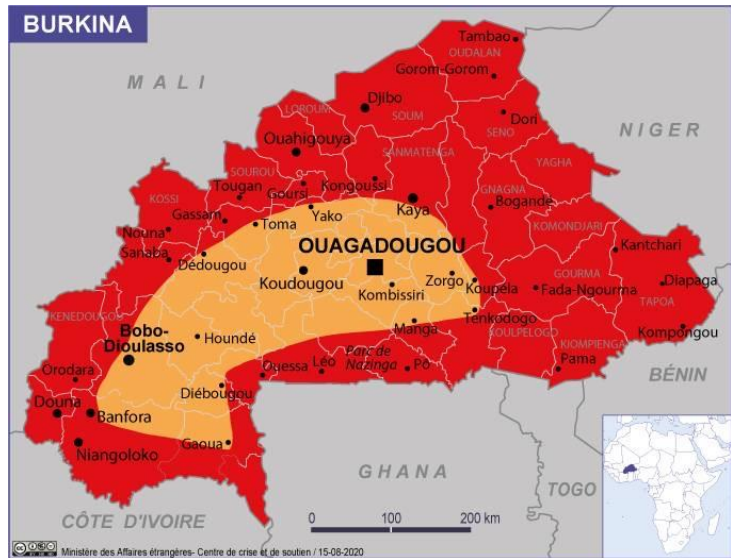


## Security Update - Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso has once again been rocked by Islamist violence, after a deadly weekend which included an attack that resulted in over 160 casualties. Further complicating the security situation have been reports on local news and social media sites of additional attacks, which raised fears amongst the local populations and prompted the Burkinabé government to issue a warning.

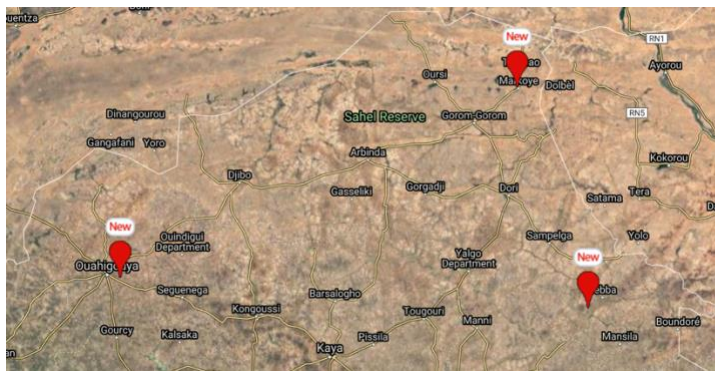
The latest violence began on Friday 4 June, when a volunteer fighter was killed and two others were wounded in an ambush by unidentified armed individuals in the locality of Nogo, in Loroum province. Then early on Saturday, unknown militants launched a deadly attack on the village of Solhan, in Yagha province.

The assailants arrived on about 20 motorbikes at around 2:00 am local time Saturday, and first targeted an outpost of the Volunteers for the Defence of the Fatherland (VDP). They then proceeded to move towards the houses, where they killed civilians indiscriminately. The attack resulted in the deaths of at least 160 civilians, with security sources reporting that the victims were mostly



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- Formellement déconseillé
- Déconseillé sauf raison impérative
- Vigilance renforcée
- Vigilance normale



young, ranging in age between 8 months to 45 years. The attackers also looted, set fire to shops and burned vehicles before fleeing the area. Nearly 800 people fled the area to the nearby town of Sebba. The armed forces reportedly arrived 1 - 2 hours after the jihadists left. Just hours after the attack on Solhan, another raid occurred in the village of Tadarayt, in the commune of Markoye, which saw at least 14 people, including a self-defence force volunteer,

killed. There have so far been no claims for this attacks.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack on Solhan, though two main groups operating in the area have been identified as the possible culprits - a local al-Qaeda affiliate (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (EIGS). However it is likely that the attack was carried out by JNIM. Recently, the al-Qaeda affiliate has strengthened its position in the area, and it is the most influential group operating in the province. Evidence that the group planted explosives after withdrawing from Solhan, in a bid to prevent access to local authorities during rescue operations, coupled with the geographical location of the attack, further suggests that JNIM is likely to be behind it. Notwithstanding this assessment, on 8 June, JNIM issued a strong denial on any involvement in this massacre. This may be due to the severity of the atrocity and a strong desire to distance itself or it may not have been sanctioned from a higher level.

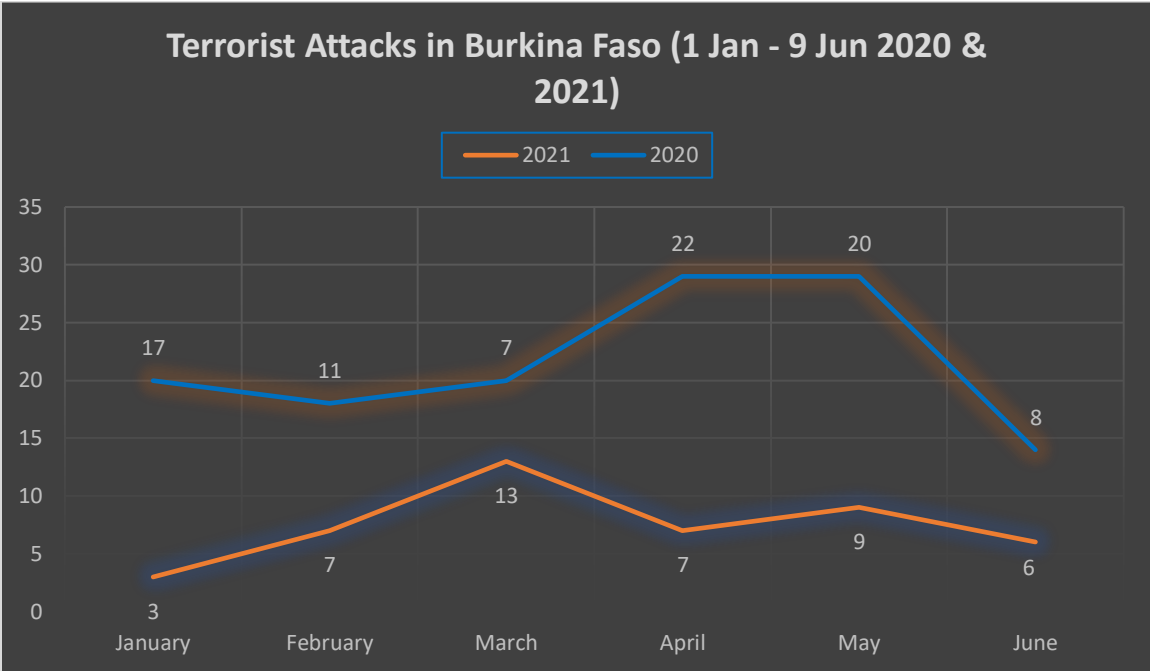
The long history of serious security incidents remaining unclaimed does make it difficult to attribute the incident with complete certainty.

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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