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Preliminary Report

BURKINA FASO: ARMED RAID IN SOLHAN CLAIMS OVER 160 LIVES:

5th JUNE, 2021

Incident:

On Friday 5th June, 2021 unidentified armed men stormed the village of Solhan in Yagha province of the Sahel region in Northern Burkina Faso and killed over 160 civilians including 20 children. The attackers who launched the offensive in an overnight raid also burned down houses and the village market. The number of fatalities makes the incident the deadliest assault in Burkina Faso since the outbreak of terrorist activities in the West African country in 2015.

In addition to the deceased, several people sustained various degrees of injury. Some of the injured were rushed to a medical clinic in nearby Sebba town, approximately 12km from Solhan where the attack took place.

In a statement released on Saturday and signed by government spokesman Ousseni Tamboura, President Roch Marc Christian Kabore condemned the attack, describing it barbaric and despicable. Although, no group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack, the statement described the attackers as terrorists noting that their crimes will not go unpunished. The government called on the citizenry to remain united and solid against what it described as obscurantist forces.

Analysis:

The deadly attack in the village of Solhan is not only the deadliest incident in Burkina Faso in 2021 but the deadliest since Islamist inspired terrorist begun launching attacks in the country in 2015. The massacre followed another attack earlier on Friday in the village of Tadaryat in the same region that claimed the lives of 14 people.

In spite of government announcement of military operations, the situation in the area is said to remain volatile as residents are fleeing to the nearby towns of Sebba and Dori.

The nature of the attack and the number of casualties occurred at a time when terrorist and violent extremist activities had gone down quite remarkably in the Burkina side of the Lipta Gourma region bordering Mali and Niger and where the Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) terrorist organizations are both active.



For the first time since 2016, terrorist attacks went down in Burkina Faso in 2020. Data compiled by the ACSRT showed that terrorist attacks last year reduced by 12 percent compared to attacks recorded in 2019. This was attributed to infighting between the JNIM and the ISGS, that had led to a number of casualties within the ranks of the groups and thereby affecting their ability of carry out attacks as well as increased counter terrorism operations by the

various military deployments in the Sahel region.

Another factor that accounted for a reduction in terrorist attacks was the increased commitment by Burkinabe authorities to fighting the scourge. Between 2017 to 2019, the defence budget rose from US\$205 million to US\$373 million, corresponding to an 80% increase. In view of the time required for building military capabilities, it appeared the investments in the previous years paid off in 2020.

Indeed, only on 14th May this year, the Minister of Defence Cheriff Sy and the country's military top command visited Sebba to assure residents in and around the town, which had been frequently attacked by terrorist groups, that life had returned to normal after successful military operations.

This positive development might have led to the deployed security personnel and the government sanctioned self-defence militia groups to become complacent, a situation that might have been exploited by the attackers to launch the deadly offensive.

Recommendations:

Gripped by security crisis that has spread across the western part of the Sahel region in recent years, the gains made by the Burkinabe security services and their international partners needs to be consolidated by continued vigilance despite this deadly attack. The security services should not assume the war is over until the terrorist groups operating in the Liptako Gourma region are comprehensively defeated.