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Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso: a country under pressure

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Burkina Faso is sinking into a political, humanitarian and security crisis. The jihadist attacks highlight the weaknesses of a state plagued by corruption and negligence. The measures put in place by the government only aggravate the situation to the detriment of the population.

On Wednesday 8 December, Prime Minister Christophe Joseph-Marie Dabiré resigned, leading to the resignation of the entire government. This was a way for Roch Kaboré, the president of Burkina Faso, to respond to the exasperation of the population.

Advance of the jihadists

The attack on the [Inata barracks](#) sent shock waves through the country. It cost the lives of 53 gendarmes. The information received and widely reported by the media is that the barracks, located in one of the most dangerous areas of the country, was abandoned because of the unavailability of a helicopter for refuelling. This tragic event is indicative of the disorganization of the Defence and Security Forces (FDS) in Burkina. From now on, every week, radios and newspapers will report the number of victims of the jihadist commandos.

The first jihadist attacks date from 2015. They were carried out by Ansarul Islam, which gave way to the two main groups operating throughout the Sahel, the GSIM, affiliated to al-Qaeda, and EIGS, linked to the Islamic State. These groups are gaining ground against an under-equipped and inefficient Burkinabe army.

The consequences in humanitarian terms are dramatic. According to UN figures, more than one million people have been displaced, fleeing the violence, and 3.5 million are in need of humanitarian assistance.

A society in crisis

Jihadist groups are trying to infiltrate conflicts between different communities whose economic activities used to complement each other thanks to regulation and mediation processes recognised by all. For several years, particularly in the Soum region, conflicts between the Mossi and Kurumba, who are mainly farmers, and the Peul, who are mainly herders, have been over water resources and grazing areas. In addition, there are acts of banditry, particularly cattle theft. The circulation of weapons of war increases the number of victims during clashes. Jihadists thrive on these latent conflicts where poverty and idleness are the lot of a large part of the youth.

As in Mali and Niger, Burkina Faso's neighbours, the Peuhl community is wrongly considered to be a supporter of fundamentalist forces. It is the victim of numerous human rights violations perpetrated by the FDS and the various community self-defence militias. The violence is encouraged by the total impunity that reigns in the country.

Burkina Faso, one of the poorest countries in the world, has tripled its military budget. However, the effects are hardly palpable on the ground. These are the consequences of widespread corruption and a division within the army dating back to the 2011 mutinies.

A cure worse than the disease

In January 2020, two months after the killing of workers at the Canadian company SEMAFO, which left 38 dead and 60 injured, Christian Kaboré launched the establishment of the Volunteers for the Defence of the Fatherland (VDP). The aim was to set up auxiliary forces for the Burkinabe army. The role of the VDPs is twofold: to be a source of information and intelligence for the military and to defend the villages while waiting for reinforcements from the FDS. These volunteers receive a short two-week training course and a Kalashnikov.

This measure raises concerns. Firstly, these VDPs are the prerogative of the Mossi and Kurumba, since Fulani volunteers are most of the time refused because they are suspected of being in league with the enemy. Secondly, arming civilians runs the risk of increasing inter-community conflicts. Finally, these WTPs have now become the target of choice for jihadists, leading to an increase in civilian casualties during village attacks.

The crisis in the Sahel is primarily a political and social crisis. African and Western leaders have chosen to respond by force, not out of stupidity, but to preserve the stability of post-colonial systems at the expense of the people. Millions of euros are being spent on war instead of on schools, health centres and other public services.

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