



Understanding the Strategic Asymmetry Warfare in the Cameroon Anglophone/Ambazonia Conflict: 2017-2023

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ABSTRACT

There has been a recrudescence of asymmetry warfare in the world since the end of the cold war. Though an old concept, the post-cold war era has revived the practice and make it preponderant in contemporary warfare especially in intrastate conflicts. The uniqueness of this typology of warfare is rooted in strategic interference which sometimes ensure that weak actors are able to challenge strong actors. This is built on strategic operations sustained by the actors in the conflict inscribed in the various asymmetry strategies. For almost a decade, the Cameroon Anglophone conflict has unveiled vestiges of asymmetry warfare in which a weak actor (separatists, Ambazonia fighters) is challenging a strong actor (the state army of Cameroon). This article seeks an understanding of the different strategies the two actors have employed to prosecute the war. The paper mobilises the strategic asymmetry warfare theory of Arreguin-Toft and employs a qualitative study approach. This involves content analyses, fieldwork research and interview sessions as well as secondary data through books and other published materials. Several trips were made to the conflict epicentre of North West and South West regions providing a framework for direct observation of field operations. Through this mechanism, several interviews were conducted with most interviewers preferring to remain anonymous because of the sensitivity of the conflict. Findings reveal that the two main actors in the Cameroon Anglophone conflict have mobilised direct and indirect strategies and in the later part of the warfare, they have all mobilised indirect strategies which has maintain a conflict stalemate.

Keywords: Ambazonia, Anglophone Cameroon, Asymmetry warfare, Conflict, strategy

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The post-Cold war period unleashed an era of conflict of democratisation in most sub-Saharan African countries. This was mostly rooted in the rise of pluralism represented by the formation of opposition political parties demanding for an open political space for everybody. This led to regime change and outright opening of hostilities in many Sub-Saharan African countries. In Cameroon, the country was plunged into a violent conflict though void of regime change and outright opening of hostilities. As such, Cameroon was considered as a harbinger of peace in the Central Africa sub region and in most of Africa (Arrey, 2023). This explains why, in the 1980s and 90s the country hoisted refugees from different African countries.

Though the country reigned on the pedestal of *no war*, there were growing grievances which affirms Galtung's description of negative peace; an atmosphere of no organized war but growing discontentment among citizens, mounting grievances, tension, suspicion etc (Galtung, 1967). As such, in 2016, an organized pacific grievance by corporate bodies including Lawyers and Teachers of English expression escalated into a violent conflict in the two English speaking regions beyond the sphere of these corporate bodies.

The conflict is rooted in the machination of three former colonial masters including Germany, France and Great Britain. The former annexed the territory in 1884 and received approval from the Berlin conference of 1884-1885. Germany's annexation was extended until 1916 when it lose the territory to France and Great Britain following her defeat during World War I (WWI).

This opened a new governing mechanism which was settled by representatives of France and Great Britain on March 4, 1916 following the conclusion of the Picot Accord (Abwa, 2015). In 1919, both colonial authorities concluded the Milner-Simon accord which officially partitioned the territory into two distinct halves. According to the accord, four-fifth of the territory Cameroon was ceded to France comprising areas from North to South. The rest of the territory comprising a tiny strip from North to South bordering Nigeria was administered by Great Britain (Ngoh, 2019, p. 94). This partition was later on endorsed by the League of Nations and Cameroon became a mandated territory under the organization entrusted to France and Great Britain.

This partition generated a diversity in the administration of Cameroon. As such, the territory under French control was administered directly as an integral part of France with the imposition of French laws, system and way of life. In the meantime, British Cameroons was administered as an integral part of Nigeria on the pedestal of British laws, system and approach. Moreover, Britain further partitioned the territory from North to South into two; British Northern Cameroon and British Southern Cameroons.

On the basis of this partition and dissimilar administrations, two distinct Cameroons emerged; one with French values and the other embedded in English values. On January 1, 1960, French Cameroon gained independence and retained the name, *La République du Cameroun*. Following a United Nations organized plebiscite in 1961 to determine the political destinies of British Northern Cameroon and British Southern Cameroons, the former voted to join independent Nigeria while the latter elected a union with *La République du Cameroun*.

The union between *La République du Cameroun* and British Southern Cameroons was the emergence of the Federal Republic of Cameroon with two states. *La République du Cameroun* became East Cameroon while British Southern Cameroons was transformed to West Cameroon. Because of their colonial past, these two states developed unlike systems of public life which raised differences in pursuing the same goals and hence, became a source of conflict. Moreover, many authors (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003, p. 22; Fonchingong, 2013)) have argued that the union between East and West Cameroon is an unequal merger which attempts to erase the identity of the latter. This raises a platform of a second-class status where inhabitants of the area only occupy second-class fielded roles. Moreover, since reunification in 1961, no English speaking Cameroon has ever been President of the country.

In 1972, the federation was dissolved and a united, centralized Cameroon was established rooted in the French system. West Cameroon became North West and South West provinces and later regions. However, this further exacerbated the situation as the minority, English Cameroon became submerged in the majority French system. Moreover, in 1984, President Paul Biya changed the name of the country from United Republic of Cameroon to *La République du Cameroun*, the official name of French Cameroun at independence in 1960 before the reunification in 1961. As a result, English speaking Cameroonians held that the change of name by the majority French government and other misgivings is a sign of assimilation. Based on these arguments, successive groups of English speaking Cameroonians, called Anglophones have been militating for a fairer representation and equal rights for their people in Cameroon.

Problem statement

The immediate cause of the conflict escalation was the appointment of Francophone Teachers and Magistrates to Anglophone schools and courts in the North West and South West regions. This precipitated a pacific strike action by Lawyers and Teachers denouncing the move by the government. The government's highhandedness of the strike; the employment of brutal force on these corporate bodies including arrests and tortures triggered the escalation of the conflict in 2017. Given this background, armed Anglophone groups emerged fighting against Cameroon government forces for the establishment of an English speaking state called Ambazonia.

The armed struggle was initially launched by elements of the Ambazonia Defence Forces (ADF) of Dr Lucas Ayaba Cho and the Southern Cameroons Defence Forces (SOCADEF) led by Dr Ebenezer Akwanga in the latter part of 2017. Both groups laid ambush on government forces in areas around Manyu and Meme divisions in the South West region. The success of their operations propelled them to more territorial gains in the South West and North West regions.

Given this background, Cameroon's President, Paul Biya officially announced the advent of war on November 30, 2017. On the strength of the President's declaration the two regions were further militarised especially with Cameroon's elite forces, the *Battalion d'Intervention Rapide* (BIR) to crush the armed Anglophone civilians. Given the fact that these armed Anglophone civilians were rooted among farmers, fishermen, traders, etc who were not trained in military tactics and poorly equipped, it was assumed that Cameroon's military would easily crush them. Moreover, the BIR is Israeli-American trained and equipped with latest ammunitions. Their engagement in the war was to frustrate the arm ambitions of Anglophone groups. However, about a decade into the war, these armed Anglophone groups popularly known as Amba Boys or separatists have been able to withstand the might of the Cameroon military.

Arreguin-Toft (2005 (Arreguin-Toft, 2005)) explains that it is possible for weak actors to withstand strong actors and even cause the latter to abandon the war and withdraw. He strengthened his arguments with some empirical examples including the Afghan-Soviet Union war where the strong actor retreated from the war. This is because such wars are not fought on the strength of military might and power but strategy employed by the actors. When a weak actor employs an indirect strategy against a direct strategy of the strong actor, the weak actor is able to win the war. When both weak and strong actors employ same strategy, the strong actor will win the war.

Operationalizing this strategy in the Cameroon Anglophone war, the Cameroon military is the strong actor, while Amba Boys the weak actor. As such, the paper seeks to demonstrate the different strategies employed by the various actors which has ensured that the war has raged on for about a decade and the weak actor is able to withstand the strong actor unabated.

Conceptualising the Cameroon Anglophone Conflict

Anglophone Cameroon

The word Anglophone has serious debates in Cameroon and some scholars have affirmed its relevance in the Cameroonian context (Fonchingong, 2013; Tapuka, 2017; Machikou, 2019; Konings and Nyamnjoh 2003) while others (Abwa, 2015) categorically reject it. The latter school of thought affirmed that there is no Anglophone or Francophone, rather all are Cameroonians either speaking French or English, or both or the native languages. They consider the Anglophone/Francophone concept as an upshot of colonialism which attempts to erase the culture of the people of Cameroon. In essence, they hold that French and English are foreign languages which must not become a determining identity factor in Cameroon more than half a century after independence and reunification.

Nonetheless, the former school of thought emphasises on the relevance of the term Anglophones as representing people sourced from the country's North West and South West regions. According to Crisis Group, (2017) Anglophones make up 20 percent of the entire population of Cameroon. Historian and university Professor, Dze Ngwa Willibroad affirms the existence of Anglophones and argue that it is the denial of such a nomenclature that has partly plunged the country into conflict (Dze-Ngwa, 2016).

Konings and Nyamnjoh (2003) who have written extensively on the conflict trace the emergence of the name Anglophone to events surrounding the reunification in 1961. They hold that, prior to reunification with French Cameroon, the territory was called British Southern Cameroons. Upon reunification it became known as West Cameroon while French Cameroon retained the title of East Cameroon. After the annihilation of the Federal system in 1972, the terms West and East Cameroon were buried and in order to identify the two people who came together to form the unitary state, former West Cameroon (English speaking Cameroonians) became known as Anglophone Cameroon, while former East Cameroon became known as Francophone Cameroon. Meanwhile another controversy revolves around the usage of English language – whether Cameroonians who speak and understand English form part of the Anglophone nation. Babboni (2018) notes that an Anglophone is not necessarily someone who speaks English but a person who hails from the former British Trust Territory which is today North West and South West regions of Cameroon.



Ambazonia

The term Ambazonia had existed for long even though it hardly featured in past and current literature. Because of this obscure status, the term was popularised following the outbreak of violence and the declaration of an Ambazonia state by Sisiku Ayuk Tabe in 2017 who acclaimed himself as the leader of the Federal Republic of Ambazonia. The name is derived from the Amba Bay which is located in the South Western part of Cameroon and incorporates part of present day Limbe (South West region). In 1858, the British missionary, Alfred Saker, founded a settlement for freed slaves at the Amba Bay and later on named it Victoria in reverence to Queen Victoria of England. As such 'Amba' refers to the coastal peoples of Southern Cameroons and 'Zonia' denotes area (Reliefworld, n.d.).

Following the Presidential decree of 1984 which erased the appellation 'United' and simply rename the country *La République du Cameroun* (Republic of Cameroon), dissenting voices revived the name Ambazonia. According to the United States Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (n.d.) they were specifically led by renowned Lawyer and leader of the Wikikum people of the North West region, Fon Gorji Dinka who declared the Republic of Ambazonia. Gorji Dinka argued that the Presidential decree took the country back to the appellation of French Cameroun when it gained independence in 1960, and this was an indication that Francophones (French Cameroun) had dissolved the union with Former British Southern Cameroons, now called Anglophones. With the escalation of the conflict in 2017, several political and armed Anglophone groups have preferred the name Ambazonia as a way of severing any ties with the word "Cameroon."

Asymmetry warfare

Arreguin-Toft (2005) describes asymmetry warfare as a conflict between actors with wide disparities in power. Meanwhile Paulus and Vashakmadze (2009) portray asymmetry warfare as a new form of war. They argue that in the past declaration of war was done formally but since the end of WWII, such declarations are non-existent. Nonetheless, Lele (2014) observes that asymmetric warfare is not a new phenomenon but since the September 11 attacks it has gained popularity around the world with changing tactics. It dates back to the Roman occupation of Spain. Practitioners used asymmetric approach with limited attacks on regular military using treachery to exploit their vulnerabilities. He considers asymmetry as the ability to concretize on the stronger actor's weaknesses. The application of hitherto unexplored and innovative means for attacking an adversary's weaknesses is termed asymmetric warfare.

In an asymmetry warfare, combat operations are murky, battle lines are not well drawn and it is difficult to identify the enemy. In such a case, parties invest more in unconventional warfare rather than open warfare. The weak actor avoids open confrontations and exploits most often the weaknesses of the strong actor to cause it to abandon the war. The essence is that in the long run, the weak actor would cripple the strong actor's ability to sustain the war, and thus cause it to withdraw.

Conflict

There is an abundance of literature on the subject matter of conflict with every school of thought raising particular aspect of the concept. However, there is general uniformity in the fact that "conflict is a process through which two or more actors (parties) try to pursue incompatible aims or goals while trying to stop the other(s) from pursuing their goal" (McGoldrick & Lynch, 2000).

Galtung (2007) attempts to trace the origins of the word conflict and downloads it from the word *confligere* meaning 'shocking together.' This is translated to parties 'shocking together' which may be expressed as a clash or violence. He explains that the underlying 'shock' is a reflection of the goals held by parties when the realisation of one excludes the realisation of other (s). According to Galtung, incompatibility of goals could be exemplified as 'independence' for a province, and 'unitary state' for the country". In the current situation, one actor (Anglophone separatists) is fighting for an independent state, while another actor (government of Cameroon) is fighting for an indivisible unitary state.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

The US-Vietnam war

The problematic of asymmetry conflict strategy has been raised previously in different cases in the past, and in contemporary warfare. A characteristic case is the United States (US) invasion of Vietnam between 1965 and 1973.

Though it is generally considered a US war against Vietnam, it was principally a war waged by the US government to prevent the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV-North Vietnam) with a communist ideology from annexing the South. At the onset of the war, the US had a population of 194 million persons while DRV had a population of about 2.5 million inhabitants. The US Army stood at 19 million while DRV stood at 256,000 making the former a strong actor and the latter a weak actor.

At first instance, the US military implemented the operation Rolling Thunder which involvement heavy bombardments of targets in the North. The DRV defended itself using aircraft and surface to air missiles supplied by the Soviet Union. As such the US government campaign failed to deliver the expected results which caused division in the US government. Secretary McNamara concluded that strategic bombing campaigns against DRV could not work. The failure of Rolling Thunder led to the adoption of pitched battles between regular units of North Vietnam Army (NVA) and of the United States and South Vietnamese Army (ARVN). The strategy became successful in destroying NVA and nationalist guerrilla (VC) main units.

Examples of this interaction, which opposed a strong actor conventional strategy with a weak actor conventional strategy, include Operation STARLITE (August 1965), the Battle of Ia Drang (October—November 1965), MASHER/WHITE WING (January—March 1966), and Phase II of Operation ATTLEBORO (October—November 1966). Because of heavy losses suffered by the North, it changed strategy and shifted to guerrilla warfare (Arreguin-Toft, 2005) (indirect strategy).

The US implemented a Counterinsurgency measure (COIN) called search and destroy involving the destruction of enemy concentration units. One of these measures included the Combined Action Platoons (CAP) which involved working with poorly equipped villagers to secure villages and hamlets and maintained a patrol team until they meet the other friendly team. However, the strategy later on proved inefficient because US soldiers were trained to fight uniformed regular adversary using heavy firepower. Rather they faced a Vietnamese military that refused to meet it on the battle and opted for unconventional battles.

The US military later on implemented the Hamlets program which required the forced displacement of large population to new areas. This limited the intelligence base of the Vietnamese army. Because of this forcible policy, the villagers who lost their livelihoods turned against their government of the South and the US government and supported the Vietnamese army. The US later on implemented the Phoenix program which involved targeting the command leadership of North Vietnamese Army. Though the Northern Vietnamese lost in the battlefield, it eventually won the war by forcing the US to withdraw by 1973.

The US Invasion of Afghanistan

The immediate cause of the US invasion of Afghanistan was the bombings of the twin towers of the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in the United States. It was presumably the work of Al-Qaeda elements (Laub & Maizland, 2022) and became one of the most visualised media elements of the 21st century (Tjade, 2005). On the basis of these events, the administration of President George Bush Junior decided to invade Afghanistan in search of the authors of the attacks. It was held that the Taliban government that ruled Afghanistan protected Bin Laden and his Al-Qaeda movement. As such, “Operation Enduring Freedom” was launched on October 7, 2001. It was a swift victory over the poorly equipped Taliban fighters and Afghan Mujahedeen.

The US military was supported by allied forces including Britain and later Germany, Australia, Canada and France. This gave a combination of the world’s best militaries against poorly equipped and undertrained Afghan

fighters. The coalition was also supported on the ground by the Northern Alliance which had historically challenged the Taliban rule as well as Pashtun anti-Taliban forces.

Early operations mainly included bombings of Afghan military sites and Al-Qaeda strongholds by US fighter jets. Ground forces were later on sent two weeks after the bombings had been launched when it was estimated that the Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces were already losing grounds and support.

Between November and December, ground combats intensified with the US using local militias against Al-Qaeda and Taliban forces. This notable included fighting within the heavily fortified Tora Bora Mountain believed to be the hideout of Bin Laden. Bin Laden eventually escaped to Pakistan while some of his fighters were captured.

Because of these early victories including the fall of Kabul, the capital, the different factions fighting against the Taliban government and Al-Qaeda met in Berlin in December. On December 5, 2001, an agreement was signed in Berlin by the different factions and Hamid Kazai was installed as the leader of the Interim Government. The deal was also endorsed by UN Security Council Resolution 1383. Moreover, the departure of Taliban leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar, paved the way for the implementation of the deal and the rebuilding of Afghanistan void of Taliban or Al-Qaeda influence. In May 2003, US then Defense Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld announced an end to major combat operations. This paved the way for more civilian operations coupled with an influx of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and humanitarian agencies. In May 2011, the assassination of Bin Laden, leader of Al-Qaeda in Abbottabad, Pakistan signalled a total defeat of the Taliban-Al-Qaeda mission in Afghanistan.

Nonetheless, by 2009, there were already sixty-eight thousand US and allied forces in Afghanistan, and President Obama announced a further thirty thousand troop deployment (Laub & Maizland, 2022), making ninety eight thousand troops. Within this period, the Taliban and allies who had retreated from major centres engaged in indirect attacks. These attacks involved less direct confrontations and mostly bothered on suicide bombings and guerrilla warfare. As a result of this situation, the security situation in Afghanistan sharply deteriorated. In the inability to defeat Taliban and allies, the US government engaged in secret talks with Afghan Taliban. Negotiations paved the way for a peace deal between the US government and Taliban representatives signed on February 29, 2020 in Doha, Qatar. On the bases of this deal, the US withdrew from Afghanistan two decades after it had defeated the Taliban. Moreover, intra-Afghan talks were organised between the Taliban and the Afghan government. In August 2021, the Afghan government collapsed and President Ghani fled the country as Taliban fighters captured the capital, Kabul.

Though numerical and militarily inferior to the US and coalition forces, the Taliban and allies resorted to an indirect strategy that forced the strong actor (US and allies) to abandon the war. The strategy adopted by the Taliban and allies lengthened the lifespan of the war and made the war more costly for the strong actor to sustain the war.

Generally, in asymmetry warfare, weak actors are not fighting to win strong actors. The goal is to strike the strong when it is weak, and make the war more costly to sustain such that the strong actor is forced to abandon the fight. This is rooted in the underlying factor that with high cost of sustaining the war, making the territory ungovernable, and the inability to militarily win the war, the strong actor will be forced to abandon the war.

Theoretical framework

Arreguin-Toft strategic asymmetric warfare

Strategic Asymmetry warfare theory presents asymmetry warfare as a case where a weak actor attempts to confront a strong actor despite the imbalance of power between the two. In this case the weak actor seeks alternative means other than conventional strategy which bothers on guerrilla warfare characterized under an indirect strategy. With its mastery of the terrain, Arreguin-Toft explains that the weak actor operates a guerrilla warfare strategy involving a hit and run method.



The main purpose is not to defeat the strong actor owing to its strength but to increase the cost of the war and to cause a psychological pain that would force it to withdraw. This is possible when both the weak and the strong actors are operating opposite strategies involving an indirect-direct strategic (opposite) approach to the war.

According to him weaponry is not enough but the deciding factor is the strategy employed. Therefore, when the strong actor is operating a direct strategy and the weak an indirect strategy, the latter would likely win. When it is a direct-direct strategy the strong actor would win. When the strong implements an indirect against a direct from the weak, the strong would win and when both sides operate indirect-indirect strategies the strong would still win. This contributes to further our understanding of the strategies employed by actors in the Cameroon Anglophone conflict and its outcome.

METHODOLOGY/DATA COLLECTION

Qualitative method

Data for this research was basically collected through a qualitative data collection scheme. Khan (2014; 225) attempts a definition of qualitative method and holds that:

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions on inquiry that explores a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports details of informants, and conducts the study in a neutral setting...qualitative research is based upon the observation and interpretations of people's perception in a natural setting.

The operationalization of the qualitative method was through a fieldwork project which was streamlined into on the spot observation and interviews with some key resource persons.

On the spot observation

On the spot observation is one of the most important and credible methods of gathering data in social sciences (Ciesielska *et al.* 2018). This is because it offers a very rich picture of social reality (Fox, 1998). The researcher immersed himself in the conflict epicentre, visited and spent time in some areas of the North West and South West regions between 2017 and 2023. The timing was essential because the conflict escalated in 2017 following the official declaration of war by President Paul Biya. Moreover, by 2023, both actors in the conflict have entered a stage of stalemate rooted in the changing strategies with no actor seemingly winning the war.

On the spot observation permitted the research to observe the war pattern, the strategies of government soldiers and Amba Boys as well as the strategy dynamism operating on the ground. This contributes in the originality of the work.

Fieldwork interview with key resource persons

Interviews were also conducted with some key resource persons. 7 persons were carefully selected through a random sampling and in some cases snowball sampling. They were sourced from among Peace and conflict experts, international organisation, local farmers and students living in the North West and South West regions. Some of these persons have had first-hand experience of the warfare on the ground. Because of the sensitive nature of the topic, some of them applied to remain anonymous.

Desk research; books and online sources

Qualitative data was also sourced from books bothering on the subject matter. Data evidence was mainly rooted from scholarly materials on the subject of conflict in general and asymmetry warfare in particular. Scholarly materials on the Anglophone Problem in Cameroon was also consulted for the study. This was sourced from onsite and online libraries as well as websites.



Ethnography

Ethnography is a long standing method of research in social science even though popularised in Anthropology. Alvaro and Iniguez-Rueda (2009) note that ethnographical research goes beyond anthropology and generally revolves around social and human sciences including fields such as Geography, Media and Communication Studies, Business Administration and Political Sciences. This lays down the basis for our incorporation of ethnography. This is because the researcher has spent more than two decades living in the epicentre of the conflict; the North West and South West regions and has a mastery of the lifestyle, patterns and attitudes of the people. This contributed in understanding the research focus including patterns of government soldiers, Amba Boys, their terrains, their local support and how the local population is generally adapting to this changing dynamics of asymmetry warfare.

Data analysis method

Data for the research was collected through interviews, open ended questions and observation on the field. Information gathered was transcribed into textual data in order to ease verification and analysis. Umbrella words were generated from the process representing the underlying notion. Thematic analysis including Themes, Thematic Explication, Quotes and Grounding were mobilised for the research.

These themes were then coded permitting the researcher to understand and interpret the phenomenon. Coding was also done and content was classified into categories. Nvivo 12 Pro max was generally used.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Direct versus Direct strategic approaches

The conflict in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon derives its strength from the strategies employed by the actors. The interaction of these strategies transforms a regular war situation to an asymmetry warfare with inherent complexities.

At the incipient stage of the conflict, there was a symmetrical pattern of event with everything bared and exposed. At this stage, only one side, the government had the monopoly of force which it exploited based on its legitimacy to use force. By the close of 2016 and early 2017, the Anglophone populace was led by the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium (CACSC also called Consortium); an umbrella association of mainly Lawyers and Teachers who had merged to foster a common front against the Cameroon government. At this stage, the leader of CACSC was a prominent Lawyer, Barrister Agbor Balla and was the main face leading the Anglophone struggle. He was never hidden and his address and location were all known to the public such that it did not warrant any covert operation to arrest him. Dr Fontem Neba was a Senior Lecturer in the language programme of the University of Buea, South West Cameroon, with a precise abode and house address. A similar situation transpired with the Programmes Director of the CACSC, Tassang Wilfried who was a school teacher with the Government Bilingual High School Bamenda, and his place of abode was also very precise.

Moreover, the followers and sympathizers of these leaders were also identifiable and known to the public and security officers. Their manner of approach was open and direct. For example, when it was rumoured that the CACSC leaders were being forced to sign an accord at duress with the government in Bamenda, in January 2017, tens of persons marched to the negotiation grounds to prevent the supposed signing (Wanah, 2022).

At this stage of the conflict, the Consortium leaders and their supporters implemented a direct strategy involving open non-violent operations including strike actions and protest march. Furthermore, actors in the conflict were able to speak openly and directly to television cameras and social media platform expressing their case. This was an evidence of conflict symmetry where everything is laid bared.

In January 2017, following stalled negotiations with government representatives in the North West city of Bamenda, CACSC leaders were arrested and jailed on terrorism charges. The void created by their absence enabled other Anglophone leaders to take the lead. As they remained in jail, gradually, faces like Sisiku Julius Ayuk Tabe, Ayaba Cho, and Ebenezer Akwanga were becoming very popular. Despite this seemingly change



of leadership, the government of Cameroon sustained a direct strategy. The new leadership embodied by Julius Ayuk Tabe argued for diplomacy and legal proceedings. Ayuk Tabe and cohorts embarked on a global tour to convince the international community of the necessity to include the Anglophone case in global agenda. Ayuk Tabe attempted to exhaust all direct non-violent strategies at his disposal. His team also consulted an international legal firm to foster legal proceedings before international jurisdiction.

Inferring from these arguments, the leadership of the Anglophone movement was in expectant of a possible internationalisation of the Anglophone case which would draw sanctions and possible intervention. This was to ensure that a non-violent intervention could pave the way for a possible referendum.

Nonetheless, the incorporation of a direct strategy approach by the strong actor and a direct approach (non-violent) enabled the strong actor to have an upper hand in the war at this stage. The government's direct approach was mainly focused on arrest, torture, ban on activism and an internet blackout for 100 days in the North West and South West regions. Given that the government controlled communication, security forces and its international public relations firm had secured a positive outlook for the country while the direct strategy of Anglophone leaders remained stalled. This pushed radical voices within the Anglophone populace to foster a violent and asymmetry strategy involving guerrilla warfare and indirect attacks. This is because the government (strong actor) believed that the fight was about brute force (supply side), when really it is about coercion (demand side) (Sullivan, 2007).

Direct versus indirect strategic approaches

Direct strategy sustained by most activists at the beginning of the conflict was abhorred by another school of thought within the same Ambazonia movement. Ayaba Cho and Ebenezer Akwanga who led this hard line position had once been members of the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC)¹ and abdicated because of the group's insistence on non-violence and direct approach even when its members were arrested, tortured and some killed by government forces.

Engaging in an arms struggle was also problematic as Ambazonia activists did not have a trained military, or a steady supply of weapons and financial flow. They were not supported officially by any major country in the world or institution which put them in a more difficult condition than other rebel groups in the world.

While the government of Cameroon is solidly founded nationally and internationally, Ambazonia activists have no such base from where they can readily tap resources for a protracted war. Even their home base support is not vociferous and does not occupy space like that of the Cameroon government. This makes Ambazonia activists an unequal match for any warfare or arms struggle with the government of Cameroon.

Fighting from a disadvantaged position, Ayaba Cho and the ADF, and Akwanga and SOCADEF quickly resorted to an indirect strategy that limited direct confrontations with Cameroon defense and security forces. Their forces organised ambushes on Cameroonian soldiers when they least expected, and with little firepower and training were able to challenge more equipped soldiers with advanced training in combat operations. From their bases in far-away jungles, they were able to organise raids on government forces and installations. The success of this strategy became a defining moment in the war. Though indirect strategy is basically hinge on operational military, tactics they also involve other methods which go beyond hardware manipulation and fighting.

In her study of the mysticisms surrounding the conflict, Machikou (2018) argues that fighters have invested heavily in magical charms which they believe protect them from bullets. It is a spiritual bullet proof called *odeshi* which is believed to stop bullets from penetrating their bodies. Emmanuel Freudenthal (2018) also affirms this thesis after embedding in the ranks of the ADF for weeks. He states that their soldiers were poorly equipped and unable to offer a match for Cameroon soldiers. He affirms that they believed in *odeshi* as their main source of

¹ The SCNC was the first major Anglophone pressure group created after the 1995 All Anglophone Conference in Bamenda, North West Region. The main was to advocate for the independence of Anglophone Cameroon (also called Southern Cameroons) using a nonviolent strategy summarized as "the force of argument" and not "the argument of force." By 2016, most of its founding leaders had died, some were jailed and others in exile.



protection. He notes that each of the amulets “known collectively as *odeshi*, has a specific task: a bracelet makes one invisible, a necklace jams the enemy’s gun, a goat’s tail waves off bullets etc.” They can also make fighters to disappear in one locality and appear in another (Anonymous, 2018). Some of the fetishes are also endowed with unbearable odour.

In her extensive interviews with some actors on the ground, Machikou (2018) affirms that the belief in *odeshi* was total and even among soldiers. Quoting a senior military officer, she notes that the adversary was invincible such that there were moments soldiers were attacked but could not see their attackers, bikes were running without a visible rider on them. This played on the psychology of soldiers who were forced to attach red cloths on their guns as an antidote (Machikou, 2018). Because soldiers were psychologically challenged by these special protective gears, some of them felt defeated even before actual confrontation. These could also account for the rise of abdication and defection among Cameroon defense forces.

A combination of these elements of indirect warfare ushered Ambazonia fighters into a guerrilla warfare that made them “invisible” (indirect) faced with a visible army (direct). They became an army that was everywhere but difficult to be detected by the adversary. Basically, they engaged the Cameroon army using a hit-and-run formula which ensures that before any reinforcement could arrive, they had terminated their operations. They organised themselves mainly in the rural areas and turned the focus of the military from urban warfare to guerrilla warfare in the bushes coupled with rugged terrains, bad roads, forested atmospheres, valley jungles and caves that became a nightmare to the Cameroon army. While these natural provisions disfavoured the military, it instead became a weapon of war for the fighters, propelling the poorly armed and inexperienced fighters to a position of strength. With direct strategy most actions were in urban areas. In the indirect strategy, Ambazonia fighters paid more focus to rural areas where they were in position of strength and the Cameroon military in position of weakness.

While the military pursued the fighters into these rural areas, they were faced with enormous challenges including rugged terrain, impassable roads, dense forest without clear coordinates, valleys and hills and unbearable rainfall in some cases. In other cases, their vehicles were stuck and unable to move, and even heavy weapons mounted on these vehicles became unusable sometimes.

Their main bastion of support for Ambazonia fighters became their mastery of the terrain and local realities, native/local bond and affinity, and how to cruise through the dense forest, mythical terrains, hills and valleys to launch surprise attacks and retreat unperturbed. In some cases, fighters communicate using local vernacular which makes it difficult to dislodge their plans. As more soldiers were fallen sometimes from mysterious circumstances and attacks, their weapons and fatigues were taken by Ambazonia fighters. In the ruggedness of these areas, many fighters were able to escape after being captured by the military (Anonymous, 2018) as these areas also provided fighters with escape routes to safety.

Moreover, the rural areas provided them with a vast network of intelligence which did not necessarily exist in urban centres. Communal solidarity ensured that everybody is everybody’s keeper. Most of these fighters were locally recruited and their familiarity with the locals gave them protection and coverage which facilitated their invincibility in the eyes of the regular army.

The state military which had technically not existed in most of these areas was also considered as a ‘foreign force’ because it lacked familiarity with the locals. Moreover, most soldiers could not speak the local languages. With French being the main language of instruction in the Cameroon Army, most soldiers sent to these areas communicated in French and were natives of French speaking regions. This widened the gap between them and the local population.

According to Arreguin-Toft, the biggest problem to a strong actor is when a weak actor operates a guerrilla warfare strategy (GWS) or terrorism. Evidently, this became a huge challenge to the Cameroon military (strong actor) and it facilitated gains for the weak actor (separatists).

However, fighters erroneously translated their gains in an indirect strategy as a possibility to directly confront the military. While the Cameroon military was reconsidering a shift in its strategy, separatists were also making a similar consideration even though in an opposite direction.

Indirect versus Direct Strategies

The Indirect strategy of separatist rooted in guerrilla warfare tactics in bushes and remote areas led to casualties within the ranks of the Cameroon military. As early as May 2018, Kindzeka Kindzeka (2018) reported that there were growing casualties within the Cameroon military as the war intensifies. This necessitated the incorporation of the Douala and Yaoundé military hospitals providing specialised services as more severe cases were emanating from the battlefield. This also increased the tendency for soldiers to defect or abandon duty. Within this period, many soldiers defected and travelled abroad because of the changing nature of the war. The scenario presents a dilemma of choice to the Cameroon military command, advisers and strategists. In this case, Arreguin-Toft argues that several options are opened to the strong actor including indirect manoeuvres;

In sum, the problem for strong actors is weak actors who pursue an indirect defense strategy, such as a GWS or terrorism. This presents strong actors with three unpalatable choices: an attrition war lasting perhaps decades; costly bribes or political concessions, perhaps forcing political and economic reforms on repressive allies as well as adversaries; or the deliberate harm of non-combatants in a risky attempt to win a military contest quickly and decisively (Arreguin-Toft, 2005, p. 222).

Arreguin-Toft refer to such actions as unpalatable because it involves a movement of strategy from a direct approach to an indirect approach involving unconventional aspects, strange and exceptional manoeuvres. Long term challenges faced by a strong actor in the hands of a weak actor in a war is an indication that the situation is moving from a normal to an abnormal situation necessitating exceptional measures embedded in counterinsurgency.

Though switching strategies in the course of the war may be costly, (Arreguin-Toft, 2005) it became amendable to Cameroon in order to counteract the activities of separatists who were gaining more grounds. In a more contemporary development, Arreguin-Toft explains that switching of strategy has been sustained in the past by major powers. He notes the examples of the French in Indochina, the British in Malaysia and the US invasion and withdrawal from Vietnam (Arreguin-Toft, 2012). Because of this, the government of Cameroon adopted a blend of direct attacks as well as indirect attacks with more emphasis on the latter. However, this switch also depended on an assessment of the strategy of the separatists in order to erect a profiting counterinsurgency strategy able to turn the tides.

Most fighters, especially at first instance were locally based. In these rural areas, communal lifestyle prevails where farms are sometimes communally cultivated and incidence of sadness and happiness are communally commemorated. Also, in the event of the death of a fighter, his replacement could easily come from within the same community (Anonymous Interviews, 2018).

Support to the fighters was also in the form of medical attention given to fighters when wounded. In the absence of equipped hospitals in most rural areas in Anglophone Cameroon, traditional medicine has widely developed passing from generation to generation. Most basic medical malady including malaria, typhoid, yeast, bacterial infection, wounds and cuts are effectively treated by traditional healers, most of whom have never been schooled in any formal educational arrangement. Some of these traditional healers are also capable of treating bone fracture and extract bullets without operating the victim. All these practices have become a lifeline for the fighters (Anonymous, 2018).

Beyond this, the porous border between Cameroon and Nigeria favours uncontrollable interactions. Natives on the border line master the routes more than state authorities. Furthermore, colonialism imposed political boundaries without taking into consideration sociocultural affinities which binds people together. These African borders have been a source of tension and in some cases conflicts within states and conflicts involving states.



Cameroon and Nigeria share a 1700km border line which makes it the longest international boundary Cameroon shares with any country in the world. This border line covers the two Anglophone regions which share boundaries with states in Nigeria. Cultural affinities are bound as the international boundary separated families. For example, the Ejagham people of Eyumojock sub division, South West regions have their relatives in the neighbouring Cross River state in Nigeria. Natives of both sides of the divide speak the same language and culturally have the same background.

The porous border also enabled fighters to quickly rush to Nigeria for spiritual fortification and training, and others who have abandoned the fight also seek solace in Nigeria.² Though the Nigerian government has officially abhorred Cameroon separatists, cultural affinity and porous borders have eased the movement of fighters and activists in and out of Nigeria.

In the operationalization of indirect strategy, government forces avoided separatists when they were in a position of strength and only attacked when they were in position of weakness. For example, in June 2018, Ambazonia forces in the South West region attacked a convoy of government soldiers escorting workers and vehicles of a road construction company SORUBAUT. As the convoy approached Banga Bakundu, a village along the Kumba – Buea stretch of the road, fighters surfaced from the bushes and from safe positions behind houses, opened fire on the convoy. There was an exchange of fire for a while, and when government soldiers realised the superiority of the fighters, they quickly retreated. Several other attacks have been recorded on the road with government soldiers retreating when they realised separatists are in a position of strength.

Because of this change of strategy (from direct to indirect) by government forces,³ many separatist camps were dislodged and tens of fighters killed. Soldiers also discovered a remedy to counter the magical powers of *odeshi* by using other means beyond the bullet. In most instances, separatist fighters were caught in their sleep; sometimes in their underwear. Some of them were attacked when they had been disarmed (spiritually), and before they could rearm, they had already been killed.⁴

Though trying to maintain a strong network of informants, government forces also unleashed a stream of barbarism which is a characteristic practice of indirect strategy. Beyond separatist fighters, they targeted civilians accused of harbouring and supporting fighters. The essence of this pattern was to destroy separatists support bases and intelligence network. Targeting non-combatants leads to forced displacement of people, and as the people move it limits separatists command base and intelligence gathering network. Moreover, it eases penetration by government forces and enables a battle void of human shields.

Lele (2014) also attempts an explanation for this strategy and affirms that the essence is to create a psychological impact such as shock and confusion that affects the opponent's freedom of action or will. In most of these attacks villagers were clearly warned of more harm if they continue to shelter fighters. Some were killed because they were unable to disclose the hideout of fighters. In February 2020, soldiers accused the population of Ngarbuh village in the North West region for harbouring fighters and promised to comeback for more attacks on civilians.⁵

It also intensifies its scorched earth policy of burning down villages suspected of harbouring fighters. In April 2019, the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa reported that over 206 villages have been burnt in the North West and South West regions by government forces (CHRNA, 2019). Some of these areas were partially burnt while others were completely burnt leaving hundreds of thousands of civilians homeless. This

² For example *odeshi* is a Nigerian word sometimes referring to protection, protection against the gun, gun power etc. it is generally believed that many fighters were fortified in Nigeria with these amulets.

³ Attacking separatist fighters when they are in a position of weakness, and using unconventional means

⁴ Several interviewed sources especially in the South West where General Ivo Mbah of the ADF was principally based attest that he was also killed when he least expected. Some sources say he was in the house of his girlfriend, others attest that he was attending a marriage ceremony and was ambushed in a room. Before he could wear his charms and rearm, the military had already killed him.

⁵ This happened just after soldiers had killed about three dozen civilians mostly women and children. The attacks caused a global outrage and condemnation. Due to international pressure, some soldiers were later on arrested and charged in court.



follows earlier investigative reports by the *BBC* detailing accounts of houses being burnt in villages by government soldiers (BBC Eye Africa, 2018).

Arreguin-Toft (2005) calls it barbarism and argues that the violation of the rules of law is a habit sustained by strong actors in order to shorten the lifespan of the war or cause a stubborn weak actor to fall. Beyond strategy, the incorporation of armoured vehicles also improved the tactical strength of government forces. These vehicles were able to penetrate difficult terrain and protect soldiers in the event of ambushes laid by separatist fighters. Previously, government forces had relied on regular pickups whose strength could not withstand ambushes by separatists.

While government forces were strengthening their positions, separatist fighters leaned on their past glories to switch to a strategy that cost many of them their lives and they almost lose the war. The early glories of the initial indirect strategy pushed fighters to erroneously see victory as very close, coupled with heavy mediatization by the various Ambazonia political wings.

Such victories rooted in *odeshi* (Machikou, 2018) raised an understanding that military bullet could not challenge separatist fighters. This mythical superiority complex pushed the fighters to morph their strategy from indirect confrontations to direct confrontations. Direct attacks were launched on the military even when it (military) was in a position of strength.

As their strength and popularity in these rural areas increased, fighters and activists considered it as readiness to form local administration. These rural areas were considered as conquered territories requiring Ambazonia administration. Flags were hoisted and fighters suddenly became administrators, court officials settling disputes and custom and taxation officers enforcing a fiscal order.

In most major roads, separatist fighters mounted road blocks to openly challenge government forces. Fighters mounted control post on major roads including the Kumba-Bamenda, Kumba-Buea road, Bamenda-border with Nigeria, Bamenda-Kumbo road, etc. These road blocks had previously existed only in rural settlements, but with time they became a practice in urban vicinities.

This shift of focus from rural to urban warfare entailed a transposition from indirect to direct approach. Fighters who were still poorly equipped and ill-trained were unable to withstand the firepower of government forces. Many separatist fighters were killed and camps dislodged. This opened a wave of criticisms and counter-criticisms which sharpened the already internal divisions within the separatist movements. As such, government forces were able to crush many fighters and their commanders killed. The years 2019, 2020 saw many fighters killed, camps dislodged, fighters abandoning the warfare, while some surrendering to the government's organised Demobilisation, Deradicalisation and Reinsertion (DDR) camps in Buea and Bamenda.

Arreguin-Toft (2005) attempts an explanation to this phenomenon. He emphasises that when a strong actor is operating an indirect strategy against a direct strategy approach of a weak actor, the strong actor will emerge victorious. This explains why the separatist push in Cameroon experienced a lull by the year 2020 with some embarrassing battleground defeats from the Cameroon military. In a live Facebook message, Ayaba Cho recalled fighters back to the barracks and warned them from any direct confrontation with the Cameroon military. He explained that they are losing the battle and sacrificing the lives of fighters because of the upsurge of direct confrontations. He reminding fighters of the necessity to capitalise on guerrilla warfare and not open warfare. He acknowledged the weakness of separatists and affirmed their strength in guerrilla warfare above direct confrontations.

As the fighters retreated, they re-strategized. Some of the road blocks that rendered them vulnerable were dismantled by the fighters themselves and they returned back to strategic ambushes. For example, all the road blocks mounted regularly by separatists along the Kumba-Buea road were removed, and were only mounted on special occasions like ghost town days.



By 2021, the war trend had altered with both sides reinforcing themselves and upgrading in their strikes and actions. While soldiers were making gains, separatists were also making gains. Both parties were employing a same strategy of guerrilla warfare, coupled with barbarism especially on non-combatants.

Indirect versus Indirect Strategies (same strategy approach)

In the arguments of Sullivan (2007), the logic of indirect strategy also bothers on coercion or target compliance. After years of fighting and unsuccessfully emerging victorious, both the strong and weak actors in the Cameroon case became focus on forcing their wills on civilians as a prerequisite for victory. Both actors had experimented direct strategy and failed, which morphed their actions from conventional to unconventional warfare.

2021 and 2022 saw a reinforcement in the indirect strategies of the belligerents with an emphasis on the population. Going beyond skirmishes between the two armed sides, the population was regularly targeted by both sides in the conflict. This focus is in two dimensions.

Coercing the people is one of the indirect approaches used against non-combatants in the conflict. Both parties have systematically attacked, killed, maimed, raped, tortured members of the population resulting in mass displacement of population internally and externally. The civilian population in the two regions came under persistent attacks from both sides which took a determined approach especially in the later days of the conflict.

The approach of government forces was force to coerce the civilian population to compliance. It sought for victory through coercing the people to accept its imposed peace pattern as a prerequisite for victory. Several accounts points (Craig, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2020) to the fact that the killing of more than two dozen civilians in Ngarbuh on February 14, 2020 was aimed at punishing the community for allegedly supporting and harbouring separatists.

In the afternoon of January 10, 2021, soldiers entered Mautu village, neighbouring Buea in the South West region looking for separatist fighters. According to villagers, fighters used to come to the village for supplies but did not use the village as a base. Without any trace of separatists, the soldiers turned their violence on the villagers as a coercive measure to comply with them against separatists. Nine civilians were killed including a child, while others were rounded up and threatened with further violence should they fail to comply with the soldiers. Though the government rejected the claims, the attacks were condemned by rights group including the UN Special Representative for Central Africa (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Twice in 2021, government forces entered the Saint Elizabeth Catholic General Hospital⁶, Shishong, Bui division, North West region searching for separatists who were not in the facility. According to a communication from the Reverend Sisters following the November visit by soldiers, soldiers entered the hospital with arms threatening everyone including the Reverend Sisters and promised to set the entire facility ablaze should they fail to comply with them (Tinsley, 2021).

Similar warfare patterns have also been followed by separatists on civilians in several instances. Separatists have invested in the abduction of civilians for the payment of ransom as a strategy to dissuade them from collaborating with government forces. The frequency of abductions has emphasised the importance of this strategy to separatists as a means of coercing the population to comply with their rules and forcefully raising funds. Separatists call kidnapping arrest and argue that the money paid is a fine for disregarding separatist's code of conduct. Evidently, members of the population who are unable to comply with separatists are subjected to the payment of fines as a penalty or leave the area.

In areas under the influence of separatists, there is no neutrality ground; you are either for them and live quietly or you are against them and bear the consequences (Anonymous, 2022). In April 2022, more than a dozen civilians were abducted in the North West town of Oku by separatists who accused them for accepting money

⁶ The hospital was founded in 1935 by the Tertiary Sisters of Saint Francis. It is operates the biggest cardiac centre in Central Africa and also operates a medical school. It is one of the main hospitals in the entire North West region receiving patients even beyond the borders of Cameroon.



from the government to stage an anti-separatist rally a fortnight ago. It emerged in a video circulated online and separatist leader, Capo Daniel confirmed their actions and argued that the persons are being questioned. He went further to promise sanctions to those found guilty (Kindzeka, 2022).

Another area where separatists have been using force to coerce the population to comply is education. During the incipient days of the conflict, Consortium leaders called for a school boycott as a means to protest government's handling of the situation then which mostly revolved around education and legal issues. Even though most of those who called for the school boycott became irrelevant as the conflict embraced a violent trend, the school boycott has been sustained by leaders of the various armed wing in varying proportions. According to the main armed group, the ADF, Cameroon government run schools cannot be permitted to operate on their 'territory' as it brainwashes their children. They have since then waged a campaign against schools and replacing them, especially in rural areas with what they called 'community schools' (Anonymous, Interview, 2022).

In November 2021, separatists entered the Kulu Memorial College, Limbe, in the South West region and forced teachers and students to strip naked as punishment for violating the no-school ban. Videos of the attack were widely shared online by the fighters.

In February 2022, separatist abducted several teachers in a school for the disabled in the North West regional capital, Bamenda. ADF's Deputy Defense Chief, Capo Daniel argued that they were abducted for failing to shut down a Cameroon government school in favour of community schools. Generally, more than 300 teachers have been abducted since the conflict started for failing to comply with separatists' educational demands (Kindzeka, Cameroon Separatists Abduct Teachers at School for Disabled, 2022).

In November 2020, Separatist fighters along the Baba area of the North West region abducted the Catholic prelate, Cardinal Christian Tumi alongside the traditional ruler of the Nso people, Fon Nsem Mbinglo II. According to the abductors, the Cardinal had been causing confusion in the area as he calls them to lay down their weapons and also reiterates stance for federalism. The Cardinal who was released after spending a night was coerced to accept a denunciation of the Cameroon government and favour the separatists. Being the highest Catholic ranked Prelate in the entire country, and a governmental critic, separatists aimed at using his abduction to force the implementation of their side of the argument.

Since 2017, ghost towns and frequent lockdowns have been enforced by Anglophone activists as a means of creating awareness on the conflict. It is also a strategy of defiance by separatists and to demonstrate their capacity to firmly control the two regions with their laws. On such occasions, all commercial and public activities are grounded, and inter and intra-urban transport services prohibited. While the civilian population is constrained to remain indoors, both separatist fighters and government soldiers occupy the streets.⁷ Because of this system, schools in the two regions, run from Tuesdays through Fridays rather than the official Mondays through Fridays which prevails in the other eight regions of the country. Moreover, majority of school children attend classes without uniforms in order to conceal their identities.

Besides the regular Monday ghost town which is almost receiving a statutory status, occasional ghost town and lock down days are also imposed on the population especially on days abhorred by separatists. For example, while match pass parades go on in the other eight regions on 20 May celebrating unitary state, it is usually a ghost town day in Anglophone Cameroon. A similar situation prevails on March 8 for the International Women's Day, political Election Day and other ceremonial events decided from Yaoundé. Though ghost town operations are followed by a majority of the people in the towns and villages, force remains the principal mode of enforcement such that any violation invites punitive measures.

The Kumba – Buea road is a characteristic example of separatists' sanction on civilians violating ghost town days. Along the 70 kilometres of road are wreckages of mostly transport buses and trucks burnt by separatists for failing to respect ghost town days. One of the biggest transport agencies in the region, *Mondial Express* has

⁷ With the exception of Buea Town area, Limbe and Tiko all in the South West region, and Nkambe in the Donga Mantung division of North West region. All these places are areas of low conflict intensity



lost more than 10 buses along the road to separatist fighters who accused them for violating ghost town rules. In the North West region, separatists have banned the use of government regulated car number plates. All cars within the region (especially civilian and public transport cars) use the car chassis number plate attributed by the manufacturer. Any violation invites the burning of the car and possible payment of ransoms.

Another formula in the indirect strategy employed by both parties is winning the hearts of the population. Though the parties have orchestrated violence on the population, they have, in some cases showcased amity in order to win the heart of the local population. This has mostly revolved around the provision of essential services including foodstuff, medical care, and educational facilities to the population without demanding for money in return. The underlying logic of such action is to avail oneself of the necessary collaboration needed for the prosecution of an asymmetry warfare. Each actor presents itself as the rescuer and liberator of the people who are being persecuted by the other actor. This formula is called “hearts and minds.” (Arreguin-Toft, 2005).

Between the 5 and 7 May, 2022, the BIR organised a free medical campaign in Nkambe, Donga Mantung Division of the North West region. The campaign saw free medical and ophthalmological consultations, medicine and surgeries to about 1,517 persons. Two incubators were also donated to the Nkambe District Hospital which is the main hospital in the entire division. The strategic importance of the event is demonstrated by the presence of the General Coordinator of BIR, Colonel François Pelele (Loh, 2022).

On June 19, 2021 at the South Western town of Ekona, the Motorised Infantry Brigade (BRIM) of the Cameroon Army donated humanitarian items to the population. Gifts including food items, farming tools and medical and anti-covid 19 apparatus for the local public hospital were donated. Senior Military Commanders including the Gendarmerie Commander for South West, Colonel Tchinda Henri and the Commander of BRIM, Colonel Eyenga Severin attended the event. The military and local authorities stressed the need for a civilo-military corporation and raised the profile of the military as a friend to the people (Ngonmenyui, 2021).

Both armed and political wings of the general separatist movement have reinforced their amity with the local population through regular distribution of food and medical facilities. At Anglophone refugee camps mainly in the Cross River state of Nigeria, the IG and many other Ambazonia groups have paid regular visits to the refugees with food and medical items. Schooling and training for handicraft jobs have also been secured for some of the refugee children in the camps.

Furthermore, in Cameroon, areas under considerable separatists controlled have also benefited from some services provided by the fighters. In these communities, where regular schools have been closed, community schools are running with teachers recruited and paid by separatists. In some cases, local and traditional medicinal services have also been developed by separatists. These “community doctors” treat the people especially for cuts, illnesses including malaria, typhoid, administration of injections and drips. Security is also provided by the fighters especially against people deemed to be rogue elements. Moreover, regular village meetings are organised by the fighters to handle community matters and settle disputes (Anonymous, 2022).

For example, in Kotto, a community around the Barombi Lake in Meme, South West region, regular village meetings are organised by separatist fighters with villagers attending. During meeting days, the ‘General’ sends an advanced team of fighters to ‘clear’ the way and prepare for the meeting which usually takes place on Sundays in the morning.

The arrival of the ‘General’ is preceded by a special gunshot which puts the people on alert. The Chief and local religious leaders are invited and because the Presbyterian Church is the main religious body on the ground, prayers are always said by the Presbyterian Pastor at the beginning of the meeting. This is followed by the singing of the Ambazonia anthem. Issues about community development and welfare are discussed and matters of indiscipline both by the local population and fighters handled. At the end of the meeting, the ‘General’ gives money for food and drinks to the women to the satisfaction of the community. While the meeting is in progress, fighters are positioned at strategic corners to guard against any incursion (Anonymous, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Going by scientific literature available, same strategic approach guarantees victory for the strong actor (Arreguin-Toft, 2005). In the case of Cameroon, both the military (strong actor) and separatists (weak actor) are operating a same strategic approach (indirect strategy) which necessitates a victory for the former. However, the persistence of the war indicates a non-incorporation of other mitigating factors in theoretical appreciation of asymmetry warfare.

Ethical Clarence

This research was conducted as part of our doctoral project. On the basis of this, we were able to obtain ethical Clarence for research from the Protestant University of Central Africa, Yaoundé, Cameroon. We also obtained due consent from all the interviewees most of whom decided to remain anonymous because of the sensitive nature of the topic.

Conflict of Interest

This research has not been submitted for publication to any review or scientific committee. It is only submitted to this Journal for publication.

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