

CAMEROON: FRAGILE STATE?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cameroon's apparent stability in a turbulent region cannot be taken for granted. The co-option of elites through the distribution of state largesse, and the emigration of many educated young people provide a certain safety valve for tensions, but the failure of reform and continued poor governance mean people no longer believe in the rule of law or peaceful political change. Multiple risks of conflict exist in the build-up to presidential elections in 2011 and beyond. This background report, Crisis Group's first on Cameroon, analyses the historical roots of the current impasse.

Cameroon's history shows a pattern of apparent stability followed by violent crisis. For long periods (early 1950s, 1970s), problems have been masked but not dealt with. In the late 1950s, widespread unrest occurred as the main party opposed to French rule was banned, leading to a bloody and protracted guerrilla war. Independence came in 1960, but in the context of extensive violence. In 1961, though the southern region of British-controlled Anglophone Cameroon voted to re-join Francophone Cameroon, the north voted to remain with Nigeria.

The late 1960s and the 1970s was a period of relative peace. The regime was obsessed with unity and stability following the traumas of the 1950s, but, having fought against the only genuine liberation movement, lacked historical legitimacy. It was autocratic, and pluralism and diversity were considered unacceptable threats to the nation-building project. Nevertheless, the economy grew, and some genuine development took place.

The resignation of President Ahidjo in November 1982 and the hand-over of power to his prime minister, Paul Biya, initially passed off smoothly. But tensions soon emerged, culminating in a coup attempt in April 1984, blamed on Ahidjo loyalists. It was violently put down, no process of reconciliation followed, and the trauma of this period is still a source of bitterness for many from the north, Ahidjo's home area. Equally, some from the south, including in the security forces, fear communal reprisals stemming from the unfinished business of 1984.

In the early 1990s, opposition parties emerged, and multi-party elections were held. For two and a half years, the regime was seriously threatened at the ballot box and in the street, and frustrations led to widespread violence in 1991. But having pulled through, President Biya and his ruling party started to push back on reforms and restore authoritarian rule behind a façade of democratic practice.

Today, the nation-building project has become frayed, as the economy has stagnated, and unemployment and inequality have risen. The economy is weighed down by corruption and inertia, and the population sees very little from what economic growth there has been, mainly through exploitation of natural resources. While potential organising forces are weak and dissipated, popular anger is high.

The regime retains its old conservative reflexes, but the experiences and expectations of a youthful population have moved on. The political opposition is weakened by internal fractures and an erosion of democratic space, leaving few channels to express legitimate discontent. The explosion of anger in February 2008, stimulated by Biya's decision to alter the constitution to seek a further term in office, showed the dangers of this situation.

Cameroon has many features of other countries which have fallen into conflict, including highly centralised and personalised leadership, political manipulation of ethnic tensions and very widespread corruption. Even if it overcomes its near-term challenges, the possibility of longer-term deterioration leading to more open conflict cannot be excluded. In Côte d'Ivoire a protracted struggle for succession of a long-serving president laid the ground for a civil war. With President Biya now 77, and in the absence of any clear signals over his intentions, the question of presidential succession also looms large.

Events in Guinea in December 2008, when weak rule of law and manipulation of the constitution were seized on by junior officers with disastrous consequences, should be sobering for anyone concerned about Cameroon. Respect for the constitution and for rule of law more generally is low. The end of Paul Biya's presidency, only the second the country has known, is likely to be fraught with risk.

But it could also be an opportunity to initiate the reforms needed to ensure the country's longer-term stability.

The international community has frequently provided the Cameroonian regime with decisive help. Though this help has come with pressure for reform, very little has been forthcoming. The danger is that the regime now sees any opening as a fundamental threat to its survival and is likely to harden its stance as the presidential election approaches.

Most donors and other international partners are very reluctant to criticise the regime and seemingly willing to go along with its cat and mouse game of fake political and economic reform. But an unstable Cameroon, or just more years of bad governance, would threaten a fragile region. The problems are of legitimate wider concern and present a classic case of possible early conflict prevention. But strong international and domestic vested interests have to be challenged to enact the changes needed to avoid instability. Donors should use their leverage, both financial and diplomatic, to send far stronger messages to the Cameroon government.

Dakar/Nairobi/Brussels, 25 May 2010

CAMEROON: FRAGILE STATE?

I. INTRODUCTION

Cameroon, a country of 20 million people and sharing frontiers with six countries of varying degrees of stability, is of vital importance to regional security, a position at odds with its low diplomatic profile. In particular, it is a crucial part of the Gulf of Guinea security puzzle and a gateway to the countries to its east, which depend on its transport infrastructure for supply of vital goods.

But its institutions are weak, and multiple conflict risks exist. Widespread local violence demonstrates the state's weak grip on public order. It reacts with periodic clamp-downs, with scant regard for human rights. National-level fractures remain untreated, between the north and the rest of the country, between the Anglophone minority and the Francophone majority and in a multitude of politicised ethnic divisions. These tensions are for the moment contained, but the possibility of a perfect storm of national crisis feeding down to the local level cannot be excluded.

This danger is exacerbated by a complete unwillingness on the part of the government to engage in dialogue or negotiate with any of the myriad movements opposing it. Its reflex reaction remains to buy off those it can, while treating those it cannot as illegitimate and subversive. The law is unevenly applied to favour those who show loyalty to the regime, a pattern repeated with the distribution of public resources and jobs. The possibility of a democratic change of regime, or even leader, is consequently low.

Cameroon's eventual ability to play a positive role in the region and to avoid being pulled into the several cross-border conflicts is dependent on improving governance and avoiding potential instability within its own borders. This background report, which will be followed shortly by a policy briefing paper, examines the country's history, its contemporary politics and the relations between its main social groups in order to uncover points of potential instability and suggest ways they can be tackled.

II. FROM MANDATE TO MODERN CAMEROON – CONTINUITIES OF POWER AND RESISTANCE

The roots of current problems lie in history. That is not to say Cameroon has not changed profoundly in the last few decades; it has. But the reflexes, habits and methods of state rule are a product of extraordinary regime continuity. Equally, faced with this continuity, opposition groups, whether in parliament or on the street, used similar tactics from the fight for independence in the 1950s to the fight for democracy in the 1990s.

Independence came in 1960 in a near civil war. This profoundly marked the emerging Cameroonian elite and was used to justify a centralised authoritarian state, which has successfully ensured regime continuity. However, as in the colonial period, "state building" was done at the expense of pluralism, and it could never fully compensate for the lack of regime legitimacy that resulted from the crushing of the country's genuine independence movement in the late 1950s. The rejection of pluralism has led to a deficit of dialogue and an inability to accommodate discontent or minority views, which in turn has produced a situation in which political reform is blocked. The consequent frustrations have led to periodic explosions of violence on the streets of the main cities, in a pattern repeated from 1945 to the current day.

A. FROM GERMANY TO FRANCE AND BRITAIN TO INDEPENDENCE

The form of modern Cameroon, and many of its current problems, originate in the colonial period. Colonial powers remodelled the territory for their purposes, establishing plantations, inducing population movements and creating the beginnings of modern urban life. This was the springboard for the development of a nationalist movement in the 1950s that drew on the complex colonial history to support its demands for independence. The relations between this movement and colonial authorities and the violent denouement of the late 1950s have strongly influenced modern Cameroon.

1. 1884-1945: the beginnings of modern Cameroon

On 12 July 1884, the German government signed a treaty with two traditional chiefs on the south-western coast of what is now Cameroon. This move, carefully planned to block British expansion in the area, marked the starting point of a particularly complex and fluctuating colonial history. During their short rule, the Germans gave modern Cameroon its basic shape – pushing north to Lake Chad and negotiating colonial boundaries with the French and British.

The Germans also created Cameroon's economic geography, much of which remains in place today. Large plantations were set up along the south coast, and German firms pushed African traders out of their previously lucrative intermediary positions. Douala was expanded to become a major regional port, a key part of German plans to build a Central African empire ("Mittelafrika"). This early development came at a huge cost to indigenous populations. The Germans inflicted such brutality that Governor Von Puttkamer was recalled and disciplined, before a supposedly more liberal colonial policy was introduced in 1907.¹

The Cameroon campaign of the First World War only lasted eighteen months but had a significant impact through conscription into the German army and population displacement. The Germans were eventually pushed out in late 1915, and the British and French partitioned the country in their 4 March 1916 agreement. Despite French and British attempts to incorporate the territory into existing colonies and thereby avoid international oversight, this arrangement was converted in 1922 into two League of Nations mandate territories, one under British rule covering around 20 per cent of the territory and population, and the rest under the French. The British divided the territory under their mandate into Northern Cameroons and Southern Cameroons, to be administered separately.

In the 1920s, the French started a program of public works overseen by a considerably reinforced colonial administration.² In net economic terms, the policy was a success,

with trade multiplying by five times between 1922 and 1938. It also had a profound impact on indigenous society. Forced labour was used, despite being disallowed under the mandate's terms. Under the *indigénat* law of the French colonies, introduced in Cameroon in 1924, local administrators wielded unchecked power over colonial subjects; arbitrary beatings and whippings were a feature of life.

But colonial development also brought important advances for a minority of the indigenous population. Many benefited from widespread missionary education and from the new cultural interaction of urban life. Some took jobs in the colonial administration, while others were encouraged by the French to develop small commercial farms. Similar changes occurred in the interwar period in British Cameroon, which was administered as part of British Nigeria. The southern coastal area, which benefited from labour immigration from French Cameroon and Nigeria, was particularly socially dynamic and was the site of early political stirrings in the 1930s.³

Development policies impacted on land use and traditional leadership. As land became more valuable, the importance of being able to claim traditional title grew. Disputes became common between indigenous communities and migrant labourers. This was especially true in the south-west areas around Douala and in the coastal section of British Cameroon, where a large number of workers migrated from the "grassfields" further north (around Bamenda and Bafoussam). Some of these immigrants were commercially successful and put their money into land purchases, but their titles were often contested by local communities. Land disputes also occurred between local communities and colonial powers. In the 1900s, the Douala ethnic group⁴ pressured the colonial administration to return river-front land taken by the Germans, a dispute which culminated in the hanging of one of their chiefs, Manga Bell, accused of sedition, in 1913.

Local chieftaincies were reorganised by both the British and the French and graded according to importance (first to third degree chiefs).⁵ In some cases, these changes reinforced the role of previously accepted traditional authorities, while in others chieftaincies were simply created in order to organise labour and collect taxes. In the north, local traditional and religious leaders had negotiated with the Germans to maintain their authority in return for tribute payments and formal acknowledgement of colonial

¹ On German rule, see Richard Joseph, *Le mouvement nationaliste au Cameroun: les origines sociales de l'UPC (1946-1958)* (Paris, 1986, first published in 1977 as *The Radical Nationalist Movement in Cameroon*, but no longer in print in English), pp. 39-43; Victor T. Le Vine, *The Cameroons from Mandate to Independence* (Berkeley, 1964), chapter II; and Achille Mbembe *La naissance du maquis dans le Sud-Cameroun, 1920-1960* (Paris, 1996), pp. 44-68.

² On Cameroon under French rule in the interwar period, see Le Vine, op. cit., chapter IV; Mbembe, op. cit., chapters I, IV and V; Joseph, op. cit., pp. 43-56. For general French colonial policy in the interwar period, see Thobie et al., *Histoire de la France coloniale* (Paris, 1990), chapter 7.

³ See Le Vine, op. cit., chapter VIII.

⁴ "Douala" refers to both the largest city in Cameroon and to the ethnic group indigenous to the area.

⁵ See Peter Geschiere, "Chiefs and Colonial Rule in Cameroon: Inventing Chieftaincy French and British Styles", *Africa*, 1993; and Mbembe, op. cit., chapter IV.

sovereignty. The French maintained this arrangement. The reordering of local politics and the new resources available to those who could claim traditional authority (chiefs kept a portion of taxes raised, and often used forced labour for their private profit) sparked off disputes over chiefs' legitimacy, many of which rumble on today.

In reordering indigenous society, colonial development policies laid the foundation of Cameroon's political consciousness, starting in the interwar period. Newly educated Cameroonians were excluded from the administrative structures (the territorial council was entirely composed of Europeans until 1927 and included only four indigenous Cameroonians in 1945). But they nevertheless developed political aspirations based on the French promise that colonialism would lead to greater political "maturity" and eventually greater autonomy. Agitation over land, noted above, led the Douala ethnic group to organise pressure groups to lobby colonial administrators. In some exceptional cases, this was articulated as a nationalist claim to independence, for example by the activist Vincent Ganty in 1931.

The Christian churches were also an important early focal point for political consciousness, especially as German presence had led to a more diverse range of Christian missions than elsewhere in French colonial Africa. Debates over indigenous control of religious life brought questions of political autonomy to the fore.⁶

The most significant secular organisation expressing early nationalist ideas in the 1930s was the French Cameroon Youth Movement (*Jeunesse camerounaise française*, JEUCAFRA). It was set up by the French in 1938 to support their administration in the face of increasing agitation by Germany to regain its former colonies. But the group did not entirely comply with its pro-French mandate. Some of Cameroon's first political figures, such as Paul Soppo Priso and Ruben Um Nyobé, used JEUCAFRA to cut their teeth, demanding greater political representation and autonomy for indigenous Cameroonians.

These developments were paralleled in British Cameroon, where embryonic political movements were created in the 1930s and 1940s, arguing for greater autonomy for the region within the Nigerian Federation. The most significant was the Cameroons Youth League (CYL) established in Lagos in 1941 by Emmanuel Endeley. As in French

Cameroon, such groups formed the basis of party politics in the post-war period.

2. 1945-1955: the emergence of Cameroonian politics

The Second World War had a profound impact on Cameroon's political development.⁷ Its immediate effect was to severely increase poverty, leading to strikes and demonstrations in September 1945 in Douala, which were met with force by the authorities. In addition, European colonisers, worried about union activities in the new more liberal post-war environment, formed ad hoc armed militias, which killed several dozen demonstrators.⁸

European colonisers, who were more numerous in Cameroon than in any other French sub-Saharan African territory (totalling 17,000 in 1955⁹), played an important role in the post-war period. Some French in that period sympathised with the nationalist movement and worked with Cameroon's indigenous labour unions. But many others came into direct competition with educated Africans in the job market, trade and commerce. Many of these settlers were poor by European standards, but they enjoyed privileged dealings with public authorities. The consequent frustrations of Cameroonians were a significant factor in the rise of militant nationalist movements.

The Second World War broke the aura of French power, and Cameroonians were again reminded of the contingency of French and British rule as the League of Nations mandates were replaced with UN trusteeships in 1946. The closing years of the war had seen significant agitation for greater autonomy for France's African colonies. At the Brazzaville conference of 1944, de Gaulle's relatively liberal position offered hope to the young nationalist movements of Francophone Africa. The hated forced labour and *indigénat* laws were revoked in 1946, and labour unions and political parties were allowed for the first time. Political representation for Cameroonians increased, both in the assembly of the French Union and in a reformed territorial assembly, the Representative Assembly of

⁶ A prominent example is Lottin Sane's attempt to create a branch of the Native Baptist Church under indigenous control in the 1920s, which brought thousands of people into a long-running and heated debate on an important aspect of colonial rule. Its creation was eventually blocked by colonial and religious authorities, who recognised the threat it represented. See Le Vine, op. cit., pp. 111-113; and Mbembe, op. cit., pp. 114-122. On Ganty, see Le Vine, op. cit., pp. 115-117.

⁷ De Gaulle's Free France movement won control of Cameroon in August 1940, after a tense stand-off with Vichy supporters. Cameroon, along with other territories of France's Central African empire, thus won itself a special place in the history of the Gaullist movement. De Gaulle's political philosophy, as well as networks within the Gaullist movement, have been highly influential in Cameroon ever since.

⁸ See Joseph, op. cit., chapter II; and Mbembe, op. cit., chapter VI.

⁹ In a population of 4.9 million (according to UN figures). The high number of European settlers (including many Greek and German settlers) was partly due to the economic opportunities linked to advanced plantation agriculture, and partly due to the League of Nations mandate, which facilitated the immigration of non-French nationals. See Joseph, op. cit., p. 166.

Cameroon (Assemblée Représentative du Cameroun, ARCAM).¹⁰

While these reforms answered some of the concerns of the early nationalist movements such as JEUCAFRA (renamed Union camerounaise française, UNICAFRA, in 1945), they failed to go far enough in the eyes of many and hence fuelled demands rather than soothed them. In addition, a proliferation of unions and parties (the latter set up as branches of French parties) were able to articulate everyday frustrations in political terms. These were numerous and profound, including the still marginal political representation offered to Cameroonians in the new institutions; the everyday humiliations in contacts with Europeans (including the use of the informal French term of address “tu”); and continued disputes over confiscation of land and widespread urban unemployment.

In April 1948, the Union of the Peoples of Cameroon (Union des peuples du Cameroon, UPC) was created by petit bourgeoisie, white-collar workers and unionists in Douala to channel these frustrations into a nationalist agenda, expressed both throughout Cameroon and internationally. Led by Ruben Um Nyobé, they quickly developed a radical nationalist platform, mobilising support against colonial abuses, especially in the south and west of French Cameroon.¹¹ The party was supported by left wing groups abroad, including the French communist party, and expressed support for fellow liberation fighters in Algeria and Indochina.¹² But Um Nyobé always tried to maintain a broad base in Cameroon, including seeking support from traditional chiefs and ethnic associations, at least in the early years.

The UPC successfully articulated a nationalist agenda, producing several regular newspapers and many political tracts. It seized the opportunity presented by Cameroon’s status as a trust territory of the UN by sending tens of thousands of petitions complaining that France was not living up to commitments to end forced labour and was not working for the independence of Cameroon, as the trusteeship agreement required, but was seeking to integrate it further into French colonial structures. These were followed up by Um Nyobé, who travelled to New York in 1952 to speak

to the General Assembly, infuriating French administrators who attempted to play down UPC support.

Colonial authorities tried to block the creation of the UPC, while allowing more moderate parties to emerge. New elected institutions encouraged the creation of new parties, the majority of which were elite based. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the political landscape quickly became divided between moderates who acquiesced to French colonial presence and those who opposed it, of whom the UPC was the only consistent representative. The best-organised moderate party was the Cameroonian Democratic Bloc (Bloc démocratique camerounais, BDC), created by the French doctor Louis Paul Aujoulat in 1951. He, along with two other pro-colonial figures, Douala Manga Bell and Jules Ninine, were elected to the French National Assembly in 1946.

Other important figures, such as Soppo Priso, Charles Assalé, Charles Okala and later André-Marie Mbida and Ahmadou Ahidjo, started their political careers in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Initially they articulated pro-French but generally progressive positions, arguing for better representation and equal treatment for Africans, but not questioning French rule as such. It was only in the latter half of the 1950s that they were gradually pulled towards a more nationalist stance, largely due to the success of the UPC.

Post-war political development in British Cameroon was dominated by its role in Nigeria’s changing constitutional arrangements and by the positioning of the emerging elite within Nigeria’s new political parties. The British saw the territory’s future in terms of further integration into existing colonial structures. Financial control was centralised in Lagos, and the south became part first of the Southern Provinces, then of the Eastern Region, while the north became part of the Northern Provinces, later Region.¹³ But in 1954 the territory gained a degree of autonomy, which was reinforced further in 1958.

The two most important figures of the 1950s, Emmanuel Endeley and John Foncha, were instrumental in creating embryonic political parties in the late 1940s. Initially allies in the Kamerun National Congress (KNC), they split when Foncha created the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) in 1955. In the first decade after the war, these two prominent politicians argued for more autonomy for British Cameroon within the Nigerian federation, all the while negotiating alliances with Nigerian parties in the Eastern Regional House of Assembly. They often

¹⁰ On the new administrative arrangements for Cameroon and the role of Cameroonian electors and representatives in the French Union, see Joseph, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-93; and Le Vine, *op. cit.*, chapter 5.

¹¹ On the foundation and early development of the UPC, see Joseph, *op. cit.*, chapters VI and VII; and Mbembe, *op. cit.*, chapters VII and VIII. For a portrait of Um Nyobé, see Joseph, *op. cit.*, pp. 112-116.

¹² Something more moderate nationalists in Francophone Africa, such as Houphouët-Boigny in Côte d’Ivoire and Senghor in Senegal, shied away from.

¹³ Nigerian federalism dates back to the pre-independence Lytton Constitution of 1954. The system adopted then of a national government and three regional governments – Eastern, Northern and Western – was maintained in the independence constitution of 1960.

invoked reunification with French Cameroon, but as a means to put pressure on British authorities to grant further regional autonomy, rather than as a clear programmatic goal.¹⁴

Throughout the colonial period, Cameroon's relatively rapid urbanisation and formal employment brought significant changes to indigenous society. With these came fast developing expectations, which were further fuelled by Cameroon's specific position as a de jure trust territory but de facto colony. Tensions emerged not only due to the distance between these expectations and the slow pace of official change, but also between those who saw independence as an objective not to be negotiated or traded, and those who sought personal or communal benefit in relations with colonial powers. As Cameroon moved to independence, these tensions exploded into a crisis that has marked the country ever since.

3. 1955-1961: the turbulent path to independence

The growing success of the radical nationalist movement presented the French colonial authorities with a dilemma. By responding to their demands, they would likely embolden the nationalists to press for full independence. But their growing popularity could not be ignored. In December 1954, a new governor, Roland Pré, was sent with the task of stemming the advance of the UPC. His approach was to seek allies among the more conservative Cameroonian elites, while hardening the administration's position vis-à-vis the UPC (blocking meetings, arresting activists, etc).

This approach merely created more anger among the nationalists, which exploded in May 1955 in widespread riots across the south west. Roads were blocked, and the property of pro-administration elites was looted or destroyed. The violence culminated in running battles on the streets of Douala during the last days of May, pitting the army (including reinforcements from neighbouring French colonies) against UPC militants and unionists.¹⁵

The colonial authorities placed the blame for these riots squarely on the UPC, now described as communist agitators, and took the opportunity to ban the party. Barred from the legislative elections of December the following year, the UPC decided to sabotage the vote. It then entered into an ill-prepared guerrilla war against the colonial administration in its south-west heartlands around Douala and Nkongsamba. The administration reacted with a propaganda campaign, forced population movements and search and destroy missions, which successfully contained the insurgency. Um Nyobé was killed by a mixed French and Cameroonian patrol in September 1958. His death seriously weakened the movement, although the insurgency continued, especially around Bafoussam, in the heartlands of the Bamileke ethnic group.

The December 1956 elections, the first held under the more liberal framework of the French "Loi Cadre" of that year, shook up the political scene in Yaoundé. Moderates seen as too close to the colonial authorities, such as Aujoulat, lost out. Pragmatic nationalists, such as Mbida and Soppo Priso, won. Mbida became prime minister at the head of a heterogeneous coalition, with Ahidjo, a relative newcomer with a northern base, as his deputy. From there, things moved quickly, partly precipitated by de Gaulle's return to power in 1958 and the consequent rapid changes across French colonial Africa. Mbida, whose changes of position on the question of independence were notorious, proved unable to keep his coalition together and was forced from office in February 1958. He was replaced by Ahidjo, who had cleverly distanced himself from Mbida several months before and had maintained close relations with the French authorities, who retained the power to name the prime minister.¹⁶

In the two years between his ascension to power and the independence of French Cameroon on 1 January 1960, Ahidjo proved adept at fending off challenges from his rivals, including the brilliant and more popular Soppo Priso. French support for Ahidjo was decisive, and the decision of the UN General Assembly's Fourth Committee in February 1959 not to demand fresh elections before independence was a major blow to his rivals. The UPC, active in exile, failed to have independence delayed. In mid-1959, Ahidjo was able to use the remaining insurgency as a pretext to declare a state of emergency and take full executive powers for himself, thereby fending off calls for a national conference to decide on post-independence political arrangements.

Having achieved independence without passing any national electoral test, Ahidjo was then able to promulgate a constitution, modelled on that of the emergent French

¹⁴ Support for the principle of reunification can be seen in the German spelling "Kamerun" in their party names. For post-war British Cameroon, see Le Vine, op. cit., chapter VIII; Nicodemus F. Awasom, "Colonial Background to the Development of Autonomist Tendencies in Anglophone Cameroon, 1946-1961", *Journal of Third World Studies*, 1998; Piet Konings and Francis Nyamnjoh, *Negotiating an Anglophone Identity* (Leiden, 2003), chapter 2; and Jean-François Bayart, *L'Etat au Cameroun* (Paris, 1979), pp. 110-117.

¹⁵ These riots were similar in terms of geography, mobilisation and the reaction of the authorities to those of 1945 and, more latterly, those of February 2008. For a detailed description, see Joseph, op. cit., chapters VIII and IX and Mbembe, op. cit., pp. 319-327.

¹⁶ For this period see Bayart, op. cit., chapter I; and Le Vine, op. cit., chapter VII.

Fifth Republic, giving strong powers to the president. Benefiting from his now dominant position, his party, the Cameroonian Union (CU), comfortably won the March 1961 elections. The resulting National Assembly officially elected him president the following month.

In British Cameroon, the January 1959 legislative elections were a decisive event in the build-up to independence, with Foncha replacing Endeley as prime minister of Southern Cameroons. While Endeley favoured the continued integration of the territory into the emerging Nigerian federation, Foncha was far less enthusiastic about relations with its powerful cousin to the west. Nevertheless, his KNDP party did not campaign for reunification with French Cameroon, aware that in a region still attached to many aspects of its Anglophone heritage, such a position would win little support.¹⁷

Following these elections, Foncha and Endeley were requested by the UN to prepare their positions on the territory's eventual status, an issue which, it was decided, would be put to separate popular votes in Southern and Northern Cameroons. Politicians took a variety of positions on what questions should be posed in this referendum. Foncha favoured a vote on separation from Nigeria, to be followed by a period of continued trust status, while Endeley favoured a choice between "association" with Nigeria and reunification with French Cameroon. The option of independence, supported by many less prominent politicians, was excluded by the UN General Assembly out of fear of further Balkanisation of Africa's colonial territories, and the options of union with one or the other of the neighbouring countries were retained.

This debate dragged on into 1960. But with Nigerian independence looming, the UN pressured Foncha to come up with an outline of how federation with French Cameroon would work. To this end, he entered into negotiations with (now President) Ahidjo on the terms of the federation. Coming from a Nigerian political scene in which federation was already a working reality, Foncha assumed that this would be the model followed in the event of reunification. Ahidjo, schooled in the centralised Gaullist tradition, saw things otherwise. The result was a vague proposal, which did nothing to educate voters on the real consequences of their choice.

The plebiscite took place on 11 February 1961, following a campaign in which Endeley argued for union with Nigeria and Foncha for union with Cameroon. Foncha's position was validated by a large majority in Southern Cameroons. This reflected political affiliations and memories of marginalisation in colonial Nigeria (a "colony of a

colony" as the popular expression had it) rather than a real desire to reunite with Francophone Cameroon. Meanwhile Northern Cameroons voted for union with Nigeria, becoming part of its Northern Region, much to Ahidjo's consternation, as he had expected to acquire a large area of potential support (the Northern Cameroons territory was conterminous with his home area).

Five months after this vote Foncha and Ahidjo met in Fomban to discuss the future constitutional arrangements. The outcome has been a source of controversy ever since. With a weak negotiating team and possibly with one eye on his future place in government in Yaoundé, Foncha allowed Ahidjo to impose a constitution that, while formally federal, had all the hallmarks of a French-style centralised state. The fact that the British were in the process of pulling out of Southern Cameroons with what some thought indecent haste, while Ahidjo was strongly supported in his negotiations by the French, may have been an important factor.

The resulting constitution did no more than adjust the 1960 constitution of French Cameroon, but allowed for direct election of the president, which Ahidjo correctly calculated would reinforce his position. There were almost no solid guarantees to enact what was to be, on paper, a "union of equal parts". The resulting frustrations linger today in Anglophone Cameroon.¹⁸

This brief overview of colonial history is important for understanding subsequent developments and the problems the country currently faces. The 1950s were formative for Cameroon's ruling elite, who held power for the next three or four decades. A pattern of blockage followed by violent crisis developed as colonial authorities refused to accept legitimate and peaceful expression of grievances and refused to negotiate, except on their own very narrow terms. Some Cameroonians reacted to this by manoeuvring for personal gain, trading their local power for the protection and resources that the colonial powers offered. But for others, it led to frustration, resulting in periodic outbursts of violence and eventually in the UPC insurgency.

Refusal to negotiate with nationalists was exacerbated by bad faith on the part of colonial powers, for example, unwillingness to comply with the terms of the UN trusteeship or to faithfully report on its implementation and by electoral manipulations.

The French, influenced by the Gaullist movement, which maintained important influence in post-war Cameroon,

¹⁷ On this period, see Konings and Nyamnjoh, *op. cit.*, chapter 2; and Awasom, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ For the plebiscite and reunification, see Konings and Nyamnjoh, *op. cit.*, chapter 2; Le Vine, *op. cit.*, chapter VIII; and Awasom, *op. cit.* For the consequences in terms of current tensions, see Section IV.B.2 below.

attempted to create strong central state authority in the last years of their rule. But they did so without allowing countervailing powers to emerge and without consistent observance of the rule of law. This refusal to allow the development of the rule of law was reinforced by the legacy of the pre-war *indigénat* law, which embedded unequal and arbitrary treatment of individuals by public authorities. One consequence of this failure has been Cameroonians' lack of faith in public institutions and the prevalent understanding that the rules of the game are ultimately contingent on political power.

The most significant legacy of the late colonial period was the crushing of the nationalist movement and the fact that Cameroon became independent in a state of civil war. Those who came to power, heavily dependent on French support, could claim none of the liberation legitimacy that other African leaders drew on in the early state building period. The legitimacy of colonial rule in Cameroon was already weak due to the status of the territory under the UN (the UPC often hoisted UN flags over its meetings to underline the contingency of colonial rule), and this weakness was carried over to the new regime.

Cameroon's leaders have subsequently obscured the history of the 1950s and played down the role of the UPC, amounting to what several observers described as a "confiscation of memory".¹⁹ The civil war of the late 1950s and early 1960s allowed the new regime to develop arguments of unity and stability and relate them to state building under single party rule, which attracted significant initial support among many citizens. It also allowed the regime to develop a strong emphasis on state (and thereby regime) security. Even today, many features of that police state, such as paid informers in universities, are still present.²⁰

B. INDEPENDENT CAMEROON 1961-1982: THE IMPERATIVES OF UNITY AND STABILITY

At the end of October 1961, Ahidjo, now president of a reunified Cameroon, had acquired strong international backing and tight presidential control over finance and appointments. Over the next ten years, he gradually created a highly centralised political system based on a single party, elite co-option and violent repression of dissent.

¹⁹ Crisis Group interviews, academic and political activists, Douala, May 2009. Mbembe, op. cit., introduction, noted the symbolic importance in this respect of the fact that Um Nyobé's grave was sealed in concrete by colonial authorities in 1958.

²⁰ On the security aspect, see Claude Abé, "Espace public et recompositions de la pratique politique au Cameroun", *Polis*, 2006.

1. The UPC's annihilation and the establishment of a one-party state

Initially, however, Ahidjo's rivals retained independent political bases, and the UPC, both in its legal and its armed wing, remained a serious potential threat. By gradually picking off members of opposition parties through offers of government positions and developing his idea of a "national unified party" as the only way to counter the dangers of fragmentation, he moved step by step towards the single-party state he aspired to. With the strong advantages of presidential patronage, his party became an efficient machine for gathering elite support.²¹

In the north, he consolidated his position by offering a continuation of the colonial deal with the region's traditional and religious leaders, but acting swiftly against those who held out against his influence, such as the traditional leaders of Maroua and of Ngaoundere, deposed in 1959 and 1963 respectively.

By early 1962, Ahidjo's intention to do away with political pluralism was clear. In what was to be a final attempt to head him off, a group of four opposition politicians, Charles Bebey Eyidi, Théodore Mayi Matip, Mbida and Okala, declared their hostility to his rule in 1962. Arguing that Ahidjo was trying to install a dictatorship, they called for a broad opposition front. They had seriously miscalculated the strength of Ahidjo's position as national president, however, and, in June, all four were arrested and imprisoned.

The legal wing of the UPC was led by figures who could still command significant political support, such as JP Sende, Dika Akwa and Mayi Matip. However, with violence continuing around Bafoussam, they had to strike a delicate balance between mobilising their base, which remained strongly opposed to Ahidjo's government, and demonstrating their ability to be a serious legal political party.²² In the immediate months after the independence

²¹ See Bayart, op. cit., and in English, Bayart, "The Political System", in Richard Joseph (ed.), *Gaullist Africa: Cameroon under Ahmadou Ahidjo* (Enugu, 1978). Further details of Ahidjo's rule may be found in Le Vine, op. cit., chapter IX; Konings and Nyamnjoh, op. cit., pp. 2-9; M.W. Delancey, "The Construction of the Cameroon Political System: the Ahidjo Years 1958-1982", *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 1987; and Jean-François Médard, "L'État sous-développé au Cameroun", *L'année africaine 1977*, Paris, 1978.

²² On the history of the 1960s guerrilla war in the Bamileke area around Bafoussam (as opposed to the violence of the 1950s, which occurred mainly around Douala), see Dominique Malaquais, *Architecture, pouvoir et dissidence au Cameroun*, (Paris 2002), chapter 5; and M. Terretta, "'God of Independence, God of Peace': Village Politics and Nationalism in the Maquis of Cameroon, 1957-71", *Journal of African History*, 2005.

of French Cameroon, they tried to present a moderate face in the hope of playing a key role in the new government. But Ahidjo, seeing that they had thus cut themselves off from their popular base, saw no reason to make concessions.

Left out in the cold, their position hardened against the government. In January 1962, they held a major congress in Yaoundé, in the course of which the report of their own investigation into the death of Um Nyobé was discussed. The government, threatened by a potential revival of revolutionary nationalism, broke up the meeting and arrested the main leaders, accusing them of supporting the armed UPC rebellion.

The armed wing of the UPC, having entered into an ill-prepared guerrilla war, was unable to hold out against combined French and Cameroonian forces. Although violence in the Bafoussam area continued well after independence, by the mid-1960s it no longer posed any threat to Ahidjo's government. The exiled wing, shunted between bases in Khartoum, Cairo and Conakry, rapidly lost support from its Soviet and Chinese backers. The capture and public execution of guerrilla leader Ernest Ouandié in Bafoussam in 1971, following the assassination of Um Nyobé's replacement, Félix Moumié, by French secret services in Geneva in 1960, put an end to Cameroon's radical nationalist movement.

Although the Anglophone political elites came out of the reunification process considerably weakened, they retained the advantage of a lively democratic tradition. They were, therefore, able to hold out longer against Ahidjo's centralising ambitions. In October 1961, Foncha automatically became prime minister of the state of Western Cameroon, while also gaining the position of federal vice president.²³ In 1962, he agreed with Ahidjo that their respective parties would not seek supporters in the other's state. This allowed the pretence of equal confederation to continue for a few years.

However, Foncha's position in the government in Buea weakened with his absence on federal duties and the rise of new politicians in his party, such as Augustin Jua and Solomon Muna. As Jua gained greater control of the KNDP, and became Western Cameroon prime minister in 1965, Muna, with implicit support from Ahidjo, split off to form a new party, the Cameroon United Congress (CUC). With Endeley's Cameroon People's National Congress (CPNC) still active, Anglophone politicians were henceforth split three ways, allowing Ahidjo to employ his customary divide and rule tactics.

²³ In line with constitutional changes, Foncha had to give up one or the other post in 1965. He chose to remain federal vice president.

In 1966, Ahidjo proposed the formation of a new party as the only legal political movement, the Cameroonian National Union (CNU). Anglophone politicians, their base eroded by the centralisation of power in Yaoundé and with one eye on countering their rivals in Buea, put up little resistance. The composition of the steering committee set up to establish the new party, with 22 seats for the CU and eight for all Anglophone parties combined, was a measure of the real balance of power. The one-party state was formally established across the whole country.

2. Centralisation of the state and all its powers

By the early 1970s, therefore, Ahidjo had succeeded in tying all political forces into his orbit of power. The federal state was dissolved in favour of a unitary constitution in 1972. While this continues to be the subject of much bitterness in Anglophone Cameroon, it was seen by many at the time as no more than the natural outcome of this centralising dynamic. The positions of prime minister of West and East Cameroon, and of the federal vice president were done away with at the same time. The result was one of the most centralised states in Africa. Ministries were weakened in favour of an ever more powerful and specialised presidential office. A fast turnover of ministers, with the exception of enduring loyalists, Party Secretary Moussa Yaya and Armed Forces Minister Sadou Daoudou, prevented any rival gaining a foothold in the system. Key ministries and agencies, including all state intelligence functions, were brought under the presidential office, and government and parliament were neutralised.²⁴

Of special importance was, and remains, the president's very wide powers of appointment and transfer across the growing civil service, as well as his control over all state financial resources. These were used to reward loyalty and punish independent thinking.²⁵ One of the consequences was the rise of the bureaucratic state. With political opinion and ambition subject to censorship or self-censorship, and in the context of growing state employment,²⁶ Cameroon's political elites became increasingly versed in tech-

²⁴ Abel Eyinga quoted one parliamentarian speaking with his local party members: "I don't have any account to give you because I don't owe you anything. It is to President Ahidjo alone that I owe this post I am occupying; and I'll remain a parliamentarian just as long as he wants me to keep it" (Eyinga's translation), "Government by State of Emergency", in Joseph (ed.), *Gaullist Africa*, op. cit., p. 106.

²⁵ Crisis Group interview, retired civil servants and teachers, Bafoussam, May 2009. For details of centralisation under Ahidjo, see Bayart, *L'Etat au Cameroun*, op. cit., pp. 141-159.

²⁶ From 3 per cent of the work force in 1965 to 9 per cent in 1970, absorbing by this time 65 per cent of the state budget, according to Bayart, "The Structure of Political Power" in Joseph (ed.), *Gaullist Africa*, op. cit., p. 66.

nocratic bureaucracy. State administrators, such as prefects, became the real holders of power.

The absorption of Anglophone Cameroon is a good example of how Ahidjo centralised power.²⁷ According to the terms of the 1961 Fouban agreement, public resources would flow to the national treasury in Yaoundé, to then be redistributed to the states. The express intention was to formalise this through a revenue allocation agreement. But Ahidjo, despite pressure from Foncha, refused to sign such an agreement. He thus retained discretionary power over all public resources, which were allocated according to annual non-binding applications from Buea to Yaoundé.

In the administrative field, Ahidjo, in October 1961, created six provinces, of which West Cameroon was only one. He then treated West Cameroon exactly as he treated the five provinces of East Cameroon, administering them with no concession to federal principles. Frequent clashes occurred between elected Anglophone officials and the staff of the federal administrators sent from Yaoundé. Tensions were particularly acute as regards security forces. The petty abuses of power by Francophone gendarmes, who were all under federal authority, remain a source of bitterness in Anglophone Cameroon to this day.²⁸

All in all, while Anglophone Cameroon was able to retain some of its autonomy in education and parts of its common law, an equal federation was rendered impossible by the centralising dynamic of Ahidjo's rule. Anglophone influence in Francophone Cameroon remained marginal, and many of the specificities of Anglophone Cameroon, such as standard measures and currency, were dismantled by Yaoundé with little or no consultation.²⁹

3. Co-option, corruption and repression as a system of governance

With resources and powers of appointment firmly in his hands, Ahidjo developed a political system based on co-option of elites. Economic and political advancement was entirely dependent on favours from "The Prince", and displays of loyalty to central power became the currency of political life. Independent political bases were not tolerated. The fate of the legal UPC described above was typical.

Ahidjo's system of co-option was funded by a buoyant economy. In the 1960s, strong growth (6.5 per cent annual average) based on agricultural exports allowed "a hierarchical clientelist system to provide enough rewards to selected potential opposition subclasses and formations to keep the system relatively stable".³⁰ Community-level consultation in the "planned liberal economy" gave a perception of national economic progress and tied the interests of many into the stability of the regime.³¹ Although the economy started to weaken in the 1970s, the political impact of the downturn was not apparent for some time, as Ahidjo's power was by that time firmly established, and new oil revenues helped mask problems in agriculture.

While clearly successful in maintaining a degree of stability, the clientelist system could not co-opt all potential opposition and was maintained by a sophisticated security apparatus. This was facilitated by repressive laws, including state of emergency legislation introduced at the height of the UPC rebellion in the early 1960s and only repealed at the start of the 1970s. Military tribunals tried civilians for "dissenting activities"; internment camps and other colonial practices, such as the *laissez-passer* system for authorising internal travel, were maintained well into the 1970s.

Security forces and internal intelligence agencies, such as the SEDOC (*Service de Documentation*) headed by the feared Jean Fochivé, were well remunerated and held, as they do now, a very privileged position within public administration.³² In addition, the idea that opposition to regime was "subversive" (or even "terrorist", as the UPC were labelled) entered the political lexicon and, for many regime acolytes, has remained.

²⁷ See Konings and Nyamnjoh, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-66, and Victor Julius Ngoh, "The Origin of the Marginalization of Former Southern Cameroonians (Anglophones), 1961-1966: An historical analysis", *Journal of Third World Studies*, 1999.

²⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Anglophone activists and journalists, Douala and Bamenda, May 2009.

²⁹ There are two separate grievances involved here. On the one hand, a small minority still feel aggrieved that the principle of "equal union" did not involve equal give and take on both sides – i.e., if Anglophone Cameroon accepted French currency as part of the harmonisation within a new federation, then French Cameroon should have accepted, say, Anglophone weights and measures. This aspiration was never realistic and is in any case largely historical. What is far more current, is how a centralised state deals with minorities which have a specific history and sense of allegiance to aspects of that history. For this, see Section IV.B.2 below.

³⁰ Reginald Green, "The Political Economy of External Dependence in Cameroon", in Joseph (ed.), *Gaullist Africa*, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

³¹ Crisis Group interviews, retired civil servants, Bafoussam, May 2009.

³² A subsequent Crisis Group briefing will look at the place of this security apparatus in the current regime. See also Abel Ayinga in Joseph (ed.), *Gaullist Africa*, *op. cit.*; and Abé, *op. cit.*

Ahidjo's security state enjoyed tacit approval from Western powers, because it was initially portrayed as counter-revolutionary or anti-communist. The Eastern bloc saw little reason to be interested in a country so clearly outside its sphere of influence. However, France, highly concerned with security and conscious of instability in neighbouring African states, gave far more than tacit support. The French army was actively involved in the suppression of the UPC rebellion in the early 1960s and retained a strong presence in the armed forces, holding the majority of senior officer posts as late as 1971.³³ In contributing to stability and bringing in investment, French presence undoubtedly had some beneficial aspects. But the French were well rewarded; their businesses enjoyed tax breaks, and French personnel dominated the management of the private sector. Equally, the French were complicit in the suppression of dissent to Ahidjo's regime, via censorship and security and intelligence support.³⁴

Ahidjo's regime was opposed by many and criticised for its authoritarian nature, but it also won support from Cameroonian elites who agreed with its emphasis on unity, stability and state building.³⁵ Events in neighbouring Nigeria, whose post-colonial territorial arrangement came unstuck in a protracted civil war in the late 1960s, reinforced their emphasis on unity and stability in a country with a highly diverse colonial past. While most of Cameroon's social groups were drawn into the orbit of state power, allowing themselves to be co-opted, others held out, although often from exile. The church was one of the very few institutions which resisted Ahidjo's all-absorbing power, at least partly. Its periodic criticisms of his rule led to confrontations, the most notorious of which was the arrest, trial and exile of Archbishop Ndongmo in 1971-1972, accused of collaboration with UPC leader Ernest Ouandié.³⁶

III. PAUL BIYA IN POWER: THE CHALLENGES OF PLURALISM

On 4 November 1982, President Ahidjo fell ill and abruptly resigned from the presidency, taking Cameroonians and the regime's international allies by surprise. He was immediately succeeded by his prime minister, Paul Biya, a long-serving technocrat and self-effacing ally. For the first six months, the hand-over of power appeared to go smoothly and was even hailed by some as a model transition in sub-Saharan Africa.

But things soon went wrong as tensions over distribution of resources led to violence and cut short the apparent liberalisation of the regime. Since that time, President Biya's rule has been characterised by the tension between two conflicting modes of governance. On the one hand is the centralised clientelist system he and his supporters inherited from Ahidjo and have maintained. On the other is the open debate, choice and popular legitimacy which have periodically emerged, whether in the one-party state or within a pluralist setting. When this latter form of political practice has gained sufficient momentum to challenge the principles of clientelist power, it is cut down to size. As an observer has said of the late 1980s, "the party-state functioned as a set of clientelist units during elections which were intended to follow a procedural, egalitarian, and competitive model. The result was a conflict of legitimacy which turned to chaos and the fracturing of the party".³⁷

A. 1982-1990: FALSE START

1. 1982-1984: a model transition turns sour

In mid-1983, Ahidjo made a surprise recovery and affirmed what he continued to regard as his pre-eminent position, by virtue of having remained president of the CNU. He claimed, among other things, that he retained the right to nominate people to party positions. In June, Biya changed the composition of the government, getting rid of several Ahidjo loyalists, including Sadou Doudou, and replacing them with people more beholden to himself. Ahidjo, safely in Switzerland, launched a series of attacks on Biya's rule on French international radio. After two tense months, Biya, on 22 August, announced that he had uncovered a plot to unseat him, led by northerners in the army and instigated by Ahidjo.

Biya had gained enough control of the government and security apparatus to contain the fall-out from this incident and felt secure enough in late 1983 to prosecute Ahidjo

³³ Joseph (ed), *Gaullist Africa*, op. cit., pp. 16, 183.

³⁴ See the polemical book by Mongo Beti, the most famous regime dissident and an internationally famous novelist, which describes how the French government and state-controlled press tried to keep the trial of Archbishop Ndongmo in 1971 away from international public attention, including by banning, in France, the sale of the first edition of that book for four years. Beti, *Main basse sur le Cameroun: autopsie d'une décolonisation* (Paris, 1972).

³⁵ Samuel Eboua, *Ahidjo et la logique du pouvoir* (Paris, 1995), is a clear statement of support for Ahidjo's style of rule from a political conservative and Ahidjo loyalist. At the other end of the spectrum, see the writings of Mongo Beti.

³⁶ On churches, see Bayart, "Les rapports entre les églises et l'Etat du Cameroun, 1958-1972", *Revue française d'études politiques africaines*, 1972.

³⁷ Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, *La Démocratie de transit au Cameroun* (Yaoundé, 1997), p. 57.

and fellow conspirators, subsequently granting them presidential pardons.³⁸ In January 1984, he was able to crown a superficially successful first fourteen months by winning a non-competitive presidential election.³⁹

The tensions of 1983-1984 were played out on two distinct levels. At the first level, Biya presented his arrival as head of state as an opportunity for change and an opening up of the political system. He understood that popular support for Ahidjo's philosophy of authoritarian nation-building under a one-party state had faded with a change of generation. But as a pure product of the Ahidjo system, Biya was a conservative and gradualist, determined to stop short of real pluralism. He therefore supported the gradual creation of a more open and democratic system, but within a reformed single party.

The ambivalence of this position became evident when he introduced a law in November 1983 to allow multiple candidates for the presidential election. But, having blocked the candidature of any potential rivals, he then won in January 1984 with over 99 per cent of the vote. However, it is undeniable that his apparently new approach – referred to as “the renewal” (*le renouveau*) – combined with much talk of combating corruption (*rigueur*), was welcomed by many. This included some regime opponents, who came back from exile in the course of 1983 and 1984.⁴⁰

At the second level lay ethno-regional implications. Although Biya went to some lengths to assure the country that he was determined to work for the benefit of the people as a whole, his arrival had significant implications for the balance of power between different regions and ethnic elites. The government reshuffle of June 1983 and changes in the CNU throughout that year favoured southerners, although not exclusively. Some southerners, considering themselves more suited to power due to better education, saw the arrival of Biya, who is from the Southern Province (now Region), as their opportunity to regain the initiative they lost when Ahidjo took over from Mbida in 1958.⁴¹

³⁸ Ahidjo was tried in absentia.

³⁹ On this first phase of Biya's rule, see Bayart, “La société politique camerounaise 1982-1986”, *Politique africaine*, 1986; and Boulaga, op. cit., chapter II.

⁴⁰ Crisis Group interviews, retired civil servants, Bafoussam, and religious leader, Douala, May 2009. See Biya's own explanation of his approach in *Communal Liberalism* (London, 1987). Important opponents of the previous regime, such as Soppo Priso and Jacques Ekindi, came back into the fold at this point, and Archbishop Ndongmo returned from exile.

⁴¹ Cameroon is often described in terms of three broad ethno-regional areas, the north, the south (generally taken to include the east) and the west. The latter may be broken down into the Littoral Region (including Douala) and the West Region, with supposed political affinities with the Anglophone North West

The transition also had economic implications. While Ahidjo had overseen an expansion of public employment, his rule also saw the enrichment of many powerful traders from the north and from the Bamileke ethnic groups in the west. As this enrichment was often closely tied to political access and protection, many expected a redistribution of economic opportunities to benefit partly Biya's south and partly those from any region who could find favour with the new regime. Many from the south have indeed done well under Biya, but what was of immediate importance was not so much the actual shifts of economic fortunes, but the associated perceptions and expectations, which did much to raise tensions in 1983-1984.

These tensions, unresolved by the Ahidjo trial, culminated in a coup attempt, led by northerners in the presidential guard, on 4 April 1984. It was thwarted, but degenerated into a major mutiny that was put down by loyalist soldiers only at the cost of widespread bloodshed. This coup attempt, and its bloody aftermath, is frequently seen as a cause of Biya's subsequent obsession with regime security and the ultimate failure of his political liberalisation.⁴² It is also considered to be the origin of the gradual marginalisation of many northerners from the top levels of the security forces and the cause of lingering tensions between the north and the rest of the country.

2. 1985-1989: the failure of single-party democracy

In the short term, however, Biya was able to gain control of the security situation and proceed with a major reorganisation of his political base. At its July 1985 congress in Bamenda, amid much talk of improved party democracy and renewal of personnel, the CNU's name was changed to the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM). But between young and old, reformers and old guard, the actual outcome of the congress was far from conclusive. Biya's desire to keep all factions on board, in order to remain the arbitrator of the party's tensions and squabbles, excluded a clear victory for any one group.⁴³

At least as important as the Bamenda congress were the elections for party posts in early 1986. Eligibility was tightly controlled by the central committee, but they nevertheless stimulated much debate and some genuine renewal. Some important regime figures were fiercely resisted by local party members. In some cases, grassroots views

Region. While these are huge over-simplifications (see Bayart “La société politique camerounaise”, op. cit., pp. 7-12), they are, nevertheless, an important part of the way Cameroonians continue to discuss their national politics.

⁴² Crisis Group interviews, civil society activists, Bafoussam, and academic, Douala, May 2009.

⁴³ See Bayart, “La société politique camerounaise”, op. cit.

won out, in others independent-minded candidates were prevailed upon to withdraw. In Yaoundé and Douala, the two biggest cities, the party hierarchy gave in to the temptation to force through candidates from “indigenous” ethnic groups over more popular candidates.⁴⁴ But new political figures did emerge, or re-emerge, and the overall renewal of the party’s bodies was impressive – just over half of the 49 section heads were replaced.

Throughout the 1980s, hopes of greater democracy via the reformed single party were thwarted by the persistent centralising habits of the government and the blocking moves of senior regime figures. The pattern was continued in the municipal elections of October 1987 and the presidential and legislative elections of April 1988. Attempts were made to liberalise the process by encouraging competitive lists and by trying to stop candidates from holding multiple posts at the same time, so as to free up some posts for new arrivals. But rather than resulting in better democratic practice, these changes led to chaotic and contentious outcomes: some candidates managed to place themselves on more than one list, and in some cases, losing candidates were made mayors by orders of the president or the party hierarchy. Internal party reports and accounts by regime loyalists admitted that the elections of 1987 and 1988, by raising hopes but not fulfilling them, left the party less popular than before.⁴⁵

Biya saw the democratisation of the single party as a response to his own weak legitimacy. He had been handed power from on high, but he could not inherit the allies, networks of support or even personal standing of his predecessor. He therefore saw a changed and more democratic party as a way of giving himself a new base. But the process also carried the risk of exposing this lack of legitimacy, as well as challenging the constellation of client groups that made up the regime, so had to be tightly controlled. Hopes of a more open and responsive political system were frustrated.

B. DEMOCRATISATION AND MULTI-PARTY POLITICS

1. 1990-1992: the explosive emergence of democracy movements

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and subsequent reduction of international support for authoritarian regimes emboldened civil society and opposition groups across Africa. In Cameroon, the lawyer Yondo Black attempted

to form a new political party early the next year.⁴⁶ He was arrested along with a dozen other democracy activists. While the activists were awaiting trial, the national lawyers association, led by the prominent Anglophone politician Bernard Muna, started a strike. Other organisations emerged and, along with former UPC militants, gathered widespread support in their push for democratisation. The regime reacted by organising demonstrations against multi-party democracy, which it described as “diversionary” and “destabilising”, in Yaoundé in March and April 1990.

In May, John Fru Ndi, a bookseller from the Northwest (Anglophone) Province, and former CPDM candidate in the 1988 legislative elections, created a new political party, the Social Democratic Front (SDF). In contrast to the more sedate lawyers association, it was determined to take the fight for democracy to the street and demonstrate popular support. The founding meeting, in Bamenda on 26 May, was violently put down by the army, at the cost of six civilian lives.⁴⁷

Following these events and in a tense but, for many, hopeful context, the SDF became the focus of a nationwide movement for democratic change. The regime was put on the back foot. In July anti-subversion laws were repealed, and on 19 December multi-party democracy was formally authorised. Dozens of parties were created, some with a popular base, others a product of more narrow opportunism.

Inspired by other Francophone African countries, the democracy movement advocated a sovereign national conference to debate new political arrangements. Biya refused, aware that such conferences had seriously curtailed presidential power elsewhere. Anger grew at the lack of progress and at the arrests of prominent journalist Pius Njawé and activist Célestin Monga in early 1991. Opposition parties and civil society groups (such as CAP liberté, led by Djeukam Tchamani) organised a general strike and a “ghost towns” movement, intended to shut down the economy and put pressure on the government.

⁴⁶ Characteristic of Cameroon’s conflicting legal provisions, this was his right under the constitution, but illegal according to the 1967 anti-sedition laws.

⁴⁷ For this period see Boulaga, op. cit., chapter III; Victor J Ngoh, “Biya and the Transition to Democracy”, in John Mukum Mbaku and Joseph Takougang (eds.), *The Leadership Challenge in Africa* (Paris, 2004); Milton Krieger, “Cameroon’s Democratic Crossroads, 1990-1994”, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 1994; Andreas Mehler “Cameroon: une transition qui n’a pas eu lieu”, in Jean-Pascal Daloz and Patrick Quantin (eds.), *Transitions démocratiques en Afrique* (Paris, 1997). For the birth of the SDF, see Milton Krieger, *Cameroon’s Social Democratic Front: Its History and Prospects as an Opposition Party (1990-2011)* (Bamenda, 2008), chapter 2, and Section IV.A.2 below.

⁴⁴ See the fascinating description of the process in Yaoundé in Boulaga, op. cit., pp. 40-41.

⁴⁵ See *ibid.*, pp. 44-54.

Initially planned for just a few weeks, the strike lasted from March to August 1991, damaging the economy and demonstrating the mobilising power of the opposition. Dozens died in violence between activists and security forces across the country, including serious confrontations on the university campus in Yaoundé.⁴⁸ But the regime remained unmoved.

In mid-1991, Biya offered to hold a tripartite meeting, including regime, opposition and civil society, in place of a national conference, to debate the transition to democratic rule. This meeting, which lasted from the end of October to mid-November, was a total success for Biya. By promising to negotiate, he broke the momentum of the opposition and ended the national strike. But having done so, he felt no need to make any real concessions or to keep the promises he did make. The opposition tore itself apart with suspicions of collaboration and co-option. Its coordinating body eventually split, and Fru Ndi refused to sign the meeting's final document.⁴⁹

Biya followed what was for him a successful tripartite meeting by holding precipitous legislative elections at the beginning of March 1992. The opposition, finding no response to its demands for more time to prepare, and in protest at continuing irregularities in the electoral law, decided to boycott. But under government pressure, including large payments to any party prepared to participate, it again split. The National Union for Democracy and Progress (NUDP), under Bello Bouba Maigari, Biya's first prime minister in the 1980s, decided to stand, leaving a section of the party under Sam Eboua to pursue the boycott under a new banner. The newly legalised UPC, seemingly arisen from the ashes, similarly split between the opportunist Augustin Kodock and the principled but ageing Ndeh Ntumazah. Nevertheless, although the SDF and the smaller Cameroon Democratic Union (CDU) maintained their boycott, the CPDM could not win an outright majority and had to do deals with smaller parties to obtain a majority in parliament.⁵⁰

The final dramatic test of this period came with the presidential elections of October 1992, in which all main op-

position figures participated. Tensions were already high after a violent campaign fuelled by Biya's blatant attempts to manipulate the vote. International observers reported "serious flaws" in the electoral process.⁵¹ When the Supreme Court announced on 23 October that Biya had won by a narrow margin, opposition outrage sparked ugly riots. Biya imposed emergency rule in the Northwest Province, and the military came down hard.⁵² Fru Ndi rejected the results and announced himself the real winner (almost certainly with justification), but fear for his safety forced him into hiding.

The early democratisation period thus finished as it had started, with a state of siege in the opposition stronghold of Bamenda. As the dust settled at the end of 1992, several things were clear. The pattern of blockage followed by crisis, characteristic of Cameroonian political life, had been confirmed. But, as before, the incumbent regime had managed to survive. Economic and political issues were again combined, as the early 1990s saw growing financial problems filter down to the population through rising unemployment, exacerbated by the general strike of 1991. International pressure, political and economic, was an important factor in pushing the system to open up. But donors, more afraid of the unknown than of the imperfect, ultimately did not allow the regime to collapse. The French, fearful of Fru Ndi's Anglophone background, offered critical financial support.⁵³

2. 1992-1997: constitutional debate and partial decentralisation

That events led to disenchantment with the electoral process, even in these very early days of democracy, can be attributed to divisions in the opposition, frequently caused by suspicions that rival politicians were seeking to trade their political base for government favours. It was also caused by the fact that the opposition was focused on removing Biya, thereby personalising the political struggle, while making little coherent effort to build an alternative

⁴⁸ Crisis Group interviews, participants in the events, Bafoussam and Douala, May 2009. See also "Soldiers return to Cameroon campus, strike shuts down Douala", Reuters, 19 April 1991.

⁴⁹ For the bad faith of the government side, see Boulaga, op. cit., pp. 94-97. For an insider's view of the suspicions which divided the opposition in this period, see Pierre Flambeau Ngayap, *L'opposition au Cameroun, les années de Braise* (Paris, 1999).

⁵⁰ For details of the unsatisfactory electoral law which precipitated the boycott, see Boulaga, op. cit., pp. 99-100. For these elections, see also Joseph Takougang, "The 1992 Multi-party Elections in Cameroon: Prospects for Democracy and Democratization", *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 1996.

⁵¹ The regime refused to register new young voters likely to vote for Fru Ndi and shut down the three main opposition newspapers. See "An Assessment of the October 11, 1992 Election in Cameroon", National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, Washington, 1993. See also, Ngoh in Mbaku and Takougang (eds.), op. cit.; and Boulaga, op. cit., chapter IV.

⁵² See "Arrests after emergency rule in Cameroon province", Reuters, 28 October 1992; "Riots in Cameroon after President Biya re-elected", Reuters, 23 October 1992; and Ngoh, in Mbaku and Takougang (eds.), op. cit., p. 442.

⁵³ Donors were divided at the time, with the French providing critical support to the regime and the Americans at times openly supporting the opposition. See Martin Dieudonné Eboho, "L'implication des puissances occidentales dans les processus de démocratisation en Afrique: analyse des actions américaine et française au Cameroun (1989-1997)", *Polis*, 1998.

program for exercising power. But equally, the unwillingness of the regime to adhere to the rules of the game, or even allow those rules to be clearly articulated, damaged the possibility of peaceful democratic change and continues to do so.⁵⁴

In 1993, attention turned to the constitution, which had not been changed since the beginning of multi-party politics. Of the cluster of issues debated at great length and in now familiar controversy (accusations of bad faith on all sides), the most important was federalism. Many Anglophones felt emboldened to argue for real federal government, but they failed to exert real influence on the process. The resulting constitution, finalised in 1996, provided for the creation of regions and for a second chamber, the Senate, to be partly made up of representatives of the new regions.

However, although the new constitution was formally passed, its enactment has depended on laws to be signed by the president. Those creating the regions were only signed in 2008, after a delay that the government has made no attempt to explain. Nor has any timetable been given for their actual implementation. With elements of the 1996 constitution still not enacted, the country continues to be governed under Article 67, which provides for the use of existing legal frameworks pending the full (“progressive”) adoption of the new constitution.⁵⁵

The new constitution also provided for local elections, the first of which took place in January 1996. These were relatively successful in procedural terms, and several opposition parties gained an important experience of local government as a result. However, as local elected bodies had been introduced without appropriate changes to the powers of nominated administrators, their work was often frustrated by the regime’s use of those administrators to thwart mayors and councils. In addition, the regime named powerful “government delegates” to the main cities (initially three, now seven), many of which were opposition strongholds. Their ostensible purpose was to deal with the

challenges of urbanisation, but in practice they were positioned to thwart the work of the elected councils.

1997 saw legislative and presidential elections. In a mirror image of 1992, the SDF and the CDU boycotted the presidential poll, complaining of an electoral playing field tilted in the regime’s favour long before polling day. However, needing to get a foothold in the state’s institutions and the symbolic and material resources that would bring, they participated in the legislative elections. Biya won the presidential election, comfortably, in relatively well-conducted polls. The legislative elections allowed the SDF to confirm its national profile with 43 of the National Assembly’s 180 seats.⁵⁶

3. 1997-2004: authoritarian restoration

The democratic advances of the 1990s proved short lived. In the next decade, the CPDM learned to use the advantages of incumbency more effectively to restore authoritarian rule, pushing the opposition back to small ethno-regional enclaves in the 2002 elections. In doing so, it employed a full range of regime powers, including harassment of independent media, the selective distribution of state resources and the use of a highly partisan administration, as well as fraud and manipulation at all points in the electoral process.⁵⁷

The centralising power of the state was again demonstrated when Maigari brought his NUDP into government in late 1997. Since then, the hope invested by Cameroonians in their democratic processes has declined sharply, along with their belief in the credibility of elections. The current very low voter registration demonstrates both the blocking manoeuvres of the regime and growing popular disenchantment.⁵⁸

The broader liberalisation that accompanied the efforts at political democratisation has had an ambivalent outcome. Although state media, which continues to act as a propaganda outlet for the regime, still dominates television and to a lesser extent radio, the press is now reasonably free. But formal media freedom has not brought freedom from political interference; journalists are frequently harassed by agents of the state, and the press is often corrupted by

⁵⁴ Boulaga, op. cit., p. 118, cites a highly illustrative example of this. Just prior to the 1992 presidential elections, a ministerial decree abrogated the right of parties to validate the returns of polling stations. In flagrant contradiction with the electoral code, this caused predictable uproar. The decree was repealed at the last moment, allowing the regime to claim it was following correct procedure. But the second change was never communicated to the public or even to officials, leaving widespread confusion on the day of voting.

⁵⁵ See Ngoh, in Mbaku and Takougang (eds.), op. cit., p. 443, for the relationship between old and new constitutions, and also Joseph Takougang and Milton Krieger, *African State and Society in the 1990s: Cameroon’s Political Crossroads* (New York, 2000), pp. 182-194.

⁵⁶ On post-1992 electoral and party politics, see Boulaga, op. cit., chapter III; Takougang and Krieger, *Cameroon’s Social Democratic Front*, op. cit., chapter 6.

⁵⁷ A Crisis Group researcher was an electoral observer in Douala in 2002 and witnessed these problems first hand.

⁵⁸ Several international and Cameroonian interlocutors voiced concern to Crisis Group at low voter registration. In the presidential elections of 2004, only 4.7 million voters were registered and only 3.7 million voted, out of a population of 17.8 million.

politicians seeking to advance personal agendas, damaging its credibility.⁵⁹

Civil society movements, which have attracted many talented individuals, perform a monitoring role often associated with the press (for example on corruption issues), but they remain under-resourced and susceptible to the same low levels of trust that have plagued political parties.

The democratisation of the early 1990s occurred in a period of severe economic crisis. In 1993, the state was close to bankruptcy and forced to cut civil service pay by between 50 and 70 per cent. The effects of this were reinforced by the inflationary effects of the devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994. These measures are remembered bitterly by many Cameroonians, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – seen as having imposed them – is still regarded with great hostility. The economy recovered in the late 1990s, at least in terms of state finances. But this recovery then levelled off, and continued problems of economic management have produced relatively low 4 per cent annual growth since 2000. Cameroon remains dependent on agricultural and mineral resources, with oil revenues constituting around a third of the government's revenues.⁶⁰

While Cameroon resisted the large lay-offs in the public sector seen in other African countries, its people have nevertheless suffered from informalisation of much of the economy. Some progress has been made on basic poverty levels, but social indicators have remained stagnant, or, like secondary school enrolment, regressed. Inequality and disparities between regions have remained stubbornly high.⁶¹

Since the economic crunch in the early 1990s, the government has negotiated a series of agreements with the

IMF and the World Bank that have been accompanied by efforts to reform public finance and broader aspects of state governance. Though they have had some effect on the former, they have failed to produce meaningful and visible reform, especially on corruption. Over the years, officials have learned how to play the “reform game” – offering just enough to maintain working relations with donors, while avoiding in-depth changes. The entry into the Commonwealth in 1995 was similar – much pressure was applied, with membership the carrot, but little reform happened.

Cameroon has gradually reduced its debt from the crippling levels of the early 1990s. In April 2006, it reached the achievement point in the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC), which has led to a huge drop in debt levels – from 91 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2000 to 13 per cent in 2008.⁶² It may be that this very significant boost to public finances can help it weather the current global financial crisis, which will otherwise seriously affect its export economy. But any improvement still depends both on technical challenges and tackling pervasive corruption that both holds back development and – because it results in economic stagnation – threatens the cohesion of elites who are highly vulnerable to a sudden drop in the money needed to grease the patronage system.

While many people's living standards have become precarious, others have continued to accumulate what appears to be fabulous wealth, usually surrounded by suspicions of political connections. The very wealthy, with children safely in expensive education establishments abroad, are seemingly increasingly detached from the day-to-day reality of the country. This has caused growing resentment and a perception that the social glue built up under Ahidjo has weakened. President Biya himself has said: “I believe that a society running at several different speeds, as well as moving away from our traditional customs of solidarity, would quickly lose cohesion and become subject to serious internal tensions”.⁶³

⁵⁹ Crisis Group interviews with several Cameroonian and international journalists have elicited detailed accounts of exchange of money in return for favourable news items.

⁶⁰ See Célestin Monga, “L'argent qui appauvrit: un état des lieux macroéconomique et financier du Cameroun”, in Fabien Eboussi Boulaga (ed.), *L'état du Cameroun 2008* (Yaoundé, 2009). See also data in Florence Charlier and Charles N'Cho-Oguie, *Sustaining Reforms for Inclusive Growth in Cameroon*, World Bank (Washington, 2009).

⁶¹ One can compare, for example, the growth rate of around 4 per cent per annum since 2000 with the country's largely stagnant social indicators, for instance in health and education. Infant mortality (under five years of age), for example, remained in 2004 at its 1991 level of 144 per 1,000 live births. See Charlier and N'Cho-Oguie, op. cit., chapter 2: “... infant mortality rates in Cameroon increased substantially during the 1990s, while declining in sub-Saharan Africa as a whole”. The Gini co-efficient (a measure of income inequality) is 44.6, putting Cameroon 153rd on a list of 182 countries ranked in descending order of equality (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) figures).

⁶² See Monga in Boulaga (ed.), *L'état du Cameroun 2008*, op. cit., p. 148.

⁶³ From his 2000 New Year's speech, cited in Bouopda Pierre Kamé, *Les émeutes du renouveau Cameroun Février 2008* (Paris, 2008). Several Crisis Group interviews point to rapidly increasing levels of corruption from the early 1990s.

IV. HOW IS CAMEROON GOVERNED?

Having pushed back democratic advances, the ruling elites now offer little but a politics of stagnation and corruption. While continuing to treat opposition groups as illegitimate and subversive (when not paying them off), they have offered no alternative way of reinforcing institutions or articulating relations between social groups, except a tired discourse of supposed national unity. Opposition parties continue to embody some hope of change, but much of that hope has now drifted to dispersed civil society groups.

Meanwhile, several areas of the country continue to suffer from economic and political neglect. In some cases, such as Anglophone Cameroon, this is associated with a strongly felt identity politics, in other cases with memories of violent periods in the past, making for a potentially dangerous cocktail. The state's occasional attempts to demonstrate its authority, often through the use of specialised security units, are not accompanied with any sustained dialogue or other types of popular participation. Relations with neighbours are generally good, an example of Cameroon's remaining pockets of competence, but also carry some risks.

A. POLITICS

1. The regime

The CPDM operates by trading employment opportunities, public contracts and state largesse for support from local elites. The distribution of resources and civil service appointments is largely a function of regime loyalty, when it is not simply a product of corruption. This system produces a highly inefficient public administration, where initiative and efficiency constantly take second place to corruption and opacity.

At the centre of the web stands the all-powerful, but strangely absent president, who has perfected practices of centralisation inherited from his predecessor. His very absence is part of the mystique of power that has, over time, led to a disillusioned citizenry disorientated by the arbitrary nature of governance. Decisions of any importance have to be signed off at the highest levels, a great many by the president himself. Given his long and frequent absences in Europe, this means that new initiatives are often left by the wayside.

The regime still operates within a one-party state mentality. The civil service, army, police, customs, judiciary, even the health and education sectors are all heavily politicised. The CPDM does not see itself as a political group distinct from the state, temporarily at the helm of a per-

manent entity.⁶⁴ It promotes a confusion of the ruling party and the state in order to make opposition to the CPDM tantamount to subversion. Civil servants are encouraged to see themselves as serving both the party and the state. Criticism of the party is deemed unpatriotic, and there is strong resistance to an impartial electoral system.⁶⁵ The system of resource distribution extends beyond the civil service, and at the lowest levels of society, poverty makes allegiance to the party a necessity for survival.

This system, centred on an apparently all-powerful presidency and operating through the ruling party, gives a superficial impression of unity. But, in reality the regime is riven with barely disguised fissures. One line of division is ethnic. There is a widespread perception, to some extent founded on reality, that Biya's Beti ethnic group holds the key positions, notably in the security forces (army, gendarmerie, presidential guard and other important units) and in the ministries of defence and finance. From there they are able to capture many opportunities for enrichment, creating a new "bureaucratic" rich.

The roots of this ethnic imbalance lie in Biya's response to the April 1984 coup attempt. Convinced that Ahidjo's northerners were behind the plot, Biya cracked down hard on the northern community. Security forces arrested over 1,000 people and carried out many extra-judicial killings. Many elites from the south took this as a signal that Biya's power depended on their support. Biya is thought to listen to the informal Beti association known as the "Essingan Group", which exerts pressure on him to ensure the Beti's privileged access to jobs and resources.⁶⁶ But

⁶⁴ Crisis Group researchers encountered numerous examples of this link between party and state and the ways in which displays of loyalty, which generally remain insincere and careerist, are extracted. For example, an employee of a private company (but one which depended on contracts with the state) was disciplined for not having attended a day of celebration for the activities of the first lady, Chantal Biya, though attendance was ostensibly voluntary. Crisis Group interview, Bafoussam, March 2010. See also Charles Manga Fombad, "The Dynamics of Record-Breaking Endemic Corruption and Political Opportunism in Cameroon", in Mbaku and Takougang (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 371; and Francis B. Nyamnjoh, "Cameroon: A Country United by Ethnic Ambition and Difference", *African Affairs*, 1999.

⁶⁵ See Paul-Simon Handy, "Cameroon's Parliament and Council Elections: plus ça change...", Institute for Security Studies, August 2007.

⁶⁶ Crisis Group interview, journalist, Yaoundé, April 2009. See Konings and Nyamnjoh, *op. cit.*, p. 8, for an evaluation of this bias to the south in the Biya regime. This privilege exists only at elite level, as the populations of the South and East regions remain desperately poor despite the political access "their" elites enjoy, as Charles Ateba Ayene pointed out in his much commented on book, *Les paradoxes du 'pays organisateur' élites productrices ou prédatrices?: le cas de la province du Sud Cameroun 1982-2007* (Yaoundé, 2006).

he attempts to maintain a reasonable balance in the allocation of government posts, and indeed uses this notion of balance to play off rival groups and individuals against each other.

Biya's rule has faced periodic challenges from internal "reformist" movements, often associated with younger regime figures, in a supposed generational divide. The most significant split was in January 2003, when Pierre Mila Assouté, former central committee member, set down, with other reformists, a series of grievances in a "white book". Assouté is now in exile in France. More recently there has been talk of a "G11" movement of regime reformers. These movements have all failed.

The recent anti-corruption drive "Sparrowhawk" (*Opération Epervier*) is President Biya's response to the emergence of rival currents in the ruling party, enabling him to enforce loyalty through highly politicised prosecutions of regime barons. It is also partly motivated by external pressure and partly a response to public dissatisfaction. While the Epervier operation has gained some popularity, it is widely, and rightly, perceived as being politically driven, as all prosecution decisions rest with the president. Biya's approach is potentially dangerous for his own position, for while providing an element of control, this corruption drive also risks exacerbating regime fractures and depriving the CPDM of resources.⁶⁷ The swiftness with which the regime now labels any dissenting voices within the party as "subversive" demonstrates the nervousness and suspicions about emerging ambitions, with the president turning 77 at the start of 2010 and giving no clear signals as to whether he intends to stay in office.⁶⁸

The co-option of traditional chiefs into state power is at the heart of how the ruling party functions. This has included, since 1977, officially employing them as state "auxiliaries". In this way the regime, like colonial powers before it,

creates, re-moulds or co-opts (pseudo-) traditional leadership, depending on the local context.⁶⁹ As under colonialism, the chiefs have proven adept at turning this arrangement to their personal advantage.

While the abuse and manipulation of traditional chieftaincy by colonial and post-colonial powers have always been controversial, the situation has become deeply politicised and contentious since the early 1990s. Before that time, chiefs were simply assumed to be part of the government machinery. Now, however, they have been drawn into political disputes – at times on the side of the CPDM against other parties, at other times in disputes between CPDM factions. This has discredited both individual chiefs and the institution of chieftaincy in the eyes of many.⁷⁰ Local politics is often all the fiercer, as contesting central power is taboo within ruling party circles.

The 1996 decentralisation laws, which introduced local elections without modifying the powers of local administrators, have generated long-running disputes within a now very complex local governance structure (chiefs, local administrators, locally elected councillors and mayors). In areas of historically high labour migration, such as Douala, the politics of indigeneity, under the guise of "minority protection", has led to sustained antagonisms, as "locals" use legal means to push back gains made by migrants and their offspring in elections.⁷¹ Disputes have been particularly severe over land use.

In many circumstances, good traditional chiefs have played an important role in resolving local conflicts, for example over land. However, as their credibility has declined due to political manipulation from the centre, so has this conflict-resolution capacity. Added to this is a widespread feeling that the politicisation of local identities is sapping the national fabric and undermining the rule of law, reversing the gains made in the state-building period of the 1960s and 1970s. From the local to the national level, there is an increasing ethnicisation of issues such as state

⁶⁷ The length of Biya's rule and the inevitable frustrations this generates, make it hard to distinguish reform movements from the expression of personal political ambitions or frustrations. On regime splits, see "The People versus Biya", *Africa Confidential*, 14 March 2008. On the Epervier operation, see "Biya's Purge", *Africa Confidential*, 6 June 2008; and "'L'Epervier' a repris son envol", *Lettre du Continent*, 3 April 2008. Epervier, launched in 2006, has led to the investigation of more than 60 current and former senior officials and ministers, the most prominent being former Economy and Finance Minister Polycarpe Abah Abah and former Health Minister Urbain Olangouena Awono, both of whom are currently in custody. A subsequent Crisis Group briefing will look in more detail at intra-regime dynamics, including at the Epervier operation.

⁶⁸ For example, the secretary general of the CPDM recently stated at a party meeting that "the enemy is not far from us, he may even appear among us", quoted in *Mutations*, 5 November 2009.

⁶⁹ Crisis Group interviews, members of civil society and a traditional chief, Bafoussam, Bamenda and Douala, May 2009. See also Charles Nach Mback, "La chefferie traditionnelle au Cameroun: ambiguïtés juridiques et dérives politiques", *Africa Development*, 2000; Geschiere, op. cit.; and Nyamnjoh, op. cit., 1999. For historical aspects, see Mbembe, op. cit., chapters IV and VIII.

⁷⁰ Crisis Group interviews, church officials and civil society activist, Bamenda, May 2009.

⁷¹ The 1996 constitution (Article 57) states that local councils should reflect the "sociological composition" of their areas and that presidents of (yet to be created) regional councils should be "indigenous" to their areas. Local administrators have generally taken this as an opportunity to support indigenous populations, who are often, although not always, more favorable to the CPDM. See Mback, op. cit.

employment.⁷² This is one symptom among many of the regime's persistent bad faith and manipulation of the political landscape.

2. Opposition

Opposition parties have faced serious tests since their dramatic appearance in the early 1990s. The task of contesting the regime's style of governance and presenting a credible alternative has become harder, as the regime has perfected its techniques of authoritarian restoration. Yet the challenge is a vital one, for "when the opposition runs out of steam, what do the people have? Just the street".⁷³

Faced with apparent regime solidity and with its multiple uses and abuses of incumbency, opposition parties are left with various options. Demonstrating popular support on the street, consolidating a more institutional position (for example through parliament) and entering coalition governments with the CPDM have all been used to counter what they fear would otherwise be a growing irrelevance.⁷⁴

These contrasting strategies, along with deep-seated antagonisms between leaders and differences between their regional bases, have constantly thwarted attempts at coalition building. Following the 1992 legislative elections, the opposition would have had a majority in parliament if a relatively small party, the Movement for the Defence of the Republic (Mouvement pour la défense de la république, MDR), had not joined a government coalition. In 1997, the boycott of the presidential election was not adhered to by all; the participation of two opponents allowed Biya to legitimise his re-election. In 2004, protracted negotiations to nominate a single presidential candidate failed, as the SDF leader John Fru Ndi refused to accept a vote of opposition leaders. He claimed, with some justifi-

cation, that his far greater national profile made him the only credible single opposition candidate.⁷⁵

The SDF remains Cameroon's most important opposition party, having gained great popular credit across the country from willingness to challenge the regime in its "heroic" early phase. The party originated in networks of students, businessmen and dissidents in Europe in the 1970s and 1980s. It was founded in early 1990 by a dozen people then referred to as "Study Group 89" and now as the "Founding Fathers", the most important of whom was Siga Asanga. It was through his influence that Fru Ndi, a relative, took the party's helm.⁷⁶

The SDF presents itself as the consistent and principled opposition to Biya's regime and as representative of workers and farmers, in contrast to what it portrays as the CPDM's culture of bureaucratic privilege. Members proudly point out that it has never entered Biya's government.⁷⁷ From its inception, the SDF has had a close relationship with movements pressing for the rights of the Anglophone minority, and many individuals have been active in both. The Founding Fathers were themselves an Anglophone group that split off from other opposition politicians in 1990. Subsequently, the party's activism won genuine nationwide support. But it remains firmly rooted in the Anglophone Northwest Province, where it enjoys very strong backing from civil society and traditional social groups.⁷⁸

Fru Ndi's sympathy for the Anglophone cause is unmistakable.⁷⁹ He and his party argue, quite reasonably, that the Anglophone problem is merely a specific case of a wider problem of bad governance and exclusion of ordinary citizens from the fruits of economic growth. In policy terms, the issue was settled in 2000, when the party fully distanced itself from Anglophone demands for se-

⁷²The origins of this lie in regional quotas in public administration employment introduced in the 1970s to try to correct historical imbalances due to education levels. But the practice has deteriorated and become antagonistic, as the ethic of public service has declined. As a journalist and civil society activist put it, "minority protection policies end up with ethnicised factions throughout public administration". Crisis Group interviews, Douala, May, 2009; and academic, Yaoundé, March 2010.

⁷³Crisis Group interview, academic, Douala, May 2009.

⁷⁴George Ngwane expressed these possible approaches as, respectively, "Biya must go", "Biya must change" and "Biya must share". "The Opposition and their Performance of Electoral Power in Cameroon (1992-2007)", presentation at the Friedrich Ebert Foundation Forum, Yaoundé, August 2007. On the tensions in the SDF over the options of "the street" and parliament, see Mathias Nguini, "Le Social Democratic Front: un parti d'opposition entre charisme et bureaucratie", in Luc Sindjoun (ed.), *Comment peut-on être opposant au Cameroun?* (Yaoundé, 2004).

⁷⁵Cameroon's presidential elections consist of one round only, with the candidate who receives the highest vote winning, hence the importance of putting up a single opposition candidate. On the failure to do so in 2004, Crisis Group interviews, senior member of the 2004 opposition coalition secretariat, Yaoundé; and John Fru Ndi, Bamenda, May 2009.

⁷⁶Crisis Group interviews, political activists, Douala, May 2009. See also Krieger, *Cameroon's Social Democratic Front* op. cit., pp. 58-59; and Nguini, in Sindjoun (ed.), op. cit., p. 220. Asanga fell out with the party leadership in 1994. He died in 1998.

⁷⁷Crisis Group interview, political activist, Douala, May, 2009. This "radical opposition" image draws on specific historic links, as Asanga, for example, was the political protégé of Ntumazah, who led the Anglophone wing of the UPC (the One Kamerun Party) in the 1950s and 60s. Fru Ndi goes so far as to occasionally lay claim to the mantle of Um Nyobé, see Krieger, *Cameroon's Social Democratic Front*, op. cit., p. 106 (fn. 68).

⁷⁸Krieger, *ibid*, Chapter 2.

⁷⁹Crisis Group interview, John Fru Ndi, Bamenda, May 2009.

cession, opting instead to advocate a return to federalism, with the final form to be determined. But the association with the Anglophone cause and Fru Ndi's defiant refusal to learn French, preferring what he sees as the national language of pidgin English, allows the regime to portray the party as not only regional in scope, but also subversive in nature.

Since the early 1990s, the SDF's political fortunes have waned, and internal fissures have multiplied. An excellent mobiliser in times of crisis, Fru Ndi has been unable to grow the party in the longer term. The loss of momentum has become a vicious circle, particularly following the failure at the 2004 elections, as the population has lost hope of change and disengaged from party and electoral politics. At the same time, the regime has clawed back the party's electoral gains, leaving it in 2007 with just a third of the parliamentary seats it won in 2002 and pushing it back to its base in the North West Region.

Important splits occurred within a few years of the SDF's founding. Some members have left; others have been expelled through use of Article 8.2 of the party code.⁸⁰ Departures have most often come amid damaging public disputes with the leadership. Mahamat Souleymane, a key founding member, fell out with Fru Ndi in 1998 and left to form the short-lived Social Democratic Movement. The famous writer Mongo Beti, who was close to the SDF in the 1990s, left behind a withering critique of the party which was published one year after his death in 2001.

Perhaps most damaging of all was the loss of Yaya Saïdou Maidadi, the most impressive of the party's rising stars, who left in 2002. His departure was followed by a further major split in 2006. While some of those who left can easily be labelled as elitist and opportunist by the party hierarchy (such as the serial dissenter Ben Muna), this charge will hardly stick with Maidadi.⁸¹ SDF splits have more recently led to violence. In 2004 a fight broke out between SDF members and supporters of Bernard Muna's new party, resulting in one death. Fru Ndi, who was not present, is awaiting trial for involvement in this incident.

These splits point to deeper problems in the party's management. All those leaving have complained of undemocratic management and particularly of the key nominations committee. This in turn points to the problem of Fru Ndi's leadership, which as time passes looks increasingly like a lifelong position, in a cruelly paradoxical mirror image of Biya's role at the head of the regime.

All other opposition parties remain confined to an expression of regional grievance or personal ambition. The NUDP, led by Biya's first prime minister, Bouba Bello Maigari, represents the north and is tied in the popular perception to the legacy of Ahidjo. It entered Biya's government in 1997, seriously undermining the opposition's role as a means of pressure on the regime and a potential force for change.

The CDU has taken a consistent and principled stance against the government, but remains a vehicle for the personal ambitions of its leader, Adamou Njoya, with very little institutional depth. It has not been able to extend its reach beyond his home town of Fouban, where it remains solidly implanted.⁸² The UPC has been taken over by opportunists with no popular base. A few other parties, such as the Douala-based MANIDEM, maintain the UPC's radical tradition, while being blocked by the law courts from using the party's name.⁸³

B. PERIPHERIES AND NEIGHBOURS

The colonial creation of a core area of economic activity ("*Cameroun utile*") around the Douala-Bafoussam-Yaoundé triangle has left a highly uneven pattern of development. While many people in all areas feel excluded or marginalised from the state's clientelist networks, some areas, in particular the north and the east, have clearly suffered from serious economic neglect. However, the north and the Anglophone area are of special concern for Cameroon's future stability, as they are characterised by both economic neglect and specific historical grievances against the central state, generally expressed through the politics of communal identity.

⁸⁰ Article 8.2 allows the party leadership to expel anyone deemed to have diverged from the party line in public pronouncements.

⁸¹ See Ambroise Kom, *Mongo Beti Parle* (Paris, 2002), pp. 261-267; Krieger, *Cameroon's Social Democratic Front*, op. cit., Chapter 7; and Crisis Group interviews, SDF members and former members, Bamenda and Yaoundé, May 2009. The long list of important dissenters gives some idea of the nature of this problem for the party: Muna (1993 and 2006), Asanga (1994), Ambroise Kom (1994), Basile Kamdoun (1994), Charly Mbock (1995), Souleymane (1998), Jean Pierre Tchoua (1998), Maidadi (2002), long-standing Secretary General Tazoacha Asonyayi (2006) and Paulinus Jua (2006).

⁸² Adamou Njoya, a former Ahidjo minister, fell out with Biya in the 1980s and left the CPDM to eventually form the CDU. The origins of the party also lie in a dispute between his father and his uncle over the inheritance of a traditional title and the manoeuvres of the ruling party to block Adamou Njoya's own access to a traditional chieftaincy role. Crisis Group interview, journalist and former CDU activist, March 2009.

⁸³ This party, created in exile in the 1970s, was originally called UPC-MANIDEM (UPC-Mouvement africain pour la nouvelle indépendance et la démocratie). It is now known simply as MANIDEM. Crisis Group interview, leader of MANIDEM, Douala, May 2009.

1. The north

The three regions of northern Cameroon are climatically, socially and historically distinct from the south, but have played a significant role in the country's history.⁸⁴ The politicisation of local authorities, a growing problem of criminality that demonstrates the failure of the state to assure public order and lingering resentment over the violence of 1984 are all potential elements of conflict there.

The region was a peripheral part of the Fulani Sokoto Caliphate of the early nineteenth century, when Islamic micro states ("Lamidats") were formed.⁸⁵ Colonial rule reinforced their position and the most important Lamibe, especially those of Garoua and Maroua, remain the most powerful individuals in the region.⁸⁶

The complex relationship between Fulani and non-Fulani groups is at times a source of friction and conflict. For nearly 200 years, non-Fulani have occupied a subordinate position relative to the Lamibe and their auxiliaries. But many local inhabitants have been assimilated, becoming Fulani over generations, often via conversion to Islam. Others have depended on the Fulani for trade and employment opportunities. Some groups, however, have resisted Fulani hegemony, a resistance that is frequently expressed in adherence to Christianity, which was introduced in the area by colonisers in the course of the twentieth century. In addition, the Fulani community itself is divided between pastoralists, often called Mbororo, and the richer and politically more powerful urbanised Fulani.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ The three regions are Adamaoua, Nord, and Extreme Nord. The area constituted a single Northern Province until broken into three by President Biya in August 1983. It is the most densely populated area of Cameroon, but its agricultural population has suffered from serious environmental degradation since the droughts of the 1970s. It has the country's worst social indicators in terms of health, education and food security. Assessment by Agence française de développement, November 2007, obtained by Crisis Group and based in part on UNDP statistics.

⁸⁵ Lamidats are ruled by Lamibe (plural of Lamido), who are both spiritual and political rulers.

⁸⁶ See Gilbert L. Taguem Fah, "Le facteur peul, l'islam et le processus politique au Cameroun d'hier à demain", *Islam et sociétés au sud du Sahara*, 2001, pp. 84-87.

⁸⁷ The large number of non-Fulani ethnic groups in the area are sometimes referred to by the umbrella term "Kirdi", which is frequently used to indicate something or someone non-Islamic. However the equivalence sometimes drawn between Fulani-Islamic and non-Fulani-non-Islamic is misleading, as several important Islamised ethnic groups have lived in the area long before the arrival of the Fulani, especially in the far north around Lake Chad. "Kirdi" constitute at least half the population of the area, although due to the fluidity of ethnic identity, it is difficult to be precise. On relations between Fulani and non-

While the rise of newly educated Fulani who did not belong to ruling families (such as Ahidjo himself) challenged the social order in the 1950s and 1960s, the economic and political position of the Fulani elite was protected and enhanced under Ahidjo. The change of regime in 1982 was, therefore, seen as a challenge to their privileged position.

The introduction of multi-party politics further heightened tensions. The NUDP was created in 1990 by Ahidjo loyalists unhappy with Biya's rule. In its initial stages it had a nation-wide base, but it soon split. Following the departure of Sam Eboua (who was from the Littoral) in 1991, it became, under Bello Bouba Maigari, a vehicle for the expression of northern concerns. But not all in the north adhered to the Ahidjo legacy. Encouraged by the regime in Yaoundé, non-Fulani elites started to create their own parties, such as the MDR under Dakole Daissala. Furthermore, despite the NUDP's success in the north at parliamentary elections in 1992, some traditional rulers remained loyal to the CPDM, which continued to hold the region's purse-strings.

The combination of historic ethnic tensions, multi-party competition and the close relations between the ruling party and local elites has frequently led to violence. Killings in Meiganga in 1991, which arose from both local and national tensions, were an early example in the multiparty period.⁸⁸ In some instances, local elites, protected by the regime, have become a law unto themselves. The most extreme case involved the Lamido of Rey Bouba. His loyalty to the CPDM, combined with grievances at his rule, led to tensions with the NUDP in the mid-1990s. This culminated in the killing of a NUDP parliamentarian by his personal militia in 1996.⁸⁹ No judicial investigation or prosecution has been initiated.

The entry of the NUDP into Biya's government the following year and its subsequent decline have calmed the situation, but underlying tensions remain. It is clear that Biya, whose ascent owed so much to Ahidjo, still regards

Fulani, see Emily Schultz "From Pagan to Pullo, Ethnic Identity Change in Northern Cameroon", *Africa*, 1984; and Philip Burnham, *The Politics of Cultural Difference in Northern Cameroon* (Edinburgh, 1996).

⁸⁸ See Burnham, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-137.

⁸⁹ Claude Abé, "Les systèmes politiques traditionnels centralisés du monde rural face à la multiplication de l'offre partisane: l'expérience du Lamidat de Rey Bouba", presentation at conference « Les mondes ruraux à l'épreuve des sciences sociales », Université de Bourgogne, Dijon, 2006. On the position of the NUDP, see Taguem G. L. Fah, "Crise d'autorité, regain d'influence et problématique de la pérennité des lamidats peuls du Nord-Cameroun: étude comparée de Rey Bouba et Ngaoundéré", in Claude-Hélène Perrot and François-Xavier Fauvelle-Aymar (eds.), *Le retour des rois. Les autorités traditionnelles et l'Etat en Afrique contemporaine* (Paris, 2003).

the north as an important part of his political base. He has retained the support of compliant Fulani elite, while also encouraging the creation of rival parties based on smaller ethnic groups, who draw support from claims to supposed “indigeneity” and the advantages that now brings.⁹⁰

In the years since Biya came to power, public authorities in northern Cameroon have been severely tested by growing criminality. This trend is linked to environmental degradation, leading to declining opportunities in agriculture; to the availability of small arms; and especially to the continued instability in neighbouring Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR). Violent gangs of highway bandits (locally known as *coupeurs de route*), involved in theft of vehicles and cattle, are frequently made up of ex-combatants from these countries’ civil wars, although Cameroonian nationals are also implicated.⁹¹ In 2001 the authorities in Yaoundé reacted by creating a special unit of the army, the rapid intervention battalion (*Bataillon d’intervention rapide*, BIR). While it had some initial success, although at a significant cost in human rights terms, it has also led the bandits to change strategies, moving in particular into lucrative cross-border kidnapping.

The coup attempt of April 1984 was followed by a violent crackdown on northerners in the army. There has been no subsequent process of reconciliation. The possibility that members of the security forces still harbour desires for personal or communal revenge should not be discounted. Many northern elites continue to believe that power should revert to them following Biya’s presidency. This is frequently based on the argument that as regime insiders, as opposed to the “troublemakers” of the west, a rotation of power is theirs “by right”. In addition many elites from the south are fearful of reprisals in the event that power slips out of their hands. This idea that power is an indivisible commodity to be traded between Cameroon’s regions

has dangerous implications for stability when the presidency changes.⁹²

2. The Anglophone minority

Nearly 50 years after the reunification of British and French Cameroon, the linguistic and cultural fault line between the two communities remains and has even been exacerbated by failed constitutional reform and the absence of meaningful dialogue. While violence has been rare, the combination of long-term grievances and strongly-felt identity politics is dangerous.

The Anglophone problem exists at two distinct although interconnected levels. On the one hand, some Anglophones still consider that the deal struck at Fomuban in 1961 and provisions for an “equal federation” have not been held to by Yaoundé. Many elite Anglophones worked with Ahidjo’s government in the expectation that federalism would allow for the mutual respect of traditions and would lead to a union of genuinely equal parts. These hopes were frustrated, leading some Anglophones to see Yaoundé as an occupying power, especially since the dissolution of federalism in 1972.

On the other hand, most Anglophones see no problem in being both Cameroonian and Anglophone and have long since dropped the expectation of a truly equal union. But they expect their historical and cultural specificities to be properly taken into account by central government. Their frustrations are not so much concerned with the failures of the 1960s, but with the current day failures of a highly centralised state in its dealing with minority groups.

Anger has surfaced over issues such as the media, the economy and education. In the early 1990s, the attempts by the government to first dismantle and then control the exam board for the General Certificate of Education (GCE) led to a long struggle with Anglophone parents and teachers. On the economic front, the privatisation of various companies which grew up under British rule has also been a source of anger, as has been a lingering sense that Cameroon’s oil is being taken from Anglophone waters by French companies and to the benefit of the “Francophone regime”.⁹³

⁹⁰ On indigeneity, see Section IV.A.1 above. The tensions created by Biya’s political management of the north became apparent in the Maroua teacher training college affair. The college was created at the demand of the northern elite, who hoped to reserve a large majority of the places for their children. When many students from the south gained entry, they put pressure on Biya to declare a certain number of places reserved for northerners, which he did. Many saw this as an abuse of republican values of equality and merit, and other regions have subsequently demanded “their own” colleges. Meanwhile, the college in question remains under-resourced and unable to function properly. Crisis Group interview, Cameroonian journalist and political activist, Douala, May 2009.

⁹¹ See Saibou Issa, “La prise d’otages aux confins du Cameroun, de la Centrafrique et du Tchad”, *Polis*, 2006.

⁹² Crisis Group interviews, Cameroonian journalist, January 2009; and CPDM member, Yaoundé, March 2010.

⁹³ See Konings and Nyamnjoh, *op. cit.*, chapter 7. On the economic front, anger has been particularly acute as regards the Commonwealth Development Corporation, now Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC), which runs large plantations in the South West Region. Some communities there felt that its privatisation (announced in 1994) amounted to selling off their land as well as their economic heritage. The dispute lasted several years, culminating in the partial privatisation of the CDC in

The complaints of the Anglophone minority are in many respects justified. In the GCE affair, for example, the government demonstrated a disregard for Anglophone traditions, while in education more widely Anglophones are constantly disadvantaged by being pushed into the Francophone system as they move towards university. This is exacerbated by the continued dominance of Yaoundé University, which, despite the creation of new universities in 1992, remains the country's best resourced. Despite some efforts at bilingualism, it is clearly a francophone institution.

However, supposed economic marginalisation is not so clear-cut. Many Anglophone elites have done well in the higher reaches of Yaoundé's civil service.⁹⁴ Anglophone Cameroon is no more economically deprived than other regions of the country, in particular the north and the east. Its "marginalisation" is part reality, part perception, a concept whose particular potency derives from the sense that a single community with a specific history has been unjustly treated in the construction of the nation.

The political liberalisation of the early 1990s brought renewed hope among Anglophones that their concerns might be addressed. Elites, many of whom had worked with the Yaoundé government, began discussing how to press their cause.⁹⁵ In 1993, they formed the All Anglophone Conference (AAC), which organised a meeting of around 500 activists in Buea in April of that year. The resulting declaration remains the clearest and most forceful statement of Anglophone grievances. It supported a return to two-state federalism,⁹⁶ the position taken by the main

negotiating group (the Anglophone Standing Conference, ASC) which was formed after the Buea conference to argue the Anglophone case in the debate on constitutional reform. It failed, however, to significantly influence the constitutional revision process. The new constitution, promulgated in 1996, provides for decentralisation in the form of ten regions, a provision that was only enacted into law in 2008 and remains unrealised in practice in 2010.⁹⁷

This failure of constitutional reform and the fact that the regime continued to portray those seeking federalism as subversive led to a hardening of positions. In the mid- and late-1990s, various groups were formed which called for outright secession. They argued that the 1961 reunification was illegal ("an annexation"), as it was done without Anglophones being offered the option of full independence, and the subsequent constitution was not properly ratified according to the provisions of the UN trusteeship.⁹⁸

The most prominent of these groups are the Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL), which was very active among Anglophone students in the 1990s, the South Cameroons Restoration Movement (SCARM) and the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), often considered the umbrella organisation.⁹⁹ No negotiations have taken place between them and the government, despite some willingness on the part of the SCNC.

In the late 1990s, these movements, under pressure from the government and operating in a semi-clandestine manner, started to splinter. Some of the most dynamic leaders, such as Carlson Anyangwe, went into self-imposed exile. Internet sites operated from abroad became an important vehicle for propagating the secessionist message, but on the ground, momentum was lost. While government repression has undoubtedly occurred, some groups even came under suspicion of selling membership cards for use in asylum applications in the West.¹⁰⁰

2002, a sale which Anglophone movements still consider illegitimate.

⁹⁴ Some Anglophones still feel that these elites are as much responsible for the region's problems as the Francophones, because they have not acted in the region's interest, but have rather been co-opted into the regime. This has some basis, for example, in that Anglophone parliamentarians had, up to 1972, a collective veto power over laws passed through parliament, but never used it. See Ngoh, 1999, *op. cit.* It is also important to note that Anglophone elites are highly divided between those from the north-west grasslands and those from the coastal areas, divisions that the regime in Yaoundé is adept at encouraging.

⁹⁵ The most notable dissent of the time was that of John Foncha, who had stuck with the regime ever since he helped create the federal state in 1961. He resigned from the CPDM in 1990, complaining bitterly that Anglophones continued to be treated as "enemies in the house". Foncha subsequently argued the case for Anglophone Cameroon at the UN in 1995. See Konings, "Le 'Problème Anglophone' au Cameroun dans les années 1990", *Politique africaine*, 1996.

⁹⁶ Federalism, seen as a potential way of countering the extreme centralisation of power in the country, has much support in Anglophone areas and some among French speakers. But important differences remain between federalising the ten current regions into ten states, an intermediate four-state option and the

original two-state solution. The last section of the Buea declaration supported the two-state option, although it also described the federal arrangement of 1961 as "illegitimate". This foreshadowed some of the doctrinal differences between Anglophone movements which emerged later in the 1990s.

⁹⁷ See section III.B above.

⁹⁸ Crisis Group interview, Southern Cameroons National Council members, Bamenda, May 2009.

⁹⁹ Crisis Group interview, Anglophone activist, Douala, May 2009. The call for outright secession was first voiced in the 1980s by the "Ambazonia" movement, created by Gorji Dinka in 1985, and so called after an early British outpost in Cameroon.

¹⁰⁰ For declining fortunes of these movements, see Konings and Nyamnjoh, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-103. On the asylum issue, Crisis Group interview, former employee of a Western diplomatic mission, January 2009.

Beyond the fate of particular movements, dissatisfaction remains, and the problem of the Anglophone minority poses broader questions about how historical and cultural differences can be accommodated in a country whose government is still obsessed with a very 1960s idea of national uniformity.

Among ordinary people, relations between the two communities are generally good, even if understanding of the specific Anglophone grievances is often poor. But at elite level, both Francophones and Anglophones tend to act in ways that favour polarisation. Anglophone movements play up differences in order to mobilise people around their cause (the Buea declaration is a good example of this). Francophones continue to see the issue in terms of assimilation and take the view that providing Anglophones with opportunities to integrate into a Francophone-dominated public life is an act of generosity.

This dynamic of mistrust and polarisation has occasionally led to violence. SCYL members were apprehended in 1997 attempting to acquire explosives. Confrontations followed in which members of the security forces and Anglophone activists were killed. Further violence in 1999, when a small group of activists took over the Buea branch of the national radio and television station, and incidents in Kumba in 2001 took a similar course of amateurish subversion followed by a security crackdown.¹⁰¹

3. Relations with neighbours: diplomatic successes but remaining risks

In the minds of many Francophones, the Anglophone population is often, quite wrongly, associated with the large Nigerian migrant population (around one million). Relations with Nigeria have been marked by some periods of tension, but also by several episodes of successful diplomacy, of which the resolution of the Bakassi dispute is the most recent example.

Many people from the east of Nigeria (generally referred to in Cameroon as Igbos – the largest ethnic group of that region) settled in west Cameroon in the late colonial period. At reunification in 1961, they immediately became foreigners in a land many had inhabited for decades. Many Nigerian nationals today have lived all their lives in Cameroon, regularly renewing their foreign residency cards. Reunification left them more vulnerable in their relations with locals and with authorities but did not stop their success in business and trade (including in informal trade with Nigeria). The harassment they suffer from

Cameroonian authorities remains of great concern today to Nigerian nationals and officials.¹⁰²

Long-running concerns over the treatment of the Nigerian population have not prevented some periods of good relations between heads of state. In particular, in 1968, Ahidjo went against French pressure and did not support the Biafran secessionists in Nigeria's civil war. This decision deprived Biafrans of a potential rear base and was partly motivated by Ahidjo's own concerns about national unity and fears of secession.¹⁰³

However, following changes of regime in Nigeria, tensions arose in the early 1980s over the Bakassi peninsula, a small piece of potentially oil-rich land at the maritime end of the common border, and over some disputed villages around Lake Chad. Combining sensitive issues of territorial sovereignty, treatment of Nigerian nationals on Cameroonian soil and control of resources, the Bakassi dispute led to armed confrontation in 1981, 1993 and 1996. While Nigeria pointed to its actual control of the area since independence, the Cameroon side used Anglo-German treaties signed between 1885 and 1913 to support its claim to sovereignty.

In 1994, Cameroon took the case to the International Court of Justice, which ruled in its favour in 2002. Subsequent high-level contacts and diplomatic activity from the UN, France, the UK and the U.S. pushed an initially reluctant Nigeria to accept the ruling. The Greentree Agreement, signed by both sides in 2006, deals with the treatment of Nigerian nationals in the territory, and full Nigerian withdrawal was achieved in 2008.

The resolution is a major diplomatic achievement, demonstrating that the Cameroonian state can act competently and decisively when issues of national security are at stake. Participation in establishing the Gulf of Guinea Commission, an eight-nation regional development and security framework, also demonstrates its readiness to collaborate with neighbours to address common challenges.¹⁰⁴

However, risks remain, in particular the growth of on- and off-shore criminality, which in some cases has a political aspect. The Bakassi Freedom Fighters, an armed gang with many of the features of Niger Delta militants in Nigeria, claims to dispute Cameroonian sovereignty and represent the grievances of the Bakassi population. This is now a

¹⁰¹ See Konings and Nyamnjoh, *op. cit.*, chapter 4.

¹⁰² Crisis Group interview, Nigerian diplomat, Yaoundé, March 2010. See also Konings, "The Anglophone Cameroon-Nigeria Boundary: Opportunities and Conflicts", *African Affairs*, 2006.

¹⁰³ Crisis Group interview, former member of the National Defense Secretariat, Yaoundé, March 2010.

¹⁰⁴ The Gulf of Guinea Commission comprises Angola, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Nigeria, Republic of Congo and Sao Tome and Principe.

major concern for the government, which recently positioned a unit of the BIR in the area and initiated information sharing with the Nigerian military, with a view to future joint patrols.¹⁰⁵

Cameroon shares a long border with both Chad and the CAR, two countries that suffer from endemic conflict.¹⁰⁶ While it has kept a low diplomatic profile in the region, there are several important issues of mutual concern, such as lingering border demarcation disputes with Chad; oil and uranium prospecting along this border; the smooth functioning of the Chad oil pipeline; and the supply of goods from Douala port.

Cameroon suffers from criminality emanating from these two countries (see above) and substantial refugee presence, including 80,000 from CAR.¹⁰⁷ With porous borders and no sign of a long-term solution to these countries' conflicts, risks clearly exist, and the presence of the refugees is highly likely to eventually put a strain on local resources. But their presence has been well managed thus far, and broader diplomatic relations are good, marked by visits in the second half of 2009 to Yaoundé of both Presidents Bozizé and Déby. There are mixed security commissions, including at local level, although the one with the CAR is moribund.¹⁰⁸ Crucially, Cameroon is not part of the Central African "conflict system", and rebel groups from the east find no officially-sanctioned support.

V. IS CAMEROON FRAGILE?

People hostile to the Biya regime tend to portray Cameroon as a tinderbox waiting for a spark. Those more sympathetic argue that the country will muddle through as it has before, that centripetal forces will prove the stronger and that the number of educated professionals with a stake in the system is too great to allow things to collapse. The truth is most likely somewhere in the middle, but the risks are certainly real.

In many respects, Cameroon is a classic fragile state. On all measures, its institutions are weak – low participation of the population in the political process, very problematic selection of political elites and little functioning oversight of government.¹⁰⁹ Further, the regime still suffers from a significant legitimacy deficit – it is widely seen not as representative of any national aspirations, but as a collection of private interests.

The international community, focused on unstable countries in the region, just hopes Cameroon will muddle through. Although stagnant, the economy, highly turned to raw material exports provides significant revenues for many investors and donor countries.¹¹⁰ Wishing to advance their micro-level interests, they offer no coordinated front in the search for change.

While some maintain vocal demands for reform, most diplomats and aid donors in Yaoundé are brought into the regime's discourse, repeating in private that the opposition is really to blame for weak democracy and emphasizing a supposed reform-stability trade off. As they only spend two or three years in place, they often support government reforms in apparent ignorance of the failures of their predecessors.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ Crisis Group interview, Nigerian diplomat, Yaoundé, March 2010. A subsequent Crisis Group briefing will look at the actions of the BIR in more detail. For the security aspects of the Bakassi issue, see Ernest Claude Messinga, "Les forces armées camerounaises et souveraineté du Cameroun sur la presqu'île de Bakassi", in Boulaga (ed.), *L'état du Cameroun 2008*, op. cit.
¹⁰⁶ See www.crisisgroup.org for Crisis Group reporting on Chad and the CAR.

¹⁰⁷ See "Près de 18,000 nouveaux centrafricains réfugiés au Cameroun en un an (HCR)", Agence France-Presse, 2 March 2010.

¹⁰⁸ See "Cameroun-RCA la sécurité aux frontières préoccupe", *Mutations*, 9 December 2009.

¹⁰⁹ These indicative elements of institutional strength and weakness are taken from "Drivers of Fragility: What Makes a State Fragile?", UK Department for International Development working paper, London, 2005.

¹¹⁰ Cameroon's principle exports are nearly all primary commodities. They are, in descending order, oil, wood, cocoa, aluminium, cotton, bananas and coffee. Oil production has levelled off since the 1990s, although new finds, and especially new finds of gas, indicate that the energy sector is likely to continue to be key for government revenues. Oil accounted for just over 10 per cent of GDP in 2007, according to figures from the Economist Intelligence Unit.

¹¹¹ It was particularly striking to hear donors speak enthusiastically in early 2010 about the plans for changes to the electoral law, just over a year after President Biya completely undermined the new electoral commission by packing it with his supporters. Crisis Group interview, aid donor, Yaoundé, March 2010.

Donors still have considerable leverage. Their aid – 5 per cent of GDP – is significant, and the regime’s desire to avoid international pariah status is also important. Donors can and should use this to extract real reforms. But to go beyond the cat and mouse game of fake reform, there needs to be far better coordination between donors, clearer and stronger diplomatic messages and much better continuity in following up assistance programs. The international community needs to be more aware of the fragilities of Cameroon and of their potential consequences.

A. RESILIENCE

Despite its clear problems, the state does have some solidity. There are significant pockets of competence and professionalism, and the general functioning of institutions is far from the disintegration suffered by “failed states”. Equally, many people in the high reaches of the state, including the security sector, have witnessed the consequences of collapse in neighbouring countries, and they have also come through a system that emphasises unity at every turn. Whether through personal interests or to protect the regime (or, more likely, a combination), many are determined to avoid state collapse. There is, therefore, some degree of regime stability, which may make conflict less likely in the event of internal crisis or external shock.

Outside regime circles, there is a striking absence of organising actors, or causes, for anti-regime violence. In the 1950s, conflict centred around the independence struggle. In the 1990s, it centred around the fight for democracy. But the existence of formal democracy has now defused much of that mobilisation. Equally, with the decline of political parties, the weakness of civil society and the continuing divisions created by suspicions of collusion, there are very few organising groups that could transform micro-level discontent into national crisis. Cameroon does not, at least at present, suffer from armed political militia, as seen in Kenya or Nigeria, although growing violent criminality points to restless youth who could be manipulated by unscrupulous politicians.¹¹²

In many respects, the people have withdrawn from interactions with the state since the hey-day of the nation-building project in the 1960s and 1970s. Although the state continues to provide a range of services, access for the country’s poor has not improved. Expectations of what the state can provide have declined. Some institutions, such as traditional ethnic organisations, trade and saving cooperatives and religious groups, have taken up the job

of providing social cohesion. Although some, such as the church and traditional authorities, have suffered from politicisation, they are still sometimes able to defuse potential conflict.

The emigration of educated young people may further reduce the potential for conflict. Although emigration is more recent and not as extensive as in other African countries (partly because the regime has been afraid of allowing a significant exiled opposition to develop), it has increased since the economic downturn of the early 1990s. It is now quite normal for middle class families to have the majority of their children abroad. This is important not only for the networks of financial support such migrants provide for their families, but also in reducing the number of discontented and unemployed young people in the country, making widespread violent mobilisation less likely.¹¹³

Finally, many who are opposed to the regime see little gain to be made from violence. Harrowing memories of the guerrilla war of the 1950s remain and are often handed down through families (with the advice to “not get involved in politics”).¹¹⁴ Equally the regime’s sheer longevity gives it an aura of resilience, thereby reducing the constituency for political violence.

B. WEAKNESSES

1. Conflict factors

These elements of resilience should not deceive us as to the many factors that could tip Cameroon towards more open conflict. The country continues to demonstrate a pattern of blockage followed by crisis that has been observable since the 1950s. Indeed, the similarities between the violence of 1945, 1955, 1990/1991 and 2008 are striking. In all cases, political and economic grievances combined to put people on the street in the main urban centres of the south and the west, and this was followed by violent reaction on the part of the security forces, leaving many dozens dead.

¹¹² A subsequent Crisis Group briefing will look at the mobilisation of street level discontent in more detail. See also Marie Emmanuelle Pommerolle, “La démobilisation collective au Cameroun: entre régime post-autoritaire et militantisme extraverti”, *Critique internationale*, 2008.

¹¹³ Crisis Group researchers have met many families in this situation. A youth leader in Douala, who had been involved in the demonstrations against Biya in 2008, stated that it was difficult to mobilise young people, “as all those who remember the agitation of the 1990s have gone abroad”. Crisis Group interview, May 2009. The brain drain also has a negative impact on the country, by depriving it of its able work force, and can also, therefore, be understood as a factor of longer-term fragility.

¹¹⁴ Crisis Group interviews, families of former UPC militants, Bafoussam, May 2009; Douala, March 2010.

The crisis-blockage pattern is reinforced by the refusal of the regime to enter into meaningful dialogue, the decline of political opposition and the use of state violence to reassert weakening authority. It demonstrates a rigidity in relations between the state and its population that bodes ill for overcoming future challenges.¹¹⁵

Since the 1970s, Cameroon's economy has been "informalised", as stable employment has declined and more and more young people live by their wits in small-scale urban trade. In parallel the numbers of the very rich have increased. This growing class divide and the perception that wealth and success no longer depend on talent or work but on luck and political connections have proven highly damaging to the social fabric.

There is a very widespread perception that the country is being "looted" by its elites, who all send their money and children abroad. This is the cause of great anger and frustration among young people who struggle to find employment, start families and get on the first rungs of adulthood.¹¹⁶ As public service stagnates or deteriorates, inequalities are increasingly inherited, for example through the differences between under-resourced public universities and Cameroon's small number of high quality but frequently expensive private campuses.

Cameroon has a certain ethnic division of labour – some groups are strong in trade, others have done well in formal employment, for example. Although these distinctions are often more perception than reality, some in both regime and opposition use them to portray social and economic divisions as communal ones, and thereby to build local political bases. As a result, people often believe that one group is being favoured above another, that it may be "stealing" land, employment or other benefits.

This communal view of economic advantage and disadvantage is embedded in the way the country is governed and can be seen in tensions between Bamileke and Douala in Douala city, between Fulani and non-Fulani groups in the north, between Anglophones and Francophones and so forth. It originates in the "regional balance" politics of

the 1970s but is now encouraged by the regime through its emphasis on the different rights of indigenous and "stranger" groups and its politicisation of local traditional leaders. This is highly dangerous, as it can act as a multiplier of conflict in the event of crisis.

The politicisation of community relations, both at local and national levels, reduces capacity for managing conflict. Little has been done to address the lingering ethno-regional tensions, which can usually be traced back to a specific period of violence (the west in the late 1950s, the north in 1984), except to co-opt the elite of each group. The local elites themselves frequently use the discourse of ethnic difference for their own ends, creating suspicion and divisions where none existed before. The corrupt distribution of resources according to political favour, including among the senior members of the security forces, is dangerous. It creates dissatisfaction among those excluded, damages the legitimacy of local leadership and makes changes of power at local as well as national level more difficult to manage.

Relations between the security sector and the population are bad. Human rights abuses are frequent, often committed in the context of a push against criminality.¹¹⁷ There have been some successes, for example against highway robbers in the north. But the record is strikingly uneven, as demonstrated by the complete failure to respond to the spectacular attack by an armed gang on Limbe in September 2008.

Those who are the receiving end of state violence are often the very smallest fish, as in the notorious case of the "Bapenda 9", a group of young men abducted by security forces in Douala in 2001 and not seen again. Abuse is frequently committed to extract a bribe from the victim or the family, and impunity for members of the security forces is high. In such a context, lingering resentments over abuse of family members, experiences of torture and desires for revenge risk becoming further factors for conflict in the future.

Democracy is seen by many people not only as the right to choose their leaders, but also as a way of establishing legitimacy and agreeing the "rules of the game". Without such basic agreement, institutions and rule of law will have little depth. With democracy failing, Cameroon faces a serious problem in agreeing such rules.

Many in the regime have never believed that multi-party democracy is suitable for Cameroon, but they have little

¹¹⁵ As Susan Woodward put it, "the clearest sign of impending failure [of the state] is a credible challenge to the monopoly over the legitimate use of force ... *Equally important is the premature resort to force because the state lacks other instruments of enforcement*" (Italics ours). "Fragile States, Exploring the Concept", paper presented to the "Peace and Social Justice" meeting of the Ford Foundation, Rio de Janeiro, November 2004.

¹¹⁶ According to Cameroon's National Statistics Institute, youth unemployment was 13 per cent in 2005, but far higher in major urban centres. As a measure of unemployment rather than underemployment, this undoubtedly underestimates the extent of the problem.

¹¹⁷ Indicative material on human rights abuse can be found in reports of Amnesty International, the Fédération internationale des droits de l'homme and the Observatoire national des droits de l'homme au Cameroun.

to offer apart from continued labelling of opposition as subversive and a misguided nostalgia for the Ahidjo period.¹¹⁸ Modernising movements within the CPDM are always cut short at the point of challenging the association between state and party – indicating that pluralism is still unacceptable to the regime's higher reaches. As a consequence, the regime rarely if ever enters negotiations with political opposition in good faith, and few people in Cameroon, therefore, believe that change can come about through the rule of law.

The problem of the constitution is exemplary of this erosion of the rule of law. Through in effect maintaining two constitutions at the same time and selecting elements from each, the regime is deliberately creating legal fluidity that can be used to buy support. Such an approach is highly dangerous. In undermining the foundations of constitutional and legal rule, the regime may be creating the conditions for a chaos that could engulf it.

2. Scenarios

There are several routes by which conflict could arise in Cameroon, none mutually exclusive.¹¹⁹ The possibility of violence around the elections scheduled for 2011 cannot be discounted. Democratic demands have long been an important aspect of urban violence. Although hopes of democracy have declined in the last decade and a half, these risks are still very apparent. Another flawed electoral process that returns the same regime to power in the context of growing socio-economic frustration could open a significant cycle of anger and repression.

The current state of organisation for the elections does not bode well. Following the setting up of the electoral body ELECAM (Elections Cameroon) in 2008, which President Biya packed with his supporters, the exact legal relationship between this body and other actors in the electoral process, especially the interior ministry, is still far from clear. There is every chance that the regime will again create a legal fluidity to suit its own purposes, making the resolution of disputes more difficult.

Few now believe that the electoral process can be an opportunity for citizens to choose a new government, should they wish to do so. Many in the international community seem to accept this situation and are urging President Biya to in some way arrange his eventual succession

within the regime – either to hand over power smoothly, or to nominate someone to the post of constitutional successor who has the de facto power to take over when the time comes and is able to regulate the rivalries around the presidency and the party's nomination process for an eventual presidential candidate.¹²⁰

Given the fractious relations between ruling party barons and Biya's own memories of Ahidjo's fate in 1983, it is highly unlikely that he will adequately arrange his succession or that his successor (chosen or not) will have the necessary legitimacy to consolidate his or her position. Biya is, therefore, likely to leave behind a dangerously fluid legal and political situation. From there, two scenarios are possible – that the current elites find a consensus and pull through in charge, or that security forces intervene, either in an organised way or through junior officers.

This last eventuality should not be excluded. In Guinea, the loss of faith in the constitution under Conté paved the way for a military take-over on his death in December 2008, with disastrous consequences.¹²¹ Cameroon cannot be directly compared to Guinea, whose institutions were exceptionally weak and where respect for rank in the army had all but disappeared by the end of 2008. However, there are similarities, in particular that few Cameroonians believe a constitutional path can be assured in the event of a change at the top. Force has always played a critical role in the establishment and consolidation of regime power. The frustrations of the population are such that a young populist, whether from the army or backed by part of it, could come to power promising to sweep the stable clean.

Cameroon may confront these short and medium term risks without significant violent conflict. But even then, a longer-term deterioration cannot be excluded. In Côte d'Ivoire, the fight for the succession of President Houphouët-Boigny, in a highly centralised state in many ways similar to Cameroon's, laid the conditions for an eventual outbreak of civil war eight years after his death. In addition, Côte d'Ivoire's clientelist political system was unable to cope with sharp economic decline, leading to communal and elite antagonisms. If the broader questions of how Cameroon is governed and the growing political and eco-

¹¹⁸ A Crisis Group researcher interviewed a very senior member of the CPDM just after the chaos of the 2002 local and parliamentary elections, who expressed the view, likely partly sincere and partly self-serving, that this chaos demonstrated that multi-party politics could not work in Cameroon.

¹¹⁹ A subsequent Crisis Group briefing will assess some of these risks in more detail.

¹²⁰ Crisis Group interviews, diplomats and aid donor officials, Yaoundé, March 2010. The current constitutional successor is the head of the National Assembly, Cayaye Yeguje Djibril, who has little political base. It is very unlikely that he would be able to take de facto power in the event of a transition. As most observers believe that President Biya will stand in the 2011 elections, the succession issue is principally related to his age (77 in 2010) and to fears that declining health or sudden demise could destabilise the country.

¹²¹ On Guinea, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°58, *Guinea: The Transition Has Only Just Begun*, 5 March 2009.

conomic gulf between rulers and ruled are not addressed, the country may face the prospect of what one academic called “rotting on its feet”, which in the longer term could lay the conditions for civil conflict.¹²²

VI. CONCLUSION

The most significant risk for Cameroon is that of the “perfect storm”. In the past, trouble has come either from the street (1945, 1955, 1991, 2008) or from the palace (1983, 1984). But it cannot be excluded that the two elements could combine and that trouble at one level could multiply across the country, as entrepreneurs of violence exploit opportunities and turn communities against each other. A change of president is the most likely single spark. The risk is particularly acute, as after only two presidents in 50 years, there is a widespread perception that the next incumbent will take power for a long time. The stakes could hardly be higher.

To prevent such a scenario, Cameroon’s ruling elite need to stick to the rules, including those they have themselves signed up to. While the formal aspects of democracy are important, the foundation needs to be re-built, and that requires a fundamental change of heart, principally on the part of the regime and ruling elites. Without this change of heart, the distance between the population’s expectations and the regime’s refusal to change could prove too much for Cameroon’s much vaunted stability.


Dakar/Nairobi/Brussels, 25 May 2010

¹²² Crisis Group interview, academic, Yaoundé, March 2010.

APPENDIX B

MAP OF CAMEROON 1919-1961



 Southern Cameroons joined Cameroon in 1961

 Northern Cameroons joined Nigeria in 1961

APPENDIX C

HISTORY OF CAMEROON – TIMELINE

- July 1884**
German protectorate established.
- 1907**
Governor Von Puttkamer is recalled to Germany for brutality inflicted on local people.
- 1915**
Germans pushed out of Cameroon by the British and the French during World War One.
- 1916**
The British and the French partition the Cameroonian territory (March).
- 1922**
Cameroon is divided into two League of Nations mandate territories.
- 1924**
The indigénat laws are introduced in French Cameroon.
- 1938**
The Jeunesse Camerounaise Française (JEUCAFRA) is established in French Cameroon.
- 1940**
Colonel Leclerc takes over Douala for the Free France Movement (August).
- 1941**
The Cameroon Youth League is established in British Cameroon.
- 1944**
De Gaulle states his relatively liberal position on colonial rule at the Brazzaville Conference.
- 1945**
Strikes in Douala are violently repressed by the French colonial authorities (September).
Elections take place for the first French Constituent Assembly: two representatives are elected from French Cameroon (21 October).
- 1946**
The League of Nations mandates are replaced with the UN trusteeship.
The indigénat laws in French Cameroon are abolished.
- Elections take place for the second French Constituent Assembly: two representatives from French Cameroon (2 June).
First elections take place for the Cameroonian Local Assembly (ARCAM) in French Cameroon (22 December).
- 1948**
The Union des Peuples du Cameroon (UPC) is formed in French Cameroon (April).
- 1949**
The Cameroon National Federation (CNF) and the Kamerun United National Congress (KUNC) are formed in British Cameroon.
- 1951**
The Bloc démocratique camerounais (BDC) is formed under Louis-Paul Aujoulat in French Cameroon.
The first elections for the Eastern Region House of Assembly are held in British Cameroon as part of the Federation of Nigeria administered by the British colonial power (August/December).
- 1952**
Ruben Um Nyobé, the UPC's secretary general, make a speech before the Fourth Committee of the UN General Assembly calling for a date for Cameroon's independence (December).
- 1954**
Southern Cameroons (the southern part of British Cameroon) is granted quasi-regional status by the British within the Federation of Nigeria.
- 1955**
John Foncha breaks away from the KNC and creates the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP).
Riots in Douala are put down by the French authorities (May). The French administration bans the UPC, holding it responsible for the riots.
- 1956**
The first elections for the Cameroonian Legislative Assembly (ALCAM) are held in French Cameroon (23 December). The UPC is banned from contesting. Violence surrounding
- elections leads to the beginning of guerrilla warfare by the UPC.
- 1957**
Elections for the Southern Cameroons House of Assembly are held: the KNC wins by a narrow margin, and Emmanuel Endeley becomes prime minister.
- 1958**
Ahmadou Ahidjo breaks away from the Bloc démocratique camerounais and founds the Union camerounaise (UC) in French Cameroon.
Southern Cameroons is granted full regional status by the British within the Federation of Nigeria.
Um Nyobé is killed by French-Cameroonian joint military forces, leading to weakening and fragmentation of the UPC.
- 1959**
Elections for the Southern Cameroons House of Assembly in British Cameroon are held: the KNDP wins and Foncha becomes Prime Minister (23 January).
- 1960**
French Cameroon becomes independent and is renamed "Republic of Cameroon" (1 January).
Constitutional referendum is held in Francophone Cameroon (21 February).
First legislative elections are held in Francophone Cameroon (4 April).
Indirect presidential elections are held: Ahidjo elected President of the Republic of Cameroon (5 May).
The KNDP is formed as a result of the merger between the KNC and the KPP in British Cameroon (May).
Foncha and Ahidjo agree on a union of both Cameroons (Francophone and British) on a federal basis, should the Southern Cameroons vote for reunification in the plebiscite.
- 1961**
UN organises a plebiscite over future of British Cameroon, with options to reunify with Francophone Cameroon or become part of newly independent Nigeria: Northern Cameroons opt to

join Nigeria, whereas Southern Cameroons opt to join the Republic of Cameroon (11 February).

Ahidjo and Foncha agree on the new federal system at the Fouban Constitutional Conference (July).

The Parliament of the Republic of Cameroon (Francophone Cameroon) approves the final version of the federal constitution (1 September).

The former British trusteeship territory of the Southern Cameroons and the Republic of Cameroon join together to form the Federal Republic of Cameroon, made up of two states, West Cameroon and East Cameroon (1 October). Foncha becomes prime minister of the state of West Cameroon and federal vice president.

1962

Ahidjo and Foncha: agree not to enter into alliances or seek supporters in the other's state.

The main UPC legal political leaders are arrested in Yaoundé (January). Ahidjo's four leading challengers are imprisoned (January).

Ahidjo replaces the Nigerian pound in West Cameroon with the CFA franc.

1963

West Cameroon withdraws from the Commonwealth.

1964

Ahidjo replaces the West Cameroon imperial system of weights and measures with the East Cameroon metric system.

1965

Augustin Jua replaces Foncha as prime minister of West Cameroon: Foncha's leadership of the KNDP is challenged.

1966

The one-party system is established through creation of the Cameroon National Union (CNU).

1968

Jua is replaced by Salomon Muna as prime minister of West Cameroon.

1970

Foncha is replaced by Muna as federal vice president.

The remaining UPC guerrilla leaders and Archbishop Albert Ndongmo are arrested (April).

1971

UPC leader Ernest Ouandié is executed (January).

Archbishop Ndongmo is sentenced to death (January), but the sentence is commuted to life imprisonment and then to exile after a presidential pardon.

The country's three major trade union confederations dissolve themselves and are reconstituted into the trade-union wing of the CNU.

1972

A constitutional referendum leads to the abolition of the federal institutional structure and establishment of a unitary state (20 May). The post of prime minister is abolished.

1975

The post of prime minister is restored, and Paul Biya is appointed.

1982

Ahidjo resigns from the presidency, retaining the position of CNU president (4 November).

Prime Minister Paul Biya becomes president (6 November). First reshuffle of government takes place.

1983

The third reshuffle of government, sidelining Ahidjo loyalists, leads to tensions between Ahidjo and Biya (18 June).

Biya announces the discovery of a plot to overthrow him, led by northerners and instigated by Ahidjo (22 August).

Biya convenes an emergency CNU congress to elect the new party president. He is unanimously elected (14 September).

Ahidjo is tried in absentia, convicted and given a presidential pardon.

A law allowing multiple candidacies for the presidential elections is introduced (November).

1984

Presidential elections are won by Biya with 99 per cent of the popular vote (14 January).

The post of prime minister is again abolished (January).

A coup attempt led by northerners in the presidential guard is put down by loyalist forces (4 April).

1985

At the Bamenda congress: CNU renewal culminates in the creation of the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) (March).

The seventh reshuffle of government since November 1982 sees the removal of ten ministers and

reorganisation of the country's ten governorships (August).

1986

Diplomatic ties with Israel are re-established.

1990

Yondo Black attempts to form a new political party but is arrested along with other pro-democracy activists. Anti-democracy demonstrations in Yaoundé are organised by the Biya regime (March-April).

John Fru Ndi creates the Social Democratic Front (SDF). The founding meeting is violently put down by the army, with six activists killed (26 May).

Anti-subversion laws are repealed by the regime (July).

Multi-party democracy is formally authorised (December).

1991

General strike and "ghost towns" movement takes place to protest Biya's refusal to set up a sovereign national conference (March-August).

The National Assembly grants a general amnesty to all political prisoners, and the post of prime minister is reintroduced (April).

"Tripartite meeting" takes place to debate the transition to democratic rule (October-November).

1992

First multi-party legislative elections are boycotted by most opposition forces (1 March).

Paul Biya is elected president by a narrow margin (11 October). International observers report "serious flaws" in the presidential election. John Fru Ndi rejects the results and declares himself the real winner. Post-election riots in the Northwest Province are crushed by a military crackdown.

1993

The All Anglophone Conference (AAC) outlines a common Anglophone stand on constitutional reforms. The Buea Declaration lists Anglophone grievances (April).

1994

Second All Anglophone Conference (AAC II) reiterates the Anglophone goal of federalism in the first instance and the intention of seceding if the Biya regime fails to engage in

meaningful constitutional talks (April-May).

The Anglophone Council is renamed Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC) (August).

President Biya creates a Consultative Committee on Constitutional Reform (December).

1995

SCNC sends delegation to the UN to file a petition against “the annexation of the Southern Cameroons by the Republic of Cameroon and to commit the international community to Southern Cameroon” (June).

Cameroon is admitted into the Commonwealth (October).

1996

A new constitution is promulgated, providing for the creation of regional councils and of a second chamber, the Senate, partly made up of representatives of the new regions.

First local elections take place (January).

1997

Presidential elections see Paul Biya re-elected president (92 per cent of the votes). The SDF and the CDU boycott.

Legislative elections (17 May): RDPC 109 seats; SDF 43; NUDP thirteen; UDC five; MDR, UPC and MLJC one each.

The NUDP enters government.

2004

Paul Biya is re-elected president with 75 per cent of the votes (October).

2006

Alphonse Siyam Siwé, former minister of energy and water and former director of the port of Douala is arrested and sentenced to 30 years in prison for corruption.

2007

Legislative elections are held (July). The CPDM wins 153 seats, the SDF 16, the NUDP 6 and the CDU 4.

2008

Riots occur in Yaoundé, Douala, Bamenda and other major cities to protest high fuel and food prices and President Biya’s plan to remove the constitutional provision imposing a two-term limit for the presidency (February).

The former economy minister, Polycarpe Abah Abah, and the former health minister, Urbain Olinguena

Awono, are arrested on accusation of embezzlement (April).

The parliament amends the constitution, removing the two-term limit for the presidency (April).

The former secretary general of the presidency, Jean-Marie Atangana Mebara, is arrested for embezzlement (August).

APPENDIX D

ACRONYMS

AAC	All Anglophone Conference
ALCAM	Assemblée législative du Cameroun
ARCAM	Assemblée représentative du Cameroun
ASC	Anglophone Standing Conference
BDC	Bloc démocratique camerounais. A pro-colonial political party created by French doctor Louis Paul Aujoulat in 1951 to support French administration.
BIR	Bataillon d'intervention rapide. Elite anti-banditry squad created in 2001.
CAR	Central African Republic
CDC	Commonwealth Development Corporation/Cameroon Development Corporation
CDU	Cameroon Democratic Union. Medium-sized opposition party created by Adamou Njoya in the early 1990s.
CNF	Cameroon National Federation
CNU	Cameroonian National Union. The ruling and single party from 1966 to 1985.
CPDM	Cameroon People's Democratic Movement. The ruling party, its name was changed from CNU in 1985.
CPNC	Cameroon People's National Congress
CU	Cameroonian Union. The ruling party in French Cameroon 1960-1966, led by Ahidjo. Became the CNU in 1966.
CUC	Cameroon United Congress
CYL	Cameroons Youth League
ELECAM	Elections Cameroon
GCE	General Certificate of Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HIPC	Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JEUCAFRA	Jeunesse camerounaise française
KNDP	Kamerun National Democratic Party. One of the most important parties in 1950s British Cameroon, headed by John Foncha.
KUNC	Kamerun United National Congress
MANIDEM	Mouvement africain pour la nouvelle indépendance et la démocratie
MDR	Mouvement pour la défense de la république
SCARM	South Cameroons Restoration Movement
SCNC	Southern Cameroons National Council. The main umbrella organisation pressing for secession of Anglophone Cameroon.
SCYL	Southern Cameroons Youth League
SDF	Social Democratic Front. The largest opposition party, created in 1990 by John Fru Ndi.
SEDOC	Service de Documentation
NUDP	National Union for Democracy and Progress. The country's third largest political movement, with a base in the north.
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICAFRA	Union camerounaise française
UPC	Union des peuples du Cameroun. The liberation movement of the 1950s, crushed in the 1960s, and now a vehicle for minor opportunistic politicians.

APPENDIX E

ELECTORAL RESULTS – 1992-2007¹²³

Date	Body	Results	Notes
1 Mar 1992	National Assembly (180 seats)	CPDM 88 seats; NUDP 68; MDR 18; UPC 6.	The SDF and the CDU boycotted the poll.
11 Oct 1992	Presidency	Paul Biya 39.98%; John Fru Ndi 35.97%; Bello Bouba Maigari 19.22%; Adamou Njam Njoya 3.62%	International observers described it as “widely flawed”.
17 May 1997	NA (180 seats)	CPDM 109 seats; SDF 43; NUDP 13; CDU 5; MDR 1; UPC 1; Mouvement pour la libération de la jeunesse camerounaise (MLJC) 1; Vacant 7.	The Supreme Court cancelled the results in seven constituencies due to serious irregularities. CPDM won all seats in re-runs, thus increasing its representation in the National Assembly to 116.
12 Oct 1997	Presidency	Paul Biya 92.57%; Henri Hogbe Ndlend 2.50%; Samuel Eboua 2.44%; other candidates 2.49%	The SDF, NUDP and UDC boycotted the poll; presidential term extended from five to seven years through the 1996 constitutional reform.
30 June 2002	NA (180 seats)	CPDM 133 seats; SDF 21; CDU 5; UPC 3; NUDP 1.	The Supreme Court nullified the results for seventeen seats due to various irregularities. By-elections were held on 15 September 2002 to fill the vacant seats; the RDPC won sixteen, the SDF one.
11 Oct 2004	Presidency	Paul Biya 75.23%; John Fru Ndi 17.12%; Adamou Ndam Njoya 4.71%; other candidates 2.94%.	
22 July 2007	NA (180 seats)	CPDM 140 seats; SDF 14; NUDP 4; UDC 4 Mouvement Progressif (MP) 1.	Seventeen seats left vacant after the Supreme Court annulled elections in five districts for alleged fraud. Partial re-run on 30 September giving the following results: RDPC 13; SDF 2; NUDP 2.

¹²³ In all elections in this period, the voting age has been twenty. Eligibility is at 23 for the National Assembly and 35 for the presidency. Presidential candidates must be Cameroonian by birth, and National Assembly candidates must be citizens.

APPENDIX F

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 130 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a twelve-page monthly bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in all the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on the website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policy-makers around the world. Crisis Group is co-chaired by the former European Commissioner for External Relations Christopher Patten and former U.S. Ambassador Thomas Pickering. Its President and Chief Executive since July 2009 has been Louise Arbour, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and Chief Prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda.

Crisis Group's international headquarters are in Brussels, with major advocacy offices in Washington DC (where it is based as a legal entity) and New York, a smaller one in London and liaison presences in Moscow and Beijing. The organisation currently operates nine regional offices (in Bishkek, Bogotá, Dakar, Islamabad, Istanbul, Jakarta, Nairobi, Pristina and Tbilisi) and has local field representation in fourteen additional locations (Baku, Bangkok, Beirut, Bujumbura, Damascus, Dili, Jerusalem, Kabul, Kathmandu, Kinshasa, Port-au-Prince, Pretoria, Sarajevo and Seoul). Crisis Group currently covers some 60 areas of actual or potential conflict across four continents. In Africa, this includes Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe; in Asia, Afghanistan, Bangladesh,

Burma/Myanmar, Indonesia, Kashmir, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, North Korea, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan Strait, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan; in Europe, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Georgia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Russia (North Caucasus), Serbia and Turkey; in the Middle East and North Africa, Algeria, Egypt, Gulf States, Iran, Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen; and in Latin America and the Caribbean, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti and Venezuela.

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May 2010

APPENDIX G

CRISIS GROUP REPORTS AND BRIEFINGS ON AFRICA SINCE 2007

CENTRAL AFRICA

Congo: Staying Engaged after the Election, Africa Briefing N°44, 9 January 2007 (also available in French)

Northern Uganda: Seizing the Opportunity for Peace, Africa Report N°124, 26 April 2007

Congo: Consolidating the Peace, Africa Report N°128, 5 July 2007 (also available in French)

Burundi: Finalising Peace with the FNL, Africa Report N°131, 28 August 2007 (also available in French)

Northern Uganda Peace Process: The Need to Maintain Momentum, Africa Briefing N°46, 14 September 2007

Congo: Bringing Peace to North Kivu, Africa Report N°133, 31 October 2007 (also available in French)

Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State, Africa Report N°136, 13 December 2007 (also available in French)

Congo: Four Priorities for Sustainable Peace in Ituri, Africa Report N°140, 13 May 2008 (also available in French)

Burundi: Restarting Political Dialogue, Africa Briefing N°53, 19 August 2008 (also available in French)

Chad: A New Conflict Resolution Framework, Africa Report N°144, 24 September 2008 (also available in French)

Central African Republic: Untangling the Political Dialogue, Africa Briefing N°55, 9 December 2008 (also available in French)

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