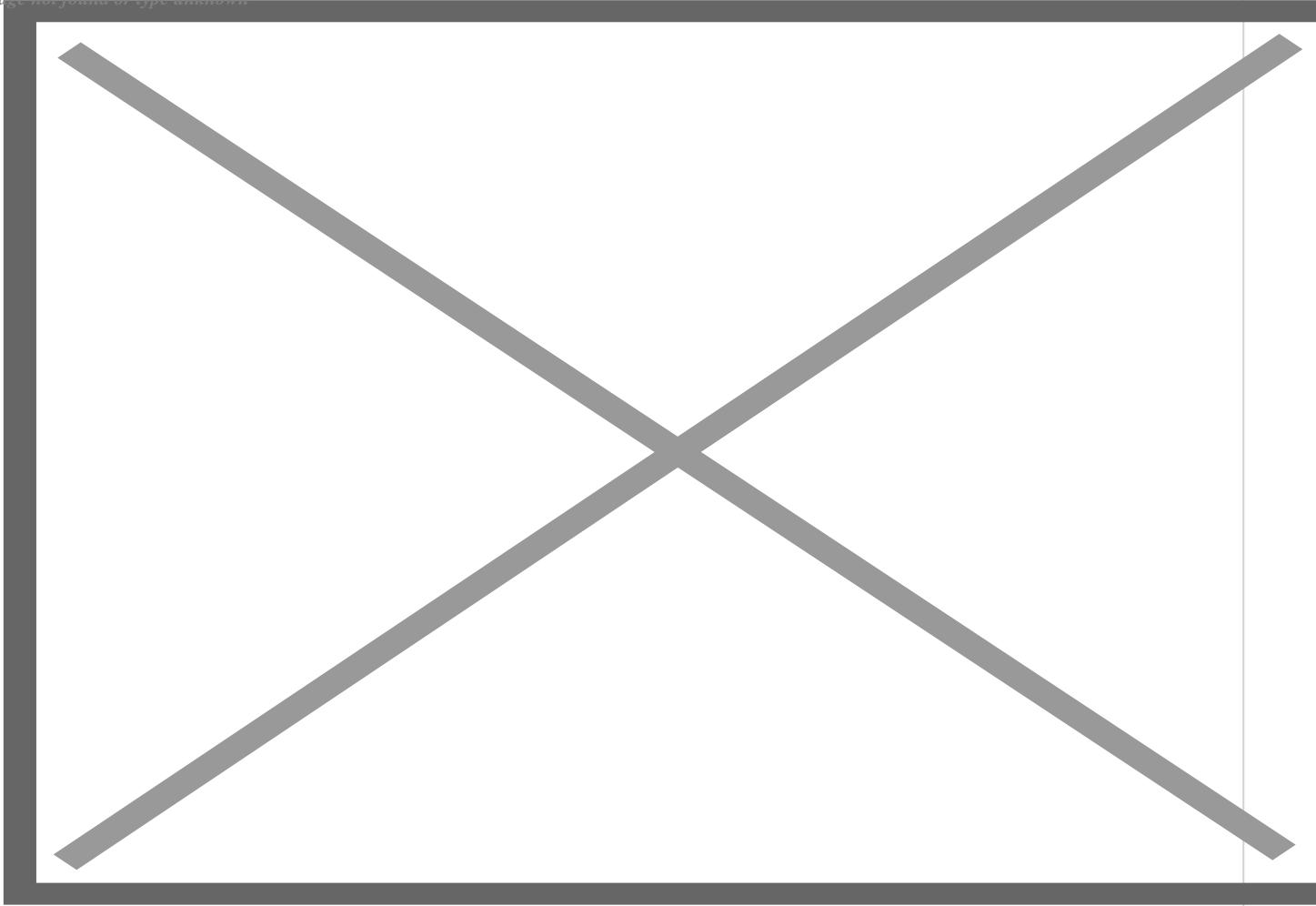


French air raids kill 40 fighters in Burkina Faso

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A close-up of a French flag patch worn by French troops in Africa's Sahel region as part of the anti-insurgent Operation Barkhane in Inaloglog

Porto-Novo, February 13 (RHC)-- French forces have killed dozens of fighters in Burkina Faso linked to deadly attacks this week in neighboring Benin whose victims included a Frenchman, the army said.

The French-led Barkhane force in the Sahel region “engaged its air intelligence capacities to locate the armed group” responsible for the attacks, before carrying out air attacks that killed 40 fighters, the army’s general command said on Saturday.

Benin is a former colony of France, having gained its independence in 1960.

According to media reports, the Frenchman had been among nine people killed this week in two attacks on park rangers in the W National Park, a wildlife reserve in Benin's remote north bordering troubled Niger and Burkina Faso.

Two roadside bombs killed five park rangers, one park official, one soldier and a French trainer on Tuesday, according to a Beninese government toll. Two days later, another park official was killed in an explosion.

France said on Thursday it had opened an investigation as a 50-year-old citizen was among those killed in a "terrorist attack" in the park. African Parks, the organisation running the reserve, said the French citizen had been a "chief law enforcement instructor" there.

Benin had long been one of the more stable countries in West Africa, where fighters from al-Qaeda and ISIL (ISIS) threaten Sahel countries, but it has experienced several recent attacks. Criminal smuggling gangs also operate along its frontier.

In January, two Beninese soldiers were killed when their vehicle hit an improvised explosive in the northern Atakora region.

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