

# After Burkina Faso bombing, France pledges to step up war in Sahel

Francis Dubois  
8 March 2018

Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, was shaken on March 2 by an attack by two heavily-armed commando squads on the French embassy and the headquarters of the Burkinabe army in the center of the city. For several hours, the Burkinabe army and French special forces were locked in a firefight with the assailants. According to eyewitnesses, approximately 30 people died in the attack, including 8 Burkinabe soldiers, and 85 were wounded including civilians.

A newly-formed jihadist group, the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (GSIM), claimed responsibility for the attack on Saturday evening, stating the attack was retaliation for French military operations Barkhane and Sabre. The French intervention has claimed the lives of 20 GSIM members in the north of Mali. The group had already claimed responsibility for the death of two French officers in the east of Mali on February 21.

“What I saw here were truly apocalyptic scenes,” said Paul Kaba Thiéba, the prime minister of Burkina Faso, after a visit to the army headquarters, which had been heavily damaged by a car bomb. He paid tribute to “the memory of our brave soldiers who fell ... arms in hand.”

According to Security Minister Clément Sawadogo, “the vehicle was stuffed full of explosives, the charge was enormous” and caused “enormous damage” to the army headquarters. “There was a meeting about the G5 Sahel ... maybe it was being targeted,” he declared during a press conference.

Press reports indicated that the explosion in fact destroyed a room where the G5 alliance of five Sahel countries aiding France in its war in Mali (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, Niger, Mali) was supposed to meet. The location of the meeting was reportedly changed at the last minute.

The attack caused panic in the city, which returned to

calm only late in the afternoon. The armed forces were deployed across the capital.

Whereas in the last two years, two previous terror attacks had claimed numerous victims in a restaurant and a hotel in Ouagadougou, the latest attack targeted some of the most heavily protected sites in the country.

It was aimed at the G5 armies that France is trying to build up as a “counter-terrorist force” operating across the entire Sahel region, and that Paris wants to associate to the 4,000 French troops who have for four years been in the region for Operation Barkhane, located primarily in Mali.

“We have the impression that this attack was an act of retaliation by these groups, just as [French President] Emmanuel Macron is putting pressure on the G5 Sahel to organize an offensive in the border area between Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso,” declared political commentator Antoine Glaser.

Shortly after the attack, Macron stressed his “determination and the full engagement of France, at the sides of its partners in the G5 Sahel organization, in the struggle against terrorist movements.”

After this latest attack, it was widely remarked in the press that Burkina Faso has become a terrorist target since the removal in 2014 of former President Blaise Compaoré in a French-backed putsch. Compaoré relied above all on negotiations to avoid the spread of attacks by terrorist groups in the Sahel into Burkina Faso. The former president still has many supporters inside the army, which launched a putsch in 2015 and briefly toppled the transitional government supported by Paris, which then intervened militarily to re-impose it.

GSIM was created by a merger in March 2017 between several Islamist movements including Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar Dine and Al Mourabitoun, which were able to spread across

the Sahel region after NATO backed Islamist militias in its 2011 war in Libya to topple Muammar Gaddafi's regime. This war devastated the oil-rich country and divided it into zones dominated by rival warlords in shifting alliances with various imperialist powers. Its consequences have been to destabilize the entire Sahel.

Libya now has become an internment zone for countless thousands of refugees who are locked up in European Union-sponsored camps in horrific conditions, tortured or even sold as slaves.

Macron's reaction makes quite clear that Paris is preparing a new intensification of the war it has been waging across its former colonial empire with conditional assistance from Washington. This region, whose surface is as large as Europe's, is rich in mineral and energy resources that Paris and the EU consider to be essential to the profits of European transnational corporations. This war policy led to street protests against Macron's visit in Ouagadougou on November 27, the day before the Abidjan summit announced an intensification France's war in the region.

Like the other European powers, Paris sees the militarization of the Sahel was an important way to stop the flood of refugees who want to cross the Mediterranean. In January, the German parliament voted to increase from 350 to 1,000 the number of German soldiers deployed to the region, making Mali the largest foreign deployment of the German army.

The army of Burkina Faso—a country of 19 million people that, like Mali and Niger, are among the 20 poorest in the world—is supposed to provide a substantial portion of the new anti-terror forces of 10,000 men that France is demanding be set up.

Last week's terror attack in Ouagadagou underscores how the neo-colonial policy of France and the EU threatens to unleash an even greater disaster across this entire region of Africa. Its population is being offered only the choice of greater misery, losing their lives in a terror attack or being used as cannon fodder in an army unit supporting the European imperialists.



To contact the WSWs and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**