



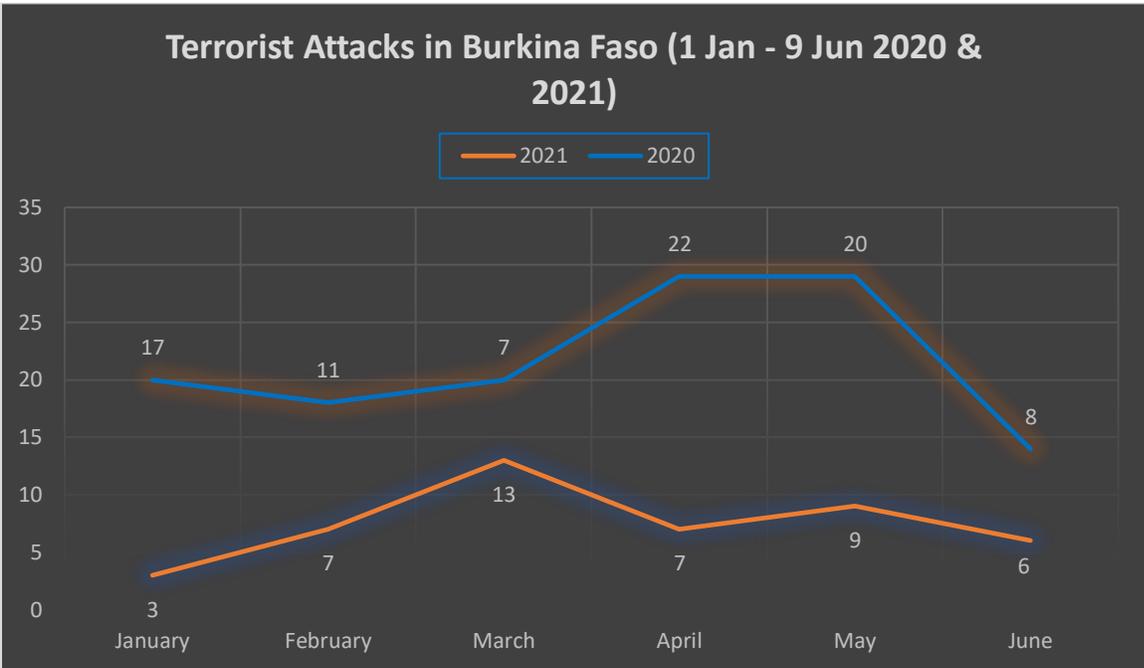
The long history of serious security incidents remaining unclaimed does make it difficult to attribute the incident with complete certainty.

The attack on Solhan comes just weeks after a visit to the region by the Burkinabé Defence Minister Chérif Sy, whose visit was meant to highlight the return of government authority after months of jihadist encroachment. With the Defence Minister declaring during the visit that normalcy had returned to the area, this attack could be seen as a reaction to the government's claim of victory in its war on terror.

In the wake of the attack in Solhan, the Burkinabé government declared a 72-hour national mourning period, with officials stating that it had been declared the most severe attack to have taken place in Burkina Faso in years. In the wake of the latest violence, the government has also implemented new security measures. In a communiqué released on 6 June, the governor of the Sahel Region informed the local population of the closure of all artisanal gold mining sites and the suspension of all activities related to gold mining on these sites throughout the entire provinces of Oudalan and Yagha. The measure, which comes into effect as of 7 June and affects only artisanal and illegal mining/orpillage, will remain in place indefinitely. In a separate communiqué also issued on 6 June, the governor of the Sahel Region informed the local populations that the circulation of two-wheeled vehicles (motorcycles and mopeds) and three-wheeled (tricycles) is formally prohibited in parts of the Sahel Region from 7 June for an indefinite period. Those who have been issued authorization by the local authorities are exempt from the ban. The measure affects the whole of Yagha province, and the municipalities of Déou, Markoye, Oursi, and Tin-Akoff in the province of Oudalan.

While no groups have claimed responsibility for these attacks, the incidents highlight Burkina Faso's continued struggle to grapple with its security situation and inability to push back the jihadist threat. Furthermore, in the chaos of the past weekend, numerous reports emerged on social media sites and in the local news of additional attacks taking place, which raised further concerns amongst the local populations. Reports emerged that a bus had been targeted by unidentified assailants on the Dori-Sebba axis, with the terrorists executing a number of passengers. There were also reports circulating on social media that terrorists had targeted the village of Damdam. In a statement released on 6 June, the Burkinabé army denied reporting that emerged over the weekend pertaining to the security situation in the northern Sahel region. The Chief of the General Staff of the Armies formally denied that there had been an attack on a bus on the Dori-Sebba axis and that the village of Damdam had been attacked. He further reassured the public that units had deployed to the affected areas, and that large-scale operations have been launched to locate and neutralize the terrorists. The statement also called on the local populations to remain calm and to rely only on information from official sources. However in the age of social media, where anyone can easily post information and news on sites like Twitter without verifying its validity, the circulation of so-called fake news can be particularly dangerous, especially when it comes to reporting attacks or incidents that have not occurred. Such reporting can generate hysteria, over reaction or inaction, and can damage morale even when found out to be untruthful. It is highly likely that reports over the weekend of a bus being targeted, and of another village being attacked heightened fears amongst the local populations, and may have resulted in some fleeing the affected areas. In the midst of an emerging crisis or crises, evidence suggests the increasing likelihood of false news reporting, which will be designed to spread fear and disrupt an effective response. Consequently, companies operating in Burkina Faso should ensure that they have robust communication and journey management protocols in place to ensure smooth passage of information and sharing of details for best results and confidence.

While in recent months, Burkina Faso has seen relative calm, these latest attacks highlight the continued security challenges that the country faces. Over this past year, Burkina Faso has continued to be targeted by the growing jihadist threat, though the number of attacks recorded monthly between 1 January - 9 June 2021 have declined in comparison to the same reporting period in 2020 (as seen below in graph).



In total, between 1 January - 9 June 2020 a total of 85 terrorist attacks were reported in Burkina Faso, with incidents spread throughout the northern Sahel region, the tri-border area between Burkina Faso-Mali-Niger, southwards along the border with Niger and down towards the frontier with Benin as well as in the western region of the country, in the Cascades and Sud-Ouest regions of Burkina Faso. In comparison, in 2021, the same reporting period has seen a total of 45 terrorist attacks reported, with incidents concentrating on the same areas as last year. The attack in Solhan however has highlighted the continued capabilities and drive of jihadist organizations to carry out deadly attacks.

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