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Curbing the Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon

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REPORT



Forum: Advisory Panel on the Question of Central Africa (APQCA)

Issue: Curbing the Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon

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Introduction

The Anglophone Crisis is an armed conflict taking place in Cameroon that has deep roots in the country's history. The two sides of the conflict are the Cameroonian government and a separatist self-declared state called Ambazonia. The issue can be traced all the way back to the Western colonization of Cameroon. Modern-day Cameroon was colonized by two colonial powers, the British and the French. While most of today's Cameroon was colonized by the French, the region known as Southern Cameroon was colonized by the British. The socio-cultural differences between these two parts of the country and the lack of representation of Anglophones in the Cameroon government are what led to this war crisis. So far this war has taken the lives of 300,000 people and displaced many more. Although the COVID-19 outbreak has decreased the amount of fighting, due to neither of the sides not giving any incentives, and the lack of negotiations, the issue is still an ongoing one.

Definition of Key Terms

Anglophone: According to the Cambridge Dictionary, an Anglophone can be defined as “a person who speaks English, especially in countries where other languages are also spoken” (Cambridge Dictionary). It is vital that experts understand the cultural difference between the Anglophone part of the country and the rest of it.

Francophone: According to the Cambridge Dictionary, a Francophone can be defined as “speaking French as the main or official language” (Cambridge Dictionary).

Interim Government: According to the Bangkok Post, Interim Government can be defined as “a government that is intended to last only a short time until a permanent government is chosen” (Bangkok Post). In this specific issue, the Interim Government refers to a side in the issue. They define themselves as the interim government of the unrecognized state of Ambazonia.

Ambazonia: Officially known as the Federal Republic of Ambazonia, a self declared Anglophone state in Cameroon (Pan African Visions).

General Overview

As previously mentioned, the issue has colonial roots. The sociocultural division in the nation can be traced back to the colonial period where both the British and the French colonized Cameroon. The divide between these two parts of the country grew stronger and stronger, building up tension. For many years, the Anglophone part of the nation was not represented in Cameroon politics, both of the presidents of Cameroon (President Paul Biya has been in the position since 1985) are from the Francophone part of the nation, political entities from the region were disrupted by the police, closed by the Cameroon law judicial system and according to Amnesty International the Anglophone politicians were tortured. The straw that broke the camel's back was protests that erupted in 2016. Protests started when the Cameroon Government appointed Francophone judges to Anglophone regions, mainly Southern Cameroon. One other reason for the protests was that the schools in the Anglophone regions were forced to give education in French. The Cameroon Government responded with police forces which caused tensions in the region to rise even further. The government arrested multiple protestors and called them a “security threat” (the Standard Tribune). After this, in 2017 the Ambazonia Governing Council, a political group formed by separatist groups, formally declared war against Cambodia and created the Ambazonia Defence Forces (ADF), a military group fighting for the independence of Ambazonia. During the same year, the Interim Government of Ambazonia was also established. Unlike the Ambazonia Governing Council, the Interim Government believed that the issue could be resolved with diplomacy and there was no need for an army. For the rest of the year 2017, the ADF and the Cameroon Armed Forces were in constant guerilla warfare.

The year 2018 had a rocky start for the Interim Government, as many of its leading politicians were arrested by the Cameroonian government. The most important figure to be arrested was Sisiku Julius Ayuk Tabe, the leader of the Interim Government and the self-proclaimed president of Ambazonia. This led many supporters of the Interim Government to flee to Nigeria, creating a humanitarian crisis. Furthermore, it also led the Interim Government to create its own military called Ambazonia Self-Defence Council (ASC). Meanwhile, the Ambazonia Governing Council and the ADF carried out attacks against both the Cameroon Armed Forces and villages that were close to the Cameroon Government. On March 3rd, the biggest battle of the conflict was fought which led to casualties on both sides. The Cameroon Government won the battle and claimed that they were able to free hostages from Cameroon, Tunisia, and Switzerland. Although the Ambazonia Governing Council denies these claims, this and the fact that they were targeting villages diminished their reputation. In the presidential elections that year many crises took place. First, the ADF and the Cameroon Armed Forces clashed in many locations, creating unrest in civilians. This led to a voter turnout of less than %10. Furthermore, both the incumbent president Paul Biya and Maurice Kamto, a candidate more favorable to the Anglophone people declared victory. Paul Biya came on top and ordered the arrest of Maurice Kamto and his presidential campaign team. Also, John Fru Ndi's -a politician once again favored by Anglophone people- house was burned down.

In 2019 clashes between Ambazonia militias and the Cameroon Armed Forces continued. Lockdowns were regularly ordered in South Cameroon by the separatists in order to show the region's sovereignty. Another side came into the conflict named the Southern Cameroons Liberation Council (SCLC). They were a middle way between the Interim Government and the Ambazonia Governing Council. However, they did not have their own military presence so when they requested a long

lockdown, they were shut by the ASC. In June, Switzerland offered to be a mediator and asked both sides (or in this case, the many sides) to start negotiations. Although the international community preached this attempt, it never took place as the Interim Government had internal conflicts and the Ambazonia Governing Council flat out rejected the offer. The same year, the first-ever actual negotiations took place. Named the Major National Dialogue, the Cameroon Government offered to make some incentives. The SCLC and the Ambazonia Governing Council rejected to take part and the Interim government only accepted if the jailed opposition and separatist leaders were released. This led the government to release Maurice Kamto. Although most sides did not take part in the negotiations, and it had no solid solution for the issue it was regarded by international organizations as successful for starting these conversations. However, the conflict only got more violent from there. On new year's eve, both President Paul Biya and the president of the Interim Government, Sisiku Julius Ayuk Tabe gave a speech at the same time claiming both assuring that the conflict was just starting.

Lastly, in 2020 two major events happened other than the ongoing violence. First, the parliamentary elections took place. Although the Cameroon Government tried their best to ensure that this election wasn't violent like the 2018 presidential elections, they couldn't do it. Once again violence all across the nation led to a very low voter turnout. The other important development was the arrival of the COVID-19 virus to Cameroon. With the arrival of the COVID-19, another separatist organization declared a ceasefire. The Interim Government, SCLC, and the Ambazonia Governing Council said on the condition that the Cameroon army would be confined to their bases they would also declare a ceasefire. However, a separatist attacked the Cameroon army before separatists and the Cameroon Government agree on a ceasefire, which then led the war to once again continue. Most recently, due to an increase in the COVID-19 cases, the government has once again met with Sisiku Julius Ayuk Tabe in order to agree on a ceasefire. This decision was criticized by SCLC and the Ambazonia Governing Council who saw Ayuk Tabe as "corrupted" for doing this. There has been no ceasefire yet, but one could come up in the very first days of 2021 (The New Humanitarian).

The conflict had a lot more violent events that include a prison riot, the kidnapping of politicians, hijacking of planes but mentioning every single event would hinder the effectiveness of this chair report. Therefore experts should do further research before coming to the conference. Overall, the conflict is still a very violent one that needs to be resolved as soon as possible.

Timeline of Events

October 6, 2016	<i>Protests against the appointment of Francophone judges started in Southern Cameroon.</i>
September 2017	<i>The Ambazonia Governing Council declared war against the Cameroon government and deployed its own military, the ADF.</i>
October 1, 2017	<i>The Interim Government was established.</i>

October 7, 2018	<i>The presidential elections took place with a lot of violence.</i>
June 2019	<i>Switzerland offered to be a mediator between the sides in order to solve the issue. The negotiations never took place.</i>
September 30 - October 4, 2019	<i>The Major National Dialogue took place.</i>
February 9, 2020	<i>The parliamentary elections took place with a very low turnout.</i>

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The biggest problem with this issue is the lack of attempts to solve it. The lack of diplomatic attempts is one of the major reasons that this issue isn't solved. The first failed attempt was the negotiations offered by Switzerland. The second was the Major National Dialogue. The reason why these failed was because of both bad timing and the lack of incentives the Cameroon government has shown. The Ambazonia Governing Council was always seen as more unwilling compared to the Interim Government so it makes sense that they would reject both of these offers but the reason the Interim Government couldn't accept the negotiations offered by Switzerland was that they were having an internal crisis at that time. For the Major National Dialogue, their participation led to the freedom of Maurice Kamto.

Although the international community has not focused on the issue, [there was a UN initiative](#) that was taken by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Cameroon. The initiative focused more on the humanitarian aspects of the issue and didn't touch upon the political aspects, not even mentioning Ambazonia by name. This report highlighted the humanitarian issues of the conflict. Touching on topics like food security and shelter, it showed that this not only a political issue that consists of territorial disputes but also a humanitarian one consisting of real people and affects on their daily lives.

Possible Solutions

One obvious solution to the issue is having negotiations with international mediators. International response to this very violent issue has been almost nonexistent. If a nation or an NGO or an intergovernmental body were to mediate the negotiations with incentives towards the separatists, the issue could be solved. At least the experts can try to come up with a ceasefire due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to ensure that this happens UN peacekeeping forces or the willing Member States could send in peace-keeping troops, of course with the consent of the Cameroon Government.

Like all wars, this war is also not only about politics. The experts have to think of the humanitarian crises that take place due to this conflict. The sociocultural difference of the Anglophones to the rest of the nation and their exclusion is what started the conflict in the first place. Experts should think of ways to integrate both of the cultures in governance Cameroon to find a sustainable solution. Furthermore, the experts should collaborate with NGOs and the relevant authorities in order to tackle the issue of both internally and externally displaced people.

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