

# CHALLENGES OF CONFLICT AND COOPERATION IN SUB-SAHARIAN AFRICA

## THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE SECESSIONIST CRISIS IN CAMEROON

Roxana Mateş\*

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### Abstract

*The article aims to illustrate the evolution and international reactions to the current secessionist crisis in Cameroon. Firstly, the anglophone crisis is presented as the result of a minority's identification with a colonially inherited identity, as well as the consequence of the regime's authoritarian style and constant exclusion of the anglophone elites from the structure of power. Secondly, the article concentrates on analyzing the reactions of various organizations, institutions and states regarding the Cameroonian secessionist conflict. However, although there are certain minor measures which have been taken against Cameroon, the actions of the international community are still below the expectations of the anglophones, who are the ones directly affected by both the government's and separatists' use of extreme violence. In addition, the international support for the fight against terrorism in the region is perceived with suspicion due to the double security crisis the country is facing.*

**Keywords:** secessionist crisis, authoritarianism, BIR, internationalization, terrorism

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\* Roxana Mateş holds a PhD in Political Science at Babes-Bolyai University since October 2021. Contact: matesroxana94@yahoo.com.

## Analysis of the metamorphosis of Cameroon's anglophone problem

The anglophone problem in Cameroon represents a secessionist claim, constructed on the anglophones' feeling of marginalization in the francophone-dominated post-colonial state. The roots of the conflict can be traced back to the unequal division of the German Kamerun Protectorate between the French and the British after the First World War. After gaining independence, the reunification of the two territories was achieved through the 1961 Foumban constitutional talks, whose result was the establishment of a "sham federation", which was only "safe for appearances."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, in 1972, through the organization of a referendum, the federal structure of the state was abandoned and the United Republic of Cameroon was created. After the 1984 presidential elections, Paul Biya changed the name of the country to simply the Republic of Cameroon,<sup>2</sup> an action which emphasized the president's superiority and control over the constitution, which has also been modified over time in order to ensure Biya's perennial position of power.<sup>3</sup> In addition, among the strategies of Biya to stay at power, there can be ineluctably illustrated the exclusion of the anglophone elites, who were only provided with insignificant jobs within the state. On the other side, the anglophones who were provided with important positions had to prove loyalty and submission to the regime.<sup>4</sup>

Hence, based on the authoritarian regime, on their constant exclusion and on their elites' passivity and duplicity, the anglophone population in Cameroon initiated the 2016 protests, which quickly turned into a genuine conflict. The radicalization of the peaceful movement was possible because of the regime's use of violence against the so-called terrorists. However, although there is a myriad of proofs of the Cameroonian army's numerous abuses against the population and despite

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<sup>1</sup> Piet Konings and Francis B. Nyamnjoh, "Anglophone Secessionist Movements in Cameroon", in L. De Vries et al (eds.), *Secessionism in African Politics*, Palgrave Series in African Borderlands Studies, 2019, p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Takougang and Milton Krieger, "African State and Society in the 1990's / Cameroon's political crossroads", Boulder: Westview Press, 1998, p. 50.

<sup>3</sup> Sergiu Mişcoiu, Louis-Marie Kakdeu, "Authoritarian clientelism: the case of the president's 'creatures' in Cameroon", in *Acta Politica*, No. 1, Vol. 56, 2021, pp. 1-29.

<sup>4</sup> Roxana Mateş, "Cameroun : analyse de la littérature sur la crise sécessionniste anglophone", in Simona Jişa, Sergiu Mişcoiu et Modibo Diarra (dir.), *Raconter les politiques conflictuelles en Afrique. Regards croisés*, Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2021, pp. 43-59.

the fact that the measures taken by the government proved to be ineffective and superficial, the international reactions are still considered to be precarious. In the following part of the article, there are illustrated the international implications in the anglophone crisis in Cameroon and how actors such as, France, US, China, UK and Nigeria, particularly approach the evolution of the conflict.

### **The international reactions to the anglophone crisis**

The first and only harmonious international action taken in relation to the anglophone crisis in Cameroon was the United Nations Security Council's informal meeting on May 13, 2019.<sup>5</sup> While China, Russia, France and some other African countries, such as, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia and Côte d'Ivoire, voted against including the anglophone crisis on the agenda of the Security Council, the US voted in favor of such a decision, while the UK abstained. Switzerland is also the only state which has committed to mediate the anglophone crisis in Cameroon,<sup>6</sup> although the population's trust in the neutrality of this actor is reduced due to the long stays of Paul Biya and his family in this European country.

Secondly, the African Union is generally criticized for its lack of involvement and action regarding the development of civil wars on the continent, sometimes taking a longer period than expected in order for it to provide even a "perfunctory statement of acknowledgment or concern".<sup>7</sup> From this regard, the strategy embraced by the African Union when approaching the diverse conflicts from the continent is one defined by incoherence, being limited by the principles of national sovereignty and non-interference.<sup>8</sup> This passivity can also be illustrated by the fact that although the political situations in Cameroon, Burundi, Mozambique and

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<sup>5</sup> "UN: Shine Spotlight on Brutality in Cameroon", *Human Rights Watch*, 13 May 2019, accessed at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/13/un-shine-spotlight-brutality-cameroon>, on 30.11.2021.

<sup>6</sup> "Switzerland mediates in Cameroon crisis", 28 June 2019, accessed at: [https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/diplomacy\\_switzerland-mediates-in-cameroon-crisis/45061332](https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/diplomacy_switzerland-mediates-in-cameroon-crisis/45061332), on 30.11.2021.

<sup>7</sup> Chris Olaoluwa Ogunmodede, "When it comes to African crises, the African Union is no solution", *World Politics Review*, 24 November 2021, accessed at: <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/30146/when-it-comes-to-african-crises-the-african-union-is-no-solution>, on 26.11.2021.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

Comoros have been tackled by the AU Assembly in 2020, they were not eventually included in the discussion of the African Union Peace and Security Council.<sup>9</sup> One of the reasons for this general silence may be represented by the fact that the AU does not support the separatist struggles, encouraging instead the unity and territorial integrity of the countries.<sup>10</sup> Thus, when the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, visited Cameroon in November 2019, he praised the implementation of the Major National Dialogue and the measures taken by the president Biya,<sup>11</sup> despite the population's general dissatisfaction in relation to the development of the dialogue. At the same time, when the opposition leader Maurice Kamto began protesting against what he considered the fraudulent results of the 2018 presidential elections, Mahamat demanded the political elites in Cameroon to refrain from statements that could "generate tensions".<sup>12</sup> Moreover, when Switzerland proposed the initiative of mediating the conflict in Cameroon, the AU was the last actor supporting the necessity of this action.<sup>13</sup> As a consequence, based on the above-mentioned actions which illustrate more the protection of the current regime in Cameroon, the African Union is ineluctably expected to provide a firmer response to the violent conflict in the country, whose negative consequences outweigh the superficial measures taken by the government.

On the other side, the resolution of the European Parliament from 24 November 2021 on the human rights situation in Cameroon

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<sup>9</sup> Shewit Woldemichael, "The reality of the AU's response to crises", *Institute for Security Studies*, 7 January 2021, accessed at: <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/the-reality-of-the-aus-response-to-crises>, on 26.11.2021.

<sup>10</sup> Cheryl Hendricks and Gabriel Ngah Kiven, "African Union needs a more robust response to conflict in Cameroon", *The Conversation*, 2 March 2020, accessed at: <https://theconversation.com/african-union-needs-a-more-robust-response-to-conflict-in-cameroon-132449>, on 27.11.2021.

<sup>11</sup> "Joint Final Declaration of the Tripartite Visit of the Chairperson of the AU Commission and the Secretaries General of the OIF and the Commonwealth", *African Union*, 28 November 2019, accessed at: <https://au.int/cpauc>, on 27.11.2021.

<sup>12</sup> "Présidentielle au Cameroun : l'Union africaine appelle à la « retenue »", *Jeune Afrique*, 10 October 2018, accessed at: <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/642891/politique/presidentielle-au-cameroun-lunion-africaine-appelle-a-la-retendue/>, on 27.11.2021.

<sup>13</sup> "Cameroon: African Union endorses Swiss mediation to end Anglophone crisis", *Journal du Cameroun*, 29.07.2019, accessed at: <https://www.journalducameroun.com/en/cameroon-african-union-endorses-swiss-mediation-to-end-anglophone-crisis/>, on 27.11.2021.

acknowledges the fact that the radicalization of the initially peaceful protests was possible because of the extreme violence of the state authorities, therefore defining the current secessionist conflict as the result of the government's marginalization of the anglophone regions. The refusal of the president Paul Biya's government to initiate any dialogue with the separatists is also mentioned in the recent resolution. The human rights violations perpetuated by both the government and the secessionists are highly criticized and this situation has led to the death of more than 3000 civilians and of hundreds of members of the security forces. Nevertheless, although the government admitted that it involved in certain attacks, such as the one in Ngarbuh, and promised to establish a commission of inquiry, it eventually failed to provide any further information on these sensitive aspects. In addition to this issue of the government's lack of assumption and responsibility towards its actions, the resolution highlights the general failure of the implementation of the National Dialogue, suggesting the reluctance of the government to accept taking the necessary measures for successfully dealing with the dimension of the crisis.<sup>14</sup> Hence, the resolution of the European Parliament firmly condemns the abuses and attacks perpetuated by the two parties, admitting that the rule of law is definitely not upheld by the state of Cameroon and that the lack of accountability for previous atrocities provokes further violence.

While referring to the responsibility of France towards the present strenuous situation in Cameroon, there needs to be emphasized the fact that the same violence perpetuated by the Biya administration today was also used by the French against the anti-colonial movement in the country, a fact which left indelible marks in the collective Cameroonian memory.<sup>15</sup> Hence, the members and the suspected collaborators of the pro-independence and nationalist party, the Unions of the Populations of Cameroon (UPC), had to deal with a myriad of difficult obstacles, such as, mass arbitrary detentions, torture and extra-judicial killings. The party was considered a communist one and its leaders were eventually killed by the

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<sup>14</sup> Joint Motion for a Resolution, European Parliament, Plenary Sitting, 24 November 2021, accessed at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RC-9-2021-0553\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RC-9-2021-0553_EN.pdf), on 27.11.2021.

<sup>15</sup> Marc Michel, "Une décolonisation confisquée? Perspectives sur la décolonisation du Cameroun sous tutelle de la France 1955-1960", in *Revue française d'histoire d'outre mer*, vol. 86, no. 324-325, 1999, p. 229.

French troops during the so-called France's "dirty war" in Cameroon.<sup>16</sup> The exclusion of the UPC members enabled France to provide the position of Prime-Minister to Ahmadou Ahidjo, a French loyalist, who subsequently became the president of the future federation created in 1961. Although the military confrontation led to an estimated number of 120 000 casualties, the French administration did not publicly assume any responsibility, a reason why the war has not been still tackled by the international community.<sup>17</sup> It was only in 2015 that the President François Hollande vaguely referred to this common chapter from the history of both countries, during the first visit of a French president in Cameroon since 1999. Within his public statement, he only admitted that there are certain "tragic episodes"<sup>18</sup> which remained imprinted in the collective consciousness of the Cameroonian people, without assuming yet any official responsibility for the role of France in the above-described conflict. However, as long as France had to deal recently with the truth of the genocide in Rwanda and Germany with its atrocities committed in colonial Namibia,<sup>19</sup> there can be felt this current reluctance of further accepting to discuss about other forgotten genocides. As a consequence, one of the factors justifying France's passivity in relation to the current anglophone crisis in Cameroon can be indubitably represented by its extremely repressive movement against the nationalist protesters in the decolonization period, as well as in the '60's and '70's.

Furthermore, France's constant military presence and support for Cameroon highlights the fact that the African country still depends on the French government, trying therefore to diminish at all costs the internal anti-French sentiments, as Emmanuel Macron demanded during a news

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<sup>16</sup> "Survivors tell of France's "dirty war" in Cameroon independence", *France 24*, 28 December 2019, accessed at: <https://www.france24.com/en/20191228-survivors-tell-of-france-s-dirty-war-in-cameroon-independence>, on 28.11.2021.

<sup>17</sup> Roxana Willis, James Angove, Caroline Mbinkar, Joseph McAuley, " 'We remain their slaves' / Voices from the Cameroon conflict", *A Working Paper*, University of Oxford, Faculty of Law, April 2020, p. 72.

<sup>18</sup> "Au Cameroun, François Hollande brise un tabou", *Radio France Internationale*, 3 July 2015, accessed at:

<https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20150703-cameroun-francois-hollande-paul-biya-guerre-upc-lydienne-yen-eyoum>, on 28.11.2021.

<sup>19</sup> Simon Marks, "France and Germany face up to the past in Africa", in *Politico*, 29 May 2021, accessed at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/france-germany-colonial-past-africa-genocide/>, on 28.11.2021.

conference at the NATO summit in Watford, UK, on December 4, 2019.<sup>20</sup> Although the US announced to halt some military assistance to Cameroon based on the human rights violations committed by the security forces, France did not sanction Cameroon in this regard, promising instead to maintain and consolidate its defense cooperation with the African state by promoting the official purpose of fighting against the terrorist Islamist groups in the region.<sup>21</sup> As such, in 2019, France provided to the Far North region in Cameroon an aid of 45 million euros,<sup>22</sup> while it had also previously made a donation of military hardware to the Cameroonian Armed Forces. The donation entailed ten French tactical vehicles and five transport trucks, as well as an all equipped sanitary unit.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, Macron assured its African partner of France's support in relation to the Cameroonian authorities' efforts to protect the paramount principles of cohesion and the stabilization of the situation in a "clear national context".<sup>24</sup> Through this statement, there can be incontestably observed France's unwillingness to approach a more critical position regarding the evolution of the anglophone crisis.

The strong economic connections and cooperation between France and Cameroon can be illustrated through the presence of over 100 subsidiaries of French companies in the African state and approximately

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<sup>20</sup> "Macron tells G5 leaders to address 'anti-French sentiment' for continued military cooperation in Sahel", *France 24*, 4 December 2019, accessed at: <https://www.france24.com/en/20191204-macron-tells-g5-leaders-to-address-anti-french-sentiment-for-continued-military-cooperation-in-sahel>, on 28.11.2021.

<sup>21</sup> John Irish, "France says to continue military cooperation with Cameroon", *Reuters*, 7 February 2019, accessed at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-cameroon-idUSKCN1PW1RA>, on 28.11.2021.

<sup>22</sup> "Cameroun : la France accorde une aide de 45 millions d'euros à l'Extrême-Nord touché par Boko Haram", *Jeune Afrique*, 25 October 2019, accessed at: <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/847523/politique/cameroun-la-france-accorde-une-aide-de-45-millions-deuros-a-lextrême-nord-touche-par-boko-haram/>, on 29.11.2021.

<sup>23</sup> Abdur Rahman Alfa Shaban, "France gives Cameroon equipment worth \$700,000 to combat Boko Haram", *Africanews*, 30 November 2016, accessed at: <https://www.africanews.com/2016/11/30/france-gives-cameroon-700000-worth-equipments-to-combat-boko-haram/>, on 29.11.2021.

<sup>24</sup> Meredith Terretta and Melchisedek Chétima, "The US and France backs Cameroon's reign of terror", 8 September 2018, accessed at: <https://africasacountry.com/2018/08/the-us-and-french-backed-reign-of-terror-in-cameroon>, on 28.11.2021.

200 businesses which belong to French nationals.<sup>25</sup> One of the most important corporations that can be mentioned in this specific context is Perenco, an independent Anglo-French oil and gas company, which has operated in Cameroon since 1993.<sup>26</sup> The French significant involvement in this sector, as well as the future investments France plans to develop in Cameroon, suggest France's stringent necessity of contributing to the controlled and artificially imposed peace in the African country.

A recent episode which happened at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic also highlights France's support for the regime in Cameroon. While the dimension of the pandemic was alarmingly evolving, the president Paul Biya had been totally absent from the public space for a period of several months, a situation which fueled the outrage and suspicion of the population. At some point, the main opposition leader, Maurice Kamto, called on Cameroon's legislature to declare a power vacancy in the country.<sup>27</sup> The first public sign Biya made was posting a photo with him and the French ambassador to Cameroon, the last one declaring that he found the Cameroonian president "always on alert".<sup>28</sup> Through this action, supported by the French ambassador, there was intended to justify and legitimate Biya's ability to rule the country, his long silence being considered only "a sign of gravitas".<sup>29</sup>

Regarding the United States approach to the current crisis in Cameroon, one paramount aspect which needs to be illustrated is represented by the US significant support for the BIR, the elite part of the Cameroonian armed forces, directly responsible to Biya. Thus, since 2015, approximately 300 US armed forces members have been deployed to

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<sup>25</sup> "Cameroon – France – Exemplary Development Partners", *All Africa*, 4 June 2021, accessed at: <https://allafrica.com/stories/202106050037.html>, on 28.11.2021.

<sup>26</sup> "Cameroon", accessed at: <https://www.perenco.com/subsidiaries/cameroon>, on 28.11.2021.

<sup>27</sup> Danielle Paquette, "The mystery of Cameroon's unusually absent president: 'Sir, are you alive?'" , *The Washington Post*, 16 April 2020, accessed at: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/cameroon-paul-biya-mystery-coronavirus/2020/04/16/9bdd4172-7ff8-11ea-8de7-9fdff6d5d83e\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/cameroon-paul-biya-mystery-coronavirus/2020/04/16/9bdd4172-7ff8-11ea-8de7-9fdff6d5d83e_story.html), on 29.11.2021.

<sup>28</sup> "Cameroun : Paris agacé par la polémique visant son ambassadeur à Yaoundé", *Jeune Afrique*, 28 April 2020, accessed at: <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/936509/politique/cameroun-paris-agace-par-la-polemique-visant-son-ambassadeur-a-yaounde/>, on 29.11.2021.

<sup>29</sup> "Cameroon President makes first appearance in two months", *Aljazeera*, 20 May 2020, accessed at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/5/20/cameroon-president-makes-first-appearance-in-two-months>, on 29.11.2021.



Cameroon to conduct "airborne intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance operations in the region".<sup>30</sup> The involvement of the US in arming and training this group is justified in the official discourses with the purpose of successfully dealing with terrorism across the Sahel Region. However, although there is clear evidence that the armored vehicles, munitions, small arms, helicopters and surveillance drones which had been initially provided in the fight against Boko Haram were redeployed in the anglophone regions,<sup>31</sup> the US support for combating terrorism in Cameroon still continues.

Moreover, the abuses and human rights violations committed by the BIR even before the beginning of the anglophone crisis were ignored by the USA. According to a 2016 research conducted by Amnesty International, more than 1000 people who were (in many situations, subjectively and unjustifiably) suspected of collaborating with Boko Haram, had to deal with the horrific treatment perpetuated by the BIR members.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, by strengthening the military capacity of a state which uses it in order to abuse the local population, the US support appears to be against the conditionalities imposed by the so-called Leahy Law, which prevents US funded assistance for the force units or individuals who have committed gross violations of human rights.<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, there have been certain sanctions which the United States applied to Cameroon, this representing the only situation in which a

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<sup>30</sup> "Letter from the President –War Power Resolution regarding Cameroon", *The White House Office of the Press Secretary*, 14 October 2015, accessed at: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/10/14/letter-from-president-war-powers-resolution-cameroon>, on 29.11.2021.

<sup>31</sup> Chris W. J. Roberts and Billy Burton, "Cameroon's Government is deceiving the West while diverting foreign aid", *Foreign Policy*, 22 November 2020, accessed at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/11/22/camerouns-government-is-deceiving-the-west-while-diverting-foreign-aid/>, on 29.11.2021.

<sup>32</sup> "Cameroon: More than 1,000 people accused of supporting Boko Haram held in horrific conditions , some tortured to death", *Amnesty International*, 14 July 2016, accessed at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/07/cameroun-conditions-de-detention-effroyables-voire-tortures-a-mort-pour-plus-de-1-000-personnes-accusees-de-soutenir-boko-haram/>, on 29.11.2021.

<sup>33</sup> Daniel R. Mahanty, "The Leahy Law Prohibiting US assistance to human rights abusers: Pulling back the curtain", *Just Security*, 27 June 2017, accessed at: <https://www.justsecurity.org/42578/leahy-law-prohibiting-assistance-human-rights-abusers-pulling-curtain/>, on 29.11.2021.

country tried to actively criticize and take action against the Cameroonian government. Hence, in 2019, the US decided to cut \$17 million in military aid to the government of Biya, while in 2020 the African country was excluded from the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGO).<sup>34</sup> In addition, in June 2021, the US also imposed visa restrictions on individuals believed to support the crisis.<sup>35</sup> However, this measure is considered to be cosmetic inasmuch as the Cameroonian citizens already living in the USA are the ones financially sustaining the secessionists. Therefore, despite the United States' dissatisfaction with the human rights situation in Cameroon, the relations between the two states remain "excellent",<sup>36</sup> as the US ambassador insisted, this aspect questioning the effectiveness of the above-mentioned measures.

In addition to the US considerable support for the BIR, the Israelis are also involved in the training, command and supply of weapons to the Cameroonian elite forces. The close links between Cameroon and Israel have their roots in the 1984 failed coup in the African state, after which the president Biya had to look for new partners to ensure his security.<sup>37</sup> At present, Mayer Heres, a retired Israeli army general, is the head of the Rapid Intervention Battalion, which is composed of over 5 000 individuals.<sup>38</sup> The Israeli interest in Cameroon may be better justified by the

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<sup>34</sup> Ilaria Allegrozzi, "US cuts Cameroon trade privileges over rights abuses", *Human Rights Watch*, 5 November 2019, accessed at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/11/05/us-cuts-cameroon-trade-privileges-over-rights-abuses>, on 29.11.2021.

<sup>35</sup> "United States imposes visa restrictions over Cameroon separatist crisis", *Reuters*, 8 June 2021, accessed at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/united-states-imposes-visa-restrictions-over-cameroon-separatist-crisis-2021-06-07/>, on 29.11.2021.

<sup>36</sup> Edwin Kindzeka Moki, "US ambassador say Cameroon relations good despite aid cut", *AP News*, 7 February 2019, accessed at: <https://apnews.com/article/1b8ed4fbcf2b462c85e3f34087147685>, on 29.11.2021.

<sup>37</sup> Emmanuel Freudenthal and Youri Van der Weide, "Making a killing: Israeli mercenaries in Cameroon", *African Arguments*, 23 June 2020, accessed at: <https://africanarguments.org/2020/06/making-a-killing-israeli-mercenaries-in-cameroon/>, on 30.11.2021.

<sup>38</sup> Georges Dougueli, "Cameroun: Paul Biya sous protection israélienne", *Jeune Afrique*, 19 November 2015, accessed at: <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/276021/politique/cameroun-paul-biya-sous-protection-israelienne/>, on 30.11.2021.

fact that Cameroon is one of the two African countries, along with Eritrea, which do not recognize the State of Palestine.<sup>39</sup>

Considering the anglophone crisis an internal issue, China did not sanction in any form the regime in Cameroon. Conversely, through its considerable loans and debt reliefs, China encouraged the passivity and total negligence of the Cameroonian authorities regarding the respect for the rule of law, but also regarding its continuous credit problems. More specifically, although in 2007 only 12% of Cameroon's gross domestic product was represented by the public debt, in September 2020 the figure had reached over 45% of the country's GDP.<sup>40</sup> According to the International Monetary Fund, Cameroon's total debt is 5.8 trillion Central African CFA francs (\$10 billion), about a third of which is owed to China, its largest creditor. However, China has granted Cameroon, throughout time, the following debt reliefs: in 2001, a debt of \$34 million was wiped out, in 2007, another \$32 million, while in 2010, a sum of \$30 million was also cancelled.<sup>41</sup> In May 2021, China again agreed to cancel Cameroon \$19 million interest-free loan.<sup>42</sup> Eventually, due to Cameroon's clear inability to repay its debts to China, there has been justifiably developed the fear regarding the necessity of ceding temporary ownership of facilities funded by these external creditors.<sup>43</sup>

One of the most important projects China began to develop in Cameroon, in 2011, is represented by the building and financing of a new port in the town of Kribi. As long as the already existing port of Douala had been overworked and filled with sediment, China committed to build the largest deep-water port in Central Africa, which will be connected by

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<sup>39</sup> "Diplomatic Relations", *Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations*, 29 July 2021, accessed at: <https://palestineun.org/about-palestine/diplomatic-relations/>, on 30.11.2021.

<sup>40</sup> R. Maxwell Bone, "China's role in Cameroon's Risk of Debt Distress", *The Diplomat*, 16 June 2021, accessed at: <https://thediplomat.com/2021/06/chinas-role-in-camerouns-risk-of-debt-distress/>, on 30.11.2021.

<sup>41</sup> Jenni Marsh, "China just quietly wrote off a chunk of Cameroon's debt. Why the secrecy?", *CNN*, 5 February 2019, accessed at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/02/04/china/cameroon-china-debt-relief-intl/index.html>, on 30.11.2021.

<sup>42</sup> Kevin Acker, Deborah Brautigam, and Yinxuan Wang, "Summary: Tracking global Chinese debt relief in the COVID-19 era", *China-Africa Research Initiative*, Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, Version 1.5, July 2021, accessed at: <http://www.sais-cari.org/debt-relief>, on 30.11.2021.

<sup>43</sup> Bone, "China's role in Cameroon's Risk of Debt Distress".

railways to iron ore mines from the east of Cameroon. During the initial construction period, the village of Lolabe was destroyed, a situation which caused the deep dissatisfaction of the 400 residents.<sup>44</sup> At the same time, more than half of the jobs available in building the port were provided to the Chinese workers, who were accused by the Cameroonians of discriminatory treatment.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, China's attention to the respect of human rights in Cameroon proved insignificant, its main actions being concentrated on the objective of extracting valuable natural resources and establishing itself as the main economic and military power in the region.

Although connected by a colonial past, the relations between Cameroon and the United Kingdom were defined by a certain absence of interest from the former colonial power. Thus, although there are significant British enterprises which exist in Cameroon, they are definitely outnumbered by the French and Chinese companies. Nevertheless, the British financial interests in Cameroon could be eventually and particularly reflected by the fact that in 2018, the London based oil and gas company, New Age, and the Cameroon government signed a deal for the development of the Etinde gas field using a floating gas facility.<sup>46</sup> As long as Etinde is situated in the anglophone region in Cameroon, the secessionists consider the deal as being void inasmuch as it does not have the consent of the Ambazonia government, representing a theft of the anglophones' resources.<sup>47</sup> Based on the recent economic interests and the need of enhancing its trade relationships especially after the withdrawal from the European Union, Great Britain did also not embrace an active critical position towards the conflict.

Last but not least, Nigeria's approach to the current conflict in Cameroon is also worth mentioning firstly because of the fact that both countries have had to deal with secessionist feelings and attempts. During the Nigerian Civil War between 1967 and 1970, Cameroon was definitely

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>45</sup> "China invests in phase II of Kribi port", *Economist Intelligence*, 21 April 2017, accessed at: <https://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=1025342686&Country=Cameroon&topic=Economy&subtopic=Forecast&subsubtopic=Policy+trends>, on 30.11.2021.

<sup>46</sup> "Report: New Age pens deal to develop Etinde field using FLNG unit (Cameroon)", *Offshore Energy*, 12 June 2018, accessed at: <https://www.offshore-energy.biz/report-new-age-pens-deal-to-develop-etinde-field-using-flng-unit-cameroon/>, on 30.11.2021.

<sup>47</sup> Willis, Angove, Mbinkar, McAuley, " 'We remain their slaves' - Voices from the Cameroon Conflict", p. 63.

against the secessionist tendency of the Biafrans, Ahidjo having done any possible effort to support the Nigerian government's objective of unity. Therefore, Nigeria is also, at present, supporting the Yaounde government, a fact which has been incontestably proved by the arrest and extradition to Cameroon of more anglophone separatists.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, the mutual support and close cooperation between the two countries are also based on the efforts for achieving the common objective of significantly diminishing the Boko Haram threat in the region.

## Conclusion

The article has illustrated that the current secessionist crisis in Cameroon represents, on the one side, the result of the authoritarian post-colonial government's mismanagement of the colonially inherited identities. In addition, the radical evolution of the conflict has also been highlighted as the consequence of the international community's reluctance to approach a more active criticism regarding what has been portrayed as one of the world's most neglected crises.

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<sup>48</sup> Christian Pagbe Musah, "Cameroon-Nigeria relations in the face of secessionist tendencies in both countries", *International Journal of Liberal Arts and Social Science*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2021, pp. 16-17.

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