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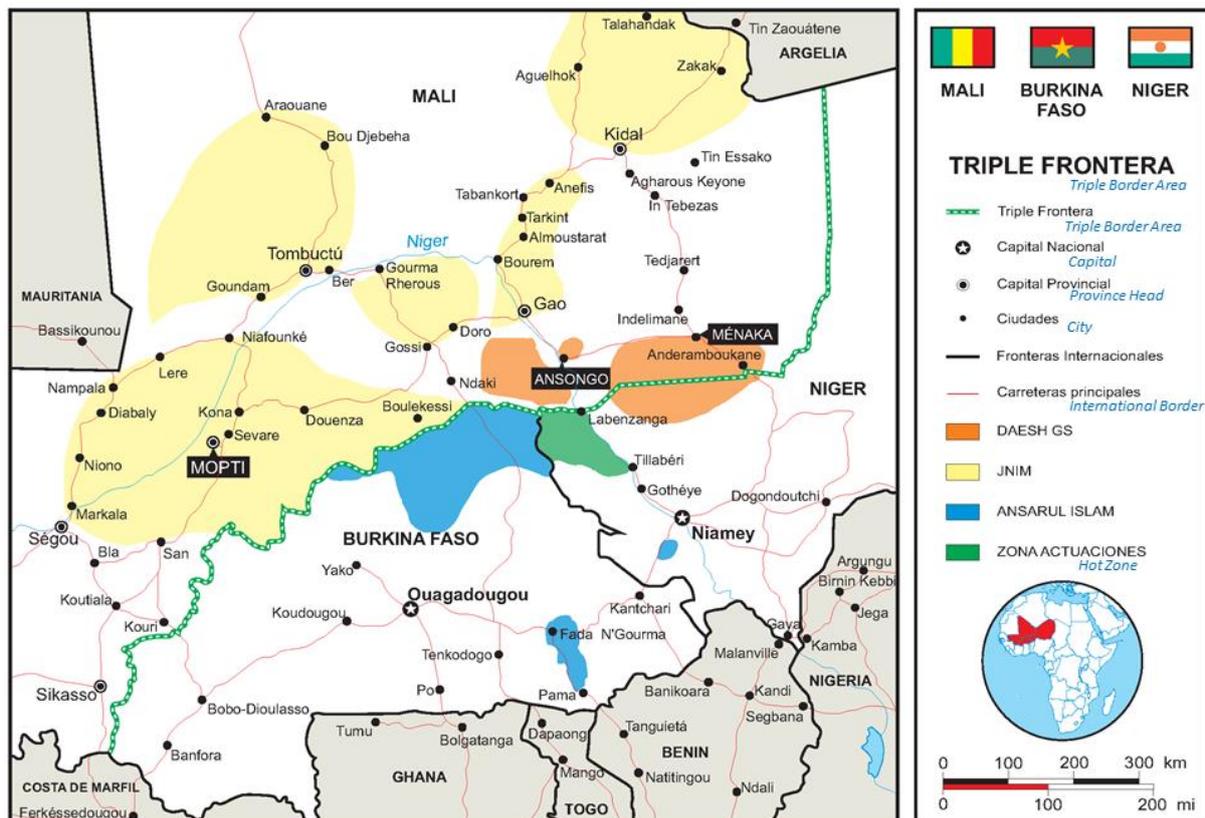
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## JIHAD IN THE REGION OF THE TRIPLE BORDER OF MALI WITH NIGER AND BURKINA FASO. KEY POINTS OF THE CONFLICT.

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## JIHAD IN THE REGION OF THE TRIPLE BORDER OF MALI WITH NIGER AND BURKINA FASO. KEY POINTS OF THE CONFLICT

Recent years have concentrated a significant increase in terrorist activity in the so-called triple border, where converge those ones of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. Next, those considered key to the conflict are exposed, which will help to understand the projection of the terrorist threat in the area, as well as to interpret its future prospects.



**1.- Geographical contamination:** If the terrorist threat from Mali comes as a result of the Libyan revolution, Niger and Burkina Faso are being contaminated in terms of violence as a result of the terrorist activity in Mali and the expansionist vocation of the Jihad that characterizes Al Qaeda

**2.- Pressure of the French operation Barkhane on the border between Niger and Mali:** The northern regions of Kidal, Timbuktu and Gao concentrated most of the terrorist activity in Mali in 2012, coinciding with the start of the Tuareg rebellion. As a result of the counter-terrorist pressure of the Serval and Barkhane operations, the main effort of the terrorist group JNIM has been displaced at present to the central regions around Mopti, as well as to the border between Niger and Mali. It is in this new scenario where the Barkhane operation executes its counter-terrorist activity, supported by the Malian Armed Forces and two Tuareg rebel groups (GATIA-Imghad and MSA-Daussak).

Two terrorist groups operate in this border area: the Macina Liberation Front, which is part of the terrorist alliance JNIM and it is subordinated also to the leadership of AQIM, as well as Daesh of the Greater Sahara. Both groups are relieved of such security pressure once settled in Niger and Burkina Faso, in whose bordering provinces they are protected, extend their influence, and operate and recruit fighters.

**3.- Daesh of the Great Sahara as the terrorist vector with the greatest impact in this order area:** The road that connects the towns of Ansongo and Menaka, parallel to the border between Niger and Mali, is the main scene of action of Daesh GS, led by the Saharawi Adnane Abu Walid.

**4.- Collaboration between terrorist groups in the area:** The desire for prominence of Adnane Abu Walid, who was relegated at the head of Al Morabitun (today integrated into the JNIM alliance) when Ahmed el Tilemsi was dead, precipitated the split of Daesh GS in 2015. However, as a statement showed in January 2018, JNIM and Daesh GS share information and resources on specific occasions. Such cooperation makes difference in both groups in relation to other international scenarios, in which Daesh and Al Qaida confront each other in most cases.

**5.- The Fullani-Peulh ethnic community as a transnational link:** The settlement of the Peulh ethnic community is important in the central regions of Mali, where its confrontation with other ethnic groups is common. The terrorist groups in the area have known how to take advantage of such disputes. The support that terrorists sometimes provide to the Peulh has a beneficial impact on recruitment. On the other hand, the Peulh are not only settled in Mali, but also in the northern provinces of Burkina Faso, as well as in the western province of Tillaberi in Niger, where terrorist groups find support and easy accommodation. Appeals to the rebellion are recurring among Peulh community settled in West Africa, made frequently until his death (23.11.2018) by the Peulh preacher of Mopti, Amadou Kuffa, charismatic leader of the Group of Liberation of Macina, composed mostly by Peulhs.

**6.- Administrative ostracism of the affected regions:** The triple border area is characterized by its extreme poverty. They are inhospitable regions in which the political and administrative action of the State is barely perceived. There is consequently no sense of State among its population. The binding bond comes from other prevailing elements, such as the ethnic, the religious, as well as the distribution of the very scarce available wealth. Such absence of perspectives generates frustration, mainly among young people, extremely subjected by the incidence of traffickers and terrorists, whose activity has gone full circle to the necessary stability and security with which development can prosper.

**7.- Lack of political harmony in the Government of Burkina Faso:** The referred poverty affects the three governments of the region, which lack of sufficient resources to face through the insecurity and generate enough development conditions to propitiate stability. Such governments need international support.

Such international cooperation has been possible in relation to Mali and Niger, but the Burkinabe case is different, at least so far. Prior to the political fall of President Compaoré's regime in 2015, Burkina Faso remained oblivious to the terrorist phenomenon as a result of

the regime's cooperation with rebel and terrorist groups. It does not happen since the establishment of democracy. Now, Burkina Faso even rejects international support because it could be interpreted by society as military interventionism. The political and social suspicion in this country as a result of French colonization minimizes Burkina's international security cooperation to the participation of Burkina in the G5-Sahel group.

**8.- Settlement of jihadism in Burkina Faso:** If originally terrorism in Burkina Faso has come from Mali, mainly in charge of Al Morabitum / JNIM, regarding the attacks of greater importance carry out in Ouagadugu, a local terrorist group, Ansarul Islam-Defenders of Islam, perpetrated an attack in Soum in December 2016 in which twelve soldiers died.

Ansarul al Islam is a split of a religious movement created by Malam Dicko, already in time of Blaise Compaoré. Its founder, a religious preacher originally from one of the northern provinces bordering Mali, gradually became radicalized. He undertook numerous trips to Mali where he came into contact with Ansar Dine group of Iyad Ag Ghali, as well as with Amadou Kouffa, founder of the Macina Liberation Group. Prior to his death, Dicko disagreed with them in Mali and approached the Daesh GS. Ansarul Islam is led by Jafar Dicko, brother of the founder.

Since the summer of 2018, Eastern Burkina Faso is also aware of terrorist attacks against Christian communities and local security forces in its Southern borders, these attacks have probably been perpetrated by local cells inspired and radicalized by terrorist groups in the area. (group of Macina, Ansarul Islam, as well as in Daesh GS).

The terrorist operations in Burkina Faso reveal the weakness of the Burkinabe security forces, unable to stop the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in their territory.

**9.- Firm commitment of Niger in the fight against terrorism:** Unlike Burkina Fasso, Niger has engaged in counterterrorism affecting its territory, also counting on the strong support of the US, mainly since October 2017, when four US special forces soldiers were killed in a terrorist attack in the proximity of the border with Mali. Such Nigerian counterterrorism harassment is the fundamental reason why Daesh GS, although operating in the Tillaberi region, lacks of a solid and permanent settlement in this country.

The settlement of terrorism in Burkina Faso is affecting Niger in the same way. Niger has seen how terrorist cells allegedly infiltrated from Burkina have attacked some enclaves south of Niamey.

**10. Prospective for the future:** at the time of preparing this report, it has been known, although not confirmed, about the death of Amadou Kouffa, leader of the Macina Liberation Front, the 23.11.2018. The prominence of this boss in JNIM and his charisma will have an impact on the Malian terrorist phenomenon. Its proximity to Iyad Ag Ghali has been a determining factor in the configuration of the JNIM alliance, as well as in the installation of jihadism in Burkina Faso. Nonetheless, the deep roots of the identified circumstances that make up the terrorist phenomenon in the triple border region make difficult to eradicate it in the medium term. The security situation in Burkina Faso and its projection in the future are worrisome, where jihad no longer only seeks to carry out terrorist actions, but also to install itself permanently. The terrorist threat in the area affects international troops installed in the

region, as well as foreigners displaced there in the context of international trade and cooperation.

**11.- Advice:** the death of Amadu Kouffa represents an opportunity to influence new government contacts with the Peulh ethnic group, trying to erode their collaboration with JNIM and promoting an environment of better coexistence with other ethnic groups.

The reluctance of the Burkinabe government to collaborate with France as a former colonial power could be mitigated if the United States decided to support Burkina Faso in its fight against terrorism.