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From ‘Anglophone Problem’ to ‘Anglophone Conflict’ in Cameroon: Assessing Prospects for Peace

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Abstract

Since 2017, an armed conflict has been raging in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon between separatist forces and the Cameroonian military. This review analyses the historical origins and root causes of the conflict; the trigger mechanism of rising protests and state repression in 2016; the emergence and evolution of the armed conflict over the past 5 years; its impact on civilians; and hopes for peace. However, there is currently little prospect for conflict resolution as the Cameroon government appears intent on ignoring limited international pressure, maintaining the charade that the ‘security crisis’ is over and reconstruction is underway, while continuing its counter-insurgency strategy to militarily defeat the armed separatist groups. We note that, while the desire for peace is profound, the political status quo is no longer tolerable nor acceptable, with conflict resolution dependent on political changes that provide, at a minimum, the Anglophone regions with greater autonomy and protection of their particular identity and institutions.

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Keywords

Cameroon, 'Anglophone problem', 'Anglophone conflict', identity, conflict resolution

Introduction

The conflict between the Cameroonian military and armed separatist groups in the English-speaking Northwest (NW) and Southwest (SW) regions is currently in its sixth year, with no sign of resolution. The separatist groups are fighting for an independent Republic of Ambazonia in the territory of the former British Southern Cameroons. The armed conflict was triggered by the Francophone-dominated government's violent repression of peaceful protests from October 2016 onwards, although the root causes go back to independence in 1960/1961, and indeed further back to the unequal colonial division of German Kamerun (1884–1916) between the French and British after the First World War.

The 2016 strikes and demonstrations were initially led by lawyers and teachers in protest against the influx of French-speaking judges and teachers that was undermining the distinctive legal and education systems in the English-speaking regions. But state repression of peaceful protests meant that initial demands in the legal and educational spheres quickly widened to demands for federalism and then secession, and shifted from peaceful demonstrations and non-violent civil disobedience to violent conflict. The January 2017 government banning order against those Anglophone civil society organisations that were calling for a return to a federal system, with the arrest and detention of their leaders, along with an internet shutdown from January to April 2017, further escalated the situation and marked a spiral of radicalisation. Secessionist voices, including from the diaspora, increasingly took centre stage and armed separatist groups emerged. The first attacks on military installations occurred in September 2017. On 1 October 2017, marking the anniversary of Southern Cameroons' independence from Britain in 1961, separatist groups unilaterally declared independence for the Republic of Ambazonia, alongside massive demonstrations of support in which at least 17 protestors were killed (Amnesty International, 2017a). The Cameroon government responded with military occupation of the Anglophone regions, and on 30 November 2017 President Paul Biya declared war on the separatist groups (Sonkey, 2017). The armed conflict has continued unabated since then, with at least 6000 deaths, mainly civilians, forced displacement of one million people, huge educational disruption, and atrocities and human rights abuses committed by both warring parties.

This review analyses the historical origins and root causes of the conflict; the trigger mechanism of rising protests and state repression in 2016; and the emergence of armed conflict in 2017 and its evolution over the past five years; its impact on civilians; and prospects for its resolution.

Historical Origins of Conflict

The current Anglophone conflict in Cameroon can be traced to the postcolonial unification of British Southern Cameroons and French Cameroun in 1961. The

unification process resulted in the adoption of a constitution to uphold an indissoluble federal system made up of the States of West Cameroon (former British Southern Cameroons) and East Cameroon (former French Cameroun). A federal system was important to uphold the bicultural and bilingual nature of the new state, given its inheritance of distinct colonial styles in governance and public administration, including different legal and educational systems, and different official languages. However, the 1961 constitution was short-lived, with a controversial dissolution of the federal system in 1972 by President Ahidjo in favour of a centralised unitary state. West Cameroon was divided into the NW and SW provinces – later renamed in 1996 as NW and SW regions out of 10 regions. In 1984, a Presidential decree renamed the United Republic of Cameroon as *La République du Cameroun*, thereby reinstating the name French Cameroun adopted at independence from France on 1 January 1960, before reunification with Southern Cameroons. These landmark changes led to even more centralisation, resulting in less political and economic freedom in former West Cameroon, with increased censorship, corruption and marginalisation of the minority English-speaking population. The illegal dissolution of the federal system in 1972 and the long standing history of political and socio-economic marginalisation and discrimination of the people of former West Cameroon – often referred to as Cameroon’s ‘Anglophone problem’ (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 1997) – is a key cause of the current ‘Anglophone conflict’.

Unsurprisingly, opposing voices objected to these constitutional and structural changes that were perceived as part of a well-oiled plan to deny former West Cameroon’s right to self-rule and to dismantle its identity and freedoms. Dissent increased with the wave of political liberalisation in the early 1990s. Cameroon’s second president, Paul Biya, yielded to pressure from civil society and enacted a law on Freedom of Association (Nkwi, 2006). This signalled a return to multi-party politics and enabled various civil society associations to register and operate legally. It gave renewed impetus to opposition movements in Anglophone Cameroon and it was not coincidental that the first major opposition party, the Social Democratic Front (SDF), was formed in Bamenda in 1990, the capital of the NW region. Nfi (2021) notes that, the key founding fathers of the SDF were activists of an informal Anglophone secessionist group who wanted a political party that would serve as the legal face of their movement. However, the SDF leadership quest to also attract support from the French-speaking regions, caused it to dither with the Anglophone problem. Many Francophone militants supported and financed the SDF compared to Anglophones and this support could not be sacrificed by the party hierarchy. As a compromise, the SDF instead endorsed a four-state federation, dashing the hopes of many Anglophones for either a return to a two-state federation or support for the independence cause. These alienated sections of the party, including elites from the SW region who thought the SDF was dominated by Northwesterners and militants from the French regions and would not fight for a two-state federation. The disappointed SW elites formed the Southwest Elite Association (SWELA),

mainly to counter the new national status of the SDF party (Nyamnjoh and Rowlands, 1998: 327). In addition to SWELANS, those calling for the restoration of the status of West Cameroon (restorationists) and those advocating for an independent Southern Cameroon state (separatists), began to openly advocate for these causes (Fonchingong, 2013).

Post 1990s, Konings and Nyamnjoh (2019) note that Anglophone interests were increasingly represented by separate Anglophone organisations, such as those for English-speaking teachers, lawyers, journalists and students, as well as political groups, notably the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC). These associations were initially active, with frequent meetings, rallies and demonstrations, though by 1996 momentum was lost. However, the Southern Cameroons Youth League opted for armed struggle, and ill-advised attacks on military establishments in March 1997 led to a ruthless and lethal response by the government, effectively ending this strategy (Konings and Nyamnjoh 2019: 77). Seizing on the divisions within the Anglophone community, Biya's government began deploying strategies to undermine the Anglophone problem. The government infiltrated Anglophone groups such as SWELA – an association which at birth was federalist, anti-centrist, and anti-Francophone, and influenced it to become pro-government, anti-SDF and became an advocate for a 10 state federation (Nfi, 2021: 17). Additionally, since 1991, Biya has been appointing NW and SW elites to the post of Prime Minister and other junior ministerial positions. However, such cabinet members are firmly co-opted and remain staunch supporters of the regime and Biya's ruling party and do little to address the grievances of the Anglophone population. In 1996, a constitutional reform promised decentralisation of governance at regional (provincial) levels, yet many aspects of the reforms have not been realised, with the Biya's regime focussed on maintaining Anglophone elite support by using lucrative government appointments as a reward for allies (Orock, 2014). In 1997, Konings and Nyamnjoh (1997: 229), summarised the government approach to the Anglophone problem thus:

The Government's continued denial of any 'Anglophone problem' in Cameroon, and its determination to defend the unitary state by all available means, including repression, could lead to an escalation of Anglophone demands past a point of no return.

Rising Grievances, Protests and Repression: 2016–2017

Almost two decades later, the year 2016 marked a turning point of the 'Anglophone problem' as frustrations intensified with the systematic francophonisation of the distinctive legal and education systems in the English-speaking regions. In particular, Anglophone lawyers, organised as the Cameroon Common Law Lawyers (CCLL), were concerned with the erosion of the common law system and the appointment

of French-speaking magistrates educated in civil law in the English-speaking regions, with justice thus compromised for English speakers (Bone, 2021: 30). Similarly, teachers and parents were dissatisfied with the influx of French-speaking teachers, and the adverse impact on students' examination results (Kouega, 2018). Initially the CCLL petitioned President Biya in May 2015 and February 2016, but such efforts were simply ignored. The lawyers then took strike action in October 2016 and organised a peaceful demonstration on 8 November 2016 in Bamenda to press for their demands, but which was violently broken up by security forces (ICG, 2017). Following the lawyers' example, trade unions representing Anglophone teachers called a strike action and marched peacefully in Bamenda on 21 November 2016 to protest against the rising problems in Anglophone education. Similarly school teachers were joined by university students and lecturers equally frustrated with deteriorating conditions and the influx of Francophone faculty (Kouega, 2018). Public support was shown by further demonstrations in Bamenda on 22 November, "marking the first time that members of the unions were not the only demonstrators" (Bone, 2021: 37). These protests were also violently dispersed by the security forces using tear gas and bullets, with at least two fatalities recorded and over 100 arrested (Awasom, 2020: 282). A government delegation did meet with lawyers' and teachers' representatives in Bamenda for negotiation, but no resolution was reached. In contrast, the violent responses to the peaceful protests indicated the reluctance of Biya's government to dialogue or genuinely address Anglophone concerns and demands.

Faced with such intransigence, the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium (the Consortium) was established on 5 December 2016 as a mouthpiece for the Anglophone population. The Consortium advocated a return to the 1961 federal system as a means of securing autonomy for the distinctive Anglophone institutions. The Consortium initiated 'Operation Ghost Towns Resistance', also referred to as 'Country Sundays' or 'lockdowns', with closure of schools and businesses in the NW and SW regions on selected days as a tactic of non-violent resistance (ICG, 2017). Such 'ghost town' days were widely respected, indicating the level of support amongst the general population. On 8 December 2016, the ruling party, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM), countered with a pro-government rally in Bamenda, resulting in violent clashes with the local population in which four people were killed, many injured and 50 arrested (ICG, 2017). On 17 January 2017, major suppression of civil society protest occurred with the Ministry of Territorial Administration issuing banning orders on the Consortium and the longstanding SCNC (Amnesty International, 2017b). Key leaders were arrested and detained, charged with treason and terrorism, while others fled the country (Bama, 2017). Additionally, the government imposed a total internet shutdown in the Anglophone regions from January to April 2017 (Quartz Africa, 2017). This government crackdown entailed a major escalation of the crisis, one which led to a shift from demands for federalism to calls for secession and the emergence of armed conflict in under a year (Bone, 2021: 46).

Following the state repression of Anglophone demands in 2017, existing separatist organisations, largely active in the diaspora, came together to form the Southern Cameroons Ambazonia Consortium United Front (SCACUF). The group was led by a leadership council composed of the heads of all its member organisations. Sisiku Julius Ayuk Tabe, previously involved in the Consortium, was appointed as chairperson, and his strategy remained non-violent, re-echoing the SCNC's call in the 1990s for "the force of argument rather than the argument of force" (Bone, 2021: 48). There were divisions within SCACUF, however, with others such as Ayaba Cho Lucas, leader of the Ambazonia Governing Council (AGC), one of the constituent organisations, advocating armed struggle. Yet, what was most significant was the fundamental shift in the key demand from federalism to secession.

While SCACUF's leadership remained largely outside of Cameroon, especially in Nigeria, civil disobedience continued in the NW and SW during 2017 with widespread support for the weekly 'Ghost Town' days in which businesses and schools were closed, along with increasing calls for secession. The claim for secession was vehemently opposed by the Cameroonian government who deemed this a rebellious act against the country's sovereignty. Although local resistance was non-violent, the NW and SW remained militarised, with state security forces arbitrarily arresting and detaining young men in particular on the pretext that they were supporting secessionism (Tabi, 2017). In response, the AGC announced on 9 September 2017 the formal deployment of the Ambazonia Defence Forces (ADF) in the NW and SW regions, with the first attack on Cameroon government forces in which three soldiers were killed (Ambazonia Redemption, 2017). On 1 October 2017, SCACUF marked the anniversary of Southern Cameroons' independence from British rule in 1961 by symbolically declaring the independence of the Republic of Ambazonia (ICG, 2017). The independence declaration was marked by demonstrations of over 1 million people throughout the NW and SW, but which resulted in the killing of 17 demonstrators and over 500 arrests by government forces (CHRDA and RWCHR, 2019). On 31 October, SCACUF officially transformed itself into the Interim Government (IG) of Ambazonia, with Ayuk Tabe assuming the role of President. Although the IG remained formally opposed to armed struggle at this point and condemned an ADF attack that killed three gendarmes in early November 2017 (ICG, 2017), President Biya formerly declared war on 30 November 2017 and the state intensified its military occupation of the Anglophone regions, with the armed conflict continuing to date.

The Ambazonia Movement and Armed Secession

The unilateral declaration of independence for Ambazonia on 1 October 2017 ushered in a new era of 'Anglophone politics', with fragmented and conflicting political authorities, mainly based in the diaspora, as well as about 30 armed groups with stronger or looser ties to the political groupings. The main political split initially was between Ayuk Tabe's IG and Cho Lucas's AGC. However, in January 2018 Ayuk Tabe and nine other IG leaders were arrested in Nigeria and extradited to Cameroon. They were detained

without trial, and later sentenced to life imprisonment by a military tribunal in August 2019 (Deutsche Welle, 2019). With Ayuk Tabe detained, US-based Samuel Ikome Sako was elected as interim IG president. However, infighting ensued with a split in early 2019 between 'IG Sisiku' and 'IG Sako' (Bone, 2020). Despite its initial rivalry with the Interim Government, the AGC supported the IG Sisiku faction, and formalised cooperation ties in August 2019 (Bone, 2020). In 2021, the AGC also formed an alliance with Biafran separatists in Nigeria, the Indigenous People of Biafra. Cho Lucas has also encouraged Francophone Cameroonian groups to take up arms against Biya's regime (Cameroon News Agency, 2021).

Militarily, while the ADF remains the largest group, there is a proliferation of smaller armed groups, for instance the Southern Cameroons Defence Forces (SOCADEF), Ambazonia Restoration Forces, Red Dragons, Tigers of Ambazonia, and Vipers (Bone, 2020), comprising around 4000 fighters (ICG, 2020). Allegiance with the political factions varies, with Red Dragons and SOCADEF believed to be aligned with IG Sako, while others have no clear affiliation (Bone, 2020). Initially fighting equipment was rudimentary, including hunting rifles and machetes. But the armed groups' combat strength has increased through acquisition of more sophisticated weaponry, including improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and rocket launchers, with a greater intensity of operations (Burton, 2021). Precise casualty figures are unknown, but both sides have lost considerable numbers of combatants.

While this war is unremitting, one characteristic is that the rival 'Interim Governments' have 'limited influence on the ground' (Craig, 2021b), perhaps unsurprising given that the political leadership is either in the diaspora or imprisoned, while the plethora of armed groups operate relatively independently. The picture is complicated further by the phenomenon of 'Fake Amba', armed criminals who carry out abductions and extort money from civilians in the name of 'supporting the struggle', making it difficult at times for local people to distinguish between those genuinely fighting for independence and those not.

Impact on the Civilian Population

After over 5 years of armed conflict, the impact on NW and SW population of four million has been devastating. While figures are approximate and underestimated, at least 6000 people have been killed (HRW, 2022b) and hundreds of villages razed in the military's counterinsurgency campaign. An estimated 1.1 million people had been displaced by 2020 (UN OCHA, 2021a: 18), including 70,000 registered refugees in Nigeria, with 2.2 million in need of humanitarian assistance (UN OCHA, 2021b). School closures have caused educational disruption for hundreds of thousands of children for years (CHRDA, 2021). Gross human rights violations committed by both warring parties have been widely documented. The military are accused of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, disappearances, unlawful imprisonment, torture, as well as the burning and destruction of homes, schools and health centres (CHRDA, 2021, 2022; CHRDA and RWCHR, 2019; HRW, 2022b; Willis et al., 2019, 2020). Armed separatist groups are

accused of kidnappings and extortion of civilians, killings of alleged informants (so-called ‘blacklegs’), and beatings of teachers and students for non-compliance with the school boycott (HRW, 2022a). Evidence indicates that the security forces are responsible for a greater proportion of the various atrocities (Willis et al., 2020: 35–36), with the World Bank (2021: 28) stating that government forces have caused ten times as many civilian deaths as separatist armed groups. Rape and other forms of sexual violence have increased dramatically, described as ‘pervasive’ and ‘rampant’ in a UN report (Craig, 2021a), and perpetuated with impunity by the military and non-state armed groups (Crawford et al., 2022: 34–37). As in other conflicts, rape has been used as a weapon of war, terrorising local communities into submission and grossly violating women and girls.

The economic impact has also been acute, both on overall economic output and household incomes. Both regions are rich in natural resources, with the SW especially noted for its commercial agricultural plantations and oil refinery, one reason why the Cameroon government is adamantly opposed to secession. Yet, because of the conflict, overall GDP in 2019 declined by 35.2% and 27% in the NW and SW respectively compared to pre-crisis figures (World Bank, 2021: 46). Agricultural production of cash crops and food crops have both been affected, including complete shutdown in 2018 of banana production in the state-owned Cameroon Development Corporation’s plantation in the SW (UNDP/GoC, 2021: 3). Additionally, palm oil production fell by almost 90% in 2019, while rubber production was eight times less in 2019 than its pre-conflict level (UNDP/GoC, 2021: 2). The impact of such economic collapse on employment levels is severe. The World Bank estimates that ‘close to 2 million workers in SW and 1.2 million workers in NW were likely affected by the crisis’ (World Bank, 2021: 48). Farming and productive activities for those remaining in the regions were adversely affected by conflict-related issues, notably ‘ghost town’ days as well as emergency restrictions and military presence, while employment proved difficult to find for IDPs. Therefore, household incomes have been severely affected, with resulting increase in poverty.

Prospects for Conflict Resolution?

There is currently an impasse in prospects for conflict resolution, despite ongoing violence and atrocities in the NW and SW regions. The Cameroon government is intent on a military solution, while international pressure on the warring parties to negotiate is minimal. We look here at the government’s strategy, the limited international response, the fragmentation of the Ambazonian movement, and the limited influence of civil society organisations as factors that all impede prospects for peace.

The Cameroon government’s approach to the war is described as one of ‘hammer and lies’ (Roberts, 2022), in other words, military force alongside a disinformation campaign. The government continues to fight a counter-insurgency war, while simultaneously denying that a conflict exists, preferring to refer to a ‘security crisis’ in the English-speaking regions, one which it portrays as largely resolved with a Presidential

Plan of Reconstruction and Development in place since 2020 (UNDP/GoC, 2021). The lie to this is evident by Biya's deployment of a new military commander and special elite forces to the two regions in September 2022 (Journal du Cameroun, 2022). Essentially Biya seeks a military victory by crushing the separatists. The only official attempt at conflict resolution was the government-organised 'Major National Dialogue' (MND) from 30 September to 4 October 2019. This was criticised for being an elite affair that excluded key actors, including major separatist groups (Hendricks and Ngah, 2019). Its main outcomes were recommendations of political reforms, notably special status for the Anglophone regions plus decentralisation to provide greater local autonomy in all regions, and a Disarmament, Demobilisation and Rehabilitation (DDR) programme. Three years on, the government maintains the rhetoric that the outcomes of the MND remain central to its strategy for resolving the 'instability' in the Anglophone regions, as noted in the Foreign Minister's speech to the UN General Assembly in September 2022 (Roberts, 2022: 1). Yet the promised political reforms have not been realised, with the decentralisation programme having remained outstanding since 1996, and the proposed DDR programme being premature as the violence continues to rage. The MND was an early example of the government's 'hammer-and-lies' strategy in which the pretence of dialogue served to conceal the government's military intent, with a military crackdown in the Anglophone regions immediately afterwards (ICG, 2020).

International pressure to resolve the conflict has been described as 'feeble', with little or no pressure from Western governments and no political intervention from the AU or UN (Mutah, 2022). The sole peace initiative has been the Swiss government's offer to mediate peace talks, instigated in March 2019 but finally abandoned in September 2022 due to the withdrawal of the Cameroon government. Other Western governments, for instance the US, UK and Germany, hide behind their rhetorical support for the 'Swiss process', but did little or nothing to actively encourage it. Instead, Western powers have prioritised their relationship with the Biya regime in order to protect their economic interests in Cameroon along with regional geo-political interests in the Gulf of Guinea and Central Africa. France's longstanding support for governments in '*La Francophonie*' involves a disinclination to criticise the Cameroon government, affirmed in July 2022 when President Macron's visit to Cameroon ignored any public reference to the Anglophone conflict. The UK government has prioritised its economic interests, including a substantial off-shore natural gas deal involving a British company in June 2018 (GOV.UK, 2018), and the signing of a UK-Cameroon Economic Partnership Agreement in April 2021, amidst continuing violence (GOV.UK, 2021). Stronger statements have come from the US Congress, the House of Representatives' Resolution 358 in July 2019 (US House of Representatives, 2019) and Senate Resolution 684 in January 2021 (US Congress, 2021), with both calling on the government and separatist groups to end the violence and engage in "genuinely inclusive dialogue". Nonetheless, these resolutions have not led to significant action by the US government. The immediate response, however, of the Cameroon government to the July 2019 House Resolution was to hire a

Washington-based public relations firm with close ties to the Republican Party in August 2019 to counter the perceived influence of the US-based Anglophone diaspora (Foute, 2019), another example of the disinformation strategy.

International organisations have also shown limited interest in the conflict. The African Union's response has been particularly disappointing, mainly to express support for the Cameroon government. The AU chairperson Moussa Fakil Mahamat visited Cameroon in 2018 and 2019 but merely emphasised the AU's 'unwavering commitment to the unity and territorial integrity of Cameroon' (Hendricks and Ngah, 2020). The AU's Peace and Security Council (PSC) has declined to place the Anglophone conflict on its agenda (ICG, 2020), and the addition of Cameroon in 2020 as a PSC member has ensured this remains the case (ISS/PSC Report, 2020). UN interest has been muted. UN agencies have asked both sides to end the violence and guarantee humanitarian access. But Cameroon has not been discussed at the UN Security Council, with permanent members such as China, Russia and France keeping it off the agenda after lobbying by Cameroon's diplomats (ICG, 2019). Somewhat surprisingly, the UNDP has collaborated with the Government of Cameroon in a major report on the 'Presidential Plan for the Reconstruction and Development of the North-West and South-West Regions', inclusive of an appeal for financial support from international donors, contributing to the pretence that the conflict is over (UNDP/GoC, 2021). Simultaneously, Biya's government has taken advantage of this lack of external criticism and scrutiny to pursue its military strategy.

The fragmentation within the Ambazonian movement has also mitigated against the prospects for peace. The political leadership struggles have created polycentric structures within the movement and multiple policy directions (Ketzmerick, 2022). Disagreements over who can participate in or has the mandate to negotiate on behalf of the movement has to some extent derailed the Swiss peace initiative (Deutsche Welle, 2021). While no separatist group has shown much interest in a peace process, in September 2019 the IG Sako faction did bring together ten Ambazonian nationalist groups to form the Ambazonia Coalition Team as a joint platform for negotiation. In contrast, the IG Sisiku alliance refused to participate. The multiplicity of voices over the policy directions of the movement is in part symptomatic of the disconnect between its diasporic leadership and their militias in Cameroon, given the absence of a physical authority on the ground to mobilise its following and coalesce its policies towards a common vision for peace negotiations (Ketzmerick, 2022).

Bottom-up attempts at conflict resolution by CSOs have been impressive and sustained, but with limited effect, given the government-imposed constraints that they operate under and that the government has shown no interest in listening. Women-led CSOs, in particular, have been very active in various peace campaigns such as 'Back to school', 'Stop burning health facilities', 'Stop the killings', 'We want dialogue' and 'Cease fire'. These campaigns have been aimed at both the government and non-state armed groups, and intended to bring national and international attention to ongoing atrocities. Such campaigns were given impetus by the establishment in May 2018 of the Southwest/Northwest Women's Task Force (SNWOT) by leaders of women's

organisations. ‘Lamentation campaigns’ (mourning as a form of protest) have been particularly effective, including consistently highlighting issues of rape and gender-based violence. Civil society generally, and women’s organisations in particular, continue to lobby and advocate for an end to violence and genuine inclusive dialogue. For example, the ‘National Women’s Convention for Peace in Cameroon’ was held from 29 to 31 July 2021 in Yaoundé, a gathering of over 1000 women, with a final declaration calling for an immediate end to hostilities and inclusive dialogue. However, CSOs operate under severe constraints. They are unable to propose a political solution that addresses the root causes of the conflict, such as a return to two-state federalism and/or more autonomy for the Anglophone regions, knowing that this would bring down the repressive force of the state upon themselves, as occurred in 2016/2017 (Annan et al., 2021). Therefore, currently, the prospects for conflict resolution remain low. For the Cameroon government to become more open to peace negotiations, it may require a change in the balance of military power between the two warring parties or an increase in government forces’ casualties, as well as an intensification of international pressure.

Conclusion

The current armed conflict in Anglophone Cameroon is now in its sixth year, with devastating effects for Anglophone citizens. As we write (December 2022), there is little prospect of its resolution, nor of a political solution that addresses the longstanding grievances of the minority Anglophone population. The Biya regime shows no interest in peace negotiations and remains intent on militarily defeating the armed separatist groups, while maintaining the charade that the ‘security crisis’ is over and reconstruction underway. Writing in 2017, prior to the armed conflict, Konings and Nyamnjoh (2019: 60) noted that the Anglophone secessionist movement’s intent was to achieve an independent state through peaceful negotiations and not force. But they also powerfully summed up the regime’s approach to Anglophone grievances, noting:

... the resolute determination of the Francophone-dominated state to approach every attempt by Anglophone Cameroonians to draw attention to their predicaments in the manner of a workman whose only tool is a hammer and to whom every problem is a nail.

Over 6 years later, little has changed in the Biya regime’s approach. Indeed, the hammer analogy has been re-used by Roberts (2022) to describe the regime’s strategy as one of ‘hammer and lies’. This strategy, especially the disinformation aspect, would seem successful in limiting pressure from Western governments and international organisations to resolve the conflict by peaceful means, although Western powers’ prioritisation of their self-interests in Cameroon also explains their lack of action.

However, the outlook of the mass of the Anglophone population would seem to have changed irrevocably. The unprecedented military occupation, repression and violence

from the Francophone-dominated state has given rise to a shift in consciousness amongst the population. While the desire for peace is profound, the political status quo is no longer tolerable nor acceptable, with conflict resolution dependent on political changes that provide, at a minimum, the Anglophone regions with greater autonomy and protection of their identity and institutions. The federal option must be on the table, otherwise the demands for secession will endure. The Biya regime's current inflexibility and refusal to countenance any change to its longstanding policy of assimilation of the Anglophone regions into Francophone Cameroon, along with its present military strategy, will only prolong the suffering of Anglophone population. Pressures for a negotiated peace must come from above and below. International actors must pressurise both the Cameroon government and armed separatist groups to ceasefire and enter negotiations, with international mediation. Yet the voices of affected civilians must also be included in any dialogue about how to resolve the conflict (Crawford et al., 2022). Indeed, any peace settlement should involve the Anglophone population in determining its future by popular democratic means, most likely including an internationally supervised referendum on constitutional arrangements in the English-speaking regions, including independence (Roberts, 2022: 4). If the decolonisation process of the Southern Cameroons in 1960/61 was botched and contravened the original UN Trusteeship Agreement, as Anyangwe (2010) and Ayim (2010) have argued, then decision-making on Southern Cameroons constitutional future has to be fully democratic some 60-plus years later and enable Southern Cameroonians to have control over their affairs.


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Vom “anglophonen Problem” zum “anglophonen Konflikt” in Kamerun: Einschätzung der Friedensaussichten

Zusammenfassung

Seit dem Jahr 2017 gibt es in den englischsprachigen Regionen Kameruns einen bewaffneten Konflikt zwischen Separatisten und der Regierungsarmee. In diesem Artikel werden die historischen Ursprünge und Ursachen des Konfliktes aufgezeigt, die Auslöser der zunehmenden Proteste und der staatlichen Repression im Jahr 2016, die Entstehung und Entwicklung des Konfliktes über fünf Jahre, seine Auswirkungen auf die Zivilbevölkerung und die Hoffnungen auf Frieden. Die Aussichten auf eine Konfliktlösung sind gering, da die kamerunische Regierung offenbar gewillt ist, den begrenzten internationalen Druck zu ignorieren und die Scharade aufrechtzuerhalten, dass die “Sicherheitskrise” vorbei und der Wiederaufbau im Gange sei, während sie gleichzeitig ihre Strategie der Aufstandsbekämpfung fortsetzt, um die bewaffneten separatistischen Gruppen militärisch zu besiegen. Wir stellen fest, dass der Wunsch nach

Frieden zwar groß, der politische Status quo jedoch nicht länger tolerierbar oder akzeptabel ist. Die Lösung des Konflikts hängt von politischen Veränderungen ab, die den anglophonen Regionen zumindest eine größere Autonomie und den Schutz ihrer Identität und Institutionen ermöglichen.

Schlagwörter

Kamerun, "anglophones Problem", "anglophoner Konflikt", Identität, Konfliktlösung