



Cameroon's Separatist War: Anglophone Grievances and its Diaspora

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Executive summary

The population of the two English-speaking regions (formerly British Southern Cameroons) makes up about one-fifth of the total population of Cameroon, constituting a sizeable minority in the country's estimated 28.5 million people. The rest of the population are from the francophone regions. The politicisation of the minority status of the two English-speaking North-West and South-West regions and their repeated complaints of discrimination and exclusion since 1961 have taken a deadly turn in recent years. A year-long protest in Cameroon's anglophone regions in 2016, following incessant complaints about their neglect and marginalisation at the hands of a brutally repressive government led by francophone elites for more than 60 years, descended into a civil war in 2017. The national 'grand dialogue' staged by the authorities in September 2019 failed to engage the leaders of the separatist movements on a clear, negotiated path towards the peaceful resolution of the conflict. Almost four years later, the conflict continues to rage on, with Cameroon's anglophone diaspora playing an important role in this regard. Following several protests by anglophone Cameroonian communities across many countries, the government's initial attempts to court and cajole this anglophone diaspora have failed. The government now looks set to extend its repressive tactics to anglophone Cameroonians abroad. This policy insight explores the complex background to this conflict and discusses the role of the increasingly activist anglophone Cameroonian diaspora in the conflict and the prospects for peace.

Introduction

Since October 2017, there has been a deadly, though under-reported,¹ conflict between Cameroon's military and separatist forces from the two anglophone North-West and South-West regions. Between 1919 and 1961, these two regions were under British colonial administration and were known as British Southern Cameroons. Following a UN plebiscite on 11 February 1961, inhabitants voted to 'reunite' with French Cameroun on 1 October 1961.²

1 Norwegian Refugee Council, 'Cameroon Tops List of Most Neglected Crisis,' June 04, 2019, <https://www.nrc.no/news/2019/june/cameroon-tops-list-of-most-neglected-crises/>.

2 Between 1884 and 1916, there was a much larger territory, which was the German colony of Kamerun. Following Germany's defeat in the First World War, its Kamerun colony was divided between Britain (one-fifth of the territory) and France (four-fifths of the territory). Between 1919 and 1960, these two territories were administered separately by Britain and France, firstly as League of Nations Mandate Territories and then as UN Trust Territories. Following the reunification in 1961, the country operated in principle as a Federal Republic of 'two equal states' until 1972. Under the federal system, East Cameroon was the name of the French Cameroon Republic and West Cameroon was the name of the two anglophone regions (called North-West and South-West regions today). From 1972 onwards, the country has been strictly organised and governed as a united and centralised state, mostly framed by French administrative law and bureaucratic principles, thus prompting anglophone nationalist claims about the 'annexation' of the former South Cameroons. In the end, separatists' claim for a 'restoration of sovereignty' for Ambazonia rests on a faulty interpretation: that British Southern Cameroon attained its independence in 1961 before its reunification with French Cameroon. The premise and framing of the plebiscite precluded the possibility of sovereignty for British Southern Cameroon if it did not join either Nigeria or French Cameroon.

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Today, anglophone Cameroonians from these two regions constitute about one-fifth of the country's estimated 28.5³ million people.

Figure 1 The separatist regions



Source: Paul-Simon Handy and Fonteh Akum, 'Cameroon holds elections in a time of crisis,' *Institute for Security Studies*, February 05, 2020, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/cameroon-holds-elections-in-a-time-of-crisis>

The politicisation of anglophone Cameroon's minority status and the violent abuses that it has suffered at the hands of Cameroon's authoritarian state for more than 60 years are the key factors driving anglophone resentment and the separatist conflict. Moreover, a profitable predatory economy supported by raids, seizures, kidnappings and extortion has developed around this conflict. This makes some actors reluctant to support peace efforts. By recent estimates, the conflict has already led to over 3,000 deaths, internally displaced

3 Central Intelligence Agency, 'Cameroon: People and Society,' *World Fact Book*, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/cameroon/#people-and-society>.

more than 750,000 people and left about 1.3 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.⁴ President Paul Biya, Cameroon's reclusive leader since 1982, is fixated on pursuing a failed path of war against the separatist groups, whom he calls 'terrorists'.⁵ Recent reports of confrontations between separatists and government troops have led to attacks and allegations of rape⁶ perpetrated against local villagers by both government forces and separatist militias, although government troops have been accused of abuses and atrocities more often than the separatists have.⁷ This desperate situation calls for greater investment in finding ways to peacefully resolve the ongoing, violent conflict.

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In September 2019, the government organised a 'Major National Dialogue' (MND) with much fanfare. However, during my last visit to Cameroon in November 2019, I realised just how little this grand dialogue had achieved. In January 2018, the government – conspiring with Nigerian authorities – abducted separatist movement leaders who were meeting in Abuja. They were extradited to Cameroon and held in secret for months. Releasing these leaders and asking them to join the MND would have been a welcome goodwill gesture, but the government ignored calls to do so. Instead, Prime Minister Dion Ngute, an anglophone, travelled around the two regions asking local civil-society organisations, chiefs and other anglophone figures already tethered to the government to participate in the discussions, omitting the main figures in the separatist movement. Leading separatists were either not invited or declined to participate in the talks because of their fear of repression and the government's insistence that there could be no discussion on the fundamental structure or form of the state.

4 James Kiven Kewir et al., 'Shrinking Civic Space and the Role of Civil Society in Resolution of Conflict in Anglophone Cameroon,' African Leadership Centre, Coventry University, January 2021, https://www.coventry.ac.uk/globalassets/media/global/08-new-research-section/ctpsr/civic_space_cameroon-web-report-jan-2021.pdf.

5 The French colonial administration notoriously engaged in brutal suppression of the local resistance to the colonial order in French Cameroon. See Richard Joseph, *Radical Nationalism and the Social Origins of the UPC Rebellion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977); Achille Mbembe, *La Naissance du Macquis dans le Sud-Cameroun* (Paris: Karthala, 1996).

6 Fraser Jackson et al., 'Rape as a Weapon of War: Sexual Violence on the Rise in Cameroon's Anglophone Region,' *France 24*, April 19, 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20190419-51-percent-sexual-violence-cameroon-anglophone-region-iran-boxer-brexit-women-impact>.

7 See Human Rights Watch, 'Cameroon: Survivors of Military Assault Await Justice,' February 26, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/26/cameroon-survivors-military-assault-await-justice>; Reliefweb, 'West and Central Africa: Weekly Regional Humanitarian Snapshot, Feb–01 Mar 2021,' March 03, 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/west-and-central-africa-weekly-regional-humanitarian-snapshot-23-feb-01-mar-2021>; International Crisis Group, 'Crisis Watch: Tracking Conflict Worldwide,' March 2021, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/crisiswatch/CrisisWatch%20March%202021%20Africa.pdf>.

Instead, besides calls for reconstruction and humanitarian assistance to be channelled to communities affected by the conflict, the MND resolved to launch a process of decentralisation with the establishment of regional councils whose locally elected representative would assume greater control over their assigned areas. In implementing this strategy, the MND also granted 'a special status' to the regional councils in the North-West and South-West regions. This decentralisation approach, including the conferring of special regional status, had been a measure adopted during the 1996 constitutional reforms. Incidentally, these were reforms that were conceded partly in response to an earlier phase of anglophone nationalism, between 1990 and 1995, but were deliberately not implemented for more than two decades. In addition, the MND resolved to 'ensure the equality of English and French in all aspects of national life' and President Biya established the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism.⁸ Furthermore, the government has claimed success in its disarmament demobilisation and re-integration initiatives with some separatists. In reality, though, the (failed) dialogue and the demobilisation and re-integration initiatives often reported on national television seem like a state propaganda effort to undermine the separatist cause.

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There is, therefore, no clear and credible agenda for negotiations as yet. So far, Biya has failed to even visit any areas affected by the conflict. In mid-2019, the Swiss government offered to mediate between the separatists and the Cameroonian government. Although the Swiss-mandated Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue initially had the support of both parties as mediator, the leadership of the separatist movement soon split over the neutrality of this institution and Biya's longstanding ties with Switzerland as whole.⁹ At the moment, it is not clear whether any significant headway has been made towards a negotiated peace settlement. A source in one of the leading separatist organisations in the diaspora disclosed: 'It is the government in Yaoundé that avoids a transparent and credible negotiation process; a delay that would only mean less concessions from us in the future than we may be currently willing to consider.'¹⁰

8 Cameroon Radio and Television (CRTV), '#CmrDialogue: Key Resolutions of the Major National Dialogue,' October 6, 2019, <https://www.crtv.cm/2019/10/cmrdialogue-key-resolutions-of-the-major-national-dialogue/>.

9 Frank Foute, 'Cameroon: Anglophone secessionists split on Swiss mediation,' *The Africa Report*, July 15, 2019, <https://www.theafricareport.com/15341/cameroon-english-secessionists-split-on-swiss-mediation/>; Ian Wendrow, 'Cameroon's Separatists Hope In Swiss Mediation To End Four-Year Old Conflict,' *Zenger News*, May 04, 2021, <https://www.zenger.news/2021/05/04/cameroons-separatists-hope-in-swiss-mediation-to-end-four-year-old-conflict/>.

10 Interview with one of the Ambazonian leaders in the United States, April 15, 2021.

Given this state of affairs, the crisis in the anglophone regions of Cameroon risks stagnating into another 'frozen' conflict,¹¹ swinging between periods of relative calm and low-intensity violence, on the one hand, and periodic intensive attacks and counter-offensives between separatists and government troops, on the other. Civilians become progressively more vulnerable in a protracted conflict, as has been the case over the last four years. Travelling in the conflict-affected regions in late 2019, I saw, first hand, that government troops were still engaged in deadly confrontations with separatists. During an earlier visit in May 2018, I travelled through these same areas, including Bamenda, Kumba, Mamfe and Buea, where I saw the terror and blatant extortion to which people are subjected on a daily basis.¹² What is also clear, both within the country and also for those anglophone Cameroonians living abroad, is that anglophone grievances run deep and have remained unaddressed for a long time.

Anglophone grievances

The separatists describe themselves as a movement for the 'restoration' of the 'Republic of Ambazonia'.¹³ The name Ambazonia – derived from Ambas Bay, located on the Gulf of Guinea near the South-West town of Limbe – was coined in the mid-1980s by an anglophone dissident lawyer, Fon Gorji Dinka.¹⁴ By the 1990s, anglophone elite activism had crystallised into deliberations called the All Anglophone Conferences in Buea (AAC I 1992) and Bamenda (AAC II 1993). These yielded resolutions aimed at advancing anglophone interests in Cameroon. However, subsequent differences within the anglophone elite and the government's dismissive response to many of the anglophone demands following the AACs prompted the establishment of a dissident, radical separatist movement – the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC) in 1995.¹⁵ Thus, there is a long, complex genealogy to anglophone nationalism, which fuels the current conflict.¹⁶ However, its immediate origins can be traced to the government's violent repression of protests by the unions of anglophone lawyers and teachers in late 2016.

11 Kamil C. Klosek et al., 'Frozen Conflicts in World Politics: A New Dataset,' *Journal of Peace Research*, September 2020, doi:10.1177/0022343320929726.

12 See Rogers Orock, 'Encountering Cameroon's Garrison State: Checkpoints, Democratic Aspirations, and the Anglophone Revolt,' WISH Seminar, Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER), February 17, 2020, <https://wiser.wits.ac.za/system/files/seminar/Orock2020.pdf>.

13 See Government of Ambazonia, 'Interim Government: Official Site Federal Republic of Ambazonia,' <https://ambagov.org/>.

14 UN High Commission for Human Rights, 'Gorji-Dinka v Cameroon, Merits,' Human Rights Committee [CCPR] Communication No. 1134/2002, UN Doc CCPR/C/83/D/1134/2002, (2005) 12 IHRR 628, IHRL 1824, UNHRC 2005, March 17, 2005, <http://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2FPPRiCAqhKb7yhsuXfSngwAQecUmCVwpZQk3PZklbvStw2QcoelEUKohrBRq7CJ6zT7XW0K6DaeDoqroBQR4rkfr0aBokambOq4tW%2BJkciGP01JEaKuwsYnWsWFbcnnAxPZpBxgmCawrWw%3D%3D>.

15 Following the AACs in 1992 and 1993, the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC) and its more militant wing, the Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL), have been at the centre of anglophone separatist claims. Both organisations have long thrived among the anglophone Cameroonian diaspora. For a long time, the SCYL was led by Ayaba Cho Lucas who now leads the Ambazonian Governing Council (AGC) and its military arm, the Ambazonian Defence Force (ADF). A number of splinter organisations, such as the Southern Cameroons Restoration Movement (SCARM) and the Southern Cameroons Peoples Organization (SCAPO), also emerged in pursuit of the nationalist/autonomist project between the late 1990s and 2000s.

16 Piet Konings and Francis B. Nyamnjoh, *Negotiating an Anglophone Identity: A Study of the Politics of Recognition and Representation in Cameroon* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2003); Victor J. Ngoh, 'The Origin of the Marginalization of former Southern Cameroonians (Anglophones), 1961-1966: An Historical Analysis,' *Journal of Third World Studies* 16, no. 1 (1999): 165-85.

In October 2016, anglophone teachers' and lawyers' unions launched peaceful protests against the 'neglect' and 'marginalisation' of the two English-speaking regions. Large groups of people took part in the year-long protests, which focused specifically on the appointment of francophone teachers, prosecutors and judges in anglophone areas. The union leadership denounced these appointments as part of the government's gradual but steady process of 'francophonisation' of a nominally bilingual (English and French) state, which had been in evidence since the reunification of British and French Cameroons in 1961.

In the francophone regions, such as Douala and Yaoundé, which host large communities of anglophones, French is often the only language that can be used when accessing vital public services. Disaffected anglophones are resentful of the chasm between the official, yet hollow, claim that Cameroon is a 'bilingual state'¹⁷ and the reality of anglophones' *de facto* second-class citizenship,¹⁸ evidenced in how they are treated by public officials and security agencies. Within both the public and private sectors, 'anglophones are easily recognised by their names and are then treated as second-class citizens with regards to employment, processing of official documents, and appointments'.¹⁹ Anglophone Cameroonians have long complained about the almost total domination of public life by the francophone elite. This elite has also leveraged its power to marginalise anglophone regions when allocating resources for economic development.

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The 2016–2017 protests were brutally suppressed. Unarmed protesters were shot and killed by soldiers who inflicted cruel and inhumane treatment on other protesters who had been detained, including the union leadership and anglophone student activists. Government also imposed a 90-day internet shutdown in the two anglophone regions.²⁰ In mid-December 2016, at the height of the turmoil, Joseph Wirba, an anglophone member of Cameroon's National Assembly (parliament) from the North-West region, denounced (from the floor of parliament) the violent repression against 'the people of West Cameroon'. Wirba decried the killings, arrests, torture and rape of young girls by government troops and the behaviour of government officials who were acting 'like an army of occupiers' in anglophone Cameroon. He contrasted the repression with the atmosphere in the former state of West

17 Greg A. Asuagbor, *Democratization and Modernization in a Multilingual Cameroon* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1998).

18 Konings and Nyamnjoh, *Negotiating an Anglophone Identity*, 83.

19 Human Rights Council, 'Written Statement Submitted by First Modern Agro. Tools – Common Initiative Group (FI.MO.AT.C.I.G), a Non-Governmental Organization in Special Consultative Status, 8 May 2018' Thirty-eighth Session, Agenda Item 4 (18 June–6 July 2018), <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/A/HRC/38/NGO/3>.

20 Moki Kindzeka, 'Internet Blacked Out for English-Speaking Minority in Cameroon,' *Deutsche Welle*, January 25, 2017, <https://www.dw.com/en/internet-blacked-out-for-english-speaking-minority-in-cameroon/a-37271549>.

(ie anglophone) Cameroon between 1961 and 1972 where people, he said, believed in 'freedom' as a fundamental value.²¹ Wirba was subsequently persecuted by government troops and fled initially to Nigeria and then to Europe.

As Wirba highlighted, a main reason for anglophone calls for separation is their resentment of the authoritarian rule by the country's mostly francophone leadership. Indeed, all Cameroonians have been the victims of this state-administered abuse, first under Ahmadou Ahidjo (1960-1982) and then under Paul Biya (from 1982 onwards). Yet in the anglophone regions, security forces are unnerved and therefore particularly brutal when dealing with protests, fearing autonomist claims. Since 1990, protests (including student protests) in the anglophone regions have often been met with swift and deadly violence.

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This repressive rule has left a terrible trail of human rights violations and executions of dissidents and protesters. Furthermore, the concentration of powers in the presidency means that parliament and the judiciary are not independent; they function as extensions of the executive. Parliament has not even formally discussed the conflict, almost four years on. These torrid conditions have bred widespread corruption and entrenched the appeal of ethnic politics among the ruling elite, particularly those within the orbit of Biya's Beti/Bulu ethnic groups.²² The end result is that public services (including public health, education, and law and order) and public infrastructure (including electricity, roads and water) have been in a deplorable state since the mid-1980s. Today the country is a 'fragile state',²³ facing security and political crises that heighten the risk of political implosion.

The second and most important cause of anglophone separatists' grievances is what they claim to be the 'coloniality' of their union with the French Cameroon state. Anglophone nationalists question the UN-imposed plebiscite of 11 February 1961. They argue that by compelling British Cameroonians to choose between Nigeria and French Cameroon as the route to their independence, the UN's implementation of its own provisions for decolonisation in Article 76 (b) regarding former trust territories, was flawed. Carlson Anyangwe, a long-time anglophone-autonomy activist, describes this decolonisation process as a case of 'annexation shrouded in subterfuge' by French Cameroon with the

21 See a video clip of Mr Wirba's speech on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-erK-ygw0>.

22 Konings and Nyamnjoh, *Negotiating an Anglophone Identity*, 7-9.

23 International Crisis Group, 'Cameroon: The Dangers of a Fracturing Regime,' Crisis Group Africa Report no. 161, June 24, 2010, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/cameroon-dangers-fracturing-regime>.

complicity of France, Britain and the UN.²⁴ Thus, Wirba's comments echo the frequently expressed sentiment among anglophone Cameroonians that the francophone majority views and treats the two anglophone regions as a colonial appendage and not as a distinct and wholly equal part of Cameroon.

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John Ngu Foncha was the prime minister of Southern Cameroon (1957-1961) who negotiated its reunification with French Cameroon in 1961. He served as vice-president of the Federal Republic after the reunification (1961-1970). Later, however, Foncha was filled with regret about the union of the two Cameroons, particularly during the effervescent displays of anglophone nationalism in the 1990s. He famously wrote his letter of resignation from the ruling party (Cameroon People's Democratic Movement) to Paul Biya in June 1990 in which he complained that 'anglophone Cameroonians that I brought into this union are now viewed as "Biafrans" and "the enemies within the home"'.²⁵ In 1994, after the AACS in Buea and Bamenda, Foncha led a delegation from the SCNC to the UN to request its backing in calls for the autonomy of the anglophone regions.

Repressive behaviour has made the mainstream or establishment anglophone elite fearful of being targeted, which has engendered a reluctance to speak out

The violent suppression of the anglophone protests in 2016-2017, including arbitrary arrests and imprisonment of anglophone leaders who criticised the government for its handling of the crisis, has had two important consequences. Firstly, unlike in the early 1990s when anglophone elites met for the AAC I and AAC II, the government's repressive behaviour has made the mainstream or establishment anglophone elite fearful of being targeted, which

24 Carlson Ayangwe, *Imperialistic Politics in Cameroun: Resistance and the Restoration of the Statehood of Southern Cameroons* (Bamenda: Langaa Publishers, 2008), 33-51.

25 See Rogers Orock, 'Rumours in War: Boko Haram and the Politics of Suspicion in French-Cameroon Relations,' *Journal of Modern African Studies* 57, no. 4 (2019): 563-587.

has engendered a reluctance to speak out, like Wirba did. Secondly, the repression has further radicalised anglophone youth, while also creating a sense of solidarity and garnering support from anglophone Cameroonians in the diaspora.

Ultimately, anglophone Cameroonians who are sympathetic towards the separatist or autonomist cause have concluded that such autonomy would only be viable if driven by anglophone Cameroonian leaders who live and work outside Cameroon. As a leader associated with the Ambazonian Interim Government (IG) remarked to me recently: 'For any separatist struggle to succeed [under this repression], the government has to be outside the country it is breaking away from. Otherwise, the leadership is always at risk of imprisonment or assassination.'²⁶

In sum, at the core of anglophone grievances is the call to change the state's fundamental structure. On the one hand, to achieve peace while maintaining unity in the country, some autonomists advocate a 'return' to the initial 1961 agreement for a two-state federation. Whereas these federalists had been in the majority among anglophones before the start of the conflict, federalists are now a minority in today's heated climate. In contrast, radical separatists are demanding outright and total independence as the only way for anglophone Cameroonians to free themselves from francophone domination and to avoid future crises. However, Biya and his government elite (including a small anglophone minority in government) refuse to enter into any discussions on changes to the fundamental form of the Cameroonian state, which would imply a loss of power for the central government in Yaoundé.

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As mentioned, following the MND, the resolutions and a number of peremptory executive orders that Biya signed in late 2019 have failed to douse anglophone separatists' strident calls for greater autonomy. Intended merely as 'evidence of good faith' rather than a deep commitment to address anglophone autonomist aspirations, many of these measures are viewed as 'sham concessions' that are 'too little, too late'²⁷ for the separatists. Anglophone

26 Interview on April 15, 2021. In reality, sometimes even this remoteness does not shield the leadership of the anglophone separatist movement. In January 2018, the government of Cameroon colluded with Nigerian authorities to arrest, detain and extradite 10 separatist leaders of the Ambazonian IG, including its president, Sesekou Julius Ayuk Tabe, who were meeting in Abuja. See Amnesty International, 'Cameroon: Ten Arrested Anglophone Leaders At Risk of Unfair Trial and Torture If Deported From Nigeria,' January 12, 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/01/cameroon-ten-arrested-anglophone-leaders-at-risk-of-unfair-trial-and-torture-if-deported-from-nigeria/>.

27 International Crisis Group, 'Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis: How to Get to Talks?' Africa Report No. 272, May 02, 2019, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/272-crise-anglophone-au-cameroun-comment-arriver-aux-pourparlers>.

Cameroonians, particularly those living and working abroad, have therefore continued to resist these superficial attempts to create a distraction from their core demand.

The anglophone diaspora and the conflict

Anglophone Cameroonians in the diaspora have been important players in the conflict in at least two ways. Firstly, from the outset, many anglophone Cameroonians in the diaspora have played a crucial role in garnering support for the anglophones' cause – irrespective of whether they were in favour of full independence for Ambazonia or were simply pushing for greater autonomy or federalism. The protests embarked upon by anglophone Cameroonian communities in Africa (especially in Nigeria and South Africa), Australia, Europe (notably in Austria, Belgium, Britain, France, Germany and Switzerland) and the US were particularly intense between September 2016 and December 2020.

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Authorities in Yaoundé quickly recognised this mobilisation from the diaspora as a major challenge to their efforts to quell the protests in the anglophone regions. Government officials repeatedly stated that 'those in the diaspora are the ones spearheading the war', especially in Belgium, Canada, South Africa and the US.²⁸ These protests from the diaspora have drawn the world's attention to the conflict. For instance, on 27 June 2017, two US congressmen, Anthony G. Brown and Jarsie Raskin, wrote to Rex Tillerson, the US secretary of state, urging him to address the 'persecution of anglophone Cameroonians in Cameroon'. The two congressmen were responding in part to protests by 13,000 Cameroonians in the state of Maryland.²⁹ Similarly, anglophone Cameroonians living in Britain believe that, as a former colonial power, Britain still has a historic 'responsibility for what happens to its former subjects', although successive administrations in the UK have routinely avoided this call for direct involvement and simply called for dialogue – as the EU and US have.³⁰

28 Immigration Refugee Board of Canada, 'Query response on the situation of Anglophones, 2016–August 2018,' August 24, 2018, <https://irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/country-information/rir/Pages/index.aspx?doc=457577&pls=1>.

29 *Journal du Cameroun*, 'Anglophone Protests: More pressure from the United States' Congress,' June 27, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170905141504/http://journalducameroun.com/en/anglophone-protests-pressure-united-states-congress/>.

30 Jon Lunn and Louisa Brooke-Holland, 'The Anglophone Cameroon Crisis: April 2019 Update,' Briefing Number 8331, April 17, 2019, House of Commons Library, <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8331/CBP-8331.pdf>.

South Africa has been the most important source of anglophone diaspora support for the separatist cause in Africa. Since 1994, when apartheid officially came to an end, 'the number of Cameroonian migrants in South Africa has increased exponentially' across the major cities of Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town and Durban.³¹ Since the start of the conflict, hundreds of anglophone Cameroonians have regularly gathered in front of government buildings in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Pretoria (including the Embassy of Cameroon) to protest.

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Crucially, too, alongside their compatriots in the United States, anglophone Cameroonians in South Africa helped to establish and have played a key role in running the Southern Cameroons Broadcasting Corporation (SCBC). This television channel was established when the war broke out in 2017, with financial contributions coming from supporters of the separatist movement in the anglophone Cameroonian diaspora around the world. The television channel has played a major role in covering the war and has been an important driver of propaganda for the Ambazonian separatist movement. Cameroonian authorities responded by trying to persuade the South African authorities to ban the media platform from broadcasting from South Africa. When this failed, the government of Cameroon banned local Cameroonians from watching the television channel and threatened cable TV service providers with sanctions 'if they do not stop broadcasting the South Africa-based channel, SCBC'.³²

While the separatist 'militias have become more autonomous' in the last two years or so, they were 'initially funded almost exclusively by the diaspora'.³³ Particularly noteworthy were the fund-raising campaigns that were widely supported by individuals and groups from anglophone Cameroonian communities around the world. Many of these groups also provided materials to be used for humanitarian assistance for displaced communities, including those in refugee settlements in Nigeria. The Cameroon Humanitarian Relief Initiative (CHRI) is an organisation created by anglophone Cameroonians in the diaspora who partner with local organisations in the two anglophone regions, including non-profits and religious organisations, to deliver life-saving necessities, such as food, water, accommodation and health services.

31 Ernest A. Pineteh and Thecla N. Mulu, 'The Changing Material Conditions of Cameroonian Migrants in South Africa: What does this say about an 'Afrophobic' post-apartheid State?' *African Human Mobility Review*, 6, no. 2 (2020): 130-149.

32 BBC, 'Cameroon bans "opposition" English-language TV channel,' August 30, 2017, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-41094096>.

33 International Crisis Group, 'Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis: How to Get to Talks?'

President Biya has ignored national and international calls for, and efforts to encourage, dialogue and negotiations with the leaders of the anglophone separatist movement

President Biya has ignored national and international calls for, and efforts to encourage, dialogue and negotiations with the leaders of the anglophone separatist movement.³⁴ Again, organisations led by members of the anglophone Cameroonian diaspora are turning up the volume in calling for international pressure to be placed on Yaoundé. For example, the Coalition for Dialogue and Negotiations (CDN), a group of English-speaking Cameroonian professionals in the diaspora (predominantly in the US), advocate a peaceful resolution to the conflict. With its 'Let's End the War' campaign, the CDN is mobilising 'international pressure for a ceasefire' and an 'international conference on the conflict', considering that such discussions 'cannot freely take place in Cameroon'.³⁵

Although Biya has not taken serious steps to address anglophone grievances at home, Cameroonian authorities have tried to undermine the influence of the diaspora in the ongoing conflict. One of the main resolutions of the MND was calling on the government to 'create a team responsible for mediation with radicalised members of our diaspora'.³⁶ In August 2020, Biya ordered delegations of government ministers to travel to consult with anglophone Cameroonians abroad. Several of these missions met with stiff resistance and were disrupted by anglophone secessionist activists.³⁷ In response, the authorities in Cameroon have cracked down on anglophone Cameroonians working and living abroad who are suspected of sympathising with the Ambazonian separatist cause. Some have been arrested and imprisoned or deported from ports of entry in Cameroon.³⁸

In the wake of growing international pressure, the regime has searched for other strategies to combat the diaspora's influence. On 17 February 2021, 61 members of Cameroon's National Assembly wrote to the US Congress to complain about the role of the anglophone diaspora in the conflict. This is a clear acknowledgment that the anglophone Cameroonian

34 See US Congress, 'S. Res. 684 (116th): A resolution calling on the Government of Cameroon and separatist armed groups from the English-speaking Northwest and Southwest regions to end all violence, respect the human rights of all Cameroonians, and pursue a genuinely inclusive dialogue toward resolving the ongoing civil conflict in Anglophone Cameroon,' January 01, 2021, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/116/sres684/text>; European Union, 'Joint Motion for a Resolution on Cameroon,' April 17, 2019, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RC-8-2019-0245_EN.html.

35 Coalition for Dialogue and Negotiations (CDN), 'A Fight for Justice and Equity: Let's End the War,' <https://coalitionfdn.org/#>.

36 Cameroon Radio and Television (CRTV), '#CmrDialogue.'

37 International Crisis Group, 'Cameroon's Worsening Anglophone Crisis Calls for Strong Measures,' Briefing no. 130, October 19, 2017, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/130-cameroon-worsening-anglophone-crisis-calls-strong-measures>.

38 See, for example, *Cameroon News Agency*, 'Police Detain Australian Based Cameroonian For Alleged Role In Armed Conflict,' February 07, 2020, <https://cameroonnewsagency.com/police-detain-australian-based-cameroonian-for-alleged-role-in-armed-conflict/>; *The Guardian*, 'Deaths and Detentions as Cameroon Cracks Down on Anglophone Activists,' January 03, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/03/deaths-and-detentions-as-cameroon-cracks-down-on-anglophone-activists>.

diaspora needs to be engaged and involved in a systematic and more serious process of conflict resolution.

The efforts of the Cameroonian authorities underline the seriousness with which the government views the contribution of the anglophone Cameroonian diaspora in the ongoing conflict. More specifically, the prominent role played by the anglophone Cameroonian diaspora sets it apart from past waves of anglophone nationalists, such as in the case of the AAC1 and AAC2 in the early 1990s. Firstly, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, anglophone nationalists were mostly middle-aged and older men based in Cameroon, often holding prominent positions in government or the corporate sector. Since the late 1990s, however, the increasing suppression of anglophone nationalism has pushed many within the ranks of the radical separatist SCNC movement into exile abroad, thus gradually radicalising an already growing number of anglophone Cameroonians in the diaspora.³⁹ In contrast to the 1990s, the leadership of the current wave of anglophone nationalists, particularly those in the diaspora, is remarkably youthful. In addition to pursuing international litigation (a political strategy that had already been initiated by the older generation), the younger generation has been much more effective in exploiting new digital technologies to promote their cause. This has allowed them to establish a considerable presence in the media (especially online media), from a range of online news blogs (including Bareta News and National Telegraph) to audio-visual platforms (such as SCBC) and social media (WhatsApp, Facebook and YouTube).

While Cameroonian authorities deploy their repressive machinery to suppress dissent or opposition at home, including arresting and detaining journalists and occasionally shutting down the internet, the anglophone Cameroonian diaspora cannot be readily affected by such repression. This digital media infrastructure has also given considerable influence and power to the anglophone separatists abroad in terms of shaping the narrative of the anglophone struggle in Cameroon. Using these media platforms, separatist leaders have championed 'ghost towns' (boycotts), including a sit-home campaign on Mondays, which was instituted in early 2017 and has remained in place to date.

Despite its successes so far in resisting the repression and violence, the anglophone Cameroonian separatist movement, including those in the diaspora, has become fragmented. The main causes of strife are differing views on the strategic direction of the movement, emerging rivalry among the different separatist forces and struggles for control over financial resources which come from donations. Ultimately, these divisions could prove to be too deep. Already, there is growing uncertainty about the leadership and ability of the separatist movement to negotiate with the Cameroonian authorities in such volatile circumstances.

39 Given their longstanding complaints of exclusion and marginalisation in Cameroon, anglophone Cameroonians have pursued the international migration pathway since the late 1970s.

Conclusion

The ongoing crisis in anglophone Cameroon has been a historically thorny, post-colonial issue, its origins going back to the post-war settlement of 1919 and the flawed negotiations over the decolonisation of the former British Cameroon. However, despite these longstanding causes, the crisis degenerated into an outright separatist conflict in 2017 – in part because of the violent and authoritarian suppression of anglophone protests over discrimination and marginalisation by the francophone majority. A substantial part of the anglophone Cameroonian diaspora has played a vital role in drawing international attention to the violence and in challenging the repressive behaviour of Yaoundé, including providing critical financial support to the separatists as well as material and humanitarian support to local communities affected by the conflict. This same diaspora will have to be seriously engaged in finding ways to successfully negotiate an end to the conflict.

Services trade requires well developed connecting infrastructure. This includes roads, railways, airports, seaports, reliable ICT infrastructure and energy security to enable the smooth flow of products, people and information across the continent

Given the hostile atmosphere, it is unlikely that pathways for peaceful dialogue and negotiations will emerge within the highly weakened social and political forces within Cameroon. Some anglophone Cameroonian groups in the diaspora have also become committed to driving the conversation on pathways to a peaceful resolution. Their efforts must be only part of the wider forms of international pressure that must be brought to bear on the authorities in Yaoundé. For example, the global leadership in the form of the US, UK, EU and France (the latter being the strongest traditional ally to the regimes in Cameroon) and the UN could play a major role in this regard. Crucially, however, given the international origins of this crisis (ie from within the UN system), members of the UN Security Council should formally add Cameroon to the Council's agenda this year and re-open the debate on the best way to arrive at an international settlement on the crisis, including calling for a new referendum for the anglophone Cameroonians.

Recommendations

- Cameroon's government should immediately abandon the military option. Rather, it should heed past and ongoing appeals from the international community to engage in peaceful negotiations with the anglophone separatists, including separatist groups in the diaspora.
- Internationally supported inquiries should be launched over the origins of the war and human rights abuses and war crimes on both sides of the conflict. All the culprits, including political authorities and actors (at home and abroad) who have used the media to inflame this conflict by advocating that hate crimes be committed, should be held accountable.
- Given the 'international' origins of the anglophone problem, the UN should support the government of Cameroon in resolving this conflict, including organising a new referendum in anglophone Cameroon to determine the kind of relationship that the people of former British Southern Cameroons ideally want with the francophone majority.

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Cover image

Yaounde, Cameroon: Prime Minister Joseph Dion Ngute presides over the opening session of the National Dialogue called by President Biya, in Yaounde, on September 30, 2019. Cameroon launched a national dialogue on Monday to end a separatist conflict in the country's anglophone provinces but hopes of a breakthrough were dimmed as key rebel leaders refused to participate (STRINGER/AFP via Getty Images)

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