prevention, mitigation and stabilisation efforts. The use of force should, for example, give way to mediation when dealing with primarily land- or community-based conflicts. More specifically, in order to re-establish good relations with communities in areas where the central authority is disputed, the state will have to demonstrate its usefulness.

The possibility of a dialogue with jihadist groups, which is barely acknowledged amid today's rising violence, should at least be considered in the medium term. Authorities should explore opportunities for such a dialogue – following the elections scheduled for 2020, for example – as is already the case in Mali and Niger, without considering this option as precluding the use of force. Many Burkinabè “jihadists” are not terrorists but insurgents driven by local demands that the state could easily satisfy. At a minimum, the state could explore the possibility of negotiating the surrender of highway robbers or bandits before jihadist groups recruit them.

With or without such dialogue, the state must adapt its responses to the local contexts in which violence spreads. It also needs to make its prevention, mitigation and stabilisation policies more coherent in regions affected or threatened by violence. To this end, the state could set up an institution responsible for coordinating the government's civil actions for violent crisis management. Better equipped than the ministries to act in a crisis situation, it could, for example, promote community reconciliation in the Centre-North, launch stabilisation and dialogue programs between security forces and communities in the East region, or initiate dialogue between communities in the West as a measure to limit the consequences of the land crisis.

Several conditions should be met to prevent this institution from becoming an empty shell, like others in Burkina Faso. To have sufficient legitimacy to act on behalf of the state, it should report directly to the Presidency of the Republic; its director should have the rank of minister and sit on the National Security Council. To lead this body, authorities will have to choose a figure listened to and respected by both civilians and the military. The latter should be represented within this body to facilitate relations with the military hierarchy and participate in designing an integrated approach that embraces both civil and military actions. Finally, the institution's proper functioning will rely on the recruitment of competent experts from the different regions of intervention, who are ready to work in proximity to vulnerable populations and with a variety of actors: local civil society, local authorities and traditional lead-

²⁰⁵ For its part, the EU supports the systematic deployment of provost forces within the framework of Internal Security Forces operations.

ers. Specialised structures such as the National Observatory for the Prevention and Management of Communal Conflicts could also be called upon.

The support of Burkina Faso's international partners is also essential for this body to react effectively to emergencies. Some have already indicated their interest in setting up a body to coordinate government action.²⁰⁶ As the UN's presence is currently being strengthened, particularly in terms of peacebuilding, this can be an opportunity to provide such an institution with human and material support. In any case, multilateral and bilateral partners must follow and support the guidelines set by the state and not replace them. They should nevertheless remain vigilant. Such an institution can turn into another empty shell or be taken over by the authorities' hardline supporters.

A body of this type already exists in the region: through the High Authority for Peacebuilding (Haute autorité à la consolidation de la paix, HACP), neighbouring Niger has demonstrated that a Sahelian country can acquire a relatively effective tool in a fragile context (and despite a profusion of state institutions) similar to Burkina Faso. The HACP has indeed promoted a more integrated approach to preventing and managing conflicts, thanks to a range of tools and European and national funds that have given it full financial autonomy. It has notably relied on non-military means, in particular by using the seat occupied by its president on the National Security Council. A great deal rests on the figure appointed to its presidency, General Mahamadou Abou Tarka. A senior army officer as well as a university graduate, he embodies a balance between security and development.

The HACP's limits should also be taken into account when creating a similar institution in Burkina Faso. The HACP is struggling to monitor the results of its actions on the ground.²⁰⁷ It bears the marks of its president's personal positions; at times, he has irritated certain communities with his words or actions.²⁰⁸ To lead this body, Burkinabè authorities will have to choose the most inclusive and least divisive figure they can find, both at the community and political level.

D. *In the Longer Term: Solving the Rural Crises*

In the longer term, Burkina Faso must tackle the structural issues that facilitate jihadist recruitment, and more broadly the various forms of violence in rural areas.

The priority issue is that of land disputes, which plays a significant role in exacerbating local tensions between communities. In the Centre-North as in other western and eastern regions, indigenous and non-indigenous populations argue over land use and land ownership, each defending what they consider to be their right. The state should act as a legitimate mediator and peacefully arbitrate land disputes. To do so, the government will likely need to revise Land Laws N°034-2009 and N°034-2012, which are proving difficult to implement and therefore generate local tensions

²⁰⁶ Crisis Group interviews, members of the European and UN delegations, Ouagadougou, October 2019.

²⁰⁷ Crisis Group analyst's interviews in a previous capacity, HACP officials, Niamey, April 2019.

²⁰⁸ Crisis Group analyst's interviews in a previous capacity, Nigerian civil society actors, Niamey, April 2019.

between communities.²⁰⁹ Beyond that, the government should look for ways to limit land speculation and its related conflicts, starting with the issue of housing developments in urban, suburban and, increasingly, rural areas.

The government should also initiate a discussion about the governance of protected areas, whose creation has led to frustration in the East region. In particular, authorities should encourage more communities to involve themselves in the management of these areas, but also take care to include nomadic herders, who were often overlooked when these areas are created.²¹⁰

The governance of peripheral zones – and especially nomadic areas – should also include specific policies that respond to the concerns of local communities. The government would thus demonstrate that it considers the locals to be full citizens in their own right. For example, with regard to bilingual schooling, the French-Arabic bilingual primary education support project (Projet d'appui à l'enseignement primaire bilingue franco-arabe, PREFA), under way in several regions including the North, could serve as an educational model in these areas. PREFA schools, run by the Ministry of National Education and Literacy, have high enrolment rates and have thus far been spared by jihadist groups.²¹¹ Mobile court hearings, provided for in Burkinabè law but very rarely held, could be organised in the most isolated areas that lack courthouses, particularly in the Sahel region.²¹²

To strengthen the sense of belonging of nomadic populations and better protect them, the state could continue to distribute identity documents, as it has been doing since early 2019, to populations that tend to avoid public administration, which they often see as synonymous with predation. Finally, it should correct the extreme under-representation of Fulani nomads within the administration – both local and national – and in particular among Defence and Security Forces, for example through positive discrimination policies.²¹³

²⁰⁹ Law N°034-2009 determines the public and private land ownership regime applicable to rural land as well as the principles of land tenure. Law N°034-2012 relating to agrarian and land reorganisation notably determines the status of land in the national land tenure domain.

²¹⁰ These community hunting grounds are known as *zones villageoises d'intérêt cynégétiques*.

²¹¹ Crisis Group interview, PREFA director, Ouagadougou, July 2019.

²¹² The Sahel region has only one *tribunal de grande instance* in Dori and the last itinerant court hearing was held in 2016. Another was planned for Sebba but insecurity does not allow it at the moment. Crisis Group email interview, judicial actors in the Sahel, 11 February 2020.

²¹³ No ethnic-based statistics exist, but several Burkinabè officials recognise that the Fulani account for only a small percentage of these forces. A police official has estimated that this figure is likely less than 1 per cent. Crisis Group interview, national police officer, Ouagadougou, September 2019.

VII. Conclusion

The deterioration of the security situation in Burkina Faso is extremely worrying. While authorities are gradually losing their control over certain rural areas, jihadist-type insurgencies are spreading into them and could even, in the long term, turn the country into a corridor toward the coastal states to the south.

The counter-insurgency struggle too often fuels local community-based violence; with inadequate state supervision, the volunteers or local security forces that it intends to mobilise could further aggravate this violence. While Burkina Faso is at a turning point in its history, most of its leaders are preoccupied with short-term politics and in particular the 2020 elections.

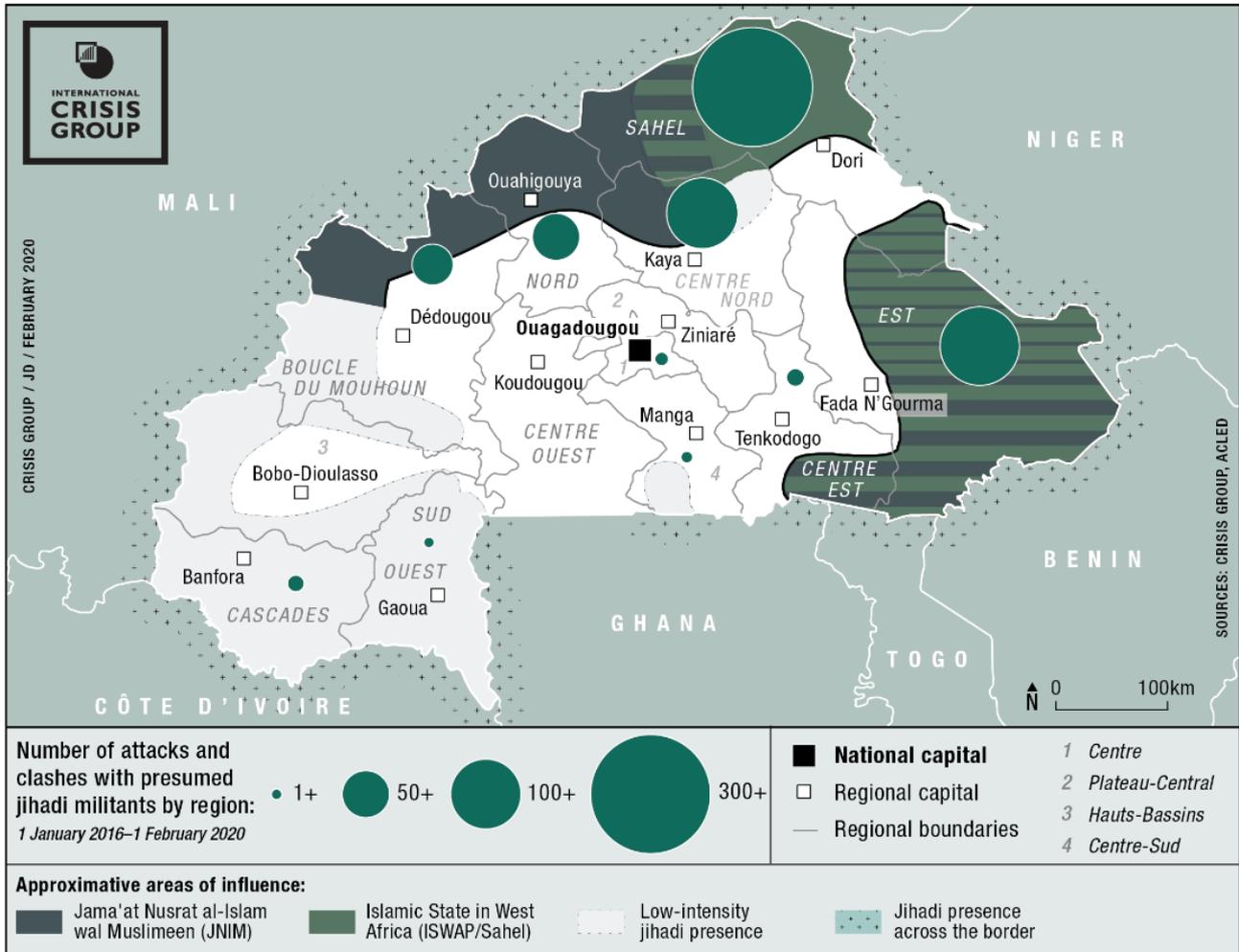
Authorities are faced with a three-fold challenge: to pursue military efforts while limiting violence against civilians; to regain the trust of communities and redeploy the state in rural areas; and to adapt their responses to local contexts by combining prevention, crisis management and stabilisation measures. Reconciling short-, medium- and long-term actions and finding the right balance between the use of force and the protection of communities pose major challenges. To overcome them, authorities and international partners must rapidly adopt a new approach.

Dakar/Brussels, 24 February 2020

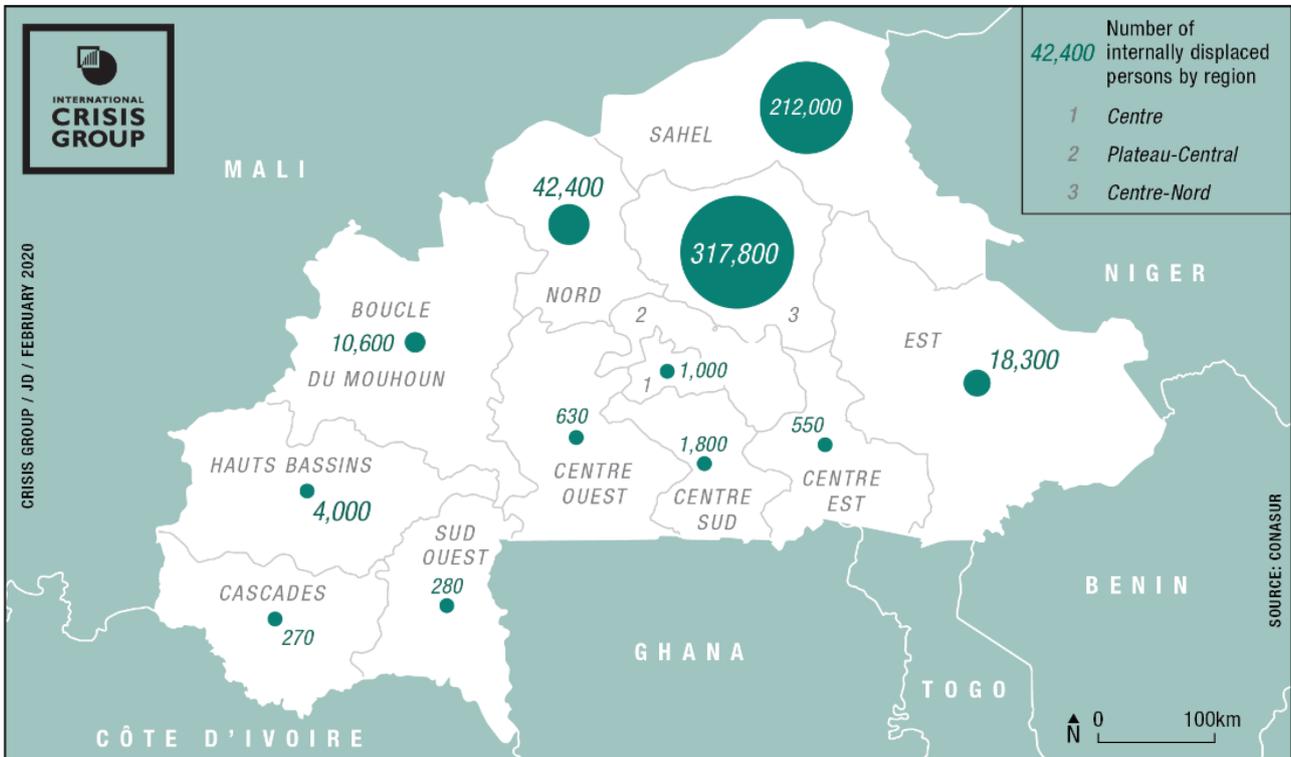
Appendix A: Map of Burkina Faso



Appendix B: Jihadist Presence and Number of Jihadist Attacks in Burkina Faso and its Borders (2016-2019)



Appendix C: Number of Internally Displaced Persons by Region (December 2019)



Appendix D: The Spread of Violence in the Centre-North

Since January 2019, the situation in Burkina Faso's Centre-North region has been deteriorating rapidly. This region has the hallmarks of rural areas experiencing seething unrest. It is a contact zone between sedentary Mossi and Fulse farming communities and Fulani herders, some of whom also live off agriculture. Growing pressure on available land has gradually poisoned relations between these communities. In the context of a jihadist push from Soum province, bordering the Centre-North, many unresolved land disputes and the territorial expansion of the Koglweogo have laid the groundwork for an explosion of community-based violence.

In the Sahel region and in the northern part of the Centre-North, the creation of Koglweogo groups since 2015 has inflamed relations between communities. In February 2015, Koglweogo from Boulsa (Nanmatenga province in the Centre-North) set up a largely Mossi group in Kerboulé (Soum province) to secure the gold sites belonging to an official from the former ruling elite. In March 2015, they apprehended a group of bandits, then tortured and detained the brother of the gang leader, Oumy Boly. After fruitless negotiations to obtain the release of his brother, in March 2016 the Boly group attacked the Koglweogo base in Kerboulé and the home of the vigilantes' leader, Aladji Djibi. Shortly afterward, Oumy Boly joined Ansarul Islam and became the group's military leader. This example illustrates how the settling of personal accounts resulting from economic interests helps aggravate antagonisms between communities and encourage certain actors to join armed groups based on their ethnic affiliation.

At the same time, relations are deteriorating between Fulani communities and Koglweogo in the nearby Centre-North region, bordering on Soum province. The Koglweogo are usurping powers that were hitherto the prerogative of the state and traditional leaders, thereby undermining them. Citing the fight against banditry to justify their actions, they have been making more arrests since 2015. They mainly target the Fulani community, taxing them heavily on the basis of accusations of cattle theft and damage caused by grazing herds. They also demand illegal taxes on livestock markets, angering Fulani herders. In reaction, the Fulani developed their own self-defence groups, the Rouga, as of 2016.

In this tense climate, warnings about bandits have subsided since 2017, to be gradually replaced by anti-terrorist rhetoric. The Fulani, and in particular the Rouga, are accused of colluding with jihadists, and the Koglweogo of the Centre-North are eager to combat them by enlisting in the state's war on terrorism. This involvement allows them to settle disputes, as was observed after the attack on Guendbila (Sanmatenga province). The Koglweogo arrested the Rouga leader from Guendbila and sought to arrest another from Barsalogo who had systematically opposed their extortion of livestock farmers in the cattle market. Along with twelve other Fulani landowners, he was also implicated in a land dispute with the Barsalogo town council, which had long sought to remove them in favour of a housing project. Nine of these landowners and the Rouga from Barsalogo were accused of terrorism by the Koglweogo and killed in 2019. It therefore becomes difficult to distinguish between the war on terrorism and the settling of personal and, by extension, communal scores.

The attack on Guendbila marks the beginning of a cycle of targeted assassinations of both Koglweogo leaders and Fulani village chiefs during 2018. As communal ten-

sions heighten, the Koglweogo in the Centre-North combine anti-terrorist action with anti-Fulani stigmatisation. For their part, the local Fulani groups, exposed to hostility from the Koglweogo who have the support of part of the Mossi and Fulse communities, appear to be approaching jihadists for their support. These fever-pitch community-based tensions set the scene for the massacres in Yirgou and Arbinda.

Taking place on 1-2 January 2019, the massacre of Yirgou (Barsalogo commune, Sanmatenga province) was both the result of this tense climate and the starting point for a new chain of violence that directly sustains jihadism. On the night of 31 December 2018 to 1 January 2019, an armed attack by unidentified men killed six people, including the Mossi village chief and his son. The presence of a Fulani individual at the burial of the village chief triggered a wave of violence against fifteen Fulani camps in the vicinity of Yirgou. The official death toll of 49 is disputed by human rights organisations, which put the figure at 210. No group has claimed responsibility for the assassination, which was never seriously investigated.

This massacre was followed in March by that of Arbinda (Soum province, bordering on the Centre-North), perpetrated by the Fulse against the Fulani. Again, this violence was the result of a progressively deteriorating climate, marked by a series of executions attributed to the army. It was reported that a Fulani chief from Gaskindé was killed in November 2018 by soldiers acting on information from Fulse informants. The Fulse Koglweogo from Gaseliki assisted those of Yirgou during the massacres in January. This killing provoked jihadist violence against Fulse civilians suspected of colluding with the army or the Koglweogo, including in Gaseliki and Sikiré (Arbinda villages) in January 2019. The events at Yirgou and Arbinda sparked major conflicts between communities that were only somewhat mitigated by existing social ties and the prudence of traditional leaders.

The Koglweogo find themselves more vulnerable than ever in the Centre-North. More than 60 members were killed by jihadists between January and September 2019 in this area. Many have stood down for fear of being targeted, whether by jihadists or by the justice system. Since April 2019, the Boulsa Koglweogo have withdrawn from the anti-terrorist struggle, as confirmed by their commander-in-chief in August. Most Koglweogo now realise that they are not equipped to fight jihadists. Those from Boulsa continue to hope that the state will provide them with the means to resume combat.

The case of the Centre-North illustrates the mechanisms by which violence spreads in Burkina Faso. To gain a foothold in the area, jihadists took advantage of worsening community-based conflicts with origins in personal and often longstanding disputes concerning mining or land resources. The appearance of armed men – Koglweogo, Rouga and jihadist groups – allows everyone to dispense their own justice with weapons, and ends up fuelling a dangerous cycle of reprisals. Strictly speaking, jihadists did not create this climate of community-based tensions. But they have shrewdly exploited it by offering protection and extralegal recourse to populations that feel threatened or discriminated against.

Appendix E: 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 80 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.

Crisis Group's President & CEO, Robert Malley, took up the post on 1 January 2018. Malley was formerly Crisis Group's Middle East and North Africa Program Director and most recently was a Special Assistant to former U.S. President Barack Obama as well as Senior Adviser to the President for the Counter-ISIL Campaign, and White House Coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf region. Previously, he served as President Bill Clinton's Special Assistant for Israeli-Palestinian Affairs.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in seven other locations: Bogotá, Dakar, 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, Tbilisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

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February 2020

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