Forum: Security Council

Issue: Addressing the recurrent ethnic conflicts in Burkina Faso

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Introduction

It is sometimes inevitable that differences between people can be used to create conflict between them. This has been expressed in the case of Burkina Faso, where the lifestyle differences between farmers and herders have created immense tension between them. Bolstered by the 360,000 hectare decrease in arable land through desertification per year and the 486,000 people displaced by the influence of terrorists on the local population, this tension has evolved into a violent conflict which is set to further deteriorate the living conditions in the area.

Burkina Faso is a country located in West Africa, containing parts of the Sahel. Sharing borders with Mali and Niger, it is at constant threat to regional terrorist groups such as Ansarul Islam, Islamic State of Iraq and ash-sham networks in the Greater Sahara and al-Qaeda-affiliated Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin, which all aim to restore Shahira law and remove government control in regions of the coyntry. Its underequipped and poorly-trained armed forces struggle to deal with them, resulting in a lack of order and presence of the law, especially in rural areas. Due to this, Mossi (farmers) take on the task of protecting their safety, enforcing their own rules in their areas and acting upon suspected threats, even if there may be no definite evidence to support their suspicions.

The Mossi taking action on suspected terrorists has led them to become suspicious of the Fulani (herders). As the Fulani are majorly Muslim, they are suspected of sheltering jihadists and, as a result, the Mossi (who are non-muslim) have attacked innocent Fulani, displacing, killing and angering them. This leads many Fulani to join the jihadists themselves, who offer protection and resonate with their frustration. It is to be noted that while religion is present in this conflict, it is mainly due to the desire of terrorists to enforce Shahira Law and convert non-muslims, but the Mossi and Fulani themselves have no conflict between their religious differences.

This conflict forces lots of people to be displaced from their homes. 486,000 people have fled within Burkina Faso, with a further 16,000 refugees in neighboring countries. This mass displacement causes conflicts between immigrants and existing residents, as an already short food and water supply needs to

accommodate more people. United Nations refugee camps have been set up, but they cannot supply these mass amounts of people indefinitely; the ethnic conflict must be defused, else the ethical, economic and humanitarian problems worsen even further.

Definition of Key Terms

Ethnic Conflict

A conflict with the objectives of one party having clear ethnic distinctions and the conflict is perceived in an ethnic perspective. The conflict need not be solely on ethnicity, and is often more focused on political, social, economical and territorial matters.

Mossi

The Mossi are the largest ethnic tribe in Burkina Faso, consisting of 52% of the population. They are primarily farmers and they have their own native religions and hierarchical societal structure. This hierarchy extends on a national level, with an emperor at the apex of the hierarchy, and chiefs which manage certain portions of the Mossi country and organises armies, taxes and completes other duties.

Fulani

The Fulani are the second largest ethnic tribe in Burkina Faso, consisting of 8.4% of the population. In contrast to the Mossi, they are primarily semi-nomadic herders and the majority are Muslim. They have little to no power in the Burkinabe society; this is due to the lack of social structure inside the ethnic group and the relative minority of the population they represent.

Koglweogo

The Koglweogo are self-defense groups composed of vigilante civilians. They operate independently on a local scale, majorly in rural areas where law enforcement is scarce. They are independent of the government and they claim responsibility for enforcing justice and satisfying other local needs, with an emphasis on efficiency and speed in decision making. Due to this, their penal measures are regarded as violent and inhumane and many of their extrajudicial decisions, punishments and killings have been criticized by human rights advocates.

Caption 1: A Koglweogo group on patrol

Internally Displaced Person (IDP)

An internally displaced person is someone who has fled their home but remains within the borders of their home country. The same government is still responsible for their safety, even if the government is the reason why they had fled their home in the first place. While they are not legally defined as refugees, they are often referred to as such.

Group of 5 for the Sahel (FC-G5S)

The Group of 5 for the Sahel is a regional organization operating in the Sahel that aims to increase economic development between the members and neutralize terrorist threats in the region. It comprises of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.

General Overview

Farmers and herders

Not that long ago, Burkina Faso seemed to be a country of relative ethnic peace, with farmers and herders coexisting peacefully side by side. Yet, the immense effects of desertification in the Sahel regions have reduced the amount of arable land for growing crops and herding animals. Tensions between the farmers (majorly Mossi) and herders (majorly Fulani) have increased, due to competition over the remaining land. While no physical violence has erupted directly from this, it has given terrorist groups a base to increase their operations in the area and recruit new members, as explained later.

Desertification and the changing climate

While any solutions aiming to tackle climate change as a whole would be out of the scope of the topic at hand, it is essential that methods are provided to Burkinans to help adapt to the effects of climate change

and desertification. Currently, one-third of Burkina Faso's land is degraded, or deemed unusable for cultivating agriculture. This area is estimated to expand by an average of 360,000 hectares per year.

Desertification is mainly caused by overgrazing livestock, which removes plants from the soil. As the roots of plants help hold the soil together, without them, the soil loses its structure and becomes more vulnerable to erosion. Ironically, this decreases the amount of land available for farmers to let their livestock graze on, so any short-term gains from the increase in food supply would come at a long-term cost to the environment and food supply of the livestock as a whole. However, overgrazing has become increasingly present in Burkina Faso, with the amount of cattle steadily rising by 700,000 between 1995-2003. This is further worsened by the lack of enforcement of modern Burkinabe legislation designed to reduce overgrazing.

Another major cause of desertification is deforestation of the Sahel. This is done for several reasons, including creating more land for agricultural purposes. However, the loss of vegetation also erodes the soil, leading to further loss of nutrients and desertification. Currently, no parts of the Sahel have over 30% tree cover, with Burkina Faso as a whole losing 4816 hectares of forest per year. Any solution will need to reintroduce vegetation and forests into the Sahel and other rural regions of Burkina Faso to combat desertification.
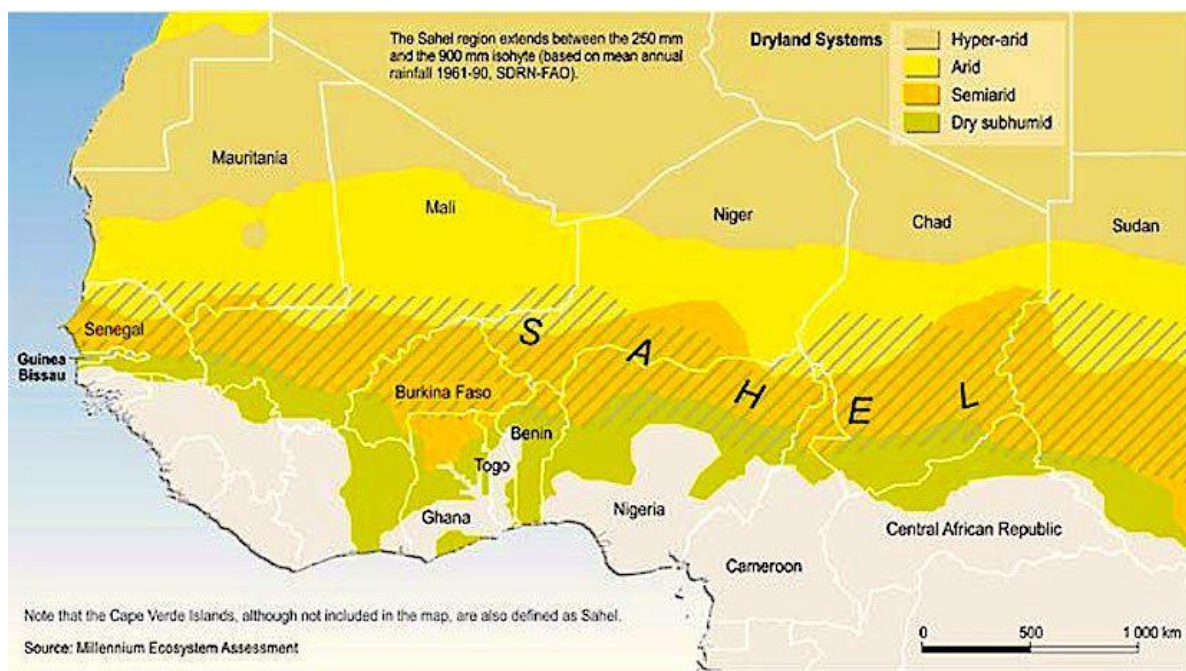
Caption 2: A map of the Sahel region in West Africa

The loss of arable land due to desertification leads to tensions between farmers and herders over control of the remaining land, especially in the Sahel. Desertification also decreases the amount of habitable land, forcing people to either stay and die or migrate to other regions. This influx of immigrants creates tensions between the local people and them.

Combating desertification will need several steps, but a successful reduction in its rate and the effects of it will immensely help diffuse the tensions driving the ethnic conflict.

The rise of extremist terrorism

While tensions between farmers and herders have existed for a significant amount of time, the situation would not have likely escalated to its current state if it weren't for the rise of Islamic extremist groups in the area. Several different groups exist, but they all help increase the conflict and barriers of mistrust and suspicion between the ethic groups, escalating the conflict to a violent and uncontrollable extent.

Origins of terrorism

The terrorist groups operating in the area can be divided into two categories: those originating from within Burkina Faso and those originating from neighboring countries, such as Mali and Niger. The terrorist groups originating inside Burkina have preyed on the frustration of the Fulani people from the lack of opinion they have in policies and government decisions and the frequent disagreements with farmers over land use and ownership. This has allowed them to recruit new members, gain strength and support. These groups include Ansarul Islam, which aims to remove government control from the northern part of Burkina Faso, and the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-sham networks in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), which aims to replace the regional governments with Islamic-led states.

Due to the relatively porous borders, terrorists wishing to escape from attacks have fled other countries to settle in Mali and Burkina Faso. These terrorists have collaborated with local extremists, providing weapons, support and aiding in the illegal trafficking of drugs, organs and humans. The main foreign organization is the al-Qaeda-affiliated Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), a coalition of several islamic extremist groups operating in the Sahel.

Effects of terrorism

Firstly, terrorists attack the poorly equipped government forces, causing casualties and a loss of government control in rural areas. Between August 6 and September 30 2019, 26 military personnel were killed and a further 25 were injured in terrorist attacks. The Burkinabe government had declared a state of emergency in several states. Terrorists attacking civilians in bombings and shootings also incited panic in the people, leading more of them to lose faith in the government and rely on themselves to implement extrajudicial safety measures. This leads to segregation between the Burkinabe people and the government, further worsening the situation and escalating the ethnic conflict. The numerous amounts of extrajudicial killings also impedes on the right to a fair trial, one of the basic human rights established in the United Nations

Declaration of Human Rights. This also leads to a large amount of innocent Fulanis being killed, injured and displaced. Traditionally, it is the government's role to prevent extrajudicial killings, however, it is evident the Burkinabe government is unable to control them and third-party measures will be needed in the short-term, with a long-term strengthening of law enforcement needed.

Caption 3: The aftermath of an al-Qaeda attack on a hotel in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso

As many Fulani have been recruited by terrorist groups and have been suspected of housing, feeding and protecting them, this leads to a generalization by the Mossi and other Koglewoego groups that all Fulani are associated with terrorists. Several raids and killings have been made by these groups on innocent villagers based on mere suspicions, further decreasing the trust between the ethnic groups. For example, in January 2019, in response to a suspected jihadist attack, Koglewoego groups killed 39 Fulani suspected of supporting the terrorists involved in the prior attack. This leads to many Fulani believing they don't have a choice; rejected by their neighbors, they have nowhere else to turn to but the terrorists - who they see as more understanding of their situation. In exchange for housing them, the terrorists provide protection from bandits and thieves, a lucrative proposition in areas with a lack of government presence and control. This creates a downward cycle worsening the entire conflict.

Terrorists agitating the local population leads to an increase in local migrations. An influx of newcomers leads to tensions between them and existing residents in the area, especially over land usage. Oftentimes, refugees from the conflict have no other places to go, so many UNHCR refugee camps have been established. Currently, there are 486,000 IDPs in Burkina, and the UNHCR has aided camps by providing security and partnering with other organizations to provide food and funding. But, even these camps aren't safe. UN and local escorts have security installments set up around the perimeter of these camps, as terrorist

attacks and inter-communal violence are frequent in the areas surrounding the camps. The inhabitants in many camps are unable to leave. One example of this is the Barsalogho refugee camp in northern Burkina. The refugees in this camp are majority Fulani, unable to leave because Koglewoego groups accuse them of aiding terrorists. They sit idle, unproductive and unable to do anything. Living conditions are ample, but the lack of activity bores the Fulani, especially the youth, who grow more frustrated by the day. Clearly, the UNHCR will not be able to support these refugees indefinitely, and the number of refugees grows day by day, so these camps aren't a long-term solution to this problem.

Caption 4: A UNHCR refugee camp in Burkina Faso

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

●   The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1948 (A/RES/3/217)

This declaration of Human Rights is one of the core resolutions passed by the United Nations, and all member-states - including Burkina Faso - are signatories. Currently, the intercommunal violence and violations from government forces impede on human rights established of the Burkinabe people. The ethical conflict needs to be resolved and the rights of the people need to be restored to help Burkina Faso return to normality and develop its backwards economy.

●   The International Convention Against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries, 4 December 1989 (A/RES/44/34)

●   The OAU Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa, 3 July 1977 (CM/817)

Under the definitions made in these resolutions, the Koglewoego groups operating in Burkina Faso are mercenaries. These mercenaries infringe on the right to privacy, freedom of expression and life of the Fulani and other people and pose a threat to governmental control over the regions they operate in. These vigilantes

have motives which don't always align with the government's and the UN's, and prioritize efficiency over justice. Therefore, they need to be dissolved, preferably into government-controlled police forces instead.

● Security Council Press Statement on Group of Five for Sahel Joint Task Force, 21 November 2019 (SC/14029)

In this statement, the Security Council has expressed deep concern and regret over the instability in the Sahel caused by regional conflicts. The FC-G5S also regularly reports to the Security Council regarding the situation in the Sahel as a whole. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has created several refugee camps in the region, serving both IDPs and refugees fleeing from other countries, such as Mali. Other than this, however, there has been relatively little discussion about the specific situation in Burkina Faso inside the UN. No resolutions specifically pertaining to Burkina have been issued as the humanitarian crisis is relatively new, so this leaves an open space for new ideas and methods of tackling the problem.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has launched an initiative called Action Against Desertification; Collaborating with Burkinabein the Sahel region, they have reforested 14,000 hectares of land. FAO provides technology and scientific knowledge to enable local communities to reforest. Villagers are able to take produce from these areas to sustain themselves and are encouraged to reforest more areas of the Sahel.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
2013	Operation Serval and Operation Barkhane successfully force jihadists out of northern Mali. Many flee to more southern regions, including Burkina Faso.
October 30th and 31st, 2014	Blaise Compaore, the former president of Burkina Faso, attempts to edit the constitution to extend his 27-year rule. The public revolt and throw him out of the office.
2015	Malam Dicko is arrested near the Algerian border by French forces, but he is released.
September 2015	General Gilbert Diendéré attempts a coup against the transitional government but fails and is arrested. A reform of the security forces follow, which increases the instability in the region and leads to the creation of lots of Koglweogo groups.
2015-2019	Jihadists and Koglweogo groups kill increasing amounts of civilians in multiple attacks and retaliations.
December 2016	Ansarul Islam commits its first attack, killing 12 gendarmes in Nassabou.
2017	Malam Dicko dies. In his place, his brother, Jafar Dicko, takes control over Ansarul Islam.
December 31st, 2018	A state of emergency is declared in provinces which lie in 7 out of the country's 13 administrative regions in response to an increase in terrorist attacks.

Possible Solutions

In order to create a fully encompassing solution to this problem, many factors influencing the situation must be considered. Firstly, the underlying issue of desertification must be tackled. Civilians must be taught methods to reduce their impact on the desertification of the environment around them, especially in regions such as the Sahel. They can also be taught methods to rehabilitate areas which lack soil fertility and vegetation, through ways such as magic stones, terracing and proper irrigation techniques.

Secondly, the issue of land rights must be solved. A process will need to be established to allocate conflicted properties and areas between the people. This is much harder to implement as it seems, and a method of enforcing these new titles will need to be established, lest the system collapses and the inhabitants of the area end up in more conflict than they started with. This will also need to consider the nomadic nature of herders, especially the Fulani, and how grazing area may be allocated to them, potentially on a seasonal basis.

Another aspect that needs to be solved is the restriction and dismantling of the terrorist threat in the region. This will certainly need the cooperation of the government, and potentially surveys and investigations will need to be conducted to establish the sources of the terror attacks and attribute accountability to groups helping extend the terrorist presence in the area. The deployment of foreign forces or UN peacekeepers could be considered, but the potential consequences of aggravating the local populace and conflict between them and the local army must be considered. Training the local army and civilian police forces should also be considered.

Finally, it will be important in the long term to dismantle Koglweogo groups. While they may provide short-term manpower to increase safety for certain groups, they are often biased and ethically prejudiced and make decisions without regard to the law or a fair trial. These groups should eventually be phased out for a regular police force, and government coordination should be increased between local civilian forces. These steps will ensure the ethical conflict in Burkina Faso will be defused, but delegates are encouraged to come up with other methods to deal with the various problems outlined in this report.

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