

Context analysis of Conflict Crisis in Burkina Faso

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“Context” - which scales of analysis

1. Burkina Faso as a National country with specific political histories regional characteristics, societal compositions & divisions etc.
2. Burkina Faso within wider Global and Regional settings

Focus of the presentation is on 1) - the current state of affairs in Burkina Faso.

Questions addressed: What are the current tensions, fault lines, regions of concern?

Pre- amble: necessary to contextualise this country focus in broader international developments:

- Geopolitical processes (e.g. developments in Libya, ousting and death of Ghadaffy in 2011),
- International responses to mounting violence and destabilisation
(effects of UN military missions in Mali),
- Transboundary dynamics (cross-country influences within),
- Climate change (e.g. issues of food security, competition over resources)



January 18 2016, first major terrorist attack in Ouagadougou

- **Targets:**

Splendid Hotel, hosting many UN staff and Cappuccino Cafe, a restaurant owned by an Italian & visited by many expats

- **Perpetrators:**

Attack was claimed by Al Qaeda in the Islamic Mahgreb (AQIM)

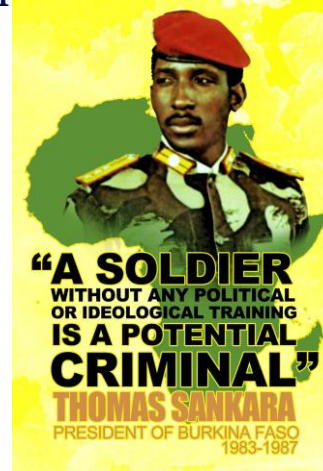


Outline of the presentation:

1. Overview political context
2. Analysis of former president Compaore's roles the in current security crisis
3. Characteristics of civil society and diversity – Fault Lines?
4. Dynamics of violence in different regions in Burkina Faso
5. Some key elements for reflection

Political History: The Political-Military Complex

- Since 1966, the year of independence, Haute Volta (in 1983 renamed Burkina Faso) has mostly had military men in power
- 1983- 1987 Captain Thomas Sankara
- 1987 – October 2014 Blaise Compaore
- October 2014 Transitional period towards elections: Michel Kafando President, Jacob Zinda premier
- Coup d'état 17 September 2015, headed by Gilbert Diendéré and RSP (Regiment of Presidential Security) – associated with former president Compaore
- Public resistance & Army intervention ended the coup
- November 29 2015: Roch Marc Christian Kaboré was elected president – this was a 'conservative' choice



The ousting of Compaore was a moment of hope for real change

- Youth had been excluded from the patrimonial system in and around political elites
- Many people felt that politics was far removed from their daily worries
- In rural areas politicians were associated with economic power, e.g. of mining companies

Could real change occur?

The election of Roch Kaboré showed:

- That there was no alternative; all politicians had been co-opted by the regime, even the opposition
- The fear that real change - e.g. leadership of youth – would lead to further instability

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A PEOPLE'S REVOLUTION IN BURKINA FASO?



Roles of former president Compaore in current security crisis

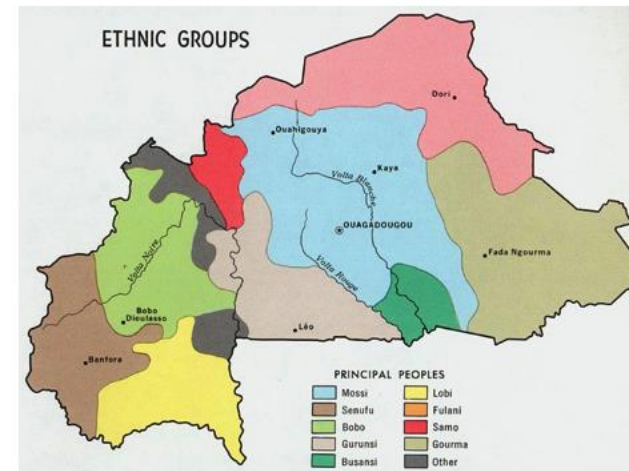
- As president, Compaore played a major mediation role in regional conflicts, e.g. Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast but also in the context of jihadist insurgencies in Mali

After his ousting, Compaore has been associated with instability in Burkina because:

- Of the coup by his former military associates
- Of alleged connections with jihadists, an accusation e.g. made by President Roch Kaboré



- 20 million inhabitants, 40% of which find themselves below the poverty line.
- 60 ethnic groups, with Mossi as a major group
- Differences in political organizations of various ethnic groups
- Differences in livelihoods; agriculture, pastoralism, gold mining
- Differences in religion: 60 % Muslim, 20 % Catholics, 5 % Protestants, 15 % traditional religion



Fault Lines?

Religion

- Burkina has a long history of religious tolerance: Every one with their road (Ned Faa ne a Sore)
- Compaore and the state apparatus played a role in tempering radical voices
- Since colonial times Catholicism was promoted; many civil servants are catholic
- Islam, long history in the region; several ethnic groups are completely Islamised (e.g. Fulani and Mande speaking groups near Bobo Dioulasso), within other groups (e.g. Mossi) islamization is on a more individual and network basis often linked to histories of migration, and groups on the south west (e.g. Lobi) are hardly Islamised

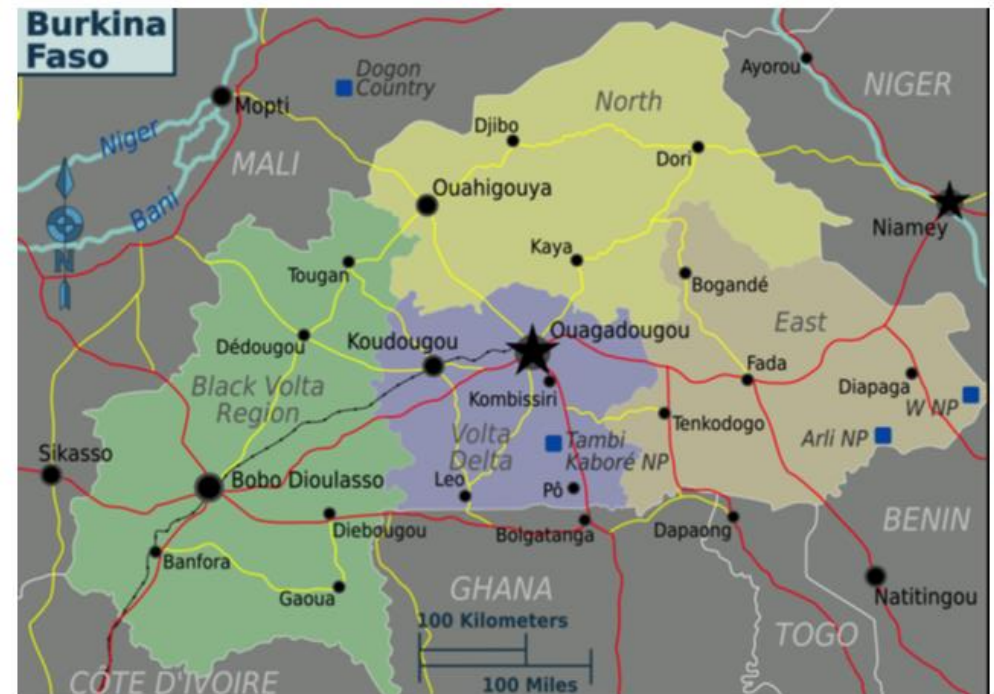
Ethnicity

- Dominance of Mossi (dating from longer political histories and colonial times) is resented by people living in the south of the country
- Fulani cattle keepers and farmers have long histories of competition over resources. This is exacerbated since the late eighties due to droughts. Movements of Fulani from the northern region (Sahel) to the south

Actual violence in different parts of the country

The violence is triggered by jihadist activities which makes inroads in localized situations –

- In the North since late 2016
- In the East since February 2018
- In the Southwest, new wave since December 2018
- In Centre Nord since beginning 2019



Some features of the violent situation in the North

- Driven by the domestic militant group Ansaroul Islam in tandem with or as part of Jama'ah Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)
- Start of the “ethnicization” of the conflict as jihadi recruitment among the Fulani ethnic group leads to other actors inflicting collective punishment on Fulani
- Weakened presence of state services (schools hospitals closed), stronger military presence
- Polarization and suspicion, also within Fulani groups; who is siding with whom, who is informing for whom; idea that the enemy is within

Some features of the violent situation in the East

- ISGS, Ansaroul Islam, and JNIM militants have implanted themselves, allying with pre-existing criminal networks.
- The militants put up roadblocks and are controlling artisanal gold mining sites. They have begun implementing sharia-style rules, prohibited smoking and music, and torched bars and huts harbouring prostitutes.
- “jihadization of banditry”

Some features of the violent situation in the Southwest

- December 11, 2018, in Bouroum-Bouroum, Poni Province (Sud-Ouest Region), gunmen attacked police stations. This is part of “jihadization of banditry”.
- Movement from mobile road blocks of highway robbers to fixed targets such as police stations
- Local inhabitants also attacked policemen after disputes over land had not been settled according to everybody’s wishes
- State authorities become targets, but are also suspected of wrong doings
- In this region ethnic differences also influence the way jihadists may or may not find inroads into local networks and concerns; Around Banfora local population Muslim, in Poni (Lobi area) not.

Some features of the violent situation in the Centre Nord

- January 2019 ethnicized violence began: a Mossi-led attack on Fulani neighbourhoods in the village of Yirgou, leaving least 13 dead. This was a reaction to a preceding jihad-perpetuated attack that killed at least six Mossi civilians along with the village chief. The Fulani had been accused of having housed and hidden the jihadists responsible for the attack, and this led to an order to retaliate by “exterminating” the Fulani.
- Major role in this violence is played by ‘vigilante’ groups
- Recent attacks on Christians (near Kongoussi) have raised the specter of inter-religious violence in Burkina Faso. This may be linked to Catholics being disproportionately represented among the political elite. Attackers may be targeting Christians partly on a religious basis, but partly also as symbols of the ruling class.
- It is important to keep in mind that many victims of the violence so far have been Muslims.
- This wave of inter-communal conflict has been extremely violent, causing a mass displacement of over 100,000 people.

Some key elements for reflection

1. Poverty, lack of opportunities and systematic exclusion makes groups of citizens, in particular youth, vulnerable to jihadist recruitment
2. Not so much fault lines, but shifting alliances & hybrid contexts
3. Illegal traffic & banditry part of hybrid cocktail
4. Distrust in institutions and elites, but also among intimate circles
5. Rumours fuel distrust
6. Displacement aggravates complex situation
7. Analysis of scale: do not tackle it as a 'small' problem, isolated from larger connections and issues

