



# Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis: How to Get to Talks?

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*Preventing War. Shaping Peace.*

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# Principal Findings

**What's new?** The conflict in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon is deadlocked. There is no dialogue between Yaoundé and the separatists, who are both refusing to give ground: the government is counting on a military victory and refuses to discuss the form of the state; the separatists demand independence.

**Why does it matter?** In the last 20 months, the conflict has left 1,850 dead, 530,000 internally displaced and tens of thousands of refugees. The intransigence of the belligerents threatens to generate further violence and prolong the conflict, which neither can win in the short term.

**What should be done?** Cameroonian and international actors should encourage the two sides to make concessions by threatening to sanction those who stand in the way of dialogue and rewarding the less intransigent. Ending the conflict will eventually require changes in the legal framework for decentralisation to grant greater autonomy to communes and regions.

## *Executive Summary*

Cameroon's Anglophone crisis is deadlocked. Twenty months of clashes have killed 1,850, displaced 530,000 and led tens of thousands to seek refuge abroad, but the government and the separatists are sticking to their irreconcilable positions. The separatists continue to dream that independence is just around the corner. In Yaoundé, the government still wrongly believes it can win a quick military victory. Meanwhile, moderates and federalists, who enjoy majority support, are unable to organise. To break the deadlock, Cameroonian and international actors should put pressure on the government and the separatists. Both sides must explore compromise solutions aimed at a level of regional autonomy somewhere between the secession desired by the separatists and the fake decentralisation proposed by Yaoundé.

The socio-political crisis that began in October 2016 in the Anglophone Northwest and Southwest regions mutated into armed conflict at the end of 2017. Seven armed militias are currently in positions of strength in most rural areas. The security forces reacted slowly, but since mid-2018 have inflicted casualties on the separatists. They have not been able, however, to regain full control over rural areas nor prevent repeated separatist attacks in the towns.

There is currently no dialogue between Yaoundé and the separatists. The latter are calling for talks to hammer out the practical details of independence in the presence of an international mediator. The government refuses to discuss the form of the state or reform of institutions. It proposes instead a decentralisation model that grants neither adequate funding nor sufficient powers to local authorities (communes and regions) and intends to organise the country's first regional elections later this year. Far from resolving the conflict, this half-baked proposal risks provoking further violence.

Local initiatives to promote dialogue are emerging. In July 2018, Anglophone religious leaders (Catholic, Protestant and Muslim) announced a plan to hold an Anglophone General Conference as a first step toward an inclusive national dialogue. A majority of Anglophones are in favour of this initiative. Initially reluctant, some separatists now seem to be more open to the idea on condition that it prepares the way for a referendum on self-determination that would give the choice between federalism and independence. Faced with opposition from the government, the conference organisers have already had to postpone it twice: from August to November 2018 and then to March 2019. It still has not taken place.

Although some separatists will refuse to give ground, others might accept a dialogue with the Cameroonian authorities, in the presence of an international mediator, to discuss federalism or genuine decentralisation that would grant autonomy and adequate funding to the regions and that would guarantee respect for the specific features of the Anglophone judicial and education systems. Similarly, although the Cameroonian government seems to rule out federalism, it might consent to regionalism or genuine decentralisation, which would involve changes to the legislative framework.

To clear the path to talks, the belligerents must each make concessions in order to establish a minimum degree of trust and reverse the spiral of violence. The government should support an Anglophone General Conference in order for Anglophones

to appoint representatives to a national dialogue while at the same time providing non-separatist Anglophones with the opportunity to express their point of view. Cameroon's president should adopt a conciliatory stance and recognise the existence of the Anglophone problem and the legitimacy of the Anglophones' demands; order investigations into abuses by the security forces; make provision for reparations to victims and the reconstruction of affected areas; and release the hundreds of Anglophone activists currently in detention, including important members of the separatist movement. The separatists should renounce their strategy of Monday "ghost towns" (general strikes) and their school boycott and expel combatants guilty of abuses against civilians.

A combination of internal and international pressures could lead both the government and the separatists to make such concessions. International actors could reward the parties who agree to moderate their positions and sanction those who remain intransigent. The Europeans and Americans, in particular, should consider targeted sanctions against government leaders and senior army officers who continue to obstruct dialogue (travel bans, asset freeze) and separatists who encourage or organise violence (judicial proceedings). The International Criminal Court prosecutor should open preliminary examinations into abuses committed by both sides, to underline that the pursuit of violence will have judicial consequences. International actors are divided, however, on what position to adopt and what measures to take and should first reach a common position, at least among Western countries.

Internally, Cameroonian Francophones and Anglophones who advocate compromise should mobilise to put pressure on the separatists and the government. In particular, federalists should work together to strengthen their position in the talks. They should continue to dialogue with the separatists and encourage them to moderate their positions, and increase the pressure on the authorities to open up to the less intransigent separatists. Finally, they should conduct an international campaign to promote peaceful solutions.

Once trust has been established, preliminary talks between government, federalist and separatist representatives will be necessary. These should take place outside the country. During this process, international actors, especially the U.S., Switzerland, the Vatican, the UN, the EU (especially France, Germany and the UK) and the African Union (AU) should continue to encourage the government to dialogue and offer funding and support for the talks.

In the event of a dialogue taking place, they could also help to fund compensation payments to victims of abuses, the reconstruction of Anglophone regions, the return of refugees and internally displaced persons and the disarmament and demobilisation of former combatants. Given the level of acrimony between the parties, the presence of an international mediator will be necessary during the preparatory discussions and then during the national dialogue. Several countries and international institutions and organisations have offered to mediate since the start of the conflict. The UN, the AU, the Catholic Church and Switzerland seem best placed to play this role, because the parties to the conflict perceive them as relatively neutral.

Substantive talks between the three parties should take place in Cameroon, which would require the government to guarantee safe passage for separatist representatives. During these talks, the government should indicate its readiness to amend the Con-

stitution in order to grant greater autonomy to the regions and develop the legal framework for decentralisation. This could include direct elections for the regional councils and these councils' presidents; the establishment of regional structures with substantial financial and administrative power; and an increase in the powers and resources allocated to communes. The government could also reform institutions and governance in order to take account of the specific features of the educational and judicial systems in the Anglophone regions.

More broadly, the conflict highlights the shortcomings of Cameroon's centralised governance model and raises two crucial issues that the government must address: the need to improve the way the state handles minority rights, colonial heritages and cultural specificities; and the need for a fairer and more equitable redistribution of the country's wealth. A lasting solution to the conflict requires dialogue and consensus, which are indispensable to undertake the institutional and governance reforms that Cameroon needs.

**Nairobi/Brussels, 2 May 2019**

# Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis: How to Get to Talks?

## I. Introduction

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The crisis in the Anglophone regions (Northwest and Southwest) of Cameroon that began in October 2016 with protests by teachers and lawyers escalated into an armed insurrection at the end of 2017 and has since degenerated into a civil war. The conflict has killed at least 1,850 people since September 2017 and has now spread to the Francophone West and Littoral regions.<sup>1</sup> It has had a substantial social and humanitarian impact in the Anglophone regions: most schools have been closed for the last two years; more than 170 villages have been destroyed; 530,000 people have been internally displaced and 35,000 have sought refuge in neighbouring Nigeria. The conflict has also devastated the local economy, which accounts for about one fifth of the country's GDP.<sup>2</sup>

While Yaoundé and the separatists maintain their irreconcilable positions, more and more members of the Cameroonian opposition and civil society are calling for dialogue. This report analyses the recent dynamics of the conflict and proposes flexible ways to get to talks and find a lasting solution. It is based on more than 160 interviews conducted between August and December 2018 in the Anglophone regions, the West region, in the country's second-largest city, Douala, and the capital, Yaoundé. About 60 interviews were carried out in Nigeria (in the capital, Abuja and in the southern Cross River state) to examine the plight of refugees, and in Western capitals to discuss solutions with Cameroon's international partners. Crisis Group submitted the findings of this report to Cameroon's government in mid-April but has not received a response.

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<sup>1</sup> At least 235 soldiers and police officers, 650 civilians and close to 1,000 separatists have lost their lives. Statistics compiled by Crisis Group from open sources and dozens of interviews in 2018 and 2019 with the public authorities, security forces and separatists. Government estimates 1,600 dead (400 civilians, 160 soldiers and police officers and 1,000 separatists); Anglophone federalists estimate 3,000-5,000 dead; separatists estimate 5,000-10,000 dead. By comparison, the death toll in the conflict with Boko Haram in Cameroon is 3,100 over five years (2014-April 2019): 1,900 civilians, 215 soldiers and police officers, and 1,000 combatants.

<sup>2</sup> About 100 schools have been burned down over the last two years, most of them by the separatists. The security forces are responsible for most of the damage to villages as they seek to destroy the property of separatist leaders and punish villages suspected of supporting secession. Crisis Group interviews, journalists and security forces, Yaoundé, December 2018. "Cameroon: joint statement of UNICEF and UNESCO on abduction of education personnel and attacks against schools in the South-West region of Cameroon", UNESCO and UNICEF statement, 1 June 2018; "Cameroon: Killings, Destruction in Anglophone regions", Human Rights Watch, 19 July 2018; "Burning in Cameroon: images you are not meant to see", BBC, 25 June 2018.

## II. The State of Play in the Anglophone Regions

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The situation in the Anglophone regions continues to deteriorate. At the end of 2017 and throughout 2018, the government deployed thousands of military and police reinforcements, an elite army unit (Rapid Intervention Battalion, BIR), and newly created special forces.<sup>3</sup> It also increased its firepower in the area, deploying armoured vehicles and helicopters recently bought from the United Arab Emirates, Ukraine and Israel.<sup>4</sup> These reinforcements helped the security forces inflict significant losses on the separatists, who have suffered heavy casualties and lost several of their field commanders since September 2018. But the army is unable to guarantee security in the towns or retain full control of rural areas.<sup>5</sup> More than 200 incidents have taken place in the last six months (attacks and kidnappings by separatists, arson and other operations by the security forces).

### A. The Security Situation

Seven armed militias present on the ground have a total of between 2,000 and 4,000 combatants.<sup>6</sup> They recruit mainly from the Anglophone community, but also among the security forces and include dozens of Nigerian mercenaries, who generally bring their own weapons and ammunition and are deployed as trainers or combatants. Some are former combatants or those out of work after agreements between the Nigerian government and political-military groups in the Niger Delta. Others are simply criminals who fled to Cross River state to escape the Delta Safe 1 Operation launched in 2016 by the Nigerian army to fight crime in the Delta.<sup>7</sup> Dozens of Cameroonian police officers and soldiers, mostly officers, and retired or discharged soldiers have also joined the militias.<sup>8</sup> Most militias have female combatants, some of whom are local leaders.<sup>9</sup>

In 2018, the militias gradually took control of some rural and urban periphery areas. Since September 2018, they have had to adapt their deployments to security

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<sup>3</sup> Faced with multiple security challenges (Boko Haram in the Far North, increasing insecurity in the East and Adamawa), the government decided in 2015 to create a special forces unit. The first recruits completed their training in 2018. The unit now has around 200 soldiers and is trained in Gabon by French personnel, who reportedly privately protested at their temporary deployment to the Anglophone regions. Crisis Group interviews, Cameroonian colonel and French military experts, Yaoundé, October 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Erwan de Cherisey, "Cameroon's BIR takes delivery of Panthera T6 vehicles", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 11 October 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Crisis Group interviews, security forces and Anglophone journalists, Douala and Buea, September-December 2018. "Generals" Amigo and Ivo Mbah (Ambazonia Defence Forces – ADF) and Andrew Ngoe (Southern Cameroons' Defense Forces – SOCADEF) were killed in November, December 2018 and January 2019, respectively. See also Mathieu Olivier, "Crise anglophone au Cameroun : qui sont les sécessionnistes ?", *Jeune Afrique*, 1 February 2019.

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix C.

<sup>7</sup> Crisis Group interviews, journalists, academics, Cameroon's security forces and Nigerian intelligence officers, Abuja and Yaoundé, November and December 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Cameroon's security forces and Western military expert, Yaoundé, December 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Crisis Group interviews, separatist militants and Anglophone women's associations, Buea and Bamenda, December 2018.

force offensives but, despite suffering losses, they retain a position of strength in most of these areas, maintaining roadblocks and security checkpoints. They have even managed to organise attacks on towns such as Buea (Southwest) and Bamenda (Northwest), which suffered about twenty attacks in 2018. They are equipped mostly with locally made traditional firearms, but also carry modern firearms and a few machine guns and RPGs.<sup>10</sup> Many of these weapons were seized from the security forces, while others were acquired in Nigeria from paramilitary or criminal groups in the Delta.<sup>11</sup>

Initially funded almost exclusively by the diaspora, the militias have become more autonomous. Last year, they carried out many more kidnappings for ransom, extorted shopkeepers and certain sectors of the population and imposed “taxes” on companies. This relative financial independence allows them to cut themselves free from political organisations in the diaspora. Ignoring orders to respect the rights of civilians, they commit abuses and are gradually alienating the residents. As the population becomes less cooperative, they have greater recourse to violence to ensure obedience.<sup>12</sup>

Since mid-2018, the conflict in Anglophone regions has spread to Cameroon's Francophone regions, increasing the risk of intercommunal conflict. About twenty attacks, including arson, have taken place in the Francophone West (Menoua, Bamiboutos and Noun) and Littoral (Mbanga, Njombe Penja and Mpenda Mboko) regions, killing about fifteen people and causing considerable material damage.<sup>13</sup> In addition to the armed separatist groups, some pro-government self-defence militias, especially in Bakweri and Mbororo communities, and an unknown number of small criminal groups and semi-criminal/semi-separatist groups are active, including in the West region. Separatist militia attacks in December 2018 against Bangourain, a village in the Francophone West region, close to the border with the Northwest region, were followed by reprisals against Anglophone communities.<sup>14</sup>

## *B. The Humanitarian, Social and Economic Impact*

The conflict in the Anglophone regions is causing a major humanitarian crisis, with 530,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) and 35,000 refugees in Nigeria, mostly women and children.<sup>15</sup>

Humanitarian assistance to IDPs is insufficient to meet needs, according to the UN.<sup>16</sup> This is due to under-funding, difficult access and security risks. Cameroon's

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<sup>10</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Nigerian academics, Abuja, November 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Some Nigerian former combatants said it would be straightforward to provide Anglophone separatists with massive arms supplies because the border with Cameroon is porous, but the separatists do not have enough money to pay for them. Crisis Group interviews, former combatants in the Niger Delta and Nigerian academics, Abuja and Calabar (capital of Cross River state), November 2018.

<sup>12</sup> The extortion of civilians is not the only reason why the population is turning against the militias. Some people are tired of the conflict and believe it is unwinnable. Crisis Group interviews, academics and residents, Buea and Abuja, November and December 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Crisis Group interviews, security forces and Anglophone journalists, Yaoundé and Douala, December 2018.

<sup>14</sup> “Cameroun : la petite ville de Bangourain sur le pied de guerre”, Radio France Internationale (RFI), 26 December 2018.

<sup>15</sup> “Cameroon: North-West and South-West situation report”, OCHA, 31 March 2019.

<sup>16</sup> “Cameroun : des centaines de milliers de personnes ont besoin d'une assistance urgente”, UN News, 24 January 2019.

authorities initially obstructed international humanitarian assistance and opposed the presence of UN and humanitarian NGOs in affected areas. In July 2018, the government reacted to increased UN pressure for access to Anglophone regions by announcing its own Humanitarian Response Plan.<sup>17</sup> Distribution of aid is all the more difficult because few IDPs are accommodated in dedicated sites. Some are hosted by families; others live in the forest where access is difficult.<sup>18</sup> International aid is focused on Anglophone regions, where three quarters of IDPs are living. Only a few of the 86,000 displaced in Francophone regions (Douala and the West) are receiving assistance, even from NGOs. The same is probably true for thousands of non-identified IDPs in Yaoundé.<sup>19</sup>

Refugees began to pour into Nigeria at the end of 2017. They are mainly in the care of the UN High Commission for Refugees, the Nigerian government, local authorities and local and international NGOs. But support is limited because Nigeria is itself dealing with the millions of people displaced by the country's multiple security and humanitarian crises.<sup>20</sup> Most of the refugees live with host families, but some camps have been established, including at Ogoja in Cross River State (6,000 refugees).<sup>21</sup> Initially established close to the border with Cameroon in the states of Cross River, Benue and Taraba, these sites were moved 50km away from the border in September 2018 to avoid incursions by Cameroon's security forces tracking secessionists.<sup>22</sup> Since then, there have been fewer incursions and also fewer trips back and forth by refugees between the camps in Nigeria and their villages in Cameroon.<sup>23</sup>

The conflict has also had repercussions for the education system. Since 2017, the separatists have demanded the closure of schools and threatened or burned down establishments that have remained open. Consequently, the pupil attendance has fallen drastically and many pupils have dropped out. The majority of children in the Anglophone regions have not been to school for two or three years; unwanted pregnancies are increasing among young women; and many families are pressuring their children into working. Even if the conflict were to end now, it would be difficult for these children to go back to school.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Crisis Group interviews, UN diplomats, humanitarian actors and senior officials, Yaoundé, October–December 2018.

<sup>18</sup> “Un Camerounais sur six a besoin d’une aide humanitaire, selon l’ONU”, *Le Monde*, 25 January 2019.

<sup>19</sup> Crisis Group interviews, displaced Anglophones, the mayor of Konye and the assistant mayor of Kumbo, Yaoundé, March 2019.

<sup>20</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Nigerian National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and IDPs, administrative authorities and humanitarian actors, Abuja and Calabar, November 2018. See Crisis Group Africa Report N°262, *Stopping Nigeria's Spiralling Herder-Farmer Violence*, 26 July 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian actors, Abuja and Calabar, November 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Refugees in Taraba are still in the process of registration. Crisis Group interviews, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Nigeria and security forces, Abuja and Calabar, November 2018.

<sup>23</sup> Some refugees are reportedly part-time combatants. Others pass some humanitarian aid to their families in Cameroon. Crisis Group interviews, Cameroonian refugees and humanitarian actors, Calabar, Ikom and Ogoja, November 2018.

<sup>24</sup> School attendance has fallen by 70 per cent since January 2017. Crisis Group interviews, humanitarian actors, teachers and mayors, Buea and Bamenda, December 2018.

Continuing conflict risks causing an even more serious problem: a whole generation of children brought up to hate Cameroon, who could form the backbone of future armed groups. At some IDP reception sites, children are re-educated about the history of Ambazonia, the name given by the separatists to their self-proclaimed state. Among the refugees in Nigeria, there is strong support for the separatists and the armed militias. Their defiance of Cameroon's government is such that they refuse gifts or visits from the authorities. They often teach their children the anthem and history of Ambazonia.<sup>25</sup>

The conflict has had devastating effects on the economy of the Anglophone regions and the entire country. Major state-owned companies, such as the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) and Pamol, which employ tens of thousands of people in the Anglophone regions, are experiencing serious problems. There is no thorough assessment of the conflict's economic impact, but in July 2018 the Cameroon Employers' Association (GICAM) estimated the value of losses at FCFA 269 billion (€410 million). It also calculated that 6,434 jobs had been lost in the formal economy and a further 8,000 jobs were under threat.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Nigerian officials, humanitarian actors and refugees, Calabar and Ikom, November 2018.

<sup>26</sup> GICAM's assessment is incomplete, but provides an interesting insight into the conflict's impact on the economy. In March 2019, the CDC evaluated company losses at €53 million and Cameroon's employers estimated the losses of companies in the Anglophone region at €460 million. "Insécurité dans les régions du Sud-Ouest et Nord-Ouest : conséquences économiques et impact sur l'activité des entreprises", GICAM, July 2018. "Le conflit séparatiste au Cameroun devient crise agricole et économique", France 24, 27 March 2019.

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### **III. Positions of the Parties I: The Government on the Defensive**

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The government has responded to the Anglophone crisis with repression and intransigence. But there is not unanimous support within the government for such a policy.

#### *A. Intransigence as a Rule*

The government has responded with denial, disdain and violence right from the initial protests from lawyers and teachers, the leaders of which it described as “secessionists”.<sup>27</sup> Since 2017, the security forces have violently repressed demonstrations, killed dozens, arrested hundreds of activists, including leaders and shut down the Internet.<sup>28</sup> The government denied even the existence of a crisis in the Anglophone regions and still denies there is any Anglophone problem. Senior officials and members of the government have described Anglophone demonstrators as “dogs” and “terrorists”, while journalists close to the government continue to incite the authorities to step up repression against the Anglophones.<sup>29</sup>

Within the government, changing the form of the state remains taboo. In the wake of the introduction of a multi-party system in the 1990s, it held out the prospect of decentralisation to dampen Anglophone discontent and demands for a return to federalism, abolished in 1972. The Constitution of 1996 provides for decentralisation, but this provision has never been fully implemented.<sup>30</sup>

Faced with federalist and secessionist demands, the government is once again presenting a phoney decentralisation. Although the budget for decentralised local authorities (regions and communes) increased fivefold in 2019, from FCFA 10 to 49.8 billion (€15.2 to €74.8 million), it only represents 1 per cent of the national budget (CFA 4,850 billion or €7.4 billion).<sup>31</sup> In decentralised African countries like Kenya,

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<sup>27</sup> Crisis Group interviews, senior officials, Yaoundé, March 2017.

<sup>28</sup> See Crisis Group Africa Report N°250, *Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis at the Crossroads*, 2 August 2017; and Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°130, *Cameroon's Worsening Anglophone Crisis Calls for Strong Measures*, 19 October 2017.

<sup>29</sup> “Governor Okalia Bilai called Southern Cameroonians dogs. Listen excerpt of the audio”, YouTube, 29 September 2017; “Issa Tchiroma traite les sécessionnistes de terroristes”, YouTube, 3 October 2017. “Cameroun : un journaliste accusé d'incitation à la haine contre les anglophones”, RFI, 4 October 2017. On 17 March 2019, a politician close to the government told Afrique Media: “Paul Biya is too soft with the Anglophones. The Constitution gives him the right to kill anybody to preserve Cameroon's unity”.

<sup>30</sup> See Law n°96-06 of 18 January 1996 on amendments to the Constitution of 2 June 1972. Between 2004 and 2019, Cameroon's parliament approved a dozen laws on decentralisation and the executive has issued several decrees. See Law n°2004/017 of 22 July 2004 on decentralisation guidelines; Law n°2004/018 of 22 July 2004 establishing the rules applicable to communes; Law n°2004/019 of 22 July 2004 establishing the rules applicable to regions; Law n°2006/004 of 14 July 2006 establishing procedures for electing regional councillors; Law n°2006/005 of 14 July 2006 establishing procedures for electing senators; Law n°2006/011 of 29 December 2006 on the creation, organisation and operation of the Cameroon Election Council (ELECAM); Law n°2009/011 of 10 July 2009 on the financial regime for decentralised local authorities; and Law n°2009/019 of 19 December 2009 on local taxation.

<sup>31</sup> See decree on the division of the general budget for the purposes of decentralisation, 22 February 2019. These funds are allocated in arrears and sometimes unfairly. For example, in March 2018,

30 per cent of the national budget is devolved to regions and communes.<sup>32</sup> In addition, the legislation and abuse of power by central authorities such as governors and prefects limit the powers of local authorities in taxation, administration, development, public infrastructure, schools, health centres and roadbuilding. Finally, the country's main cities, such as Douala, Yaoundé, Edéa and Garoua, are governed by super-mayors ("government delegates"), appointed by the President of the Republic.<sup>33</sup>

Over-centralisation is one of the country's main structural weaknesses, however, which has led to the Anglophone crisis. A genuine decentralisation would see a significant part of the national budget allocated to communes and regions, a real transfer of powers, the abolition of the position of government delegates, a limited supervisory role for governors, direct elections for regional executives and greater powers for the two Anglophone regions in the education and justice sectors. By opposing these measures, the government is obstructing the resolution of the Anglophone crisis and accentuating the country's structural vulnerabilities.<sup>34</sup>

The governing elite is still hoping for a military solution to the conflict before the local elections scheduled for October 2019. It is comforted in this illusion by the setbacks inflicted on the separatists in recent months. But this is a mistake: the weakening of the separatists is more due to internal divisions and poor management of resources than to the losses they have suffered. Furthermore, since March, the separatists have been raising funds to buy arms and are convening meetings to discuss reorganisation of the armed groups.<sup>35</sup>

### *B. Disagreements within the Governing Class*

Within the governing elite, almost all the Francophone leaders advocate a military solution to the conflict, but senior Anglophones in government are more divided. Some fear they will lose their positions in the event of dialogue, which may lead to the emergence of a new Anglophone elite. Others are favourable to dialogue with the separatists. But they are careful to hide their views and sometimes even take intransigent positions for fear of arousing suspicion they may be sympathetic to the Anglophone cause.

Some senior officers in the security forces firmly believe in repression. Others feel that a more political approach, with emphasis on decentralisation or regionalism, should accompany the military response. Aware there can be no military victory, they nevertheless hope to contain the conflict and reduce the violence to a residual level, as in the Far North. Rather than seeking complete control over the Anglophone

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several communes had not yet received the funds allocated to them for the year. Some opposition mayors believe this is a government strategy to weaken them and say that communes under the control of the governing party get preferential treatment. Crisis Group interviews, mayors, Kumba, Buea, Bamenda, Douala and Yaoundé, March and October 2018.

<sup>32</sup> "The Constitution of Kenya", 6 May 2010; Crisis Group interviews, Kenyan researchers, Nairobi, March 2019.

<sup>33</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Francophone and Anglophone mayors and subprefects, Yaoundé, Buea, Kumba and Bamenda, March 2017, October 2018 and March 2019.

<sup>34</sup> See Crisis Group Africa Report N°160, *Cameroun: Fragile State?*, 25 May 2010.

<sup>35</sup> Crisis Group interviews, separatist militants, Washington, March 2019; "Official launching of the National AK campaign", YouTube, 3 March 2019.

regions, they aim to maintain control over urban areas, the urban peripheries and “strategic” rural areas.<sup>36</sup>

The disagreements within the military are also fuelled by doubts among senior officers in the Army high command about their capacity to sustain the conflict for several more years. They have already had to redeploy some units and combat vehicles in the Far North to the Anglophone regions. Moreover, the hasty and poorly planned recruitment of more than 20,000 soldiers and police officers over the last five years has lowered standards.<sup>37</sup> The army is sending an increasing number of soldiers to the front before they have completed their training. Poor management is another problem: senior officers sometimes reportedly request the purchase of costly and inefficient equipment in the hope of obtaining large kickbacks, while army officers lack basic equipment in some units.<sup>38</sup> Other obstacles have recently emerged, such as the desertion of Anglophone soldiers and the difficulty of recruiting Anglophones, leading to over-representation of Francophones among the military deployed in affected areas.<sup>39</sup>

These disagreements within the governing class partly explain the timid concessions made by the government in 2017 and 2018.

### C. *Sham Concessions*

International pressure, in the form of statements by Western countries and inter-governmental organisations – including the UN and the European Union (EU) – combined with internal pressures (increased use of civic strikes, boycott and burning of schools and the emergence of a separatist leadership) have forced the government to make some concessions. Between March and July 2017, it took several measures in response to the demands of teachers’ and lawyers’ trade unions: translation into English of the code produced by the Organisation for the Harmonisation of Business Law in Africa; recruitment of bilingual teachers and court auditors; creation of a Commission for Bilingualism and Multiculturalism; and restoration of the internet. But the Anglophone population deplored these cosmetic measures, which were irrelevant to its main demand – a return to federalism.<sup>40</sup> The government also accepted the legality of the teachers’ and lawyers’ demands and, at the end of August 2017, released several leaders of the initial protests, including the lawyer Agbor Balla and some 30 activists.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Crisis Group interviews, senior army officers, Yaoundé, October 2018.

<sup>37</sup> Crisis Group interview, general, Yaoundé, October 2018.

<sup>38</sup> Crisis Group interviews, colonels and parliamentarians, Yaoundé, July 2018.

<sup>39</sup> Crisis Group interviews, senior army officers and senior Western officer, Yaoundé, December 2018.

<sup>40</sup> For example, the Commission for Bilingualism is accountable only to the President of the Republic and has no power to punish language discrimination in public or private institutions. Crisis Group interviews, members of the Commission for Bilingualism, Douala and Buea, March 2018. Crisis Group Report, *Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis at the Crossroads*, op. cit.

<sup>41</sup> They were arrested in January 2017 and accused of terrorism for demanding federalism and organising general strikes after the failure of negotiations with the government about their initial demands. “Cameroun : les premiers leaders anglophones libérés”, RFI, 31 August 2017.

In 2018, the government took other measures, but they were not preceded by either a conciliatory discourse or inclusive dialogue. In March 2018, President Paul Biya created a ministry for Decentralisation and Local Development and appointed Anglophones to ministerial posts that no Anglophone had previously occupied.<sup>42</sup> In June, the prime minister announced a Humanitarian Response Plan with a budget of FCFA 13 billion (€19.8 million) for the Anglophone regions; in November, President Biya created a disarmament and demobilisation committee for ex-combatants of Boko Haram and the separatists; and in December, he released 289 of the around 1,000 detained Anglophone activists.<sup>43</sup> Finally, in his end of year speech, he announced that elections for regional councils would be held in 2019.

But these measures may be counter-productive if the government is simply trying to offer evidence of good faith. The president may have appointed Anglophones to important ministries, but the appointees are very unpopular in the Anglophone regions.<sup>44</sup> He said he wanted to accelerate decentralisation but refuses to make the necessary changes to the legislative framework. Furthermore, he plans to organise regional council elections before municipal and legislative elections, which, given that regional elections are indirect, would allow the governing party to continue dominating regional councils.<sup>45</sup> Without an inclusive dialogue and amendments to laws on decentralisation, regional elections risk provoking a new wave of violence in Anglophone regions and accentuate intercommunal tensions in Francophone areas.<sup>46</sup>

These sham concessions show, however, that the government may consent to genuine decentralisation, including changes to the legislative framework and greater autonomy for Anglophone regions in the education and judicial sectors, if it is subjected to strong pressure. The government might also consider encouraging the development of Anglophone regions. During discussions with diplomats in October 2018, government representatives showed willingness to increase public investment in the Anglophone regions.<sup>47</sup> Meanwhile, the danger for Cameroon is that the government runs out of the measures that could have eased tensions at the onset of the crisis but which are now too little too late.

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<sup>42</sup> Atanga Nji and Nalova Lyonga were appointed as ministers for Territorial Administration and Secondary Education respectively.

<sup>43</sup> Decree n°2018/719 of 30 November 2018 on the creation of the National Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Committee; “Libération de prisonniers anglophones au Cameroun ; du saupoudrage pour les ONG”, RFI, 17 December 2018.

<sup>44</sup> Atanga Nji is a strong advocate of repression and denies that an Anglophone problem exists. His appointment was frowned on by some independent journalists and NGO leaders in Cameroon, who consider him a destructive element. Crisis Group interviews, Anglophone NGO and journalists, Yaoundé, Buea and Bamenda, September 2018.

<sup>45</sup> 90 per cent of the electoral college (municipal councillors, mayors and traditional chiefs), whose mandate was supposed to have ended two years ago but was extended by the President of the Republic, are members of the governing party. “Cameroun : deux projets de lois du gouvernement pour l’élection des conseillers régionaux”, camer.be, 21 March 2019.

<sup>46</sup> See Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°142, *Cameroon: Divisions Widen Ahead of Presidential Vote*, 3 October 2018.

<sup>47</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Western ambassadors, Yaoundé, 2018.

## **IV. Positions of the Parties II: The Anglophone Actors**

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Anglophone public opinion has perceptibly changed since the end of 2016. In the context of the government's intransigence, the notion of separatism first gained traction. At the end of 2017, armed militias emerged on the ground. Today, although Anglophones of all shades of opinion (separatists, federalists and supporters of decentralisation), remain unhappy with the government's response, support for the armed militias is weakening because of the abuses they have committed and the heavy price the population is paying for the conflict.

### *A. The Separatists in a Strong Position in the Anglophone Movement*

The separatists are structured around two main political bodies, both with armed wings. The Interim Government of the Federal Republic of Ambazonia (IG) and the Ambazonia Governing Council (AGC) both claim to be the legitimate government of Southern Cameroons, the name of the Anglophone regions under British trusteeship and mandate. There are also several smaller separatist organisations.<sup>48</sup> Most of the separatist organisations are based abroad. At the start of the crisis, not all of them were convinced of the need to take up arms. But as the violence intensified, they prepared for a "liberation" struggle. Today, the separatist current includes seven main armed militias.

Considered by most separatists and many Anglophones to be the government of Ambazonia on its creation in June 2017, the IG was weakened politically by the arrest in January 2018 in Nigeria of its figurehead, Julius Ayuk Tabe. Several separatist activists accuse the new leadership under Ikome Sako of incompetence and misappropriation of funds.<sup>49</sup> Some activists now see the IG as just a separatist organisation among many others.

Grouping several organisations, it nevertheless remains the most politically credible and best-funded separatist organisation.<sup>50</sup> It established an Ambazonia Security Council (ASC), a kind of platform for cooperation between the armed militias within its field of influence, such as Tigers 2 and Red Dragons, and an embryonic parliament called the Ambazonia Recognition Coalition (ARC).<sup>51</sup> It has ten ministerial departments, including the Department of Health and Social Services, which assists Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria. The IG, whose monthly budget reportedly varies from

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<sup>48</sup> The smaller organisations include the Ambazonia People's Liberation Movement (APLM) and the Southern Cameroons Peoples' Organisation (SCAPO). A product of the Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL), the APLM is led by Ebenezer Akawanga. Its military wing is the Southern Cameroons Defense Forces (SOCADEF). The SCAPO is led by Milan Atam, former IG general secretary. The APLM and the SCAPO are close to the IG's line. Crisis Group interviews, Anglophone journalists, Buea, December 2018.

<sup>49</sup> Several office holders have gone so far as to resign in protest at the poor management. The most recent resignation was by the spokesperson, Chris Anu, in February 2019.

<sup>50</sup> For example, the Southern Cameroons Consortium United Front (SCACUF), the Movement for Independence and Restoration of Southern Cameroons (MORISC), the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), the Southern Cameroons Congress of People (SCCOP) and the Southern Cameroons Restoration Movement (SCARM). Crisis Group interviews, Anglophone journalists, Buea, December 2018.

<sup>51</sup> See the Interim Government's website: [www.ambazoniagov.org](http://www.ambazoniagov.org).

tens of thousands to a hundred thousand dollars, is mainly funded by donations from the diaspora, including a significant number of women, but business people and shopkeepers in Cameroon allegedly also contribute in order to protect their premises from vandalism.<sup>52</sup>

The IG's official objective is the "restoration of the independence of Southern Cameroons". The conditions put forward for a dialogue with the Cameroonian state include international mediation by the UN, the African Union (AU) or the U.S., negotiations to take place on neutral territory and an agenda covering the practical details of separation.<sup>53</sup>

The IG's rival, the Ambazonia Governing Council (AGC), was founded in 2013 by its president, Ayaba Cho Lucas. The Ambazonia Defence Forces (ADF), led by Benedict Kuah, and other movements, such as the Ambazonia Recognition Collaboration Council (ARCC) are affiliated to it. The AGC is more hardline than the IG.<sup>54</sup> Ayaba Cho, who lives in Norway, is its undisputed leader and takes decisions practically alone, contrary to the relatively collegial way of making decisions in the IG. It aims to make the Anglophone regions ungovernable until the government realises that the cost of fighting the armed militias is greater than the benefits accruing from exploitation of the regions' natural resources.<sup>55</sup>

Despite the public discourse, some separatist movements and influential members of the IG reportedly are in favour of a confederation/autonomy (for example, similar to Northern Ireland's status within the UK) or federation (like in Germany, Canada, the U.S. and Nigeria). But pressure from hardline members and young activists, some of whom have lost family members in the violence, and the dynamics of the conflict mean they allegedly do not dare to publicly countenance a confederation as a compromise solution. They therefore take an unrealistic maximalist position to satisfy the hardliners and those in the diaspora who fund the IG, and also to maintain morale among the armed militias.<sup>56</sup>

Some Anglophone journalists think that several separatist leaders could even accept an advanced form of decentralisation, on certain conditions.<sup>57</sup> Aware of the impossibility of achieving secession in the short term, they would opt for a long-term strategy: an advanced decentralisation that would allow them to get elected at the local level and prepare for later battles for autonomy.<sup>58</sup>

The separatist movement is relatively divided. The various organisations and their militias do not share the same political demands.<sup>59</sup> The differences concern the

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<sup>52</sup> Crisis Group interviews, journalist and Anglophone activists, Douala and Bamenda, October-December 2018.

<sup>53</sup> Crisis Group interviews, separatist leaders, Washington, March 2019. The many speeches by Julius Ayuk Tabe and Ikome Sako available on their Youtube and Facebook pages reiterate this position.

<sup>54</sup> See [www.agcfreeambazonia.org](http://www.agcfreeambazonia.org).

<sup>55</sup> See Ayaba Cho Lucas' YouTube channel: [www.youtube.com/channel/UCCCxu79YjaoZCHMAhM5ugmA/featured](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCCxu79YjaoZCHMAhM5ugmA/featured).

<sup>56</sup> Crisis Group telephone interviews, IG members, February 2019.

<sup>57</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Anglophone journalists, Douala, December 2018

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Faced with recriminations from armed groups regarding their lack of unity and their poor financial management, the political wings of the separatists met in August 2018 in front of the White

operational strategies and financial management, and also relate to internal power struggles. The disagreements between separatists, especially between the IG and the AGC, led to fratricidal clashes that left dozens dead in 2018.<sup>60</sup>

Although militia leaders seem opposed to federalism and decentralisation, many combatants might defect if a genuine political solution acceptable to the Anglophone populations and the diaspora can be found.<sup>61</sup> Combatants join the militias for many different reasons: some on ideological grounds, others to avenge family members or because their homes and villages were burned down. Others join because they are unemployed or in the hope of material benefit. But Anglophone journalists and activists believe that, whatever their reasons for joining, a significant proportion of combatants would lay down their arms in exchange for an inclusive dialogue and an adequate demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration program.<sup>62</sup>

In addition to the main militias that depend on political movements based abroad, the small semi-criminal, semi-political groups pose a supplementary problem. Faced with the diaspora's inability to provide sufficient financial support, and in the context of an increase in the recruitment of combatants, these militias partly fund themselves through extortion, kidnappings and taxation. Profiting from the spoils of war to get rich, some militia leaders reject any proposal short of secession.<sup>63</sup>

In short, a large proportion of separatists might eventually accept a dialogue with the Cameroonian state on federalism and agree to participate, remotely, in talks held in Cameroon. They would no doubt demand the involvement of an international mediator, preferably in combination with the initiatives of religious leaders. They would also expect the release of all Anglophone detainees, including members of the IG; better political representation for Anglophones, including the appointment of an Anglophone as vice president of the country; an increase in public investment in the Anglophone regions; and special measures for the reconstruction of areas affected by the conflict.<sup>64</sup>

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House, in the U.S. to publicise and sign a joint statement on the closure of schools and the "Ghost Town" civic strikes. But this agreement misfired. "Arrival of Ambazonia leaders to protest in front of White House", YouTube, 19 August 2018.

<sup>60</sup> In general, the IG opposes attacks in Francophone areas, contrary to the AGC. The two organisations also have different views whether the "Ghost Town" civic strikes are the right course of action and how long they should last beyond the customary Monday events. For example, at the end of December 2018, the IG called for a halt to civic strikes during the last two weeks of the year, but the AGC opposed this call. In February, militias close to the IG or independent declared ten days of civic strikes to boycott the 11 February celebrations (date of the referendum on self-determination organised by the UN in 1961 in Southern Cameroons; in 1966, 11 February became a national holiday for youth), but the AGC again opposed. Crisis Group telephone interviews, Anglophone activists, January 2019. "Cameroon: Ambazonia activists divided over ten-days lockdown", *Journal du Cameroun*, 4 February 2019.

<sup>61</sup> Crisis Group interviews, journalists and Anglophone activists, Douala, Buea and Bamenda, December 2018; and telephone interviews with two separatist combatants, January 2019.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Crisis Group telephone interviews, separatist combatants, January 2019.

<sup>64</sup> Crisis Group telephone interviews and email correspondence, influential separatists and two armed militia chiefs, October 2018-February 2019.

## B. *Federalists at the Crossroads*

A significant sector of Anglophone opinion favours federalism.<sup>65</sup> It calls for the reform of the Cameroonian state rather than its dismemberment and does not support the armed struggle. The federalists include leaders of the initial protest, such as the lawyer Felix Agbor Balla, political parties, such as the Social Democratic Front, some members of the ruling party, members of the Bilingualism Commission and most traditional chiefs, religious leaders and economic operators.<sup>66</sup> In the diaspora, groups supporting federalism, such as English Cameroon for a United Cameroon have been formed and have tried to assert points of view other than separatism among Cameroonians abroad.<sup>67</sup>

The federalists played a key role at the start of the crisis, by associating sector level demands with more political questions, such as the place of Anglophones in public life in Cameroon and the form of the state.<sup>68</sup> The Social Democratic Front, which has long advocated federalism, unsuccessfully tried to put the Anglophone crisis on parliament's agenda in 2017.<sup>69</sup> It also tried in vain to obtain the annulment of the presidential election results of October 2018 in the Anglophone regions. The Bilingualism Commission compiled the grievances of the Anglophone community in June 2018 and presented the return of federalism as the population's main demand, but with no response from the government.<sup>70</sup>

But since the imprisonment of its leaders in January 2017, the federalist current has lost ground to the separatists and has been unable to overcome its divisions. Several federalists have even joined the separatists since the end of 2017. The federalists are divided between hardliners and others who could accept decentralisation. The latter group would be larger still if decentralisation was accompanied by government recognition of the Anglophone problem, the release of Anglophone detainees, the reconstruction of places affected by the conflict, better political representation and greater autonomy for Anglophone regions in the education and judicial fields. The federalists are also divided on what form of federalism to adopt (the number of federated states) and between those who demand that any political solution is put to the population in a referendum on self-determination (seeking to gain the support of

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<sup>65</sup> There is also a small minority trend in favour of decentralisation, especially within the governing elite and the ruling party. Those who hold this view call for better technical responses to the crisis and changes to the legislative framework for decentralisation. They follow the government line, even though some think that the latter's response is inadequate. They want at any price to avoid resolution of the conflict disrupting the social and political order.

<sup>66</sup> Crisis Group interviews, SDF leaders, academics, traditional chiefs and local NGOs, Douala, Buea and Bamenda, October-December 2018.

<sup>67</sup> Crisis Group interviews, SDF leaders and federalist figures, Douala, Buea and Bamenda, October 2018.

<sup>68</sup> Crisis Group Report, *Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis at the Crossroads*, op. cit., p. 11- 16.

<sup>69</sup> "Crise anglophone au Cameroun : le SDF lance un blocus de l'Assemblée nationale", *Jeune Afrique*, 23 November 2017.

<sup>70</sup> Crisis Group interview, member of the Bilingualism Commission, Buea, October 2018. "Crise anglophone : ce que les anglophones demandent au gouvernement", *Journal du Cameroun*, 6 June 2018.

the separatists) that would allow the Anglophones to choose between decentralisation, federalism and secession, and those who do not insist on a referendum.<sup>71</sup>

The federalist camp is therefore fragmented. To be able to eventually negotiate with the government and find common ground with the separatists, the federalists must first get together and agree on a common position.

### C. *Other Anglophone Actors*

Several Anglophone actors, many of them close to the federalists, have launched initiatives. The Anglophone General Conference and initiatives by women's associations, such as the South West and North West Women's Task Force, seem to be the most credible.

In July 2018, Cardinal Christian Tumi, former Archbishop of Douala, and three Protestant and Muslim religious leaders convened an Anglophone General Conference as a forum to prepare for national dialogue.<sup>72</sup> The idea was to create space for the various Anglophone actors to try and reach agreement on the questions that should go on the agenda of such a dialogue, and on who would represent the Anglophone regions. A large proportion of Anglophones, including some federalists in the diaspora, support such a conference and have contributed to its costs.<sup>73</sup> Cardinal Tumi quickly raised the necessary funds (\$55,000).<sup>74</sup>

The conference organisers, however, have faced opposition from Yaoundé and the separatists. They have had to postpone it from August to November 2018 and then to March 2019; the conference did not take place but the organisers have not yet set a new date. Some separatists have issued death threats to one of the organisers.<sup>75</sup> In addition to ideological reasons (refusal to speak to a government that they believe is an occupying force), separatists in the diaspora are especially fearful that, if the conference takes place, they will lose their position as leaders of the Anglophone opposition to the advantage of activists in the country.

For the conference to have a chance of taking place now that the March date has passed, the organisers must reassure the government and the separatists about their intentions.<sup>76</sup> According to the cardinal, separatists might consent to the conference on condition that it leads to a referendum on federalism or independence; the IG even sent representatives to a preparatory meeting in Douala on 29 September

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<sup>71</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Anglophone federalists, Buea, Kumba, Bamenda and Ndop, July-December 2018.

<sup>72</sup> For more on the Anglophone General Conference, see Crisis Group statement, *Cameroon: Proposed Anglophone Conference Deserves National and International Support*, 17 September 2018; and Crisis Group Briefing, *Cameroon: Divisions Widen Ahead of Presidential Vote*, op. cit.

<sup>73</sup> Crisis Group interviews, organisers of the Anglophone General Conference, Douala, October 2018.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> "Cameroon: Simon Munzu pulls out of Anglophone General Conference", *Journal du Cameroun*, 14 November 2018.

<sup>76</sup> The cardinal told Crisis Group that he did not intend to go against the government and: "if the conference takes place and President Biya does not heed its recommendations, we are not going to do anything because we cannot get involved in an arm wrestling match with the government". Crisis Group interview, Cardinal Tumi, Douala, October 2018.

2018.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, strong international pressure could lead to a change in the government's attitude. Since September, Western embassies in Yaoundé, especially the EU and the U.S., have indicated their political support for the conference. In order to not be seen as creating obstacles to peace initiatives, the government seems to be using indirect means to stop the conference taking place, such as not issuing the necessary authorisations.<sup>78</sup>

For some diplomats, however, the hearings given to Cardinal Tumi in February 2019 by the prime minister and in April by the director of the cabinet of the presidential cabinet could foreshadow an upcoming opening of the government on his initiative.<sup>79</sup>

Since 2018, women's associations, such as the South West and North West Women's Task Force have mobilised in favour of dialogue and on other specific issues. In August 2018, dozens of women from the two regions criticised violence against women and children and the school boycott policy imposed by the separatists and they called for dialogue.<sup>80</sup> This mobilisation had some results, persuading the IG to change its position on school boycotts for a while.<sup>81</sup>

This association seems to be tolerated by the government, including Anglophone officials, who do not see it as a threat. Since it was created in 2018, it officially encourages all initiatives that seek to give autonomy to the regions (decentralisation and federalism).<sup>82</sup> Moreover, it is also appreciated by Western embassies, particularly those of Canada and the EU. It works closely with the organisers of the Anglophone General Conference.<sup>83</sup> But for the moment, notwithstanding slogans, these activities are almost exclusively limited to awareness raising.

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<sup>77</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Cardinal Tumi, Douala, October and December 2018.

<sup>78</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Western diplomats, Yaoundé, October and December 2018.

<sup>79</sup> Crisis Group telephone interviews, Western and UN diplomats, April 2019.

<sup>80</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, president of the South West and North West Women's Task Force, February 2019.

<sup>81</sup> IG's president advised Anglophone children not to follow official education programs, but said that those who wanted to go back to school could do so. The success of this spontaneous mobilisation can also be explained by the fact that several demonstrators are the mothers of combatants. Moreover, while the Anglophone population initially accepted the school boycott, it has become very unpopular.

<sup>82</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, president of the South West and North West Women's Task Force, February 2019.

<sup>83</sup> Crisis Group telephone interviews, UN diplomats, January 2019.

## **V. The Other Main Actors: Francophone Cameroonians and International Partners**

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Francophone Cameroonians and international actors are now paying heed to the conflict in the Anglophone regions. But although some Francophone political parties and civil society organisations have expressed their solidarity with the Anglophones, they have proved unable to generate support among the Francophone community. Meanwhile, international partners are increasingly worried about the way in which the conflict is spreading, but remain divided regarding their analysis of the crisis and how to solve it.

### *A. Civil Society and the Francophone Opposition*

From the start of the conflict, the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon (CENC) has spoken out on behalf of the Catholic Church, the most credible institution in the country, to call for dialogue and a halt to the violence.<sup>84</sup> On several occasions, it has called on the government to make efforts to understand the frustrations of Anglophones and their demands for more autonomy. The Church has also offered to mediate, but the government has not accepted this offer. Twice in 2018, the Episcopal Conference asked for an audience with the President of the Republic to discuss the Anglophone crisis, but in vain.<sup>85</sup>

The Church remains divided between pro-federalism Anglophone bishops and Francophone bishops who prefer decentralisation or regionalism. Among the Francophone clergy, some bishops in the Centre, South and East of the country (where the President of the Republic has a strong influence) are close to the government's position and act as a brake on the initiatives taken by the Episcopal Conference and other bishops.<sup>86</sup>

In February 2019, the Vatican offered to mediate (through his Minister of Foreign Affairs). In March, the apostolic nuncio remitted a letter of Pope Francis to President Biya encouraging him to seek peaceful and enduring solutions to the Anglophone crisis.<sup>87</sup>

Other religious associations have launched initiatives to promote dialogue. In particular, the Cameroon Association for Interfaith Dialogue (ACADIR) has been trying for a year to instigate an interfaith mediation initiative to find peaceful solutions to the conflict. But this is a task of Herculean proportions. To create a consensus among all religious faiths on the Anglophone question is almost impossible, especially as there is no such consensus within the various faiths. Moreover, the ACADIR enjoys government support but does not inspire much confidence among federalist

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<sup>84</sup> See Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°138, *Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis: How the Catholic Church Can Promote Dialogue*, 25 April 2018.

<sup>85</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Western diplomats, bishops, Yaoundé and Douala, October 2018.

<sup>86</sup> Crisis Group interviews, priests, Yaoundé and Douala, October 2018.

<sup>87</sup> "Sécession au Cameroun : le Vatican propose son aide pour sortir le Cameroun de la crise anglophone", *Journal du Cameroun*, 26 February 2019.

and separatist Anglophone activists.<sup>88</sup> Finally, its project is running in parallel with that of the Anglophone General Conference, which already brings together representatives of different religious faiths in the Anglophone regions.

Of all the Church initiatives, the Community of Sant'Edigio's offer of mediation seems to be considered most seriously by the Cameroonian head of state, particularly because it is supported by the pope. Officials from this Catholic NGO met President Biya in April 2019 and officially offered to mediate. The latter was apparently open to the idea but did not approve it formally. He has reportedly admitted some management mistakes at the beginning of the crisis in 2016 and 2017, and apparently has not ruled out regionalism (large decentralisation) as a middle ground solution.<sup>89</sup>

Cameroonian NGOs, such as the Central Africa Network for Human Rights (Réseau des droits de l'homme en Afrique centrale) and Un Monde Avenir (A World to Come) have condemned violence in the Anglophone regions and called for dialogue. They have proposed to establish a national truth and reconciliation commission on the Anglophone crisis. As for solutions, they tend to favour regionalism, in the form of comprehensive decentralisation.<sup>90</sup> These initiatives might eventually play a role in resolving the crisis but, for now, they risk creating confusion and diluting the impact of initiatives more likely to find support with the parties, such as the Anglophone General Conference.

The Francophone-dominated opposition reacted late and timidly to the crisis. The Cameroon Renaissance Movement (Mouvement pour la renaissance du Cameroun), the Eleven Million Citizens Movement, the Now Movement and the Cameroon People's Party are critical of the government's poor management of the crisis. For the most part, they favour regionalism, with the exception of the Now Movement, which supports a ten-states federalism. The Cameroon Renaissance Movement and the Cameroon People's Party are the best organised and supported of these groups. They provide material support for IDPs and refugees and organise civic strikes and marches in the Francophone regions in support of the Anglophone population, but few Francophones participate.<sup>91</sup>

## B. *The International Partners*

International actors do not have a common view of the Anglophone crisis and not all of them are involved to the same degree. But as a group, they are taking a tougher line against the violence, are calling for dialogue and some have individually proposed their mediation or technical support. Most of them are asking Cameroon's government to

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<sup>88</sup> ACADIR has worked with the government for a decade on issues related to interfaith dialogue and the fight against radicalism. Crisis Group telephone interviews, diplomat, ACADIR official, Anglophone activists, January 2019.

<sup>89</sup> Crisis Group telephone interviews, Western diplomats and priests, April 2019.

<sup>90</sup> Crisis Group interview, director of the Central Africa Network of Human Rights Defenders, Douala, October 2018.

<sup>91</sup> For more details on these parties and how the positions of the Cameroonian opposition have changed over time, see Crisis Group Briefing, *Cameroon: Divisions Widen Ahead of Presidential Vote*, op cit. According to the president of the Ayah Foundation, the Cameroon Renaissance Movement donated \$50,000 to his organisation for use in assisting Anglophone IDPs. Crisis Group telephone interview, president of the Ayah Foundation, January 2019.

consider Anglophone demands for autonomy without, however, openly proposing a particular model (decentralisation, regionalism, or federalism). Several countries recognise in private that it will be difficult to get the government to agree to more than genuine regionalism or decentralisation.<sup>92</sup>

#### 1. The Western powers and multilateral initiatives

The U.S. has been the harshest vis-à-vis the Cameroonian government. The State Department issued a first statement in December 2016, followed by five others, condemning human rights violations and asking the government to better consider the Anglophones' claims to autonomy. In May 2018, the U.S. ambassador to Cameroon condemned security forces burning villages in the English-speaking areas. The U.S. Congress is also concerned about the situation, and held two hearings (in the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission and in the House Foreign Affairs Committee) on Cameroon in June 2018.<sup>93</sup> Members of Congress have played an important role in putting pressure on the Departments of State and Defense to reduce U.S. military aid to Cameroonian security forces.<sup>94</sup> Some senators like Richard Durbin, Ben Cardin, Amy Klobuchar, Elizabeth Warren, and Kamala Harris are intent on an assessment of whether the U.S. government should impose additional conditions on security assistance, and on asking it to put in place sanctions on individuals found to have committed gross violations of human rights.<sup>95</sup>

Most other Western countries, particularly Germany, Canada and the UK have condemned separatist and security force violence and called for dialogue. While the executives of these countries are trying to criticise both sides equally, their parliaments have taken a more strident attitude toward Cameroon's government. In Germany, the Bundestag has organised debates on Cameroon and some 50 deputies have called on the government to suspend economic cooperation with Cameroon in the event of further human rights violations in the Anglophone regions.<sup>96</sup> The Canadian and British parliaments have also debated the issue.

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<sup>92</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Western ambassadors, Yaoundé, October-December 2018.

<sup>93</sup> The House Foreign Affairs Committee held a hearing, entitled "Crisis in the Republic of Cameroon" on June 27, 2018. See <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/hearings?ID=11262B96-5691-47AA-B828-69200B680E05>; a video of the hearing's proceedings can be found at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=kyi\\_gCwOjDw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kyi_gCwOjDw).

<sup>94</sup> "U.S. to cut military aid to Cameroon due to alleged human rights violations", CNN, 7 February 2019. Crisis Group interviews, staff and members of the U.S. Congress, Washington DC, June 2018 and February 2019.

<sup>95</sup> In December 2018, ten members of the U.S. Senate, all from the Democratic Party, sent a letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo calling for "the imposition of sanctions on individuals found to have committed gross violations of human rights, consistent with the law. In addition, we will work with our colleagues in the Senate to assess whether additional conditions should be imposed on security assistance to Cameroon". See [www.cardin.senate.gov/newsroom/press/release/cardin-democratic-senators-raise-alarm-over-human-rights-in-cameroon](http://www.cardin.senate.gov/newsroom/press/release/cardin-democratic-senators-raise-alarm-over-human-rights-in-cameroon). Crisis Group interviews, staff of the U.S. Congress and American diplomats, Yaoundé, Washington DC and New York, October 2018, February and March 2019.

<sup>96</sup> "Prävention ernst nehmen: Die Krise in Kamerun eindämmen", Liberal Democrat (FDP) motion to the German parliament (Bundestag), 27 June 2018.

The positions taken by France have stood out. It initially kept a low profile and perhaps even supported the government's approach. Faced with the escalation of the crisis, it called for a political solution and, like other Western powers, encouraged the organisers of the Anglophone General Conference. In private, it supports decentralisation and rules out federalism.<sup>97</sup> In order to convince Yaoundé to accelerate decentralisation and calm the situation, France is presenting itself as its protector against international pressures, while underlining that other European countries might demand more and the Americans might impose sanctions. It has obtained some concessions. In November 2018, Biya received the French ambassador for three hours and made a series of promises. The president has delivered to some extent (release of 289 Anglophone detainees and the creation of a disarmament committee) but has done little to encourage the Anglophone Conference, reshuffle the government or speed up decentralisation.<sup>98</sup>

There are historical reasons why France has more clout, but it is the involvement of the French at the highest level of government that has made the difference: telephone conversations between Presidents Macron and Paul Biya in June and October 2018 and in February 2019; private letters to Biya ; and the 2018 visit of the head of the Elysée's Africa Unit and the Quai d'Orsay's number two.<sup>99</sup> France is then able to counterbalance the EU's political role by vaunting the success of what it describes as its "more measured" diplomacy and pointing out that it is the only country that Biya listens to.<sup>100</sup>

Switzerland has not taken an open position since the beginning of the crisis, but is apparently pushing in private for regionalism.<sup>101</sup> Since late 2018, the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue (a Swiss NGO) increased its engagement with Anglophones federalist leaders and some separatist groups, in order to move toward dialogue between them and the Cameroonian government.<sup>102</sup> In March, the president of Switzerland travelled to Cameroon to offer his country's mediation to president Biya. During the audience granted to the Swiss ambassador in April, Paul Biya reportedly responded in an ambiguous way: he has neither rejected regionalism nor formally approved it.<sup>103</sup>

At the multilateral level, the UN is at the forefront. The UN Regional Office for Central Africa has issued statements and the Secretary-General has phoned Paul Biya. The UN has asked both sides to guarantee humanitarian access to zones affected by the conflict, end the violence and agree to dialogue. It has offered its good offices for the purposes of mediation. But the Anglophone question has not yet appeared on the Security Council agenda, due to disagreements between permanent members and lobbying by Cameroon's diplomats. Non-permanent members, such as the Nether-

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<sup>97</sup> Crisis Group interviews, French diplomats, Yaoundé and Paris, March and May 2018.

<sup>98</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Western diplomats, Yaoundé, 2019.

<sup>99</sup> "Etoudi : l'entourage de Paul Biya jubile après le coup de fil de Macron", *camerounweb.com*, 2 July 2018; "Le secrétaire d'Etat français aux affaires étrangères attendu au Cameroun", *Journal du Cameroun*, 28 June 2018.

<sup>100</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Western diplomats, Yaoundé, October 2019.

<sup>101</sup> Crisis Group interview, Swiss diplomat, Yaoundé, October 2019.

<sup>102</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, researcher at the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, February 2019.

<sup>103</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, Western diplomat, April 2019.

lands and Norway, have tried to get it on the Security Council agenda even under Any Other Business (AOB), but have been unable to obtain the minimum number of votes required (9/15). China, Russia, France and the African countries (Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia and Côte d'Ivoire) voted against. Other countries, including the UK, abstained. The U.S. was in favour but has not tried to influence the other countries. Debate of the issue has therefore been limited to private discussions.<sup>104</sup>

However, in November 2017, the Security Council did indeed have a detailed discussion on the Anglophone crisis at the biannual hearing of the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Central Africa. Representatives of the U.S., the UK and other Western countries made strong statements and demanded access to Anglophone regions for the UN and human rights organisations, investigations into violations and immediate dialogue between Cameroon's government and the separatists.<sup>105</sup>

The UK also announced a donation of €2.3 million humanitarian aid to the Anglophone regions.<sup>106</sup> But like the French, the British are not popular with Anglophone activists who criticise the former colonial power for not taking the lead on the Anglophone question in the Security Council and for being too accommodating with Cameroon's government.<sup>107</sup>

The AU and the EU carry little political weight in Cameroon. They have virtually no direct access to President Biya and try to avoid offending the government. Despite its immense economic role (Cameroon's main trading partner, main contributor of development and humanitarian aid), the EU is unable to intervene decisively on major political issues, such as the Anglophone crisis.<sup>108</sup>

Nevertheless, the EU position has recently evolved. In March, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs raised the tone after the arrest and indictment by the Yaoundé military tribunal of the main opposition leader, Maurice Kamto, and 150 members of his party, the Cameroon Renaissance Movement.<sup>109</sup> In April, the EU parliament voted a resolution on Cameroon, calling on the Cameroonian government to "immediately release Maurice Kamto and other political detainees", "engage in dialogue to find peaceful and sustainable solutions to the Anglophone crisis" and "reform the electoral law". It also suggested that the Commission and member states should reevaluate development aid and security assistance to Cameroon if the government does not rapidly take positive steps.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Netherlands ambassador to the UN and UN officials, New York, June 2018.

<sup>105</sup> "United Nations Security Council calls for immediate action to the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon", YouTube, 15 December 2018.

<sup>106</sup> "UK aid for children caught up in Cameroon conflict", press release, British government, 13 December 2018.

<sup>107</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Western diplomats, Yaoundé, December 2018.

<sup>108</sup> Crisis Group interviews, European diplomats, Yaoundé, October–December 2018.

<sup>109</sup> "Declaration by the High Representative, Federica Mogherini, on behalf of the EU, on the deteriorating political and security situation in Cameroon", European External Action Service, 5 March 2019; "Cameroun : droit, justice et dignité pour Marice Kamto", *Le Monde*, 1 March 2019.

<sup>110</sup> "European parliament resolution of 18 April 2019 on Cameroon (2019/2691 (RSP))", 18 April 2019; "Arrestations d'opposants et crise anglophone au Cameroun : le parlement européen hausse le ton", *Jeune Afrique*, 19 April 2019.

The AU has taken a more discreet position on the Anglophone crisis, although many African and Western diplomats would like to see it playing a greater role.<sup>111</sup> For the moment, only the African Commission of Human and People's Rights has condemned firmly government actions.<sup>112</sup> Former African Heads of State, including Nigeria's Olusegun Obasanjo and Ghana's Jerry Rawlings have emphasised that a solution requires an inclusive dialogue, but the AU does not seem inclined to put any pressure on Yaoundé. It will probably maintain this position in 2019 under the Egyptian presidency – the Egyptian government believes that it is not the AU's role to get involved in the political affairs of states.

Inter-governmental organisations, such as the Commonwealth, have little influence or willingness to take the initiative on the Anglophone question, although the Commonwealth has issued some statements and its secretary general visited Cameroon in December 2017. Others, such as the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (EMCCA) and the International Organisation of the Francophonie have condemned violence but tend to back the government.<sup>113</sup>

## 2. Nigeria's role

Rarely mentioned in discussion on the crisis in Cameroon, neighbouring Nigeria is one of the countries that could help to find a political solution to the Anglophone crisis. The country shares a 2,100km border with Cameroon and its territory is strategically crucial for the separatists.<sup>114</sup> It is also an ally of the government in Yaoundé, including in the struggle against Boko Haram. For all these reasons, it might be listened to by the protagonists.

Nigeria is in a position to pressure its ally to be more receptive to Anglophone demands. Nigerians are sympathetic to the Anglophone cause, especially in the east of the country.<sup>115</sup> The Nigerian government tends to support Yaoundé's position, however, partly because it fears that the conflict in the Anglophone regions will encourage its own separatist movements in Biafra. The Nigerian president, Muhammadu Buhari, also fears annoying Paul Biya, an important ally in the struggle against Boko Haram. The Nigerian government arrested separatist leaders in Abuja in January 2018 and has handed over suspected separatists to Cameroon's security forces.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Crisis Group interviews, African and Western diplomats, New York, February 2019.

<sup>112</sup> See "Press Statement on the recent arrests and detention of about 200 members of opposition parties following the protests of 26 January 2019", African Commission on Human and People's Rights, 6 March 2019.

<sup>113</sup> Their press releases tend to condemn separatist abuses but not abuses by the security forces. "Cameroun : Michaëlle Jean condamne fermement les violences dans les régions du Nord-Ouest et du Sud-Ouest", International Francophone Organisation, 16 February 2018.

<sup>114</sup> The separatists consider Anglophone regions to be ground 0; Nigeria ground 1 (first fallback position) and Ghana ground 2 (second fallback position). Crisis Group interviews, Nigerian academics and Cameroonian separatists, Abuja, November 2018.

<sup>115</sup> Crisis Group interviews, academics and residents, Abuja, Calabar and Ikom, November 2018.

<sup>116</sup> In addition to IG members, about 30 suspected separatist combatants were arrested in Taraba in January 2018 and more than 50 refugees were arrested and sent back to Cameroon in 2018. Crisis Group interviews, academics, Nigerian intelligence service officials and officers, Abuja, November 2019.

The Nigerian security services also launched Operation Delta Safe 3 in Cross River state to curb arms trafficking and the flow of combatants from Nigeria to Cameroon. They also try to ensure that humanitarian aid contributed by Nigerian and Cameroon's NGOs to refugees is not used to fund the separatists.

The presence of 35,000 Anglophone refugees in Nigeria and the way in which the Anglophone crisis and the closure of the border interferes with trade, however, could eventually lead the Nigerian government to push for a political solution. Abuja might come round to understanding that a military response alone will not end the violence, and that the only way of stopping the conflict on its borders going on indefinitely or merging with the many identical demands in Nigeria is to put pressure on Biya to agree to a political solution.

## VI. How to Establish a Dialogue?

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The Anglophone crisis is deadlocked: the government and the separatists are sticking to their irreconcilable positions and neither can win a military victory in the short term.

Breaking the deadlock requires strong internal and international pressure. Cameroonians who advocate compromise solutions (civil society, opposition, Anglophone federalists and supporters of decentralisation) should pressure the government and the separatists to participate in the Anglophone General Conference and, subsequently, a national dialogue.<sup>117</sup> Francophone Cameroonians have a special role to play in political parties, churches and society at large, to show the government their solidarity with their Anglophone compatriots. But faced with the belligerents' hard-line stance, internal actors cannot succeed without resolute international support. International actors can encourage the parties to the conflict to make concessions, reward those who agree to moderate their positions and sanction those who stand in the way of dialogue. But they should first reach a common position.

### A. *Build Trust and Break the Cycle of Destruction*

Resolving the Anglophone crisis will ultimately require the government and the Anglophones to put their views directly to each other. This must include the separatists, given their control over the armed militias. Some mutual concessions could build trust between the belligerents and break the cycle of destruction. International actors should push for reciprocal concessions at each stage to ensure that talks do not stall.

The government:

- ❑ The President of the Republic should adopt a conciliatory stance, acknowledge the existence of the Anglophone problem and that the security forces have committed abuses and agree to take into account Anglophone demands for autonomy.
- ❑ He should order investigations into abuses by the security forces, make provision for reparations to victims and start reconstruction of affected areas.
- ❑ He should undertake a major reshuffle of the government and senior levels of the administration and defence and security forces in order to purge those who fuel the conflict with hate speech, and to integrate non-separatist Anglophones who are seen as credible by the Anglophone populations.
- ❑ He should indicate a willingness to respect the Anglo-Saxon features of the Anglophone education and judicial systems.

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<sup>117</sup> The Social Democratic Front, federalist associations and Francophone associations and political parties such as the Cameroon Renaissance Movement took some action in 2018, but to little effect. In general, Cameroonians are afraid of opposing the government, which often brutally represses demonstrations and any other form of dissent. "Au Cameroun : l'inquiétant crépuscule du régime Biya", *Le Monde*, 15 March 2019.

- ❑ The government should not place conditions on a dialogue with the separatists about the form of state (decentralisation, regionalism, or federalism) even if it believes that the unity of the country is not negotiable.
- ❑ The government should send a strong signal of its intentions to create a favourable environment for talks by releasing hundreds of Anglophone activists and key actors, such as IG members and radio broadcaster Mancho Bibixy.
- ❑ It should encourage rather than obstruct the Anglophone General Conference, to strengthen proponents of federalism and decentralisation against those who support separatism.
- ❑ Finally, the government should postpone the forthcoming regional elections, which could provoke violence in the Anglophone regions, so that those elections only take place after the Anglophone General Conference and the national dialogue on the form of the state.

#### The separatists:

- ❑ The separatists should first begin an internal dialogue. The more pragmatic among them should urge their colleagues, including those who have lost family members, to understand that the armed struggle will receive no support from international actors and that it represents a political cul-de-sac. This is all the more important because the more intransigent elements enjoy support from a large proportion of grassroots activists and is crucial for avoiding serious disagreements within the separatist movement that complicate moves toward dialogue. Once the currents of opinion within the separatist movement have achieved a common position, they could begin discussions with the federalists prior to talks with the Cameroonian government.
- ❑ To show their good faith, they should abandon their school boycott strategy.
- ❑ The separatists are likely to continue to insist that talks should cover separation.<sup>118</sup> However, given that international actors do not support secession, they should be ready from the start to discuss other options that would meet Anglophone demands for greater autonomy and respect for the specific features of their regions.
- ❑ In return for the punishment of members of the security forces responsible for abuses, separatists should exclude combatants who have committed atrocities against civilians.
- ❑ Finally, they should abandon their “Ghost Town” strategy.

#### The federalists:

- ❑ They should hold talks with the less intransigent separatists to try to convince them to attend the Anglophone General Conference.
- ❑ They should conduct an international campaign to promote a peaceful resolution of the conflict, to avoid leaving the international field to the separatists alone.

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<sup>118</sup> Crisis Group interviews, separatists, Washington DC, February 2019.

- Finally, if Cameroon's government continues to oppose an Anglophone General Conference, they should propose holding it outside Cameroon. Such a step would require material support from the country's partners, including the EU and the U.S.

### *B. Getting to Talks and the International Support*

It will not be easy to get to talks, given that the separatists do not recognise the legitimacy of the government, which, in turn, will not tolerate any questioning of the unity of the state. Moreover, Yaoundé believes it has already made too many concessions and points out that it has already launched several dialogue initiatives. However, the latter fall a long way short of what is required and international action is crucial for organising an inclusive dialogue.<sup>119</sup>

Final talks between the government and Anglophone representatives, including the separatists, should take place in Cameroon. The authorities must guarantee the security of participants and grant safe passage to separatist representatives. Preparatory discussions between government, federalist, diaspora and separatist representatives should take place abroad in the presence of mediators.

The most credible mediators in the eyes of both parties – the UN, AU, Switzerland, Catholic Church (Episcopal Conference, Sant'Egidio or even the Vatican) have already offered to mediate. Given the profound disagreement between the two sides and the current or potential divisions within them, preparatory discussions will be complex and could take time. It will therefore be important to put together an international team equipped with the political weight and enough experience to get people to change their positions, put pressure on Yaoundé and mobilise the support of other key actors, such as Nigeria. In the absence of a leading role for the UN, mediation could take place under the aegis of the AU if it has solid support from the UN.

It will be difficult to convince the Cameroonian authorities to accept such mediation because they want to avoid the internationalisation of the question, retain the initiative, and draw the political credit from any eventual agreement.<sup>120</sup> But the Anglophone crisis is currently a threat to the stability of Cameroon and the subregion. International actors, notably the Africans (AU and Nigeria), must work in a more concerted manner, formulate common positions and pressure Cameroon's government to accept the extent of the threat: an armed conflict that is three times more lethal than Boko Haram in the Far North and that is getting worse each month.

In general, European and American actors must work together to push the parties to make gradual but substantial measures. They could encourage the government by agreeing to fund the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants and the preparatory meetings held to prepare the dialogue on Cameroonian territory and abroad. They could also offer to help fund the reconstruction

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<sup>119</sup> In response to international calls for concessions and dialogue, the government says its release of some federalists, creation of a DDR committee and consultation missions to Anglophone regions by the prime minister and the Bilingualism Commission in 2017 and 2018 constitute steps to dialogue. It also presents interministerial missions to the U.S. (Washington DC), Europe, South Africa and the UN (New York) in 2017 and 2018 as attempts to dialogue with the diaspora. Crisis Group interviews, senior officials, Yaoundé, October 2018.

<sup>120</sup> Crisis Group interviews, senior officials, Yaoundé, October 2018 and March 2019.

of Anglophone regions, government compensation to families and other victims of abuses, the return of refugees and IDPs, as well as the government's humanitarian assistance plan, on condition it is coordinated with the response of the UN and humanitarian organisations already present on the ground. They should also try to persuade President Biya that a peaceful solution to the Anglophone crisis would be an honourable legacy.

The U.S. and the EU should consider targeted sanctions (travel ban, asset freeze) against senior government leaders and senior army officers who obstruct dialogue or continue to commit abuses, and against separatists who continue to advocate and organise violence by calling for attacks against Francophone civilians and funding or commanding separatist militias (judicial proceedings, non-renewal of residence permits).

The U.S. and the EU could also review development aid and security cooperation and reduce it if the government continues to refuse to participate in talks, while ensuring that reductions do not directly prejudice the population. Several members of the American Congress and some senior administration officials are currently making plans for such an option.<sup>121</sup>

At the multilateral level, Europeans, Americans and Africans should lobby the UN Security Council to include the Anglophone crisis on its agenda despite its divisions, all the more so as the French are less reluctant and the Americans are more active since the arrest of Maurice Kamto.<sup>122</sup> It is also important to put the Anglophone crisis on the agenda of the African Union's Peace and Security Council, an initiative that could be taken by the chair of the African Union Commission, Chad's Moussa Faki Mahamat. This seems unlikely given his and the Chadian President Idriss Deby's close relations with the Cameroonian authorities and Faki's preference for using his own good offices over the more public forum of the PSC. However, this seems the only way forward because regional organisations in Central Africa (ECCAS and EMCCA) support Yaoundé.<sup>123</sup>

The prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) should state her intention to launch preliminary examinations of abuses committed by both sides. This could encourage the government to initiate its own investigations and, depending on the outcome, start criminal proceedings, as well as deterring others from further abuses against civilians. That would also show the separatists that their violent actions spark international disapproval.

### *C. The Substantive Issues: Institutional Reform and the Form of the State*

In his end-of-year speech in 2018, Paul Biya promised "to accelerate decentralisation" and organise regional elections in 2019. Speeding up decentralisation could be a first

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<sup>121</sup> Crisis Group interviews, U.S. Congress staff, Washington DC, February 2019.

<sup>122</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Western diplomats, New York, March 2019.

<sup>123</sup> AU diplomats said, however, that its Peace and Security Council would feel compelled to put the Anglophone crisis on its agenda if it was on the UN Security Council agenda. Crisis Group interviews, AU diplomats, Addis Ababa, March 2019. In Madagascar and the Comoros, rather than calling on support from the PSC, Faki deployed a special envoy to help respectively ease tensions ahead of a fraught presidential election and defuse a crisis over the constitutional amendment process.

positive step, as long as it is not limited to the organisation of regional elections. In order to reduce tensions, the government should postpone these elections until after the national dialogue and after municipal and legislative elections. Without prior inclusive dialogue and modification of the laws on decentralisation, these elections are likely to provoke a new sequence of violence in the Anglophone regions, because the separatists will try to disturb the vote, and to bring about communal tensions in Francophone areas. If they took place before municipal elections, regional elections would only reinforce the dominant position of the ruling party, the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (RDPC), which has a majority on the municipal councils that would elect the regional councils.<sup>124</sup>

Crisis Group has held dozens of interviews with separatists, federalists, senior government officials and senior army officers to judge the unspoken and real expectations of each side prior to an eventual dialogue. We conclude there is a set of proposals that might eventually prove acceptable to both sides and lead to lasting peace in the Anglophone regions.

During talks, the government should show itself ready to take the following measures regarding the form of the state:

- ❑ Revise the Constitution to make significant improvements to the legal framework for decentralisation, including the direct election of regional presidents and councils.
- ❑ Establish regional administrations; abolish the post of government delegate; reduce the governor's role to one of supervision; give regional administrations significant financial and administrative autonomy; and broaden the taxation powers and tax base of local authorities. The government should increase the proportion of resources transferred from central government to regions and communes from 1 to 10-30 per cent of the national budget, as in countries where regions enjoy a lot of autonomy, for example, Italy, and in highly decentralised African countries like Kenya.<sup>125</sup>

During talks and following the confidence-building measures detailed above, the government should offer to undertake the following institutional and governance reforms:

- ❑ Greater consideration of the specific features of the education and judicial systems in the Anglophone regions must be a priority for institutional reform. The government should ensure that Common Law is fully applied in Anglophone regions and respond in good faith to the demands formulated in December 2016 by teachers' unions and students regarding the Anglo-Saxon characteristics of schools and universities in the Anglophone regions.<sup>126</sup>
- ❑ The second priority consists of guaranteeing better representation for Anglophones in central government and administration and an increased allocation of

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<sup>124</sup> Crisis Group interviews, separatists and political leaders, Douala, October 2018.

<sup>125</sup> The decentralisation budget in Cameroon is CFA 49 billion, which is 1 per cent of the national budget of CFA 4,850 billion.

<sup>126</sup> Crisis Group Report, *Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis at the Crossroads*, op. cit.

the public investment budget to Anglophone regions, including for the reconstruction of places affected by the conflict.

- ❑ Finally, the Bilingualism and Multiculturalism Commission must be given more independence and include representatives of all Anglophone tendencies.

Once agreement has been reached, the disarmament and social and economic reintegration of the militias could lead to the demobilisation of combatants. The government should issue a specific decree on DDR for ex-separatist combatants.

The agreement should also include amnesties for political prisoners detained because of their support for secession and allow separatist leaders to return to Cameroon, participate in politics and stand for municipal, legislative and regional elections.

These recommendations will only have a chance of being followed if strong internal and international pressure is brought to bear. Separatists seek nothing less than confederation or federalism. The government does not want genuine decentralisation, but strong internal (Francophone and non-separatist Anglophone) and international (UN, EU, AU, U.S., France, UK) pressure might convince many separatists to accept regionalism, synonymous with comprehensive decentralisation, combined with the confidence building measures listed above.<sup>127</sup> The government could agree to that, especially if there is a real risk of sanctions and international criminal proceedings.<sup>128</sup>

If this does not happen, the most likely scenario is a prolonged conflict lasting several years, which could end in a Pyrrhic military victory for Cameroon's security forces, without resolving the Anglophone problem.

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<sup>127</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Anglophone journalists and separatists, Douala and Washington DC, December 2018 and February 2019.

<sup>128</sup> Crisis Group interviews, senior officials, Yaoundé, March 2019.

## VII. Conclusion

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Cameroon is facing an increasing number of security challenges: Boko Haram in the Far North, a conflict in the Anglophone regions and violence in Adamawa. In addition to these pockets of insecurity, economic weaknesses, heightened political tensions and ethnic divisions have become more acute since the presidential elections in October 2018 and the arrest of the opposition leader in January 2019.<sup>129</sup> Of all these crises, the conflict in the Anglophone regions is the most costly in terms of casualties and the public purse. Ending this conflict must be a priority for Cameroon's government and partners.

President Paul Biya, 86, has been head of state for 37 years. As he begins what must surely be his final seven-year term in office, the "peace" and "coexistence" that he has always claimed to promote belong to the past. The peaceful resolution of the Anglophone crisis is perhaps his last chance to give new impetus to the country, failing which, he will enter the history books as a president who went missing when his country needed him most, and left Cameroon in the throes of endless cycles of violence.

**Nairobi/Brussels, 2 May 2019**

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<sup>129</sup> "Retrait de la CAN au Cameroun: enquête sur un double fiasco", *Jeune Afrique*, 10 December 2018; "Le principal opposant du Cameroun inculpé de rébellion et insurrection", TV5, 13 February 2019.

**Appendix A: Map of Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis**



## Appendix B: Acronyms

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ACADIR	Association Camerounaise pour le Dialogue Interreligieux/Cameroonian Association for Interfaith Dialogue
ADF	Ambazonia Defense Forces
AGC	Ambazonia Governing Council
APLM	Ambazonia People's Liberation Movement
ARC	Ambazonia Recognition Coalition
ARCC	Ambazonia Recognition Collaboration Council
ASC	Ambazonia Security Council
AU	African Union
BIR	Bataillon d'intervention rapide/Rapid Intervention Battalion
CDC	Cameroon Development Corporation
CENC	Conférence Episcopale Nationale du Cameroun/National Episcopal Conference
CNDDR	Comité National de Désarmement, de Démobilisation et de Réintégration/ National Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Committee
EU	European Union
GICAM	Groupement Inter-Patronal du Cameroun/Cameroon Employers' Association
ICC	International Criminal Court
IG	Interim Government of the Federal Republic of Ambazonia
MORISC	Movement for Independence and Restoration of Southern Cameroons
MRC	Mouvement pour la Renaissance du Cameroun/Cameroon Renaissance Movement
RDPC/CPDM	Rassemblement Démocratique du Peuple Camerounais/Cameroon People's Democratic Movement
SCACUF	Southern Cameroons Consortium
SCAPO	Southern Cameroons People's Organization
SCARM	Southern Cameroons Restoration Movement
SCCOP	Southern Cameroons Congress of People
SCNC	Southern Cameroons National Council
SCYL	Southern Cameroons Youth League
SDF	Social Democratic Front
SNWOT	South West and North West Women's Task Force
SOCADEF	Southern Cameroons Defense Forces
UN	United Nations

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## Appendix C: Armed Separatists Presence in the Anglophone Regions

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### Armed militias

Group	Leader	Stronghold	Numbers (estimate)
Manyu Tigers	Martin Ashu	Manyu division (Southwest)	500
Southern Cameroons Defense Forces	Ebenezer Akwanga	Mémé Department (Southwest)	400
Ambazonia Defense Forces	Benedict Kuah	Both regions	200-500
Red Dragons	Olivier Lekene Fongunueh (alias Field Marshall)	Lebialem division (Southwest))	200
Seven Kata		Batibo town and Momo division (Northwest)	200
The Sword of Ambazonia (TSOA)		Mémé division	200
Ambaland Quifor	Silas Zama	Mezam division (Northwest)	200

**Small armed groups**

Group	Leader	Stronghold	Numbers (estimate)
	"Général" Nyambere	Kupe-Manenguba division (Southwest)	50
Southern Cameroons Restoration Forces	"Général" RK	Boyo division (Northwest)	100
	"Général" Satan	Fundong town and Boyo division (Northwest)	Few dozen
Warriors of Nso	Warriors of Nso	Bui division (Northwest)	100
White Tigers		Bafut, Bamenda (towns) and Mezam division (Northwest)	50
Menchum Fall Warriors		Menchum division (Northwest)	Few dozen
Ten-Ten	"Général" Ten Ten	Buea (town) and Fako division (Southwest)	50
	Eugène	Ekona town and Fako division (Southwest)	50
	"General" Obi	Muyuka town and Fako division (Southwest)	50
Dongang Mantung self defense group			
Vipers			Few dozen
Ambazonia Restoration Army (ARA)			Few dozen

**Note:** It is difficult to estimate the numbers in these armed groups in the Anglophone part of Cameroon because they tend to claim higher numbers than they really have. For example, SOCADEF's leader said that his group had more than 3,500 active combatants, but he appears to have no more than 500. International Crisis Group has only listed groups with at least 200 members, an official name and an identifiable leader. About 20 smaller semi-criminal, semi-separatist groups also exist and have a few dozen members.

Finally, the attacks in the Francophone West Region (Noun, Bamboutos and Menoua divisions) seem to be the work of a few small groups based in Ngoketunja division (Babessi, Bambaland, Bamessing and Bamali) in the Northwest region.

## Appendix D: About the International Crisis Group

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The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 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 or regions 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, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early-warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 70 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, [www.crisisgroup.org](http://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 of Trustees – 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 policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lord (Mark) Malloch-Brown.

Crisis Group's President & CEO, Robert Malley, took up the post on 1 January 2018. Malley was formerly Crisis Group's Middle East and North Africa Program Director and most recently was a Special Assistant to former U.S. President Barack Obama as well as Senior Adviser to the President for the Counter-ISIL Campaign, and White House Coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf region. Previously, he served as President Bill Clinton's Special Assistant for Israeli-Palestinian Affairs.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in seven other locations: Bogotá, Dakar, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Algiers, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Hong Kong, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Mexico City, New Delhi, Rabat, Tbilisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

Crisis Group receives financial support from a wide range of governments, foundations, and private sources. Currently Crisis Group holds relationships with the following governmental departments and agencies: Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Austrian Development Agency, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, European Union Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, French Development Agency, French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, Germany Federal Foreign Office, Irish Aid, Japan International Cooperation Agency, Principality of Liechtenstein, Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign Affairs, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the UK Department for International Development, and the United Arab Emirates Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

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**May 2019**

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## Appendix E: Reports and Briefings on Africa since 2016

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### Special Reports and Briefings

*Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State*, Special Report N°1, 14 March 2016 (also available in Arabic and French).

*Seizing the Moment: From Early Warning to Early Action*, Special Report N°2, 22 June 2016.

*Counter-terrorism Pitfalls: What the U.S. Fight against ISIS and al-Qaeda Should Avoid*, Special Report N°3, 22 March 2017.

*Council of Despair? The Fragmentation of UN Diplomacy*, Special Briefing N°1, 30 April 2019.

### Central Africa

*Chad: Between Ambition and Fragility*, Africa Report N°233, 30 March 2016 (also available in French).

*Burundi: anatomie du troisième mandat*, Africa Report N°235, 20 May 2016 (only available in French).

*Katanga: Tensions in DRC's Mineral Heartland*, Africa Report N°239, 3 August 2016.

*The African Union and the Burundi Crisis: Ambition versus Reality*, Africa Briefing N°122, 28 September 2016 (also available in French).

*Boulevard of Broken Dreams: The "Street" and Politics in DR Congo*, Africa Briefing N°123, 13 October 2016.

*Cameroon: Confronting Boko Haram*, Africa Report N°241, 16 November 2016 (also available in French).

*Fighting Boko Haram in Chad: Beyond Military Measures*, Africa Report N°246, 8 March 2017 (also available in French).

*Burundi: The Army in Crisis*, Africa Report N°247, 5 April 2017 (also available in French).

*Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis at the Crossroads*, Africa Report N°250, 2 August 2017 (also available in French).

*Avoiding the Worst in Central African Republic*, Africa Report N°253, 28 September 2017 (also available in French).

*Time to Reset African Union-European Union Relations*, Africa Report N°255, 17 October 2017 (also available in French).

*Cameroon: A Worsening Anglophone Crisis Calls for Strong Measures*, Africa Briefing N°130, 19 October 2017 (also available in French).

*Cameroon's Far North: Reconstruction amid Ongoing Conflict*, Africa Briefing N°133, 25 October 2017 (also available in French).

*Time for Concerted Action in DR Congo*, Africa Report N°257, 4 December 2017 (also available in French).

*Seven Priorities for the African Union in 2018*, Africa Briefing N°135, 17 January 2018 (also available in French).

*Electoral Poker in DR Congo*, Africa Report N°259, 4 April 2018 (also available in French).

*Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis: How the Catholic Church Can Promote Dialogue*, Africa Briefing N°138, 26 April 2018 (also available in French).

*Increasing the Stakes in DR Congo's Electoral Poker*, Africa Briefing N°139, 8 June 2018 (also available in French).

*DR Congo: The Bemba Earthquake*, Africa Briefing N°140, 15 June 2018 (also available in French).

*Cameroon's Far North: A New Chapter in the Fight Against Boko Haram*, Africa Report N°263, 14 August 2018 (also available in French).

*Helping the Burundian People Cope with the Economic Crisis*, Africa Report N°264, 31 August 2018 (also available in French).

*Cameroon: Divisions Widen Ahead of Presidential Vote*, Africa Briefing N°142, 3 October 2018 (also available in French).

*Chad: Defusing Tensions in the Sahel*, Africa Report N°266, 5 December 2018 (also available in French).

### Horn of Africa

*Ethiopia: Governing the Faithful*, Africa Briefing N°117, 22 February 2016.

*Sudan's Islamists: From Salvation to Survival*, Africa Briefing N°119, 21 March 2016.

*South Sudan's South: Conflict in the Equatorias*, Africa Report N°236, 25 May 2016.

*Kenya's Coast: Devolution Disappointed*, Africa Briefing N°121, 13 July 2016.

*South Sudan: Rearranging the Chessboard*, Africa Report N°243, 20 December 2016.

*Instruments of Pain (II): Conflict and Famine in South Sudan*, Africa Briefing N°124, 26 April 2017.

*Instruments of Pain (III): Conflict and Famine in Somalia*, Africa Briefing N°125, 9 May 2017.

*Instruments of Pain (IV): The Food Crisis in North East Nigeria*, Africa Briefing N°126, 18 May 2017.

*Kenya's Rift Valley: Old Wounds, Devolution's New Anxieties*, Africa Report N°248, 30 May 2017.

*Time to Repeal U.S. Sanctions on Sudan?*, Africa Briefing N°127, 22 June 2017.

*A New Roadmap to Make U.S. Sudan Sanctions Relief Work*, Africa Briefing N°128, 29 September 2017.

*How to Ensure a Credible, Peaceful Presidential Vote in Kenya*, Africa Briefing N°129, 2 October 2017.

*Managing the Disruptive Aftermath of Somalia's Worst Terror Attack*, Africa Briefing N°131, 20 October 2017.

*An Election Delay Can Help Avert Kenya's Crisis*, Africa Briefing N°132, 23 October 2017.

*Uganda's Slow Slide into Crisis*, Africa Report N°256, 21 November 2017.

*After Kenya's Leaders Reconcile, a Tough Path Ahead*, Africa Briefing N°136, 13 March 2018.

*Somalia and the Gulf Crisis*, Africa Report N°260, 5 June 2018.

*Averting War in Northern Somalia*, Africa Briefing N°141, 27 June 2018.

*Al-Shabaab Five Years after Westgate: Still a Menace in East Africa*, Africa Report N°265, 21 September 2018.

*Improving Prospects for a Peaceful Transition in Sudan*, Africa Briefing N°143, 14 January 2019.

*Managing Ethiopia's Unsettled Transition*, Africa Report N°269, 21 February 2019.

*Salvaging South Sudan's Fragile Peace Deal*, Africa Report N°270, 13 March 2019.

*Bridging the Gap in the Nile Waters Dispute*, Africa Report N°271, 20 March 2019.

### **Southern Africa**

*Zimbabwe: Stranded in Stasis*, Africa Briefing N°118, 29 February 2016.

*Zimbabwe's "Military-assisted Transition" and Prospects for Recovery*, Africa Briefing N°134, 20 December 2017.

### **West Africa**

*Burkina Faso: Transition, Act II*, Africa Briefing N°116, 7 January 2016 (only available in French).

*Implementing Peace and Security Architecture (III): West Africa*, Africa Report N°234, 14 April 2016 (also available in French).

*Boko Haram on the Back Foot?*, Africa Briefing N°120, 4 May 2016 (also available in French).

*Nigeria: The Challenge of Military Reform*, Africa Report N°237, 6 June 2016.

*Central Mali: An Uprising in the Making?*, Africa Report N°238, 6 July 2016 (also available in French).

*Burkina Faso: Preserving the Religious Balance*, Africa Report N°240, 6 September 2016 (also available in French).

*Nigeria: Women and the Boko Haram Insurgency*, Africa Report N°242, 5 December 2016 (also available in French).

*Watchmen of Lake Chad: Vigilante Groups Fighting Boko Haram*, Africa Report N°244, 23 February 2017.

*Niger and Boko Haram: Beyond Counter-insurgency*, Africa Report N°245, 27 February 2017 (also available in French).

*The Politics of Islam in Mali: Separating Myth from Reality*, Africa Report N°249, 18 July 2017 (only available in French).

*Double-edged Sword: Vigilantes in African Counter-insurgencies*, Africa Report N°251, 7 September 2017 (also available in French).

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*The Social Roots of Jihadist Violence in Burkina Faso's North*, Africa Report N°254, 12 October 2017 (also available in French).

*Finding the Right Role for the G5 Sahel Joint Force*, Africa Report N°258, 12 December 2017 (also available in French).

*Preventing Boko Haram Abductions of Schoolchildren in Nigeria*, Africa Briefing N°137, 12 April 2017.

*Frontière Niger-Mali : mettre l'outil militaire au service d'une approche politique*, Africa Report N°261, 12 June 2018 (only available in French).

*Stopping Nigeria's Spiralling Farmer-Herder Violence*, Africa Report N°262, 26 July 2018.

*Drug Trafficking, Violence and Politics in Northern Mali*, Africa Report N°267, 13 December 2018 (also available in French).

*Nigeria's 2019 Elections: Six States to Watch*, Africa Report N°268, 21 December 2018.

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