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## Continuity and Change in Cameroon's Foreign Policy in the Post-Ahidjo Era

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Effective presence", "active participation", "open door", "diplomacy of active presence", "co-operation without frontiers" and "diplomacy of development". These are some of the terms that have been used in describing Cameroon's foreign policy since the accession of Paul Biya to the presidency on November 6, 1982.

In a world that was still mired in Cold War rivalries and ideological differences between East and West, it seemed clear from these characterizations that the President's strategy was not only aimed at continuing with the non-aligned policy of his predecessor, but perhaps more importantly, it was intended as a signal that he would be more aggressive in expanding and strengthening Cameroon's diplomatic and economic relations beyond France and the Western industrialized nations to wherever Cameroonian interests may be served and promoted.<sup>1</sup> In a speech to members of the National Assembly during his taking of the oath of office on November 6, 1982, the new President outlined one of his foreign policy goals in this manner: "At the world level, they are peace among nations, non-alignment\* I mean authentic non-alignment\* and co-operation, a new kind of co-operation which would usher in a more just and stable new world economic order."<sup>2</sup>

For that reason, therefore, Ejedepang-Koge sees the establishment of the first Cameroonian Embassy in South America (in Brazil) as evidence of the new policy.<sup>3</sup> Despite the proposed high-profile, aggressive approach which was in sharp contrast to what some have described as his predecessor's low-key "behind-the-scenes" style,<sup>4</sup> there is a consensus among scholars and observers of the Cameroon political scene that there has been no significant ideological shift in Cameroon's foreign policy. For example, William Eteki Mboumoua, the former Secretary General of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and Biya's foreign minister from July 1984 to January 1987, remarked in 1985, that even though there was a change in style under President Biya, there had been no change in Cameroon's foreign policy since the days of Ahidjo.<sup>5</sup> Ngoh agrees, noting that Biya's foreign policy has been more or less a continuation of Ahidjo's policy of "cautious diplomacy"<sup>6</sup> Along the same line, Kubam and Nyamboli argue that Biya's foreign policy was essentially the product of over two decades of evolution, and a harmonious blend of continuity and change.<sup>7</sup>

While these statements are generally correct, however, it is important to point out that there have been some significant changes under President Biya. The main objective of this paper is to examine the extent to which President Biya has continued with or deviated from the policies of his predecessor. In so doing, we will focus on five areas: (1) Relations with France; (2) Relations with other Western Industrialized nations; (3) Relations with China and the former states of Eastern Europe; (4) Relations with Israel and the Arab countries

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of the Middle East and (5) Cameroon's African relations. The final section of the paper will look at the forces that helped in shaping Cameroon's external relations under Presidents Ahidjo and Biya.

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### Relations with France

Soon after independence, the Ahidjo administration (1960-1982) on November 13, 1960, signed a series of diplomatic, cultural, trade, economic, military and financial cooperation agreements with France that granted the latter a privileged position in almost every facet of Cameroonian life. For instance, under the terms of the diplomatic accord, the French ambassador to Cameroon had the exclusive privilege of serving as dean of the diplomatic corps in Yaounde. At the same time, the Cameroon ambassador to France was granted rights similar to those enjoyed by ambassadors from other French-speaking countries. Another provision of the diplomatic accord allowed citizens of both countries to enter each other's territory without an entry visa.<sup>8</sup>

The trade and economic agreements called on both countries not to place customs' duties on products from each other's territory, and for Cameroon to purchase most of its products from France. However, in order to protect its infant industries, Cameroon was permitted to impose tariffs on French goods that were likely to compete with locally produced goods.<sup>9</sup>

As a result of the trade agreements, France has remained Cameroon's premier trading partner since independence. In 1961, for instance, France received 59 percent of Cameroon's exports while at the same time providing 55 percent of its imports. Even though its share of trade had declined significantly by 1978, France remained the single largest recipient of Cameroon exports with 32 percent while providing 42.2 percent of its imports. France was also the single largest donor of bilateral assistance to Cameroon with a total of 251.5 million dollars from 1971 to 1976, followed by West Germany and Canada with 57.7 and 36.9 million dollars respectively.<sup>10</sup>

The defence and military co-operation agreements signed between the two countries also required Cameroon to procure most of its military hardware from France. In fact, from 1960 to 1969, Cameroon purchased 75.8 percent of its military supplies from France.<sup>11</sup> France, on the other hand, promised direct military assistance to Cameroon whenever necessary. It also accepted the responsibility for providing the Cameroon military with technical advisers and training for Cameroon officers in French military institutions.<sup>12</sup> It should, however, be pointed out that even before the signing of the 1960 agreements, France and the Ahidjo administration had negotiated a temporary military co-operation agreement on December 25, 1959<sup>13</sup> that called for French military assistance in protecting Ahidjo's government. That assistance (requested by Ahidjo in January 1960 when France sent two battalions of French paratroopers) was decisive in eliminating the threat by the outlawed anti-colonial Union des populations du Cameroun (UPC) against Ahidjo's administration.

France's willingness to again flex its military muscle on behalf of Cameroon and the Ahidjo administration was also evident during a border conflict with Nigeria in July 1981.

With the possibility of the conflict escalating, France reminded the latter of its defence agreement with Cameroon and its willingness to send French troops and weapons to bolster Cameroon's defenses.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, French military presence in Cameroon continued well into the 1970s. Except for the Army that had been transferred under the command of a Cameroonian, Brigadier Piere Semengue in 1973, the tiny Cameroon Navy and Air Force were still under the command of French officers as late as 1975.<sup>15</sup> Also, by 1981, there were still about seventy French military personnel stationed in Cameroon. At the same time, there were 142 Cameroonian officers receiving training in French military institutions.<sup>16</sup>

French predominance during the Ahidjo era was also evident by the large number of French non-military personnel in the country. In 1979, there were about 9,044 French citizens out of a total European population of 12,552 in Cameroon.<sup>17</sup> Many of the Frenchmen were either private businessmen or were employed by French companies located in major Cameroonian cities, especially in Douala, Edea and Yaounde.

Although the Franco-Cameroonian cooperation agreements were renegotiated in 1973, Kofele-Kale argues that, with the exception of the diplomatic convention, nothing of substance was accomplished.<sup>18</sup> In other words, the new agreements did not seriously affect future French presence in Cameroon nor, did it as Kale puts it, "affect the basic structure of master-client relations between Cameroon and France."<sup>19</sup> In fact, as a result of the various economic opportunities created by the exploitation of oil in the late 1970s, the number of French citizens in Cameroon had increased to about 18,000 in 1980.<sup>20</sup>

However, it should be pointed out that Franco-Cameroonian relations under President Ahidjo were not always cordial. In pursuance of Cameroon's policy of non-alignment, and as the former President attempted to assert Cameroon's independence vis-a-vis its former colonial master; there were bound to be some areas of disagreements. This was the case in the late 1960s when Ahidjo rejected France's request to establish diplomatic relations with the people's Republic of China. At the time, the Ahidjo administration was still unhappy at the fact that China had supported the UPC rebellion against his administration. The Cameroon President also rejected pressure from France to recognize the breakaway Republic of Biafra during the Nigerian civil war from 1967 to 1970. Because of its close proximity to Biafra, it was possible that such a move by Cameroon would not only have provided a diplomatic boost for Biafra, but would also have allowed it to use Cameroonian territory in transporting badly needed food and military supplies for its troops and civilian population.

Other areas of disagreement involved Cameroon's decision to withdraw from the Common Organization of African and Malagasy States (OCAM) in 1973, its refusal to attend the annual Franco-African summit (which brought together the French president and heads of state of the former French colonies in Africa) that was started in 1973, and its withdrawal in 1971, from the French controlled air lines-air Afrique. Ironically, Air France provided most of the technical assistants and 30 percent of the initial capital for Cameroon to launch its own national airlines-Cameroon Airlines (CAMAIR).<sup>21</sup> In fact,

Kofele-Kale views the disagreements in Franco-Cameroonian relations as merely minor adjustments that had little effect in the structure and unequal relations between France and Cameroon<sup>22</sup> that has continued.

Despite a change in administration in 1982, and in spite a brief period of strained relations between the two countries in 1983 and 1984,<sup>23</sup> Franco-Cameroon relations have remained strong. The fact that Biya's first overseas visit as President in February 1983, was to France was perhaps symbolic of the close relationship he expected Cameroon to maintain with the former colonial power. One might even argue that Franco-Cameroonian relations under Biya are much stronger than was the case on the eve of President Ahidjo's resignation in November 1982. It was widely believed at the time that Ahidjo's resignation had been precipitated by ideological differences between himself and the socialist government of President Francois Mitterrand. The French President might have given some credence to the speculation when he remarked in a speech to members of the National Assembly in Yaounde during his visit to Cameroon in June 1983, that he felt more at home in Cameroon with Biya in power.<sup>24</sup>

A further indication of the improved relations with France was evident in Cameroon's decision in May 1989, to send a delegation to the Franco-African summit in Dakar, Senegal, for the first time since the beginning of the annual summits, in 1973 after initially refusing to do so. Until then Cameroon had refused to attend the gathering on the grounds that Cameroon was bilingual, and therefore neither a Francophone nor an Anglophone country.

Meanwhile, Cameroon continues to maintain its close military relations with France. For instance, the number of Cameroonian officers receiving military training in French military institutions increased from 142 in 1982 to 169 in 1988.<sup>25</sup> In addition in 1988, there were still about 69 French military officers providing training and technical advise to the Cameroon military.<sup>26</sup>

Unlike his predecessor who had remained neutral in the Chadian civil war (perhaps because of his strong support for the Organization of African Unity and its charter restricting involvement in the internal affairs of a member state), President Biya was openly supportive of France's direct involvement, and support of Hissene Habre in the crisis. For one thing, it was in Cameroon's interest to have a stable Chad since that was likely to prevent a flood of refugees into Cameroon, especially in the towns along the Cameroon-Chad border. Secondly, a stable Chad was also in Cameroon's economic interest because it (Chad) provided an important market for Cameroonian products, including tea produced by the Cameroon Development Corporation.<sup>27</sup> However, because of President Gaddafi's adventurism elsewhere in Africa. He supported Goukouni Oueddeye in the conflict. President Biya was perhaps more comfortable with a stable Chad that was under a regime supported by France than one that was under Libyan influence.

Trade relations with France have also remained strong under Biya's administration. Except for a brief period in the early 1980s when the United States surpassed France as Cameroon's major trading partner (mainly from the purchase of Cameroonian oil), France

has maintained its position as Cameroon's major trading partner and donor. In 1984, France imported 28 percent of Cameroon's export products and provided 48 percent of its imports. Although French exports to Cameroon declined by 4 percent to 44 percent in 1985 (mostly as a result of competition from other European countries), Cameroon's exports to France increased to from 28 to 35 percent.<sup>28</sup> In fact, for the first time since independence, Cameroon had a favourable trade balance with France which at the end of August 1985 stood at 943 million FF (French Francs).<sup>29</sup>

Despite increased competition from other European countries, France remains the primary foreign investor in Cameroon. In 1986, about 67 percent of all the foreign investment capital in Cameroon worth about 90 billion francs CFA was French. By 1990, the French firm Elf-Serepca was still the leading oil producing company in Cameroon accounting for about 80 percent of the production.

Meanwhile, France's contribution to the cultural and educational development of Cameroon remains phenomenal. In 1986, there were 833 French cooperation personnel (technical assistants) working in Cameroon at a total cost of 13.8 billion francs CFA provided mostly by the French government.<sup>30</sup> During the same period, France awarded 320 scholarships worth about 700 million francs CFA to Cameroon students studying in various fields.<sup>31</sup> Although the number of French nationals in Cameroon had dropped from 18,000 in 1980 to 16,000 in 1986, it still represented the largest number of European nationals in the country.

#### Relations with other Western Industrialized Nations

Although President Ahidjo had tried to diversify Cameroon's diplomatic and economic relations beyond France, the Biya administration, under its policy of "co-operation without frontiers" or "diplomacy of active presence", has been more aggressive and perhaps more successful in pursuing both goals, especially vis-a-vis the industrialized nations of Western Europe and North America.

Cameroon's relations with Britain (which together with France was one of the former colonial powers in Cameroon) which was almost non-existent under the previous administration was strengthened following President Biya's visit to Britain in May 1985. His visit was followed in November 1985, by a visit to Cameroon by a British delegation led by Linda Chalker, the British Secretary of State for Transport. The goal of the visit was to evaluate British development projects in the field of transportation, and to seek other ways for British firms to increase their participation in Cameroon's markets that had hitherto been dominated by France. A reciprocal visit to London in June 1986, by Andre-Bosco Chewa and Isabella Bassong, Cameroon minister of transport and deputy minister of health respectively, was also aimed at seeking more British aid and technology for their respective ministries.

The net result of the increased relations has been an increase in trade between the two countries. For instance, Cameroon's exports to Britain increased by over fifty percent, from 2,065 million francs CFA in 1982 to 3,498 million in 1984. During the same period British exports to Cameroon increased from 14,121 million to 16,828 francs CFA, making

it Cameroon's sixth trading partner behind France, West Germany, the United States, Japan and Italy. Also, in 1984, Britain signed a series of aid packages with Cameroon worth 35 billion francs CFA.<sup>32</sup> The improved relations between Britain and Cameroon prompted Mr. Channon, the British Minister of Trade to predict during a visit to Cameroon in February 1985, that the British were going to return to Cameroon in a big way.<sup>33</sup>

A further indication of the improved relations with Britain was made evident by the visit of the princes of Wales to Cameroon in 1990, and recent attempts by Cameroon to seek membership in the commonwealth. Although one might argue that the latter was ostensibly to eliminate criticisms from the English-speaking population for the President's decision to begin attending the Franco-African summit, there is also no doubt that Cameroon expected to gain from the commonwealth trade preference.

Improved relations with other Western industrialized nations have also been beneficial to Cameroon. In 1984 for instance, a 15 billion francs CFA loan from Italy was used in financing the Bafia-Bafoussam section of the Yaounde-Bafoussam road project. Meanwhile, a 215 billion francs CFA loan from Denmark was also utilized for developing water projects in rural areas.<sup>34</sup> In July 1985, Switzerland granted Cameroon two loans totalling 11 billion francs CFA for rural development projects and improvement of communication infrastructure, water supply and energy resources.

A Cameroon economic delegation headed by Elizabeth Tankeu, vice-minister of planning and development, visited Japan in October 1984 in order to explore ways of expanding Japanese aid to Cameroon and also in improving the unfavorable trade balance between the two countries. This visit was followed in July 1985 by a visit to Cameroon by the Japanese foreign minister, Mayumi Mariyama and the signing of a 1.2 billion francs CFA grant agreement with the Cameroon government.

Between 1982 and 1984, West Germany's total assistance package to Cameroon totalled 225 million Deutch Marks.<sup>35</sup> German companies were also involved in many development projects in Cameroon including the construction of the Edea-Kribi road. A German trade fair in Yaounde in 1986 was aimed at exposing German companies to Cameroonian businessmen.

Relations with the Vatican, strained since the early 1970s following the arrest and trial of Bishop Ndongmo, Archbishop of the Diocese of Nkongsamba have also improved. The improved relations culminated in President Biya's visit to the Vatican in 1985, and later, to the Pontiff's visit to Cameroon in August 1985. As part of his "diplomacy of active presence", President Biya, in 1984 increased the number of Cameroon's diplomatic missions in Western Europe from four to six with the opening of new embassies in Rome and Madrid. Previously, Cameroon had been represented in both countries by non-resident ambassadors based elsewhere.

Cameroon's relations with the United States and Canada have also improved tremendously under President Biya. In fact, from 1982 to 1984, the United States temporarily replaced France as the major buyer of Cameroon's exports, mostly from its purchase of Cameroonian oil. In 1984, for instance, Cameroon's exports to the United States totaled 226,917 million

francs CFA. France was a distant second with 179,889 million francs CFA. However, France retained its position as the major source for Cameroon's imports with a total sale of 207,536 million francs CFA while the United States had a mere 49,619 million during the same period.<sup>36</sup>

Relations between Cameroon and the United States have also witnessed a significant improvement in other areas. In 1984, the United States signed an agreement providing Cameroon with an 18.3 billion francs CFA for the improvement of primary education in three of Cameroon's ten provinces.<sup>37</sup> A year later, another agreement provided Cameroon with a 19 million dollars five-years development grant. As a result of the economic boom in the 1980s (mostly due to oil production) and the signing in November 1984, of a "most favoured nation" agreement between both countries, many United States companies and financial institutions were attracted to invest in Cameroon.<sup>38</sup> By 1986, there were about 100 United States companies in the country with a total investment of 600 million dollars. Meanwhile, the Peace corps continues to provide valuable help in the field of education and other areas of development.

Cameroon's relations with Canada have also witnessed a significant improvement under President Biya's policy of "active presence". Canada has been involved in a number of development projects in Cameroon, including rural electrification, forest exploitation, primary health care and public transportation. In 1986, it provided 36 million of the 120 million dollars that was needed for the improvement of the Douala seaport.<sup>39</sup> Also in 1986, Canada granted Cameroon a 55 million dollar multi-purpose loan and a 2.2 million dollar (Canadian) loan for the training of its civil servants.

### **Relations with China and the former States of Eastern Europe**

Relations with China and states of the former Eastern Europe had an ominous beginning because of their support for the UPC in its struggle against Ahidjo's administration. However, by the early 1970s, following the demise of the UPC rebellion, and in pursuance of Cameroon's policy of non-alignment, Ahidjo normalized relations with many of those countries. By 1973, Cameroon had established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, the German Democratic Republic, the People's Republic of China, North Korea, North Vietnam and the Royal Government of National Union of Cambodia.<sup>40</sup>

When he became head of state in 1982, President Biya moved to expand and strengthen those relations. For the first time since the normalization of relations between Cameroon and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) in 1974, the latter was allowed to open an embassy in Cameroon with a resident ambassador in Yaounde in August 1983. In February 1984, an accord was reached between Cameroon and Bulgaria establishing diplomatic relations.<sup>41</sup> Two Cameroonian delegations visited North Korea in August and November 1984 with the goal of exploring possible areas of economic co-operation between the two countries.

Meanwhile, relations with China have continued to improve under President Biya. In 1986, the President opened the Lagdo dam on the Benoue river which had largely been financed

by a 41 billion francs CFA interest-free loan from the Chinese government. In 1991, China granted Cameroon a loan of 30 billion francs CFA to finance a variety of projects in Cameroon, including the Lamdo Agricultural Project and the renovation of the Congress Hall in Yaounde which had initially been built with financial support from the Chinese government. China continues to provide scholarships for Cameroon students to study in China. It has also provided Cameroon with expertise in other areas of development, including medicine and public health.<sup>42</sup>

By the mid-1980s, Cameroon's efforts to diversify its relations, particularly with the industrialized countries of Western Europe and North America caused some worries and raised a few questions in some French government and private circles whether France would be able to maintain the dominant role it had played in Cameroon since independence. For instance, a correspondent for the French daily newspaper, *Le Monde*, questioned whether the countries Cameroon was courting were prepared to give it the same level of aid and investment it was receiving from France.<sup>43</sup> Despite these early concerns, however, France has retained its role as Cameroon's major trading partner and closest ally. As we indicated earlier, many of the treaty agreements signed between Cameroon and France in 1961 and renegotiated in 1973 remain intact.

### Relations with Israel and the Arab countries of the Middle East

Perhaps President Biya's boldest foreign policy shift came in August 1986, when he re-established diplomatic relations with the state of Israel. This action came after a thirteen-year break, when Cameroon together with many other African states decided to break diplomatic relations with the Jewish state following the 1973 Arab-Israel war. Cameroon thus became one of the few African states to formally re-establish relations with the Jewish state.<sup>44</sup>

Unafraid of alienating the large Moslem population in the country, and in spite of opposition from some members of his cabinet, including his foreign minister, William Eteki Mboumoua, Biya rationalized his decision to renew diplomatic relations with Israel on grounds that peace could only come to the Middle East through peaceful negotiations. He also argued that there was no reason for Cameroon not to re-establish diplomatic relations with Israel since Egypt, a major player in the conflict on whose behalf many African countries had broken off diplomatic relations with Israel in 1973, had already done so.

The re-establishment of relations was followed by the signing of a series of trade, tourism, agricultural, communication and military agreements with Israel. The renewed relations allowed Cameroon to purchase a number of military aircraft and hardware from Israel. Even before the re-establishment of formal diplomatic relations in 1986, Cameroon, like many other African states, had maintained close economic relations with Israel. In 1985, for example, Cameroon exported coffee worth about 28 million francs CFA to Israel while it imported goods totalling 155 million francs CFA from Israel during the same period. Also, following the failed military coup in April 1984, President Biya decided to turn to

Israeli security agents for his protection. Israel has also been involved in the training of Cameroon military officers both in Cameroon and in Israel.

In dispute of initial hostility from some Arab countries, especially Libya and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), Cameroon has maintained warm and friendly relations with many Arab countries in the region, including Egypt and Saudi Arabia with whom it has diplomatic relations.

### Relations with African States

By 1970, after reconciling his differences with the African states (Ghana, Guinea, Egypt and People's Republic of Congo) that had actively supported the UPC in its struggle against his administration, President Ahidjo was well on his way to establishing himself as one of the most respected statesmen on the continent, and a strong supporter of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). He was the chairman of the organization in 1969-1970; played an important role in reconciling Nigeria with the African states (Gabon and the Ivory Coast) that had sided with the breakaway Republic of Biafra in the Nigerian civil war, and was one of the four African heads of state (including Leopold Senghor of Senegal, Yakubu Gowon of Nigeria and Mobutu Sese Seseko of Zaire) selected by the OAU in November 1971, to mediate in the Middle East conflict. Cameroon's importance in the continent was also evident by the selection of two Cameroonians, Nzo Ekhah Nghaky and William Eteki Mboumoua as Secretary General of the organization from 1972 to 1974 and 1974 to 1980 respectively.

Cameroon's African policy under President Biya has essentially been a continuation of that of his predecessor: continued support for the OAU, non-interference in the internal affairs of member states, opposition to the apartheid regime in South Africa, improved bilateral relations and support for regional groupings such as the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Customs Union of Central African States (UDEAC) of which Cameroon is a founding members. Like his predecessor, Biya perceived regional groupings as a necessary first step in providing a solid foundation for African unity, and the basis for the eventual economic development of the continent:

...we have always felt that for economic co-operation in our continent to be strong and effective, realistic and durable, it must be founded on the interests which are within the grasp of our people.

In other words, the African Common Market which we are longing for, and other forms of regional integration on the continent can only be achieved through concentric circles of solidarity, that is, within sub-regional co-operation bodies which constitute realistic, well-defined and coherent economic entities.<sup>46</sup>

It is for these same reasons that Biya, in 1983, supported the creation of another regional group-the Economic Community of the States of Central Africa (ECSCA) grouping Cameroon, Zaire, Gabon, Congo, the Central African Republic, Rwanda, Burundi, Equatorial Guinea, Chad, Angola and Sao Tome and Principe.

Despite his support for regional groupings, President Biya also expanded and strengthened bilateral relations with other African States. Within the first two years of his administra-

tion, he had paid official visits to a number of African states including, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Senegal and Ethiopia. Yaounde' also played host to many of these countries' heads of state. In August 1984, President Biya appointed ambassadors to Senegal and the Ivory coast and authorized the opening of a consulate at Oyem in northern Gabon.<sup>47</sup>

Meanwhile, Cameroonian institutions of higher learning, including the International School of Journalism, the Armed Forces Training School, the school of International relations, the Medial School and the School of Administration and Magistracy have remained opened to students from Gabon, Congo and the Central African Republic.

Of particular importance to Cameroon have been its relations with two of its neighbours- Gabon and Nigeria. Despite a brief period of strained relation in the early 1980s, Cameroon-Gabon relations have improved in recent years. For instance, thousands of Cameroonians have since returned to Gabon following a soccer incident in 1982 in which Cameroonians living in various Gabonese cities were attacked and their property destroyed. Also, food exports to Gabon which were halted early in 1984 because of alleged pro-Ahidjo sympathies in the country were resumed after President Bongo had visited Cameroon in October apparently to explain his country's position to Cameroonian authorities and to reassure them of his support.

The fact that President Biya's first official visit to an African country as head of state was to Nigeria instead of a Francophone state was an indication of the importance that Cameroon placed in maintaining good relation with its powerful neighbour to the west. Despite the problem of smuggling lower-priced Nigerian goods into Cameroon and occasional border clashes along the ill-defined oil-rich coastal area of Rio-del-Rey, the leaders of both countries have been quick to prevent such incidents from escalating into a much broader conflict. The latest border incident occurred in August 1991, and was followed by an emergency visit to the Nigerian capital by President Biya and a return visit by the Nigerian Minister of External Affairs to Yaounde to discuss border conflicts and other bilateral issues.

### **Determinants of Policy**

Despite the high-profile, aggressive approach to foreign policy, our discussion has shown a greater degree of continuity in Cameroon's foreign policy in the post-Ahidjo era. In fact, the very forces that helped shape Cameroon's external relations under President Ahidjo have also been influential in determining those relations under his successor. They include: (1) Cameroon's historic relations with France (2) Cameroon's economic and political interests and (3) the constitutional provisions of the presidency, and the personality of the presidency.

A common characteristic in the foreign policy of most African states since independence has been the close relations each country has maintained with its former colonial power. In the case of Cameroon, the historic ties with France dating back to the end of the First World War, to France's support for Ahidjo's rise to power in February 1958, have all

contributed to the continued strong Franco-Cameroonian relations. In a speech in May 1958, former President Ahidjo (at the time he was still the prime minister of the trust territory) had alluded to this historical connection and its likely ramifications on future Franco-Camerouns relations:

In a world in which seclusion is harmful to individuals and nations, we cannot remain isolated and in these conditions, how can we conceive having any other partner than this country we know and love? How can we forget its accomplishments all these years that we have learned to understand and appreciate her, how can we ignore the cultural education that is leading us today i the course whose direction was determined by her. It is with France that Cameroon, once emancipated, wish to bind its destiny and in concert, sail freely along with her through the turbulent seas of todays world (my translation).<sup>48</sup>

Ahidjo also owed special gratitude to France because it had been instrumental in his rise and continued stay in power from 1958 to 1982. In fact, as we mentioned earlier, French military aid was decisive in the defeat of the UPC rebellion that threatened Ahidjo's government in the early years of independence.

In addition to the historical connection, Professor Kale argues that he privileged position that France continues to enjoy in Cameroon may also be due to the strange fascination for French culture that Cameroon's ruling elite have development as a result of the historical relationship.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, as we have previously indicated, Cameroon had on November 13, 1960, signed a series of agreements with France that guaranteed the latter continued presence in Cameroon.

But while historical connections played an important role in determining the strong Franco-Cameroonian relations, the same could not be said of Ango-Cameroonian relations, especially during the Ahidjo era. Although Britain's colonial presence in the former Southern Cameroons (now the southwest and the Northwest provinces) was equally as long as the French presence in the former French Cameroons, Britain failed on the eve of independence to negotiate with its former trust territory the same kind of agreements that allowed for France's strong presence in Cameroon after independence.

Bayart argued that the reason for lack of stronger Anglo-Cameroonian relations, especially during the Ahidjo administration, was due to the fact that Britain had conceded the fact that it could play an important role in a Cameroon that was dominated by French-speaking Cameroonians.<sup>50</sup> By the same token, former President Ahidjo was reluctant to push for such a relationship. For one thing, he held Britain responsible for the fact that the British Northern Cameroons had elected in the February 1961 plebiscite to join the Federation of Nigeria instead of the Republic of Cameroon. He also blamed Britain for allowing the UPC to operate from the southern Cameroons between 1955 to 1957 after it had been banned in the French Cameroons.<sup>51</sup> Ultimately, however, president Biya's decision to actively pursue relations with Britain may partly be due to his desire to renew that historical connection.

Cameroon's foreign policy under President Biya (as was the case under former President Ahidjo) has also been motivated by pragmatic domestic economic and political considerations. A few years ago, Professor Kamarck pointed out the following:

The economic forces at work and the economic structure of a country are important factors in both domestic politics and its foreign policy. Very simply, to survive you must eat. The way in which an individual or nation has to act to get food and the other desired commodities is bound to affect nearly everything it does.<sup>52</sup>

The need for Cameroon to survive economically as an independent nation, and the fact that it has chosen a capitalist economic path for its development (under former President Ahidjo and currently under Biya), have obviously had an influence in determining Cameroon's foreign partners and foreign policy orientation.<sup>53</sup>

Although independent, Cameroon, like most other African countries is mainly an exporter of primary production and lacks the necessary capital for its development. For that reason, it has had to rely on the economic largess of the developed nations, particularly the Western industrialized nations for its survival. In fact, one of the reasons why France continues to maintain a decided edge in Cameroon and in many of its former colonies in Sub-Saharan Africa has largely been because of its willingness to provide these countries with greater economic assistance.<sup>54</sup>

These domestic economic needs were also important in Biya's decision to diversify Cameroon's relations and aggressively pursue aid from other capitalist countries besides France. One observer explained as follows:

The Reagan dollars still fascinate. Canada is offering 50-year loans without interest and with ten year grace period, West Germany lends for forty year with less than 1 percent interest. France lends rarely, usually not for long periods with ....9.5 percent interest.<sup>55</sup>

In other words, because of domestic economic considerations, Biya has been willing to pursue economic and diplomatic relations with any country that is prepared to provide Cameroon with a better deal.

Cameroon's continued support for UDEAC may also be rationalized on the grounds that the organization presets a potentially valuable market for Cameroonian goods which in 1986 stood at 28,221 million francs CFA. Cameroon also enjoys other financial benefits from the organization by serving as a port of entry for goods bound for landlocked Chad and the Central African Republic. Cameroon's relations with Gabon may also be rationalized on the basis that it provides tremendous business and employment opportunities for Cameroonians. Before the 1982 soccer crisis we have earlier mentioned, there were over 30,000 Cameroonians living in Gabon.<sup>56</sup> This figure represented a large number of Cameroonians for whom the Cameroon government did not have to provide jobs. We have also indicated that Cameroon's economic interest were one of the reasons why President Biya supported French intervention in Chad.

Domestic political considerations have also played an important role in Cameroon's foreign policy-making process. For instance, one of the reasons why President Ahidjo refused to recognize the breakaway Republic of Biafra during the Nigerian Biafran war was that such a policy could encourage a similar thing at home, especially among the

"restless" Anglophones, many of whom were already regretting the 1961 decision to reunite with the former French Cameroon. In addition the decision by President Ahidjo, and initially by Biya's administration not to attend the Franco-African summits was based on the argument that Cameroon was a bilingual country. Therefore, both men did not wish to alienate the English-speaking minority by aligning the country with any particular linguistic bloc. However when President Biya reversed the decision in 1989, he moved quickly to blunt any criticism from English-speaking Cameroonians by seeking the admission of Cameroon into the commonwealth. Similarly, earlier moves by President Biya to improve Cameroon's relations with Britain may also be construed as an attempt to extricate his administration from criticism (similar to those levelled against former President Ahidjo) that Cameroon had not aggressively pursued its relations with Britain as it had done with France or for that matter, West Germany.

Another important element in the foreign policy making process in Cameroon, has been the personality of the president and the enormous constitutional powers the office confers upon him, wide and commanding authority, including the right to negotiate and ratify agreements and treaties.<sup>57</sup> The fact that a single individual has such exclusive control of policy formulation means that he alone could decide the foreign policy orientation of the country. Former President Ahidjo utilized these presidential powers in charting the course of Cameroon's foreign policy during his tenure.

President Biya did not rescind those prerogatives when he became president in November 1982. In other words, under him, the foreign policy making process in Cameroon remains "a highly personalized thing".<sup>58</sup> For instance, the decision to aggressively expand Cameroon's relations with other Western industrialized states besides France, to attend the Franco-African summit beginning in 1990, and to re-establish diplomatic relation with the state of Israel in 1986, were all Biya's personal decisions. In fact, it was rumored at the time that one of the reasons for William Eteki Mboumua's replacement as Foreign Minister in January 1987, was his objection to the president's decision to renew relations with Israel.

In addition to the enormous constitutional powers that gives the President the final say in foreign policy decisions, Cameroon's foreign policy orientation (which remains highly pro-French) might also be due to the fact that President Biya is a product of French educational institutions, and like many French-speaking Cameroonians, he probably remains fascinated by French culture. In fact, over the past decade, President Biya has made more official and private visits to France than to any other European or African state. Moreover, like his predecessor whose rise and continued stay in power was supported by President Charles de Gaulle and subsequent French presidents, (at least until President Mitterrand), Biya is also a President acceptable to France<sup>59</sup> and therefore owes his continued stay in power to French support. In fact, either by persuasion or coercion, France was partly responsible for President Biya's 1990 decision to pursue multiparty politics in Cameroon. Commenting on President Mitterrand's 1990 call at La Baule, France, for Francophone African countries to pursue the course of democracy in their respective countries, the Cameroon head of state noted on a visit to France in April 1991, that "President Mitterrand had been warmly appreciative of Cameroon's efforts in fulfilling the

requirements outlined at La Baule....I don't thin I am twisting the President's thoughts in saying he sees me as one of his best pupils."<sup>60</sup>

Such a statement clearly indicates that France remains a major player in determining the course of politics in Cameroon. In fact, despite allegations of fraud and other election improprieties in the first multi-party presidential elections on October 11, 1992, France was only one of a few Western industrialized nations to accept the results of the re-election of President Biya.

Perhaps at this point of the discussion, it's important to say a word or two on the role the OAU has played in shaping Cameroon's foreign policy, both under former President Ahidjo and currently under President Biya. Like many other African states, Cameroon has over the years been a strong supporter of the OAU and its charter. Consequently, some of its foreign policy decisions have reflected the tenants of the organization. For instance, the decision to end diplomatic relations with the state of Israel in 1973, support for the liberation movements in Southern Africa and Cameroon's outspokenness against the white minority government in South Africa all have mirrored the stand taken by the OAU on these issues.

### Conclusion

Although there was certainly a change in style, especially in the early years of Biya's administration, it is clear from our discussion that there has been more continuity than change in Cameroon's foreign policy in the post-Ahidjo era. Ngoh points out that Biya's attempts at diversifying Cameroon's trading partners and the numerous trade contacts between Cameroon and the United States as well as between Cameroon and Britain were not a departure from Ahidjo's policy.<sup>61</sup> DeLancey agrees, noting that:

...the transfer of power to Biya did not represent a change in ideology or orientation in leadership. Biya has not altered the Cameroon's foreign relations in any significance fashion in his period in office.<sup>62</sup>

In other words, despite the high profile, aggressive approach that characterized the early days of President Biya's administration, Cameroon has maintained a conservative and highly pro-Western and pro-French policy. In spite of the relative decline in France's market share in Cameroon, and despite earlier concerns in some French quarters that France was losing its dominance in Cameroon, our study has clearly shown that France remains Cameroon's premier foreign trading partner. One of the reasons for the French influence in Cameroon and throughout its former colonies in Black Africa is the fact that French economic aid remains strong.<sup>63</sup>

Although it may still be too early to predict what changes might occur in Cameroon's external relations as a result of the end of the Cold War and the collapse of communism in Easter Europe, one thing is perhaps certain; so long as the ruling elite continued to be dominated by French-speaking Cameroonians, and if that ruling elite retains its "strange fascination" for French culture, it is likely that France's influence in Cameroon will remain strong.

### End notes

1. S.N. Ejedepang-Koge, *Change in Cameroon* (Alexandria, Virginia: ARC Publications, 1985), p. 31.
2. *The New Deal Message* (Yaounde: Editions Sopecam, 1984), p. 330.
3. Ejedepang-Koge, *Change in Cameroon*, p. 32.
4. Victor J. Nhoh, *Cameroon 1884-1995: A Hundred Years of History* (Limbe: Navi-Group Publications, 1988), p. 280.
5. *West Africa* (April 29, 1985), p. 829.
6. Ngoh, *Cameroon*, p. 335.
7. Patrick Sam-Kubam and Richard Ngwa-Nyamboli (eds), *Paul Biya and the Quest for Democracy in Cameroon* (Yaounde: Editions cle, 1985), p. 73.
8. Ndiva Kofele-Kale, "Cameroon and its Foreign Relations," *African Affairs*, vol. 80, No. 319 (April 1981), p. 208.
9. David E. Gardinier, *Cameroon: United Nations Challenge to French Policy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 97.
10. Kofele-Kale, "Cameroon and Its Foreign Relations", p. 203.
11. Rubin Kuckham, "French Militarism in Africa," *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 24 (1982), p. 57.
12. John Chipman, *French Power in Africa* (London: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1989), p. 117.
13. Willard R. Johnson, *The Cameroon Federation: Political Integration in a Fragmented Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 246.
14. DeLancey, "Cameroon's Foreign Relations," p. 214.
15. Richard A Joseph, "Contemporary Cameroon," in idem, *Gaullist Africa: Cameroon Under Ahmadou Ahidjo* (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publications, 1978), p. 183.
16. Ibid, p. 132.
17. Kofele-Kale, "Cameroon and Its Foreign Relations.: p. 202.
18. Ibid, p. 207.
19. Ibid.
20. Philip N. Nwankwo, "Franco-African Relations: The Case of Cameroon in the Postcolonial Period 1960-1985" (Ph.D, diss., New York University, 1988), p. 181.
21. Harold D. Nelson et al. *Area Handbook for the United Republic of Cameroon* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974), p. 279.
22. Ndiva Kofele-Kale, "Cameroon and its Foreign Relations. ". p. 202.
23. The strained relations was due to the fact that France had provided refuge to former President Ahidjo who was on self-imposed exile in France and because France had failed to come to Biya's support during the April 1984 attempted coup. However, relations were soon normalized



- following Biya's second visit to France in November 1985 followed by a flurry of visits by French government and business officials to Cameroon, perhaps to reassure Biya of continued French support.
24. Ejedepang Koge, *Change in Cameroon*, p. 18 also see J. -P. Biyiti bi Essam, *Cameroon: Complots et Bruits de Bottes* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1984), p. 92.
  25. Chipman, *French Power in Africa*, p. 132.
  26. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
  27. DeLancey, "Cameroon's Foreign Relations," p. 209.
  28. Mark w. DeLancey, *Cameroon: Dependence and Independence* (Boulder and San Francisco: Westview Press, 1989), p. 107.
  29. Colin Legum (ed.) *Africa Contemporary Record 1985/86* (London: Rex Collings, 1986), p. B189.
  30. *West Africa* (London), May 18, 1987, p. 955.
  31. *West Africa*, 18 May 1987, p. 955.
  32. Sam-Kubam and Ngwa-Nyamboli, *Paul Biya*, p. 84.
  33. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
  34. *Ibid.*
  35. *Ibid.*, p. 84
  36. Edith Hodgkinson "Cameroon Economy:", in *Africa South of the Sahara 1991* (London: Europe Publications Limited, 1991), p. 327.
  37. Sam Kubam and Ngwa-Nyamboli, *Paul Biya*, p. 86.
  38. The goal of this agreement was to provide protection for United States investors in Cameroon.
  39. *West Africa*, 26 November 1986, p. 2450.
  40. Nelson et al, *Area Handbook for the United Republic of Cameroon*, p. 168.
  41. Ngoh, *Cameroon*, p. 332.
  42. DeLancey, *Dependence and Independence*, p. 157.
  43. *West Africa*, 5 January 1987, p. 14.
  44. The other countries to have done so were: Egypt, Botswana, Ivory coast, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Swaziland and Zaire.
  45. *West Africa*, 1 September 1986, p. 1813.
  46. *The New Deal Message*, p. 346.
  47. Sam-Kubam and Ngwa-Nyamboli, *Paul Biya*, p. 80.
  48. Cited in Dieudonne Oyono, "Introduction a la Politique Africaine du Cameroon", *Le Mois en Afrique* Vol. 18, No. 207-8 (1983), p. 21.
  49. Kofele-Kale, "Cameroon and Its Foreign Relations", p. 201.
  50. Jean-Francois Bayart, "La Politique Exterieur du Cameroon (1960-1971)" *Revue Fracaines D'Etude Politiques Africaines*, 75 (Mars 1972), p. 51.

51. Ngoh, *Cameroon*, p. 287.
52. Andrew M. Kamarek, "Economic Determinants", in *African Diplomacy*, p. 55.
53. DeLancey, *Dependence and Independence*, p. 151.
54. Charles O. Chikeka, *Britain, France and the New African States* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), p. 114).
55. *Africa Research Bulletin*, 31 December 1985, p. 7991.
56. DeLancey, *Dependence and Independence*, p. 162.
57. Kofele-Kale, "Cameroon and Its foreign Relations," p. 197.
58. *Ibid.*
59. DeLaancey, "Cameroon's Foreign Relations", p. 196.
60. *West Africa*, 15-21 April 1991, p. 557.
61. Mgoh, *Cameroon*, p. 335.
62. DeLancey, "Cameroon's Foreign Relations", p. 196.
63. Chipman, *French Power in Africa*, p. 189.

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