



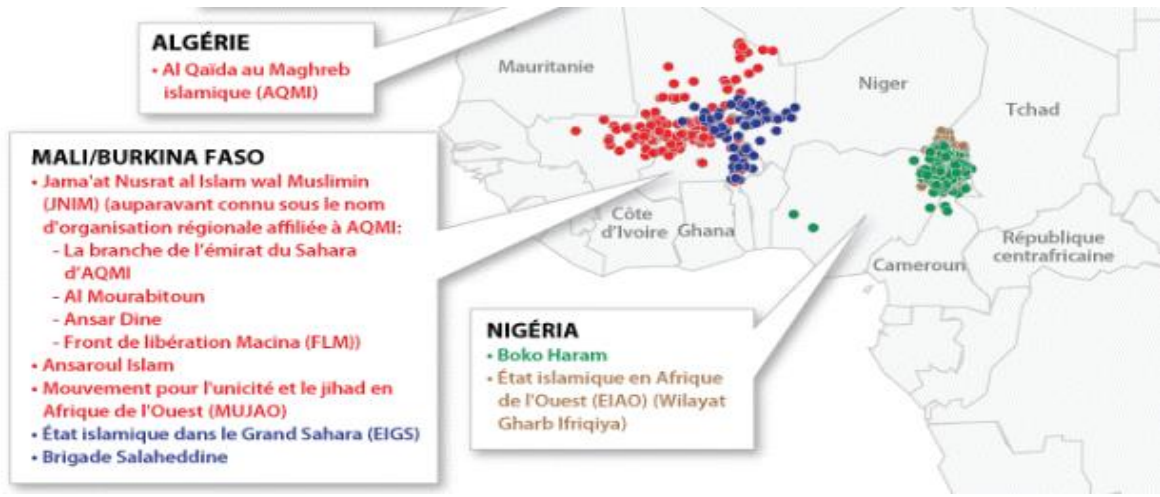
SECURITY ALERT

19 May 2019

Situation Room

Early Warning Directorate

Persistence and mutations of terrorist threats in West Africa



INTRODUCTION

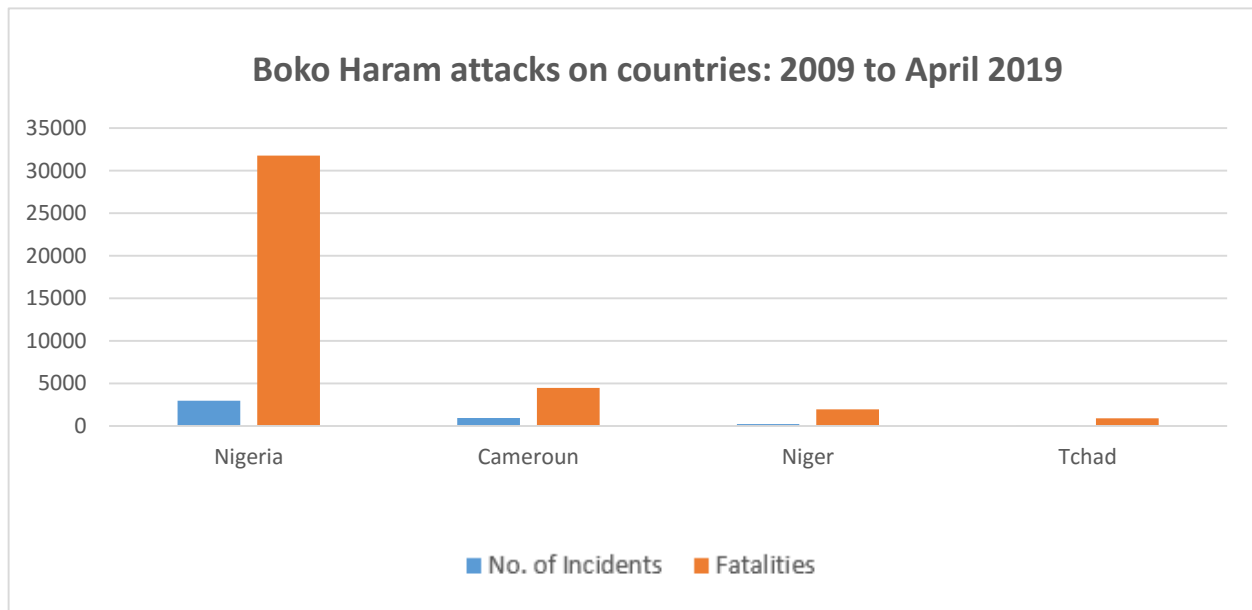
Terrorism in the ECOWAS region is a transboundary threat that is not only restricted to the geographical limits of West Africa, but also affects other regions, particularly Central and North Africa. Terrorism is rampant in the Lake Chad Basin and the Sahel-Saharan region.

Despite the considerable efforts made by ECOWAS, other regional economic communities, regional mechanisms and the international community, we cannot but notice that while the terrorist threat persists, it has also assumed new dimensions, particularly in the Sahel-Saharan region.

I. LAKE CHAD BASIN

The presence of the Multinational Joint Task Force against Terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin has undoubtedly weakened the operational capacity of terrorists, as evidenced, on the one hand, by the recapture of Gwoza (Borno State, Nigeria), which was declared a Caliphate by Abubakar Shekau in August 2014, and, on the other hand, by the decline in the number of attacks.

Despite these efforts, terrorism remains a significant threat in view of the daily terrorist attacks, which cost the lives of civilian population and military personnel.



The humanitarian situation is worrisome. On 22 March 2018, at the United Nations Security Council's review of the situation in the Lake Chad Basin, it was observed that:

- ✓ 4.5 million people are currently affected by food insecurity
- ✓ 10.7 million people in the region rely on life-saving assistance
- ✓ 2.3 million people are displaced.

2019 marks the 10th year of the start of the Boko Haram terrorist insurgency that broke out in 2009 in Maiduguri. It is also worth recalling that in 2015, Boko Haram became the deadliest terrorist group in the world, with more than 5,000 people killed. The *modus operandi* of terrorists is characterised by attacks against isolated civilian settlements and military positions to cart away weapons and ammunition; mass abductions of women, girls (from Chibok, then Dapchi) and young men; use of improvised explosive devices against convoys or to carry out suicide attacks in public places.

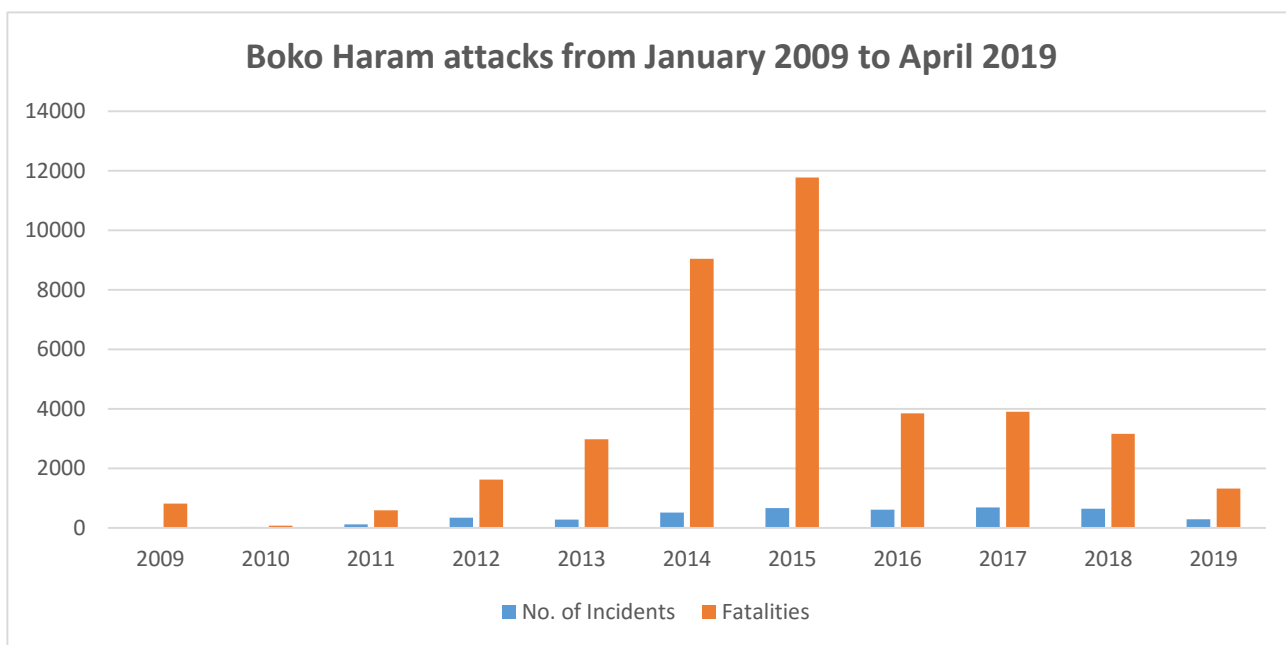


Chart generated by ECOWARN showing the evolution of data on terrorist attacks perpetrated by Boko Haram over a decade

Since the beginning of the insurgency, two major developments have been observed:

1. A geographical spread of the terrorist threat:

Widespread terrorism in Nigeria spilled over into Niger, Chad and Cameroon respectively.

2. **An internationalisation of the terrorist threat:**

On 7 March 2015, Boko Haram pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, thereby becoming the Islamic State's West Africa Province. More than just a name change, membership of an international terrorist movement does have operational advantages, especially in terms of know-how and access to increased terrorist financing. Presently, due to internal strife, Boko Haram coalesces with the Islamic State's West Africa Province to carry out terrorist attacks.

II. **SAHEL-SAHARAN REGION**

Terrorist groups operating in the area include the Support Group for Islam and Muslims; the Islamic State in the Great Sahara and Ansarul Islam. The terrorist threat in the Sahel is assuming the following dimensions:

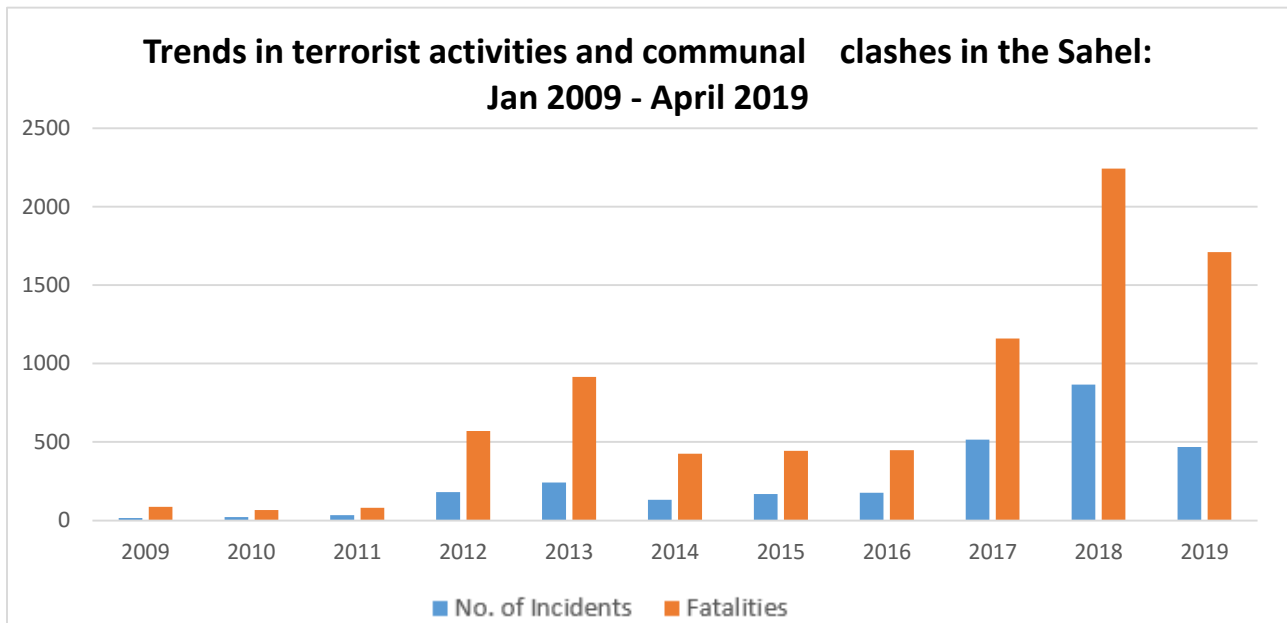


Chart generated by ECOWARN showing the evolution of data with regard to the two situations in the Sahel over a decade

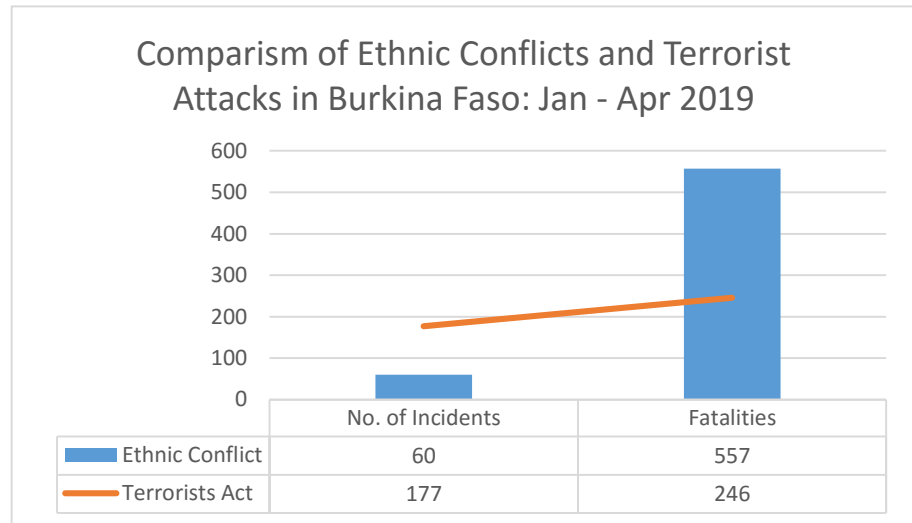
1. **Spread to West African coasts:**

The attacks in Grand-Bassam on 13 March 2016 turned terrorism along the West African coast from a risk level into threat.

More than 3 years after the attack, the threat still persists, due to the escalation of the terrorist threat in eastern Burkina Faso, which borders Togo, Ghana and Benin, where two French tourists were kidnapped by suspected terrorists in Pendjari Park on 1st May 2019. To further illustrate the terrorist threat facing coastal Africa, on 15 February 2019, a Spanish priest and 4 gendarmes were killed by terrorists in Nohao (Burkina Faso), a locality near the Togolese border. In April 2019, Togolese security forces also announced the arrest of around 20 suspected terrorists from Burkina Faso.

Alarmed by the situation, the Heads of State convened a summit on the fight against terrorism in Accra on 22 February

2019 at the behest of Ghana's President, Nana Akufo Addo. The summit was attended by Presidents Patrice Talon of Benin, Faure Gnassingbé of Togo, Marc-Christian Kaboré of Burkina Faso and Vice President Daniel Kablan Duncan of Cote d'Ivoire.



2. A double shift in modus operandi:

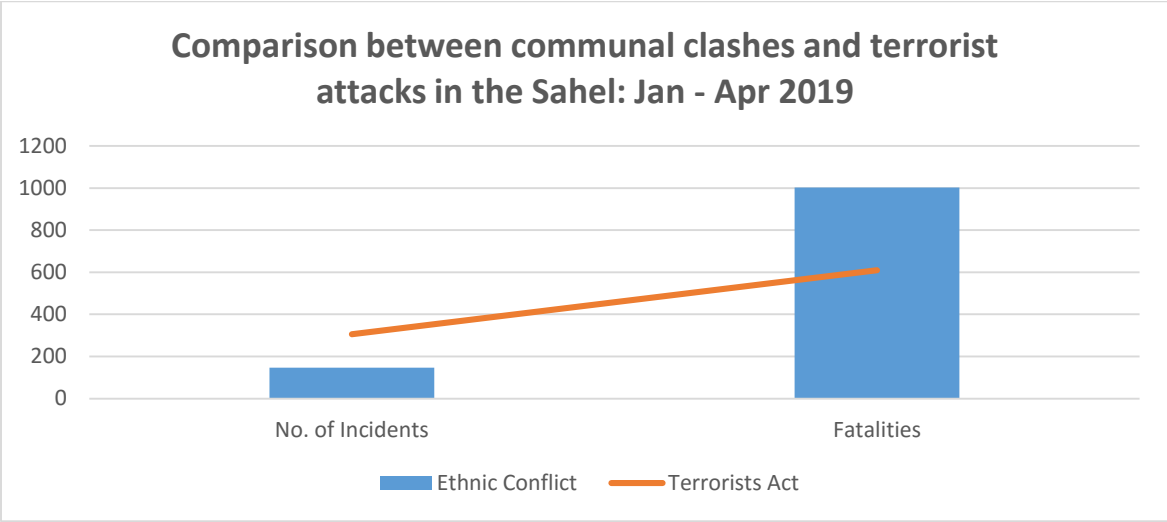
The manipulation of inter-communal clashes in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, and the subsequent increase in attacks on churches in Burkina Faso, are further mutations of terrorism in the Sahel.

As a matter of fact, the Sahel is facing an unprecedented increase in inter-communal clashes. This is being manipulated by terrorists thus causing a stigmatisation of the Fulani ethnic group by several communities. Inter-communal clashes are characterised by a cycle of attacks and revenge. An attack on a community is swiftly avenged by alleged members of the attacked community, who deliberately launch reprisal attacks on Fulanis.

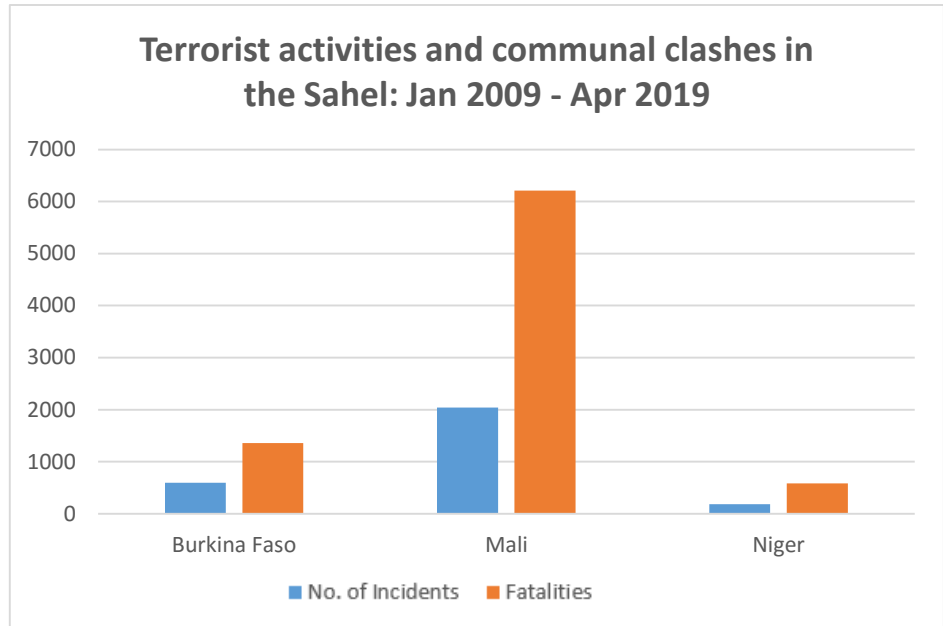
The mutation is brought about by the creation of two terrorist groups whose leaders are Fulani: Amadou Koufa - Macina Liberation Front and Malam Ibrahim Dicko -Burkina Faso-based group Ansarul Islam.

The situation is exacerbated by the fact that the number of victims caused by these inter-communal clashes far exceeds the number of victims from terrorist groups, as evidenced by the murder of 164 Fulanis in the village of Ogossagou in Mali on 23 March 2019. The outcry that followed the attack prompted the fielding of an ECOWAS high-level mission, comprising the President of the Commission, the Vice President and the Commissioner for Industry and Private Sector Promotion.

The chart below highlights the gap between the victims of terrorism and victims of inter-communal clashes.



The same upward trend is also observed at humanitarian level. As a case in point, OCHA¹ believes that in the Mopti region, the number of internally displaced persons has increased from 2,000 at the end of 2017 to nearly 57,000 as at 31 December 2018, representing a 2,750% rise.



As regards churches, on 28 April 2019, Burkina Faso experienced its first attack on a church in Silgadji by suspected terrorists, who killed the pastor and 5 worshippers. The sad event was re-occurred on 12 May 2019, when terrorists attacked a Catholic church in Dablo-Province of Sanmatenga, killing the priest and 5 worshippers.

Chronologically, the attacks on churches were preceded by the assassination in Nohao on 15 February 2019 of Father César Fernandez, a Salesian missionary of Spanish origin. Long before that, there were kidnappings of Christian clergymen, in particular of catechist Mathieu Sawadogo and his wife, in Arbinda on 20 May 2018; Pierre Boena, pastor of the Protestant church of Beléhouro on 3 June 2018, Father Joël Yougbaré, priest of Djibo, on 17 March 2019. Unlike the first 2 who were released, the fate of Father Joël Yougbaré is still unknown.

This new turn of events is particularly worrisome given that Burkina Faso has 60.5% Muslims, 23.2% Christians (19% Catholics and 4.2% Protestants) who live in harmony, according to data obtained during the 2006 General Population and Housing Census.

¹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-profil-humanitaire-de-la-r-gion-de-mopti-f-vrier-2019>

As with the stigmatisation of Fulanis, the attacks on churches are likely to lead to the stigmatisation of the Muslim community. The goal of the terrorists is to considerably damage the national social fabric for Salafist purposes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

ECOWAS should:

- **Opt for a unified approach to the fight against terrorism:** the emergence of two areas where terrorism is prevalent, namely the Lake Chad Basin and the Sahel-Saharan region, does not preclude the possibility of collaboration between the different terrorist groups. In view of this risk, there is a need to develop a common approach to combating terrorism, while taking due account of the specific characteristics of each area.
- **Promote concerted efforts:** the mini-summit of coastal States on terrorism is an indication of the serious concern and eagerness of these States to find a rapid solution to curb terrorism in the Sahel. However, it is imperative to counter the threat by focusing and strengthening collective action in the epicentres of the threat: Nigeria, Mali and Burkina Faso. It should be recalled that the attacks in Grand-Bassam were planned and prepared in Timbuktu. To that end, there is a need to strengthen the different security cooperation platforms in West Africa: intelligence, police, army and be more involved in efforts undertaken by regional mechanisms: the Multinational Joint Force and the G5 Sahel.
- **Implement a mediation programme:** the fight against terrorism cannot be pursued without the people. It is in this light that terrorists seek to weaken the social fabric in an attempt to undermine the State and compound counter-terrorism operations. It is therefore important to develop a regional inter-community mediation programme to bring the different communities together.
- **Convene, as soon as possible, a two-day extraordinary Summit** of Heads of State and Government in order to brief them on the situation and hold bilateral talks to take relevant decisions on this major challenge currently facing the region.