

INTERNATIONAL INVOLVEMENT IN SOVEREIGN STATES: THE ROLE OF THE AU IN THE PRESERVATION OF PEACE AND SECURITY IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: THE CASE OF CAMEROON

Abstract

The Anglophone issue, the jihadist insurgency, and Boko Haram are among the several violent conflicts that are occurring in Cameroon, along with escalating ethnic and political tensions both online and offline. Nevertheless, the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) tenet has been steadily adopted across Africa. This study's primary goal was to learn what the African Union (AU) is doing in connection to the peace and security situation in Cameroon in light of the above context. This study was descriptive in nature. Secondary data was the sole form of data used in this investigation. Information was gathered through the internet, periodicals, newspapers, books, journals, and other sources. Numerous studies show that the AU Peace and Security Council, which makes decisions on the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts, do not address Cameroon's challenges and problems. It was recommended amongst others that AU and United Nations (UN) coordinate their efforts in addressing the humanitarian needs of refugees and displaced people.

Keywords: Peace, Security, Responsibility to Protect (R2P), Conflict Resolution, International relations.

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Introduction

With more than 35 non-international armed conflicts (NIACs) occurring in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic (CAR), and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to name a few, Africa ranks second in terms of the number of armed conflicts per area. These conflicts feature a number of armed organisations against government forces or perhaps one another. In the NIACs occurring in Burkina Faso, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, and Somalia, Western powers as well as nearby nations are interfering (Sulaiman, 2021, p. 4).

Similar to this, armed wars, brutality, poverty, and even environmental reasons have forced migrants and refugees from their homes in various locations across Africa. Asylum seekers who have recently been ordered to return home in Eritrea and Cameroon have been subjected to arbitrary imprisonment and multiple forms of torture. Numerous reasons, including abuse, exploitation, and discrimination, have contributed to migrant deaths. These are related to the absence of safe migrant routes, obstacles to seeking refuge both inside and outside of Africa, and the immense pressure and sway that the European Union (EU) and its member states exert (Human Rights Watch (HRW), 2023, p. 66).

African conflicts are most prevalent in Libya, South Sudan, the Central African Republic (CAR), Northern Mozambique, Ethiopia, and the north- and south-west of Cameroon. Since some years ago, the situation in Libya has gotten worse (ISS PSC Report, 2021). There are little to no indications that any of the five nations will have successfully transitioned to democracy by 2023. Cyril Ramaphosa, who is preparing to run for a second term in power in Southern Africa, is up against political opposition, while Filipe Nyusi plans to seek an illegitimate third term, and Emmerson Mnangagwa is still eroding civil liberties and human rights in Zimbabwe (CSIS, 2023, p. 55).

It should be emphasised that the top 10 crises in the world are all in Africa, with the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) ranking first in the yearly survey of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) for most overlooked displacement crises in the world. Three factors—a lack of finance, a lack of media attention, and a lack of global political and diplomatic initiatives—are used to compile the annual list of neglected displacement crises. South Sudan, Burkina Faso, and Cameroon are listed after the DRC. According to the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC),

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"Africa is home to the majority of the world's unaddressed crises, and this highlights the persistent failure of policymakers, donors, and the media to address conflict and human suffering on the continent" (NFC, 2022, p. 19).

Intercommunal tensions and wars have plagued the north-east of the DRC, and since November 2021, attacks on camps for displaced people have dramatically increased. 5.5 million people are currently internally displaced, and a third of the population is suffering from food insecurity, which has now reached its highest level ever seen. Despite a significant increase in the number of people fleeing their homes in Burkina Faso in 2021, the displacement crisis received significantly less media attention overall than the conflict in Ukraine did for the first three months of the war (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2022, p. 45).

There are two significant violent conflicts going on in Cameroon right now, and there are also growing online and off-line ethnic political tensions. More than 6,000 people have died in the larger conflict that began in 2017 between the government and separatists from the English-speaking minority. Over 70,000 of the 765,000 persons who have been displaced by it are refugees in Nigeria. Of the four million people living in the anglophone regions, the UN estimates that 2.2 million require humanitarian assistance, and the fighting has prevented roughly 600,000 children from receiving an adequate education (Crisis group, 2020).

The country also faces a jihadist insurgency with deadly attacks in the Lake Chad area. The war with Boko Haram, centred in the Far North, has killed over 3,000 Cameroonians, displaced about 250,000 and triggered the rise of vigilante self-defence groups. Nascent ethnic clashes along the border with Chad have displaced thousands too. Elsewhere and particularly following the October 2018 presidential election, ethnic discourse is heightening political tensions on- and offline (Crisis Group, 2020).

In Cameroon, the conflict in the Lake Chad basin, the North-West and Southwest (NWSW) crisis, and the refugee crisis in the Central African Republic (CAR) continue to have an influence on nine out of ten areas. One in six Cameroonian residents, or 4.7 million people, will require humanitarian aid and protection by 2023. In 2023, it is anticipated that more than 3.2 million individuals will experience severe food insecurity. More than two million individuals are refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs), or returnees. Due to the effects of violence and insecurity, the number of people in need in Cameroon keeps increasing (OCHA, 2023, p. 25).

People's already fragile resilience is being weakened by the protracted nature of these crises, ongoing relocation, and insufficient humanitarian aid. Negative coping strategies like child labour, child marriage, and survival sex are rising as a result of this. Local economies continue to be impacted by violence, frequent lockdowns, and road closures. The Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC), which had formerly employed approximately 15,700 people, including seasonal workers, and was Cameroon's second-largest employer, collapsed as a result of the crisis. Banana, rubber, and palm oil plantations that were owned by farmers who worked for the CDC had to be abandoned. Since the crisis began, the CDC has seen a sharp drop in both operations and revenue. An entire ecosystem of subcontractors that relied on the CDC to be functioning actually collapsed as a result of this big agro-industrial company's demise (OCHA, 2023, p. 2).

Significantly, in all of Cameroon's anglophone regions as well as in the Far North, armed groups and government troops have violated human rights, notably by killing large numbers of people. As of August 2021, more than 712,000 people had been internally displaced due to the crisis in the anglophone areas, as well as in the francophone littoral, west, and centre regions, and at least 2.2 million people still required humanitarian aid. This crisis had been going on nonstop for five years. Separatists have persisted in attacking children and educators while aggressively enforcing a boycott of schools since 2017. Over 340,000 people were internally displaced as of August 2021 as a result of the Islamist armed group Boko Haram's increasing attacks in the Far North region between January and April (Human Rights Watch (HRW), 2022, p. 44).

According to the International Crisis Group, at least 3,000 people have died in the violence, and 530,000 have been displaced or forced to flee to neighbouring countries like Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea. Numerous villages are totally deserted, and numerous homes have been set on fire. Children in the area have not attended school for three years, and hundreds of Cameroonian separatists are incarcerated. Women who enter the woodlands where the guerilla is hiding run the risk of being sexually assaulted by armed men. Diseases are killing those who survive the gunshot (Muvunyi, 2019).

In the previous two years of the insurgency in the English-speaking Northwest and Southwest areas of Cameroon, a country with a mostly Francophone population, Anglophone fighters have frequently engaged in combat with government security forces virtually every day. The

administration convened a five-day National Dialogue a month ago in an effort to stop the bloodshed, but it seems the violence is escalating rather than decreasing. In relation to the Anglophone secessionist forces named after their self-declared independent state, Ambazonia, journalist EyongBlaise of Deutsche Welle (DW) reported that there were numerous accounts of attacks on government installations and police and soldiers being killed by "Ambazonia" fighters (Hairsine, 2019).

Blaise claims that there have been reports of Cameroonian military members burning homes and towns on fire in the Northwest. Blaise stated over the phone from Buea, the Southwest region's capital, that "nothing has changed in terms of security, from both the side of the government forces and the Ambazonian fighters, since the dialogue ended." Since the violence started in late 2017, the United Nations estimates that almost a third of the Anglophone population requires immediate humanitarian assistance and that a tenth (about 536,000 individuals) have been forced to flee their homes. Due to a ban on education imposed by paramilitary groups, 80% of schools are still closed, and 40% of medical facilities in the Southwest region are thought to be inactive (Hairsine, 2019).

Government forces have also committed illegal executions and arbitrary arrests as a response to the armed conflict, as well as other violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. The state-sanctioned discrimination against lesbian, homosexual, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people grew worse while the government continued to impose restrictions on the right to free speech and association. Following their return, government agents severely violated the human rights of Cameroonian asylum seekers who had been deported from the United States. These actions included physical assault and abuse, arbitrary arrest and detention, extortion, and the confiscation of identity documents, which restricted their freedom of movement, ability to work, and access to public services (HRW, 2022, p. 8).

The 1994 Rwandan genocide served as the most horrifying example of how regional and international players failed to protect civilian populations from international crimes, leading UN members to unanimously adopt the responsibility to protect (R2P) principle. According to this commitment, states should cooperate with one another to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing. However, it also stipulates that if a state fails to uphold this commitment, the international community will intervene

through peaceful means or, if those fail, coercive action (International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI), 2017, p. 44).

Members of the UN unanimously adopted the responsibility to protect (R2P) principle in response to regional and international actors' abject inability to shield civilian populations from transnational crimes, most tragically displayed during the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. This commitment stipulates that states should cooperate with one another to fulfil their primary responsibility of protecting their populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing. It also states that if a state fails to uphold this responsibility, the international community will act to enforce its obligations through peaceful means or, if those fail, coercive action (IRRI, 2017, p. 44).

But the problem is if the African union is doing something concerning the peace and security problems in Cameroon. One of the goals of AU's agenda 2063 is to ensure that Peace, security and stability are preserved. That is to mean that peace and security is to be maintained and sustained with the assistance of the African Union within its 55 member states. What has the African Union done to preserve and maintain peace and security in Cameroon? What Recommendations can be brought forward to ameliorate this peace and security situation in Cameroon?

The AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government adopted a historic declaration during the OAU/AU's 50th anniversary celebration in May 2013 to make our point. They committed to ending violent conflict on the continent by 2020 and made a promise that Africa would not pass the weight of conflicts down to future generations (AU, 2020).

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Research Methodology

This study aimed to investigate the activities of the AU as far as preserving and maintaining peace and security in Cameroon is concerned. Also, some recommendations were brought forward to ameliorate this peace and security situation in Cameroon.

This study was a descriptive in nature. Secondary data was the sole form of data used in this investigation. Information was gathered through the internet, periodicals, newspapers, books, journals, and other sources. The data was analyzed, reconstructed and compared so as to get valid answers to the questions posed in this study.

Results

A Strategies of the AU to preserve and maintain peace and security in Cameroon

African leaders use the African Union as a forum to discuss regional and domestic concerns and coordinate efforts to address them. 55 countries have come together to form the organisation, which is very ambitious. There are more than a dozen organisations that make up the African Union, each with a specific goal in mind. While others carry out and keep an eye on policies, some are in charge of planning and proposals. The Assembly, which is made up of the heads of state or government or their authorised representatives, is the body that makes decisions for the African Union. Before being put into effect, significant policies suggested by the other bodies must be approved by the Assembly (Luursema, 2023).

The Commission of the African Union assists AU organisations and member states in putting policies that have been agreed by the Assembly into practise. Budgets and resources are also managed by the Commission. The Executive Council, which is made up of ministers from member states, oversees the execution of AU policy. The body that makes decisions about conflicts is the Peace and Security Council. Through it, AU member states monitor and decide on crisis and conflict situations collectively, and they act jointly to both prevent and end hostilities. The leadership of the African Union has also made some dubious choices in order to defend leaders who have been charged by the International Criminal Court (ICC) with killing civilians and committing genocide. For instance, the AU said in 2010 that it would not work with the ICC to extradite Omar al-Bashir, the president of Sudan, who the ICC accuses of committing a genocide in Darfur (Luursema, 2023).

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In a similar vein, the AU oversees policy development and decision-making to ensure that Africa achieves Agenda 2063's Aspiration 4 of "A peaceful and secure Africa," which calls for the establishment of a culture of peace and tolerance fostered in Africa's children and youth through peace education and the use of mechanisms that promote a dialogue-centered approach to conflict prevention and resolution. The centrepiece of efforts being made to make Africa a more peaceful and secure continent is the Agenda 2063 flagship programme of Silencing the Guns by 2020 (AU, 2023)

The Peace & Security Council (PSC), the permanent decision-making body of the AU for the prevention, management, and settlement of conflicts, is the primary AU Organ for fostering peace and security on the continent. It is a system of collective security and early warning designed to provide quick and effective responses to crisis and conflict situations throughout Africa. Additionally, it is the cornerstone of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), the framework for fostering stability, security, and peace in Africa. The African Union Commission's (AUC) Department of Peace and Security coordinates AUC efforts to promote stability, security, and peace on the continent and assists the PSC in carrying out its obligations under the PSC Protocol. The Department works with special representatives designated by the AUC Chairperson in the field of peace and security in Cameroon and supports several peace and security offices and missions (AU, 2023).

Additionally, the AU has the authority to act militarily in any of its member nations where war crimes, genocide, or crimes against humanity have occurred. The group has repeatedly conducted peacekeeping missions in order to achieve this. United Nations (UN) missions frequently collaborate with African Union (AU) peacekeeping operations. Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Comoros, Darfur, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Mali were among the countries where the African Union's actions prevented disasters and shielded citizens from hostility. The diplomatic efforts of the AU have been successful on numerous instances. For instance, the African Union facilitated talks between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front in October 2022, which led to a peace agreement (Luursema, 2023).

It is sufficient to say that the AU is aware of the violence experienced by unarmed citizens in several Cameroonian districts. President Paul Biya was asked to put the Major National Dialogue's recommendations into action in order to promote peace and stability through this

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peaceful process by a delegation that included the chairwoman of the AU Commission as recently as November 2019. However, the president of Cameroon reassured his people in his message for the New Year that the military forces would perform their tasks "without weakness." The Anglophone problems will be solved militarily, according to Biya (Nkongho, 2020).

For the Anglophone regions, the fighting has had disastrous repercussions. Around 3,000 people have died, and 500,000 people have been displaced, according to Crisis Group. Humanitarian aid is thought to be required by one in three persons in the anglophone regions. There have been efforts to end the problem, including the intervention of foreign nations. Switzerland, for instance, spearheaded a mediation project in 2019. The AU, however, has mostly kept quiet about the conflict (Hendricks and Kiven, 2020).

In July 2018, Moussa Faki Mahamat, the leader of the African Union, met with President Paul Biya of Cameroon to discuss the necessity of a national conversation to settle the crisis. He returned in November of this year. However, the African Union's Peace and Security Council, which makes decisions on the "prevention, management, and resolution of conflicts," is curiously silent about the conflict. Despite the council having the responsibility to "facilitate timely and efficient response to conflict and crisis situations in Africa" (Hendricks and Kiven, 2020), this is what has happened.

That is to say, the AU has not yet gotten involved in the continuing issue in Cameroon. DW was unable to obtain an official statement from the AU regarding the contentious topic. Ayo Johnson, Director of Viewpoint Africa and an authority on African politics, told DW in an interview that "it's a failure of the AU and the UN collectively." Separatist calls are coming from uneasy, angry, and unsatisfied regions of the nation in Nigeria and Cameroon (Politics, 2017).

Cameroon issued a 190-page report to the AU in January 2020, analysing its own performance against its responsibilities under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. The document, which amounted to a student grading her own paper, stated that Cameroon had ratified a slew of human-rights treaties. Its portrayal of Cameroon contradicts the conclusions of watchdog organisations such as Transparency International and Freedom House, both of which give Cameroon the lowest grade. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International would likewise fail to identify the country as it appears in the AU report (Nkongho, 2020).

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B Recommendations to ameliorate peace and security situation in Cameroon

The government and both moderate and extreme Anglophone voices must engage in open-ended peace negotiations if Cameroon is to move forward. The AU summit should make it clear to the Cameroonian government and the armed separatist groups that there will be consequences if they refuse to participate in the proposed Swiss-led peace talks and the upcoming Africa Forum symposium as well (Nkongho, 2020). The summit's 2020 theme is "Silencing the Guns" for development.

The proposed Swiss-led peace talks and the upcoming Africa Forum symposium should both be boycotted, the African Union summit, whose 2020 theme is "Silencing the Guns" for development, should make clear to the Cameroonian government and the armed separatist groups. The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights must be applied to a scenario like Cameroon's if it is to have any meaning (Nkongho, 2020). "Silencing the Guns" for development is its 2020 theme.

There are a few alternatives available to the AU; "Sanctions could be one, membership revocation could be another," she said. However, revocation of membership is only symbolic because it has no practical impact on the nation. But it has a psychological effect. On the other hand, sanctions are different; they may entail travel bans or limitations on access to services provided on a global scale. Alternately, they can be requests for the UN and the African Union to appoint a special rapporteur (Politics, 2017).

Furthermore, I agree with Hendricks and Kiven's assertion in 2020 that a variety of issues must be handled jointly in order to manage the situation in Cameroon.

First and foremost, the African Union and UN could coordinate their efforts to meet the humanitarian needs of the displaced and refugees. The African Union Commission on Human and Peoples Rights must also look into the numerous reports of violations of human rights in Cameroon and take the necessary action.

Second, the continental organisation must use its "Panel of the Wise" to decide how to handle the problem most effectively. Thirdly, it must also dispatch a special representative to the

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Anglophone region to put into action a conflict-management plan that would result in a lasting peace accord.

Discussion

According to the 2017 Global Peace Index (GPI) regional score, Sub-Saharan Africa saw its poorest state of peace since 2008. SSA's GPI score has consistently declined throughout the previous four years, albeit by varying amounts, even though the area had noticeable yearly increases between 2011 and 2013. Conflicts frequently result in significant economic losses in addition to unimaginable human anguish. Conflicts also put a substantial burden on a nation's public budget and reduce income.

Armed groups and government troops notably violated human rights in Cameroon, murdering several people in both the Far North and the Anglophone parts of the country. Government troops have committed illegal murders and arbitrary detentions as a result of the armed hostilities, as well as other breaches of international humanitarian and human rights law. Thankfully, R2P tenet has been steadily adopted in Africa. A member state's war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity may be investigated and prosecuted by the African Union.

The important question is whether the African Union is taking action to address the security and peace issues in Cameroon, and if so, what suggestions can serve as a wake-up call for the AU. As earlier stated, numerous studies have shown that Cameroon's issues are not addressed by the AU Peace and Security Council, which decides on the prevention, management, and resolution of conflicts. It was suggested, among other things, that the AU and UN work together to meet the humanitarian needs of refugees and internally displaced persons.

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Conclusion

Given the conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic, Burundi, and Chad, Central Africa, where Cameroon is located, has long been seen as one of the more unstable regions of the continent. Such statistics, though, were altered when a number of conflicts and crises changed the story. As a regional tool to promote unity on the continent and play a role in ensuring peace, stability, and security, the African Union was established. Consequently, the AU is required under its charter to settle conflicts throughout Africa, Cameroon inclusive.

The AU's members must tackle the human rights violations taking place in Cameroon rather than ignoring them if they are to uphold the high standards of their founding charter. The AU needs to show that it exists for the people of Cameroon, not the wealthy political and commercial elite, by standing up for the truth when one of its members transgresses the AU's guiding principles. Finally, the African Union runs the risk of seeing the dispute in Cameroon worsen and even causing instability in the country if it does not take more initiative in finding a solution quickly.

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