



West Africa Security Report

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Burkina Faso



Security Update

Presidential and legislative elections are scheduled to take place on 11 October, with a possible second round of voting on 15 November. All travellers to Burkina Faso in the weeks leading up to the elections, and during the election period, are advised to maintain a high level of security awareness and exercise caution. We advise that during the electoral period, all travellers avoid political rallies, campaign events, demonstrations, polling stations and large crowds. Peaceful demonstrations may turn violent with minimal notice. We advise that all travellers monitor the local news for updates.

There is an underlying threat from terrorism. Travellers are reminded that attacks could be indiscriminate, and may occur in places that are frequented by foreigners. On 24 August, several suspected Islamic militants launched a rare attack near Burkina Faso's border with Mali, wounding at least two people, with the militants indicating that they were targeting Christians. The incident occurred at a police station in Oursi, which is located 50 km (30 miles) from Mali. One witness reported that the assailants had indicated that they were Boko Haram. So far no extremist group has taken responsibility for the incident, and although the attackers mentioned Boko Haram, it remains unclear whether they have any connection to the Nigerian-based group that has launched attacks in Chad, Cameroon and Niger. While in the wake of the attack, the military has deployed soldiers to the area in a bid to step up security in the region; the incident has demonstrated that Burkina Faso is increasingly becoming affected by jihadist violence that has destabilized neighbouring states.

MS Risk currently advises against all travel to the area north of the town of Boulsa. This is due to the town's proximity to the border with Mali.

Threats and Concerns

There is a general threat from terrorism throughout the Sahel region. While for the most part, Burkina Faso has not been affected by Islamist militancy, the country's shared border with Mali, coupled with the regional threat, may enable such elements to gain access. The regional Islamist elements that could threaten Burkina Faso include al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), Ansar al-Dine, Ansar al Sharia and Boko Haram.

Kidnapping Threat

There is a heightened risk that terrorist groups may cross the northern borders from Mali and Niger into Burkina Faso in order to carry out kidnappings. On 4 April 2015, an armed group kidnapped a Western national in the Tambau Region. His current whereabouts remain unknown. Since 2008, over 25 Westerners have been kidnapped in the Sahel region, and a number of these hostages continue to be held.

Crime

There is a high risk of armed groups stopping vehicles, including public buses, in order to rob them. Such incidents have occurred in various parts of the country, particularly at night. Therefore all travel between towns by road at night is to be avoided, particularly from Ouagadougou to Po, where there is a heightened risk. This is especially severe on market days, when bandits often target merchants with stock or cash en route to and from the urban areas.

Major Incidents

30 August

The Constitutional Council has provisionally cleared 16 candidates for the upcoming presidential elections in October however it has declared the nominee of ousted president Blaise Compaore's party ineligible. Eddie Constance Konboigo, head of Compaore's Congress for Democracy and Progress party, is amongst six candidates barred from running, along with Gilbert Noel Ouedraogo of the ADF/RDA groups, which was allied to the former president's administration. Konboigo has called the decision a move to "exclude" his party based more on politics than the law, stating, "we dispute the decision of the Constitutional Council...We will denounce it but we will comply." The final list of presidential candidates will only be published after the deadline for appeals runs out on 6 September. Only those candidates who have made the provisional list can contest the candidacy of a rival.

Romania's Foreign Ministry has disclosed that it is working to verify the authenticity of a video of a Romanian security worker pleading for help after being kidnapped by militants with ties to the Islamic State (IS) group. According to officials, the man in the videotape identifies himself as Iulian Gherghut and states that the recording was made on 18 August and that he was kidnapped at Tambao, a mining site in Burkina Faso, by the al-Qaeda-linked al-Murabitoun group. Speaking in French, Gherghut apparently urges the Romanian and Burkinabe governments, along with his family and the head of the Pan African security company, to negotiate for his freedom. On Sunday, the Romanian Foreign Ministry confirmed that the images were of Gherghut, who was kidnapped on 4 April in the West African nation.

Ivory Coast



Security Update

Presidential elections have been scheduled for 25 October, with a possible second round of voting on 22 November. All travellers to Ivory Coast in the weeks leading up to the polls, and during the voting period, are advised to maintain a high level of security awareness and exercise caution. We advise that during the election period, all travellers avoid political rallies, demonstrations and campaign events as well as polling stations and large crowds. Demonstrations may turn violent with minimal notice. We advise that all travellers monitor the local news for updates.

MS Risk currently advises against all but essential travel to the western regions of Dix-Huit Montagnes, Haut Sassandra, Moyen-Cavally and Bas-Sassandra, particularly the area to the west of Duekoue up to the border with Liberia. This is due to the risk of serious violence by local militias. As recently as February 2015, fatal clashes between militias and the security forces have occurred in this area.

Major Incidents

9 September

Ivory Coast's constitutional court has cleared ten candidates to stand in next month's presidential election, including incumbent Alassane Ouattara who is the favourite to win a second term in office. Other candidates, which the court adjudged to have met the criteria to run, include Pascal Affi N'Guessan, leader of the largest opposition party, the Ivorian Popular Front, which is the party of former president Laurent Gbagbo. Former prime minister Charles Konan Banny and the former president of the national assembly, Mamadou Koulibaly, have also been cleared to run along with two women. In total, 33 candidates registered with the independent electoral commission. The 25 October election is seen as a critical step in the West African country's recovery from civil war.

8 September

On Tuesday, appeals judges at the International Criminal Court (ICC) rejected a request for the temporary release of former Ivory Coast president Laurent Gbagbo on health grounds weeks before the start of his trial. Gbagbo has been accused of plunging his country into civil war after losing a presidential run-off election in 2010. His trial is scheduled to begin on 10 November. He has been detained in The Hague since November 2011, after being arrested in April of that year in the Ivory Coast. Court documents have indicated that he suffers from posttraumatic stress syndrome and an unspecified physical ailment. In Tuesday's ruling, which was the 9th review of his detention by the court, a panel of three judges rejected all grounds of appeal that were lodged by Gbagbo's lawyers against a lower court's decision to extend his custody. It indicated that the trial chamber had

properly weighed Gbagbo's health issues and potential flight risk, adding, "the appeals chamber found that it was not unreasonable for the trial chamber to find the existence of Mr Gbagbo's support network posed a risk to abscond or obstruct investigation." In June of this year, judges confirmed four counts of crimes against humanity against Gbagbo for post-election violence in which around 3,000 people were killed.

31 August

On Monday, the opposition coalition invited President Alassane Ouattara, who is seeking a second term in office, to discuss conditions for the upcoming elections while "there is still time." According to Jean-Jacques Bechio, spokesman for the National Coalition for Change (NCN), "the elections cannot and must not be held without sitting down to discuss the conditions." The NCN opposition coalition, which includes some twenty Ivorian politicians including ex-prime minister Charles Konan Banny, who is a candidate in the upcoming 25 October elections, is demanding the dissolution of the electoral commission in charge of the elections, which is considered favourable to the incumbent president, as well as the "effective disarmament of all militias." On Monday, the Ivorian Constitutional Council gave a tentative list of 33 presidential candidates, including three women, who filed their application for the presidential elections.

Mali

Security Update



Security in Mali remains unstable, particularly in the northern region of the country with clashes in the area breaking a fragile peace agreement and threatening the security of the area. A number of incidents across the country last month have demonstrated that Mali's security remains unstable.

On 2 August, two Malian soldiers were killed and five injured when their convoy was ambushed on the road between the central towns of Nampal and Diabaly, located 400 km (250 miles) north of the capital Bamako. On 3 August, armed men launched an attack on an army post in the northern village of Gourma-Rharouss. The attack was later claimed by AQIM. In a major attack last month, militants stormed a hotel hosting United Nations staff members in central Mali. On 7 August, militants targeted the Byblos hotel in the town of Sevare, in the region of Mopti. The attack lasted several hours, with at least thirteen people killed. This is the first attack to be carried out by Islamic extremists in a central Malian town, indicating that militants operating in the region are spreading their aggression, targeting the government, military and UN peacekeeping force. A number of other incidents throughout the course of last month, including roadside bombings, targeted security forces operating in the country. The breaking of a fragile peace agreement in northern Mali has prompted concerns that this will further destabilize the security situation in the area. On 15 August, rival armed groups reported that they briefly exchanged fire in what is an apparent breach of a peace agreement, which they signed with the Malian government in June. This incident prompted UN peacekeepers to announce that they will establish a 20-kilometer "Security Zone" around the town of Kidal in order "to avoid any possible extension of the fighting that could affect the population of the town." The zone will take effect as of 0800 GMT 18 August and will remain in place until further notice. On 17 August, GATIA militia members chased Tuareg separatists from the town of Anefis. While on 27 August an official peace monitoring group demanded that GATIA leave Anefis, which is located 150 km (93 miles) south of the city of Kidal, on 28 August, a spokesman for the militia stated that if they leave and the army does not come in, the Tuareg separatist group that previously occupied the town will return, warning that there is little that the United Nations can do to get them to leave.

MS Risk currently advises against all travel to the provinces of Gao, Kidal, Mopti and Timbuktu. We currently advise against all but essential travel to the rest of the country.

Terrorism Threat

There is a high threat from terrorism. MS Risk advises all in Mali to be aware that attacks could be indiscriminate and can occur in places that are frequented by expatriates and foreign travellers. Following the French/African military intervention in January 2013, the threat of retaliatory kidnap or attack against Western interests has increased. While the threat of kidnap exists across Mali, it is particularly high in areas north of Mopti. Recently, there have been a number of bomb attacks that have occurred in Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu. Further such attacks are likely to occur.

Major Incidents

7 September

On Monday, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that Mali is on high alert after a baby was found to have the highly contagious poliovirus, with officials blaming low vaccination coverage. In a statement, the WHO indicated, “a case of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2 (cVDPV2) has been confirmed in Bamako.” According to the UN health agency, Malian authorities had detected polio in the 19-month-old child from Guinea, who was brought to the capital Bamako for medical treatment seven days after paralysis set in on 20 July. Monday’s announcement comes just less than a month after Africa marked one year since the last recorded case of wild polio, which had raised hopes that the continent was moving towards eradicating the crippling disease. According to WHO spokesman Oliver Rosenbaer, while there have been no cases of wild polio in Africa since 11 August 2014, there have been several cases since then, in Madagascar and Nigeria, of vaccine-derived variants like the one that was found in Mali. The WHO has indicated that the latest case is genetically linked to a confirmed case of the virus that was detected in the Siguiri district, in the Kankan Region of Guinea, in August 2014, which appears to have been circulating undetected across international borders for more than two years. The agency has reported that “the risk of spread of this virus is deemed high and it has the capacity to cause paralytic disease in humans or kill,” warning that the emergency of the virus revealed “low population immunity against the virus due to low rates of vaccination coverage in Guinea.” The WHO further indicated that it was helping the health ministries in both Mali and Guinea to investigate the circumstances behind the emergence and spread of the virus, and to mount a robust vaccination campaign to put an end to the outbreak, adding that the first vaccination round would begin this week in Mali and within two weeks in Guinea.

Pro-government militia fighters in Mali have reported that they have begun withdrawing from a town where the group’s fighters have clashed with separatist rebels. On Sunday, Fihroun Maiga, s spokesman for the militia coalition, disclosed that its fighters have begun pulling out from Anefis in what he described as a “progressive” withdrawal. Maiga however declined to disclose how long it would take until the fighters, with all of their weapons have left the town.

The Malian military reported on Monday that it had arrested three suspected members of a new Islamist group who it claims were behind a number of recent armed attacks targeted security forces in and around the capital city Bamako. The Massina Liberation Front (MLF), which is led by jihadist Amadou Koufa, has been blamed for a number of attacks that have moved the country’s three-year-old conflict from the remote desert region in the north to the south. According to Modibo Naman Traore of the army’s public relations office, “three terrorists all belonging to Amadou Koufa’s group, were arrested by the Special Forces in the night from Saturday to Sunday.” An army statement identified the men as Hassan Dicko, who has been described as Koufa’s number two, and Ali Sangare, a taxi driver. The statement further disclosed that Ayoub Sangare, an Ivorian, was responsible for the cell’s logistics and authorities discovered large quantities of weapons, ammunition and grenades during a search of his house. The

army further reported that the cell was behind attacks on the lodgings of personnel from the country's UN peacekeeping mission, MINUSMA, as well as a police post in Bamako and a gendarme base in Begueda, which is located just outside the capital.

3 September

According to local authorities, nineteen people died when an overloaded canoe capsized in what is the second major river accident to occur in the West African country in four months. Officials have reported that the vessel overturned Wednesday on a stretch of the Niger river that passes through the town of Bangou, which is located around 140 kilometres (85 miles) from the central city of Mopti. According to Oumar Sanke, of the Mopti civil protection department, "19 people were killed, four are missing and 70 survived," adding, "the search and rescue continues. The death toll remains provisional because we do not know exactly how many passengers boarded (the canoe)." A spokesman from the Mopti river rescue authority however reported that the vessel was "overloaded, as usual." According to the official, "there was a very strong winds and there was a panic on aboard. All passengers leapt to one side of the boat. With the imbalance, it capsized...The search continues. We believe there are other victims." A statement released earlier by the government had put the death toll at 18 and had indicated that the accident occurred around 5:00 AM, adding that the eight crewmembers were amongst the survivors. In April of this year, ten people drowned after their vessel capsized in the town of Tienfala, which is located about 30 kilometres from the capital, Bamako.

According to authorities, at least seven jihadists, who have been accused of attacking the Malian military in the country's south, have been arrested in neighbouring Ivory Coast. On Thursday, Modibo Naman Traore, a spokesman for the Malian Special Forces, reported that the suspects had been hiding in the forests of northern Ivory Coast, adding that they men have since been handed over to the Malian authorities, who believe that they are linked with the group Ansar Dine.

2 September

According to Mali's defense ministry adviser, five neighbouring countries have met in order to discuss a joint force aimed at fighting extremism in the region. On Wednesday, Lt. Col. Diarran Kone reported that representatives from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger were meeting in Bamako in order to strategize, adding that they are meeting with experts from the African Union (AU) and the West African economic bloc (ECOWAS) in order to discuss what is necessary to deploy such a military force. There have been a number of meetings of the five Sahel countries, with the first summit being held in February in Mauritania, where officials discussed coordinating development and security policies.

1 September

A defense ministry and a UN source have reported that two Malian soldiers were killed Tuesday in a pre-dawn attack that targeted an army checkpoint located outside Timbuktu in the northern region of the country. According to a defense ministry official, "we lost two men this Tuesday at about 3 AM at our checkpoint north of Timbuktu." The ministry official further indicated that several soldiers had also been hurt in the "heavy arms" attack against the checkpoint and that a Malian army vehicle had been hijacked, adding that the toll so far is "provisional." The attack, which was carried out by unknown assailants, was also confirmed by a security source at MINUSMA,

which is the UN mission in the country. The attack follows a deadly ambush that occurred on 3 August also in the Timbuktu region, when ten soldiers were killed in an attack on their camp at Gourma-Rharouss by attackers believed to be jihadist fighters linked to Islamist group Ansar Dine.

30 August

A government-allied militia has agreed to leave a northern Malian town, which it occupied earlier this month following clashes with Tuareg separatists. According to Fihroun Maiga, spokesman for the Platform coalition of militia groups, on Saturday, the militia agreed to leave the town following the intervention of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. On Sunday, Maiga disclosed that the president “gave the order to leave Anefis without conditions and we are executing it,” adding that militia representatives planned to take a helicopter from the northern town of Gao to Anefis in order to alert their fighters. The news comes just a day after Maiga insisted that the group would remain in the town in a bid to prevent the separatists from returning. The UN has praised the move, stating that is helpful in preserving the fragile peace accord.

29 August

The French army reported Saturday that a French soldier has been killed by a colleague in “accidental fire” in an army camp in Mali. According to a statement released by the French army, Marine Baptiste Truffaux was shot by a fellow soldier on Thursday at a camp in Gao, adding that he was treated at the scene and then transported to a surgical hospital where he died. Truffaux joined the army in June 2013 and was deployed to Mali in May as part of France’s 3,000-strong Operation Barkhane counter-terrorism deployment.

27 August

According to a UN official, Mali’s peace accord monitoring committee is demanding the immediate evacuation of government-allied militia members from a town, which they took from separatists in the country’s northern region. On 17 August, GATIA militia members chased Tuareg separatists from the northern Malian town of Anefis. On Thursday, Arnauld Akodjenou of the UN mission in Mali disclosed that the committee has condemned the violence and has ordered the evacuation. Fighting between the groups has broken a peace accord, which was signed by the government, allied militias and separatist groups in June. Akodjenou has reported that the UN will investigate the fighting, which broke out between 15 – 17 August, adding that the militia members are blocking the peace process. **Update (28 August)** – A government-allied militia has indicated that it will not follow demands by an international peace-monitoring group to leave the northern town of Anefis, which it took from separatists last week. On Friday, Fihroun Maiga, spokesman for the militia, disclosed that if they leave and the army does not come in, the Tuareg separatist group, which previously occupied the town, will return, adding that there is little the UN can do to get them to leave.

Niger



Security Update

MS Risk currently advises against all travel to the following parts of Niger: all areas of the country north of the city of Abalak, including the Air Massif region; the province of Agadez, including the road that links Assamakato Agadez and the city of Agadez; areas of Tahoua province north of the city of Tahoua, including the city itself; the area of Tillaberi province north of Niamey to Menaka; and areas within 40 km of the border with Nigeria in the provinces of Diffa, Maradi and Zinder. We currently advise against all but essential travel to the rest of the country, including the capital city Niamey.

Terrorism and Kidnapping

There is a high threat from terrorism and kidnapping. Attacks could be indiscriminate and may occur in places that are frequented by foreigners.

There is a growing threat from Nigerian-based Boko Haram. On 6 February 2015, Nigerian and Chadian military forces were attacked by Boko Haram in the towns of Bosso and Diffa. On 8 February 2015, there was an explosion in the town of Diffa, which resulted in a number of deaths and injuries. With military operations, aimed at ending Boko Haram's six-year insurgency, ongoing in northeastern Nigeria, it is likely that further attacks may take place, particularly in those areas of Niger that border northern Nigeria. MS Risk advises all travellers to the Diffa region to remain alert and to monitor local updates.

Major Incidents

6 September

On Sunday, Niger, Chad and Algeria stressed the urgency of forming a national unity government in order to solve the ongoing conflict in neighbouring Libya. Algeria's African affairs ministers, and the foreign ministers of Niger and Chad, stressed the importance of such a government "to preserve Libya's unity and territorial integrity and its people cohesion." In a joint statement, Abdelkader Messahel, Aichatou Kane Boulama and Moussa Faki Mahamat stated that this would allow Libya to tackle the many challenges it faces "with the help of the international community." Libya, which borders Algeria to the west, and Niger and Chad to the south, has been affected by violence since the NATO-backed uprising against dictator Moamer Kadhafi in 2011. The North African country currently has two rival parliaments, the General National Congress (GNC) in Tripoli and the internationally recognized government, which is based in the eastern region of the country. On Friday, just a day after the rivals resumed peace talks in Geneva, UN envoy to Libya Bernardino Leon indicated that a unity government agreement could be reached "in the coming days." The UN

hopes that the talks could lead to an agreement being signed by 20 September, with a unity government coming into force a month later.

27 August

Suspected Boko Haram militants have raided a village in southern Niger, killing three people including a soldier. According to security sources, the overnight attack in the village of Abadam in the Diffa region, which lies near the border with Nigeria, occurred earlier this week. One military source has disclosed that “Boko Haram attacked Tuesday night...They killed two civilians and looted shops of goods. We lost a sergeant on Wednesday during a pursuit of the terrorists. But we neutralized them.”

About MS Risk

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 - Due diligence and investigations.
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 - Interim security
 - Training
 - Special assignments
- Crisis Management
 - Crisis response
 - Business continuity management
 - Hostile operations support to commercial interests
- Virtual Security Director service for clients lacking a full time security executive.

References are always available. More information is found at www.msrisk.com

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