

CAMEROON: THE DANGERS OF A FRACTURING REGIME

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After 28 years of the Biya presidency, Cameroon, Central Africa's largest economy, faces potential instability in the run-up to the presidential elections scheduled for May 2011. Constitutional and legal uncertainty; rivalries between the regime's leading figures; the government's attempts to control the electoral process; the rupture of the political contract between leaders and the population; widespread poverty and frustration; extensive corruption; and the frustration of a large part of the army all point to the possibility of a major crisis. To escape this Biya and his government must restore the independence of the body responsible for elections; institutionalise an impartial fight against corruption; and ensure the military's political neutrality. They must also urgently establish the institutions the 1996 constitution envisaged, so that a power vacuum and the potential for violence can be avoided in the event of a transition, including an unexpected one such as the death of the 77-year old president in office. Cameroon's most influential partners, particularly France and the U.S., should actively support such measures to avoid unrest.

The ruling party is increasingly divided. Although it dominates political life, it knows that it lacks legitimacy, and it is weakened by intense internal rivalries over control of resources and positioning for the post-Biya period. Having done away with the constitutional limitation on the number of presidential terms, Biya, who is at the same time feared and opposed in his own party, is deliberately maintaining uncertainty over whether he will stand again. Many members of his party harbour their own presidential ambitions.

The security forces, a pillar of support for the regime, are also divided. A small number of elite units have good equipment and training, while the rest lack resources and are poorly prepared. The military as a whole suffers from tensions between generations, not least because the refusal of old generals to retire blocks promotions for more junior officers. Some members of the security forces are also widely believed to be involved in criminal activities.

With the country afflicted by high levels of corruption, a clientelist political system and a heavy security presence in all areas of life, many citizens feel excluded from the system. Fully half the population is younger than eighteen, so the high level of youth unemployment and underemployment is a considerable source of social tension. Given such fissures, were Paul Biya to die in office a serious crisis could unfold, aggravated by the unclear constitutional provisions for a transition. In any event, the 2011 elections could easily lead to conflict if they are poorly organised or lack transparency. The organising body has no legitimacy and has already made a bad start in the preparations. If there is no option for democratic political change, there is a good chance ordinary citizens, members of the political class and/or military elements will eventually choose violence as a way out of the current impasse.

The long Biya era, his manipulation of ethnic identities and the corruption and criminality among elites have generated numerous frustrations. The serious unrest of 2008, when economic grievances, political protest and elite manipulation resulted in dozens of deaths, gives an indication of the risks of violent conflict. A chaotic situation could lead to a military takeover and would certainly have detrimental effects on the region, in which Cameroon has up to now been a point of stability.

In the medium term, Cameroon faces numerous challenges to improve management of public resources, an issue which lies at the heart of its problems. But in the shorter term, urgent actions need to be taken to avoid a crisis around the 2011 elections.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Government of Cameroon:

1. Accept greater transparency in electoral processes by restoring the independence of the electoral body; revising the electoral code; drawing up credible electoral lists; and making further efforts to enlarge the electoral register, whose current very restricted scope risks excluding many citizens.
2. Set up, as soon as possible, the institutions provided for in the 1996 constitution but still not in place, including the senate, the constitutional council and the regional governing bodies.
3. Improve anti-corruption efforts by:
 - a) reviewing the “Epervier” operation, in order to make it part of an institutional and impartial fight against corruption;
 - b) creating an anti-corruption body which is truly independent of the executive and follows clear legal processes; and
 - c) improving anti-corruption sensitisation and instigating transparent, systematic sanctions against those responsible for unlawful practices.
4. Enter in good faith into dialogue with opposition forces on election management and tackling corruption.

To the International Community, in particular the Governments of France and the U.S.:

5. Put maximum pressure on the government to establish the senate and the constitutional council.
6. Continue to support electoral processes, but speak out clearly against poor practices.
7. Begin planning observation missions for the 2011 elections; agree on common positions with regard to unacceptable practices before, during and after the elections; and emphasise the need both for all parties to accept the outcome and for neutral legal means to be available for them to contest results peacefully.
8. France and the U.S. should use their aid and training support to the security sector to pressure the government to acknowledge the role its security forces have played in human rights abuses, especially during the February 2008 protests, and to apply appropriate punishments.

Dakar/Brussels, 24 June 2010

CAMEROON: THE DANGERS OF A FRACTURING REGIME

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the early years of this decade, there have been acute tensions within the Paul Biya regime. Even prior to 2004 and Biya's re-election for a seven-year term - which was to be his last, according to the Constitution at that time - several of his lieutenants began manoeuvring in view of the 2011 presidential elections, some even attempting to undermine the president himself.

Biya has firm control over the political game, but is totally absent from the conduct of the country's social and economic affairs. He actively participates in his party's behind-the-scenes rivalries. After having hinted at his intentions in his 31 December 2007 end-of-year speech, Biya then removed the constitutional limit on presidential terms in April 2008. This was despite major riots, partly directed against this planned constitutional revision, that had shaken the country two months earlier. He also dismissed several influential members of the ruling party (Cameroon People's Democratic Movement, CPDM) by having corruption charges brought against them, potentially alienating a part of his political base.

This jockeying for position within the ruling class is extremely risky: the players' room for manoeuvre is very tight and the economic and social situation is fragile. This could lead to a confrontation between factions that could be hard to contain.

This report examines Cameroon's current situation by focusing on the aspects that, according to Crisis Group, constitute the most significant destabilizing factors in the medium term; namely the regime's internal divisions, fractures within the security forces and the population's anger and frustration. This report therefore updates the historical analysis of Crisis Group's first report on Cameroon and suggests how to keep the country from descending into a climate of instability in the lead up to the 2011 elections.¹

II. THE REGIME: AN APPEARANCE OF SOLIDITY

A. A POWERFUL BUT ILLEGITIMATE SYSTEM

Through the CPDM, a true "party-state", the regime controls the administration, the electoral process and the justice system. Following the 2007 legislative elections, the CPDM almost regained the supremacy it had exerted during the single-party period by retaining 153 of the National Assembly's 180 seats.² While the opposition Social Democratic Front (SDF) held 43 parliamentary seats in 1997, it now holds only fifteen. The CPDM's dominant position allows it to modify or adopt laws at will, as demonstrated by the constitutional amendment of 2008, which was passed by the National Assembly without a referendum. Conversely, it has also continued not to enforce certain laws: the Senate and the Constitutional Council stipulated in the constitutional amendment of 1996, which itself was the result of a 1991 tripartite meeting, are still not established. Even though the laws required for creating regional assemblies were ratified in 2008, the institutions themselves are as yet non-existent.

The presidential party also ignored the opinion of its international partners by reasserting control over Elections Cameroon (Elecam), an independent electoral body created in 2006 to organise and supervise the voting process, previously overseen by the administration. Elecam was established at the request of international financial backers as a condition for debt cancellation under the framework of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. However, when it came to nominating the members of Elecam's board of management, at the end of 2008, the authorities went back on what they had agreed to and violated the very law they had adopted. While members should have been recruited from among candidates noted for their "spirit of neutrality and impartiality", and the law specifies that their function is incompatible with "party membership or support", Elecam's twelve representatives, appointed by Biya, are either members or

¹ For an in-depth analysis of the country's history, and the origins of the current risk of instability, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°160, *Cameroon: Fragile State?* 25 May 2010.

² The opposition contested the results of these elections.

close associates of the CPDM's central committee.³ Samuel Fonkam Azu'u, for example, was deputy secretary general of the National Assembly when he was appointed chair of Elecam.

On 26 March 2010, the CPDM went even further by hastily amending the 2006 law which created Elecam.⁴ The adopted amendment gave the administration a renewed role in organising the electoral process, thus depriving Elecam of its very essence, as it was intended to be an independent body.

The ruling party likes to be unpredictable. In a surprise move in 2008, without any regard for the opposition, the government introduced a bill to amend the Constitution, in a session shortened to 15 minutes. The vote for its adoption was abruptly rescheduled 24 hours prior to the agreed date, once again catching the parliamentary opposition off guard.⁵

However, the Biya regime has a serious handicap in its total lack of popular legitimacy. Practically none of the current 60 ministers have ever held elected office. Rather, they owe their appointment to the president of the Republic. Completely dependent on Biya, these senior civil servants, who became politicians through decree, have therefore no political legitimacy or social contract with their constituents, from whom they are completely disconnected.⁶ Relations between members of parliament or mayors and their constituencies also seem tenuous, due to the unreliability of the electoral process.⁷

President Biya's appointments further aggravate the sense of the leadership's illegitimacy in the eyes of Cameroonians. His choices do not seem motivated by any concern

for competency ("the most incompetent are promoted"⁸ according to a CPDM activist), but are rather a function of political calculation. In the last 30 years the president has consistently chosen from the same pool of senior civil servants. The majority of magistrates, managers of state-owned companies and appointed ministers are consequently over the age of 60 or even 70 - the eldest being Félix Sabal Lecco, Chair of the National Communication Council (CNC), who was born in 1918 - while half the population of Cameroon is under the age of 20.⁹ In their constant shuffling of positions, Cameroonians see these ministers and senior civil servants as participating in an eternal game of musical chairs, monopolizing power and senior positions.

These elites do not compensate their lack of legitimacy by redistributing national resources in their region of origin, except only occasionally and flamboyantly, without any notable effect on the population's standard of living. In 2008, a CPDM activist criticised the absence of development in the south, even though several ministers, senior civil servants and the president come from this region.¹⁰ Through Biya's clientelist management ("If you support me, I will give you sinecures") and the absence of oversight and sanctions, the leaders constitute a "chop tribe", which monopolizes the country's riches.¹¹ Through the embezzlement of state funds, many of them have amassed substantial wealth, in contrast with the majority of Cameroonians' low standard of living.¹²

³ Articles 8 and 13 of the 26 December 2006 law N°2006/011 on the creation, organization and functioning of Elecam.

⁴ The amendment on Elecam was adopted a few hours before the parliamentary session's close.

⁵ In 2002, after an initial six-month postponement, the legislative elections were again unexpectedly postponed for a week after the polling stations had already opened.

⁶ The party has always prevented its own members from building independent political bases. See also Luc Sindjoun, "*Le président de la République au Cameroun (1982-1996)*", Travaux et documents N°50, Centre d'études d'Afrique noire (Tallence, 1996). Crisis Group interview, academic, Yaoundé, March 2010.

⁷ See "*Au Cameroun, le cardinal Tumi doute de voir des élections transparentes*", Agence France-Presse, 21 June 2007: "The party in power is afraid to organize transparent elections because it is not sure of winning Sometimes I ask myself if I am compelled to comply with the laws when one knows they are created by people who did not win the elections. Who do they represent?" A member of the CPDM stated that elected representatives "are all wrongfully elected and/or have a criminal record". Crisis Group interview, Douala, February 2010.

⁸ While maintaining the system of regional balance established by Ahmadou Ahidjo, Paul Biya continues to favour his ethnic group, the Béti, many of whom hold key positions, specifically within the government (finance, economy and defence ministries). Crisis Group interview, members of the CPDM, Yaoundé, March 2010.

⁹ United Nations figures for 2010 indicate that people over 59 represent 5 percent of the population. See the lyrics of the rapper Valsero, "For 2008, I Speak"; "This country kills the young the old don't let go / 50 years of power and after that they don't let go / The young are slowly dying while the old are getting drunk on fire water in their fortress / This country is like a bomb and a coffin for its youth / Beware, when it blows up they will be only bits of flesh, so make way the old, the torch must be passed on".

¹⁰ See Charles Ateba Eyéné, *Le paradoxe du pays organisateur* (Yaoundé, 2008). Crisis Group interviews, author, Yaoundé, March 2010.

¹¹ The expression appeared in the early 1990's. "Kontchou does not represent the Bamilekés; Mbouï does not incarnate the Bassa people; and Owona is not mandated by the Betis to defend their interests. However, all three men, and many others, originate from one and the same ethnic group: the chop tribe!", *Challenge Hebdo*, N°3, 1991.

¹² The Cameroonian financial specialist Babissakana estimates that 40 per cent of government spending is embezzled by unscrupulous civil servants. See "*Cameroon: une corruption struc-*

Many of the regime's barons are also discredited because of their shady ties with economic and business circles (specifically with foreign companies), often creating potential conflicts of interest. For example, the current Minister of Commerce is also chairman of the board of the country's largest banana exporter, a subsidiary of a French company.¹³ Some belong to or have set up criminal networks: in 2007 an investigation carried out by an NGO pointed to the involvement of certain senior officials in the Ministry of Forests and Fauna in the illegal international trade of a protected species.¹⁴ The chairman of Elecam was involved in trafficking visas organized by the offices of the National Assembly.¹⁵

In 2006, a scandal around lists of "alleged homosexuals" illustrated the degree to which the ruling elite has been discredited. Published in newspapers, these lists accused people by name, including many politicians, of resorting to homosexual practices (which are prohibited by law and considered an infamy by a large proportion of the population) as a way of getting ahead, socially and politically. The huge public interest in these lists¹⁶ showed the extent to which the processes of power have become incomprehensible to Cameroonians - in whose eyes those who succeed have necessarily made a shameful compromise - while power seems distant, criminalised and maintains itself only "by a kind of delinquency and sacrilege".¹⁷

turelle malgré un plan de lutte", Agence France-Presse, 3 May 2008. According to a study by the Institut national de la statistique (INS) published in February 2010, the number of poor (living with less than €1.1 per day) rose from 6.2 million in 2001 to 7.1 million (39.9 per cent of the population) in 2007.

¹³ See "Au Cameroun, une exploitation de bananes au goût amer", *Libération*, 18 May 2009.

¹⁴ Under pressure after the discovery of an extensive illegal trade of grey parrots, the minister was compelled to dismiss these senior civil servants, including the ministry's secretary general. However, none of these officials were prosecuted and the national press never mentioned the affair. Being employed in a ministry such as Forestry is essentially about stealing the forest's resources rather than protecting them. Those involved in trafficking protected species have connections in the administration and security forces. Crisis Group interviews, head of NGO, Yaoundé, March 2010. See "Annual report 2007" of The Last Great Ape Organization (Laga).

¹⁵ Crisis Group interview, head of NGO, Yaoundé, March 2010. Also see "Le président d'Elecam Fonkam Azuu au centre d'une filière", *Mutations*, 8 January 2009.

¹⁶ Newspapers that published the lists saw a substantial increase in circulation, and many other copies of the lists were circulated.

¹⁷ Crisis Group interview, academic, Yaoundé, March 2010. Paul Biya's lengthy and regular absences from Cameroon (at least a third of the year) and the substantial deployment of security forces during his rare appearances in Yaoundé reinforce the image of a distant and unattainable power.

The permanent masquerade played by the ruling elite, whose actions systematically contradict their words, reinforces the image of the regime as occult and fearful, which over the years has fuelled the mistrust and even defiance of the population with regard to the management of the country.¹⁸ Since 1982, Biya has often advocated "rigueur" (anti-corruption) in his speeches and "raising moral standards", in complete contradiction with the corruption of the ruling class. Moreover, his regular denunciation of the government's inertia contrasts with his own inaction, typified by the number of cabinet meetings he presides over: one a year on average.

However, the regime is aware of its unpopularity and seeks to counteract it by upholding the myth of an esteemed president, publishing numerous "motions in support of the head of state" in the public daily *Cameroon Tribune*. In this spectacle he is also regularly presented as a victim - articles published in the French press on the high cost of Biya's visit to France in 2009 were described by the minister of communication as a "media plot" and a "collection of dark forces that manipulate the media even outside the national territory".¹⁹ But this perpetual deceit, which no one believes, yet which no one any longer seeks to contest, does not hide the fear many of the elite feel over losing their privileges were they to lose power, and also of the likelihood of being held accountable for their involvement in embezzlement. These fears mean that most of them are unable to even countenance the prospect of a change of power indicating how far they may be prepared to go to protect their positions.²⁰

B. INCREASING DIVISIONS

For the CPDM, a consensus on managing their position of power is currently elusive. Confronted with internal rivalries from its inception, which result from or are aggravated by Biya's management of perpetually competing elites, the party is increasingly fragmented by the prospect of an end to his presidency. Since Biya will be 77 in 2010, the risk of a long illness, or even death in office, are increasingly apparent. Some of his allies are therefore positioning themselves to succeed him as party chief, and thus potentially as president. But their margin for manoeuvre

¹⁸ In Cameroon, where several communities grant their traditional chiefs the power to communicate with the invisible world, sorcery is often associated with power. See in particular, Dominique Malaquais, who writes, "To rule the Beti country, from where President Biya originates, one must possess 'evu', the power of sorcerers", in "Anatomie d'une arnaque: feyamen et feymanie au Cameroun", études du CERI (Paris, June 2001).

¹⁹ See "Polémique au Cameroun sur les coûteuses vacances de Paul Biya en France", Agence France-Presse, 12 September 2009.

²⁰ Crisis Group interviews, CPDM members, Yaoundé, March 2010.

ving is very narrow. They cannot call on an elective base and are fully aware that the president, who has made many enemies during his lengthy presidency, and who no longer trusts anyone, may not designate someone to take his place.²¹ But they have no other choice than to attempt to discredit their adversaries in order to gain the president's favour should he choose a successor.

Since presidential term limits were lifted, indicating that Biya will likely be a candidate in 2011, another option is to remove the president himself. By amending the Constitution, the president alienated a segment of his party and violated a pact he had passed with his own camp: when the Constitution was adopted in 1996, it was CPDM parliamentarians who imposed term limits.²² While Biya is still feared and not openly contested within his own camp, for the first time, in 2009, his wealth and his management of state funds were criticised in the private press. In 2010, several complaints were filed against Biya by Cameroonians living abroad who are suspected by members of the CPDM of being in the service of other party members seeking to remove the president.²³

In 2004, even before the presidential elections in October, the "after Biya" question came up for the first time since the early 1990s, following several incidents involving the president. The first occurred in April during the inaugural flight between Yaoundé and Paris of the "Albatross", a new presidential plane. The plane, carrying Biya and his family, experienced several technical failures, including faulty landing brakes. The president had to borrow a plane for the return trip. An official inquiry established that the Boeing was old and in disrepair and that embezzlement had occurred when senior officials in the president's office purchased it. This affair revealed to Biya the unreliability of his entourage and the possible consequences for his security.²⁴

It also raised the spectre of his death while in office, an issue that acutely resurfaced in early 2004 when a rumour of the president's death in a Swiss hospital spread around Cameroon. An official denial was issued after two days,

but in the meantime general panic occurred among the ruling class as well as among ordinary citizens aware of the constitutional uncertainty surrounding the interim should Biya be declared incapacitated. According to the Constitution, the president of the Senate is sworn in for the interim; however, this position is yet to be created.²⁵

Since that time, members of the CPDM and their cronies have been lining up in the race for power and whispering accusations in the president's ear to undermine their rivals. They use the press by supplying information, true or false, to discredit their opponents in Biya's eyes. According to several testimonies collected by Crisis Group, the 2006 affair of the list of alleged homosexuals, followed by the list of "billionaire civil servants", was orchestrated by regime members to discredit others.²⁶

Between 2006 and 2008, certain newspapers also liberally alluded to the existence of a real or imaginary informal group of CPDM dignitaries called the "G11", for "Generation 2011", preparing to seize power in 2011. According to Crisis Group sources, alleged members of the G11, who opposed the 2008 constitutional amendment and a probable Biya candidacy in 2011, attempted to amplify the February 2008 riots with the objective of destabilizing the president.²⁷ At the end of 2009, the same newspapers published another list of names of regime members suspected, according to them, of having created "Brutus", a network plotting against the president.²⁸

In this internal jousting, figures such as René Sadi stand out. At 62, this bureaucrat, reputed for his discretion and loyalty to the president, has appeared as a potential successor ever since Biya appointed him secretary general of the CPDM in 2007. In 2010 a national daily announced as an April Fool's joke that Sadi was a presidential candidate for the 2011 elections. His allies believed it was a ploy by his rivals to alienate him from the president, who notoriously dislikes anyone trying to upstage him. In the past,

²¹ Crisis Group interviews, CPDM members, Yaoundé and Douala, March 2010.

²² Crisis Group interview, academic, Yaoundé, March 2010.

²³ Crisis Group interviews, members of the CPDM, Yaoundé and Douala, March 2010. In February 2010, a hitherto unknown association of Cameroonians living in France, the *Conseil des Camerounais de la diaspora*, filed a complaint against Paul Biya before the Public Prosecutor of Paris for "possession of embezzled state funds", accusing him of having purchased real estate using stolen state funds. This complaint was thrown out due to the Cameroonian president's immunity.

²⁴ Some of them, including the former Secretary General of the Presidency, Jean-Marie Atangana Mebara, who is also suspected of belonging to the G11, were arrested on corruption charges in 2008.

²⁵ Biya, normally not fond of public appearances, made a triumphant return to Yaoundé a few days later. "Some people are very interested in my funeral. I tell them to come back in twenty years", he quipped while disembarking. Many Cameroonians withdrew money from their bank accounts, stockpiled food and retreated to their villages. Some ministers began arrangements for their families to travel abroad. Most ministers had little idea what was happening and relied on journalists for news. Crisis Group interviews, journalist, Yaoundé, April 2010.

²⁶ Crisis Group interviews, members of the CPDM, Yaoundé and Douala, March 2010.

²⁷ Some analysts also believe that the president may have played a part in these riots with the objective of creating a chaotic environment to justify the strong deployment of security forces until the constitutional amendment was adopted. Crisis Group interviews, academic, Yaoundé, March and April 2010.

²⁸ See "Après le G11, voici le groupe Brutus", *La Nouvelle*, 9 November 2009.

the president has got rid of anyone who appears to be developing the profile of a potential successor.

The secretary general of the presidency, Laurent Eso, who is equivalent to a deputy president, is also seen as a potential successor.²⁹ He is also chairman of the board of Société nationale des hydrocarbures (SNH), which manages oil revenues and is a major provider of illegal funds to top regime members. The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Justice, and former Secretary General of the Presidency, Amadou Ali, in charge of the anti-corruption “Epervier”³⁰ operation, is also seen, along with Alain Mebe Ngo’o, Minister of Defence and Biya’s godson, as being close to the president and potentially influential in the “post-Biya” period.

Two main factions can also be distinguished. The first is made up of barons that have been in power for a long time. These leaders, some of whom consider themselves presidential material, want to maintain their hold on power and protect their positions and interests. Some have placed their children in the regime to perpetuate their influence. These old leaders are being challenged by younger CPDM members, whom the president mistrusts since he does not know or control them. Most of these members still do not hold senior positions and consequently do not yet have access to significant resources.

Considering itself “progressive”, this second group criticises the current leaders for maintaining their grip on power and monopolising the right to speak for the regime. Covertly, and occasionally overtly, they criticise the management of the country and the party, accusing the CPDM of failing to follow its own rules. They also denounce the fact that no ordinary congress of the CPDM has been convened since 1996, despite provisions in the party statutes that they should be held every five years, and are quick to allege that the party’s internal elections are rigged. Conflicts between these two factions can be found on both the local and national level.³¹

²⁹ Since the beginning of 2010, he has been for the first time the target of virulent attacks from the press.

³⁰ A major anti-corruption drive, called Epervier, led to the arrest of several dozen senior civil servants and former ministers. See Appendix D.

³¹ The battle for the office of mayor of Douala V illustrates these conflicts and their local and national ramifications. Following the 2007 municipal elections, the incumbent CPDM mayor seeking re-election - the all-powerful businesswoman Françoise Fonong - had for the first time to confront, in the competition to be named mayor, an opponent who was also from the presidential party. The race immediately became a national issue, with Fonong receiving the support of the Central Committee. Her opponent, Emmanuel Simo, criticized her management and stated that he wished to fight “the stagnation in the CPDM”,

Each of these groups are divided by personal ambitions. Some leaders have amassed enough wealth to gradually construct and sustain substantial administrative, political and economic support networks, and fund newspapers and television stations, for example.³² Their wealth also enables them to finance political campaigns. Other prominent networks of recruitment and influence exist (Freemasons, Rosicrucians, Opus Dei, Laakam, Essingan³³), connecting business, military and political circles, even though membership of such occult networks may discredit supposed members. Economic interests, specifically foreign interests, are also involved.

Ethnic identity also plays a part. The Bamilike elites, who are seen as holding economic power, are regularly suspected of working clandestinely for the interests of their community. Among the Beti, the scarecrow of vengeance directed against them by northerners, should they lose their grip on the presidency, is used to gather support.³⁴ However, rivalries persist within ethnic groups, as a result of Biya’s regional quota policy.³⁵ The Minister of Territorial Administration and of Decentralization, Marafa Hamidou Yaya, directly competes with the Minister of Justice, Amadou Ali, both of whom are from the north. The same holds true for the Minister of Defence, Alain

while one of his supporters declared: “Yaoundé must stop imposing candidates on us”. The CPDM’s leadership ultimately prevailed and installed Fonong, though the opposition camp obtained three of the five deputy-mayor positions. Crisis Group interviews, members of the CPDM, Yaoundé and Douala, March 2010.

³² This money, which is stolen through fictitious public projects and procurement and through the allocation of substantial bonuses, is used for ostentatious spending, for maintaining client networks and for property investments in Cameroon. Some is invested abroad, often through fraud related to imported goods. However, little information is available on the exact amounts embezzled, especially those siphoned off abroad. The regime, or members of it, finance most of the country’s national dailies, including those professing to be opposition media.

³³ Essingan, the Beti secret society created in the 1980s, was encouraged by the president in the late 1990s to circumvent the influence of the Rosicrucian’s, led by the former secretary general of the presidency and Biya’s former personal doctor, Titus Edzoa, who was arrested and imprisoned in 1997, shortly after declaring his candidacy for president. Laakam is a similar organisation created in the late 1980’s to defend the interests of the Bamilike community.

³⁴ This supposed desire for vengeance is a result of the executions, violence and sanctions against northerners following the attempted coup of 1984.

³⁵ “A Bamilike always replaces a Bamilike. An Etoudi always replaces an Etoudi Therefore, when a person from Ombessa is appointed in the government, his brothers, who become potential ministers ... covet his position and plot his downfall”. See “25 ans après, les 7 plaies du RDPC”, *Le Messager*, 24 March 2010.

Mebe Ngo'o and his predecessor Rémy Ze Meka, who both originate from the village of Zoétélé (south).

There is still a risk that things will spin out of control. Some have tried to make names for themselves by treading the dangerous path of ethnic division, frequently used in the 1990s to divide the opposition. In the wake of the 2008 riots, the elites of Mfoundi, the region around Yaoundé, published a letter addressed to "the predators from elsewhere", referring to the Bamilike who originate from the west, but are numerous in the capital, where many have bought up land.³⁶ During a March 2010 CPDM meeting in Douala, Sawa representatives (from the Douala region) used similar language. While these statements have little immediate impact, they have a dangerous effect on the Cameroonian psyche. The stigmatisation of the Bamilike, whose dynamic entrepreneurship is often criticised by members of other ethnic groups, resulted in violence in the 1990s and again more recently.³⁷

Politicians' use and manipulation of the media had tragic consequences in April 2010 when the journalist Cyrille Ngota Ngota died in prison due to a lack of medical treatment. Along with two other journalists, Ngota was imprisoned for forgery and use of forged documents, in a corruption scandal apparently involving the Secretary General of the Presidency, Laurent Eso.³⁸

Biya also has a hand in the infighting between CPDM elites. With the Epervier anti-corruption initiative, launched at the end of 2004, he has partially altered the shape of the regime. This operation, initiated under pressure from international aid donors, took a political turn in 2008 with the jailing of three influential former ministers. Their dramatic and public arrest appeared to have been due to the mismanagement of public funds, but also to their per-

ceived presidential ambitions and presumed membership in the famous G11.³⁹

With the ongoing Epervier operation, the president kills several birds with one stone: he rebuilds political legitimacy in the fight against corruption by dismissing those of dubious character, and reinforces his power via the elimination of those considered too ambitious. He could also be clearing the way for a potential successor. However, this strategy could destabilise his own camp and cause a backlash, as the majority of the casualties of the Epervier operation come from the centre and southeast region, his traditional stronghold. In June 2009, a letter written by these "Beti elites from the Centre" to the president was indicative of their apprehension.⁴⁰ Imprisoned dignitaries, whose networks of influence are still partially operational, may be tempted to retaliate.⁴¹

These intrigues reveal both the political and personal nature of the Epervier operation, and the fact that it has little institutional depth. The operation is not accompanied by any public anti-corruption sensitisation or improvement in the management of state resources. The analyst Olivier Vallée points out how slow the regime has been to enforce the disclosure of senior officials' assets, despite it being required by the 1996 Constitution. Regarding the Epervier operation, he also observes: "We have therefore witnessed a growing 'personalized' treatment of corrupt individuals, rather than the deployment of a strategy for dismantling the mechanics of corruption".⁴²

³⁶ See "Déclaration des forces vives du Mfoundi", *Cameroon Tribune*, 3 March 2008.

³⁷ In July 2008, in Akonolinga (centre), several people were wounded in violent clashes following the victory of the Bamilike-dominated Dschang city football team (west), over the local team. Yebekolos sought out Bamilikes and attacked them. See "2009 Human Rights Report: Cameroon", U.S. State Department.

³⁸ The 39-year old Mr. Ngota Ngota probably died due to lack of medical care, as he suffered from high blood pressure. As is often the case in such affairs in Cameroon, this incident was interpreted in different ways. According to some, the three journalists, who worked for little-known publications, attempted to blackmail the Secretary General of the Presidency, Laurent Eso, with a forged letter. The document ordered the payment of substantial commissions to intermediaries for SNH's purchase of a ship. Crisis Group interview, member of the regime, Yaoundé, April 2010.

³⁹ For additional details on the Epervier operation, see Appendix D. Some of the former ministers arrested suspect Amadou Ali and Laurent Eso of seeking to remove them from power and being behind their arrest. Crisis Group interviews, allies of the ministers in question, Yaoundé, April 2010.

⁴⁰ See *Le Messager*, 4 June 2009. "Under the guise of the Epervier operation, all those accused of having embezzled public funds were arrested. It seems coincidental, but it clearly appears that only our own deserving sons, and among them those with the stature of statesmen, were concerned. Without calling your authority into question, Central Cameroon asks itself the question: When you are no longer there to defend our interests, which of our sons will carry the torch if they are all in prison?"

⁴¹ The former Secretary General of the Presidency and former Minister of Foreign Affairs Jean-Marie Atangana Mebara is often mentioned in this respect. Crisis Group interviews, members of the CPDM, Yaoundé, Douala, March and April 2010.

⁴² In *La Police morale de l'anticorruption* (Paris, 2009), p. 170. According to Vallée, since independence the state oscillates between a permissive attitude towards corruption, allowing a temporary lifting of fiscal and state pressure, and sudden bursts of discipline intended to restore order in the country's affairs.

The tactics employed in this struggle for power post-Biya, including those used by the president himself, amount to little more than gambling. No one can be assured of controlling future events, especially since none of the protagonists know the precise nature and strength of their opponents' networks. Corruption also renders alliances unpredictable. The regime increasingly resembles a court society at the end of its ruler's reign, dominated by its own behind-the-scene games and intrigues. But if the divisions between the players continue to widen, the game itself could end in gradual disintegration or implosion, with serious consequences for the country.⁴³ Occupied solely with their internal quarrels, the leaders of the CPDM are paying little attention to the other vital actors in the post-Biya game: the street and the army.

III. OMNIPRESENT BUT DIVIDED SECURITY SECTOR

The security forces (army, gendarmerie, police) serve as the regime's principal support, used to compensate for its lack of popular legitimacy and to satisfy its obsession with order and internal stability. But these forces suffer from several weaknesses: they are fragmented, with ill-equipped, partially ethnicised, regular forces on the one hand, and privileged specialized units on the other. Some of the forces have also developed ties with business or criminal organisations. How the security forces will react if there is a crisis in the top echelons of the state is therefore difficult to assess: they will potentially be divided and some will be concerned with preserving their privileges and interests, potentially leading to a seizure of power.

Trained from the beginning to fight their own citizens, the security forces have, since independence, been a key element of regime stability in Cameroon. The regime of President Ahmadou Ahidjo used them to establish his authority at independence, crushing the Union des populations du Cameroun (UPC), which threatened his rule. Their heavy public presence in the 1960s and 1970s amounted to a virtual state of war, and they have played an important part in repressing opponents of the regime and controlling the country's citizenry.

To fight against "enemies from within", they benefited from emergency rule for a long period - for 30 years it was "the rule, the norm, and part of daily life". The state of emergency declared in 1959 was only lifted in the early 1970s, and laws against subversion were not repealed until 1990.⁴⁴ It was only in 1993, during the conflict with Nigeria over the Bakassi peninsula, that the army assumed what should be its primary role, namely defence of the national territory.⁴⁵

At the head of an authoritarian regime preoccupied with maintaining internal order, President Ahmadou Ahidjo kept close control over the security forces. In order to keep a tight reign on the army, between 1973 and his departure from power in 1982, he made sure that it had only one general. The ministry of defence and other key positions were filled with people from Ahidjo's own region. Military training centres were established in the north and

⁴³ Crisis Group interview, sociologist Claude Abé, Yaoundé, March 2010.

⁴⁴ Voir Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, *La démocratie de transit au Cameroun* (Paris, 1997), p. 66.

⁴⁵ On the history of security forces, Crisis Group interviews with three experts, Yaoundé, March 2010; and see Chantal Belomo-Essono, *L'ordre et la sécurité publics dans la construction de l'Etat au Cameroun*, doctoral dissertation in political science (Bordeaux, 2007).

the west, far removed from the power centre. Throughout the period the country was closely tied to the French, whose strong presence included a technical military assistance agreement.

The attempted 1984 coup against Biya, instigated by officers close to Ahmadou Ahidjo, altered the position of the security forces. From that time on they became both the president's ally and potential enemy, as Biya was obsessed only with his own security. After drastic purges in the army, Biya regained control by placing trusted men in key positions. He forged close ties with the officers who had rescued him in 1984 and rewarded their loyalty with promotions, but at the price of an highly expensive security sector.⁴⁶ He ensured that security forces were not affected by the substantial pay cuts endured by civil servants in 1993. The president also allowed senior officers to get into business in order to ensure their loyalty and keep them out of the political arena. Certain generals currently own forest concessions or plantations and several officers head private security companies or own land that is rented out to multinationals.⁴⁷

A. FRAGMENTED SECURITY FORCES

The benefits granted to high-ranking officers have undermined the army's stability and resulted in a military bourgeoisie with incomes out of all proportion to those of regular soldiers.⁴⁸ Some have enjoyed privileged relations with the president since 1984 and their desire to preserve lucrative positions coupled with the president's suspicion of younger officers has resulted in some generals remaining in post well beyond the legal retirement age. Cameroon currently has 21 generals, most of whom are older than 65.⁴⁹ The highest-ranking general, Pierre Semengué, is 75. Keeping these generals in active duty not only erodes and complicates their command (several generals also do not get along), but also gives rise to deep resentments in other officers, specifically colonels, who must retire at the legal age and whose promotion is blocked.

This rancour is intensified by discrepancies in training: the military reform initiated in 2001 produced a younger generation of officers with a higher level of education than their elders and commanding officers. Some colonels feel threatened by these young cadets, who in turn feel undervalued.⁵⁰ There are additional frustrations related to what is viewed as arbitrary promotion that usually favours the president's own ethnic group, the Beti.⁵¹ In the last decade, several Beti officers have been promoted on a seemingly non-transparent basis, raising suspicions among their colleagues.⁵² There are also lingering resentments from the attempted coup of 1984: some army members that participated in thwarting the coup believe they were not sufficiently rewarded, while others believe they were unjustly sanctioned.⁵³

While granting privileges to certain individuals, President Biya has simultaneously neglected a significant segment of the security forces, of whom he remains wary. In the absence of political will and the arbitrary use of the defence budget⁵⁴, troops have insufficient incomes, few weapons, are poorly trained and are largely idle.⁵⁵ With few military barracks, soldiers live alongside civilians in military districts. Many gendarmerie brigades have only three or four troops and no means of transport. Consider-

⁴⁶ In 2010, after Secondary Education and Public Works, the Ministry of Defence has the third highest state budget, some 175 billion CFA francs (€267 million).

⁴⁷ Crisis Group interviews, experts on security issues, Yaoundé, March 2010.

⁴⁸ Currently, the highest salary within the army is 500,000 CFA Francs (€762), including bonuses, whose functioning is largely opaque, equivalent to a teacher at the end of his career.

⁴⁹ Some observers play down the actual power of the older generals and stress the role of colonels and military intelligence. Crisis Group interviews, academic, member of the security forces, Yaoundé, March and April 2010.

⁵⁰ In 2001, the army, of approximately 30,000 troops, was reorganized with the help of France (and, in particular, the former French army general Raymond Germanos) to bring it up to international standards so it could participate in peacekeeping operations. Since then, Cameroon has created the high level inter-army defense curriculum (Cours supérieur interarmées de défense, CSID) on a regional level, in addition to the interarmy military college (Ecole militaire interarmées, EMIA), the headquarters college (Ecole d'état-major, EEM), and the centre for perfection of crowd control techniques (Centre de perfectionnement aux techniques de maintien de l'ordre, CPTMO) for the gendarmerie. The reorganization also created three joint military regions, the first covering the regions of the Centre, South and East; the second the regions of the Littoral, West, South-West and North-West; and the third the regions of the Far North, North and Adamaoua. The army is present over the entire territory and each of the ten regions has a military command. Crisis Group interviews, expert on military issues, Yaoundé, March 2010.

⁵¹ While the country's various ethnic groups are represented within the army for the sake of regional balance, the Beti seem to be favored. The Minister of Defence is also Beti.

⁵² Crisis Group interviews, members of the security forces, Yaoundé, March and April 2010.

⁵³ Crisis Group interviews, members of the security forces, source close to the military, Yaoundé and Douala, April 2010.

⁵⁴ A substantial part of the budget is embezzled and wasted on sumptuary spending. Crisis Group interview, members of the security forces, Yaoundé, April 2010.

⁵⁵ A member of the security forces confided to Crisis Group that he has not handled a weapon since 1990. Crisis Group interview, member of the security forces, Yaoundé, April 2010.

ing these handicaps, security forces for the most part are not very efficient.⁵⁶

Their inefficiency has led the authorities to create and favour specialized units, with special status and *de facto* impunity, to handle specific criminal or border-related issues. The position of two of these elite corps, the Presidential Guard (*Garde Présidentielle*, GP), in charge of the president's security, and the rapid intervention battalion (*Bataillon d'intervention rapide*, BIR), is particularly problematic. Both benefit from special treatment, since they depend directly on the president's office rather than the Ministry of Defence. Moreover, they are led and trained by a foreign officer, Avi Abraham Sirvan, a retired colonel from the Israeli army and former defence attaché to the Israeli Embassy in Yaoundé, who is retained on a private contract.⁵⁷

While the GP stationed in Yaoundé looks after the president's security, the BIR was created to handle new forms of crime,⁵⁸ and was initially charged with fighting high-way bandits operating in the north and east of the country. Recruitment for the BIR is different from the other corps; it is centralized while regular forces have a recruitment centre in each region. The BIR is led solely by officers from the regular army. Its soldiers are very well trained and have a reputation for competency in handling weapons.⁵⁹

Since the February 2008 riots, when the BIR was deployed as reinforcements to secure Douala, Yaoundé and the presidential palace threatened by demonstrators, the role of the BIR has changed considerably. Since March 2009, its numbers have been increased, and it has replaced regular forces in Bakassi. However, this increased presence of the BIR, which is currently made up of at least 3,000 troops, is problematic. When Biya deployed the BIR in Bakassi, for example, it was an act of defiance vis-à-vis the regular army. The resources placed at the disposal of the BIR, which looks increasingly like an army within the army, are more substantial and more sophisticated than those provided to the regular forces,

which in turn feels cheated. BIR troops also enjoy advantages and bonuses that regular soldiers do not, giving rise to jealousy and tension.⁶⁰ Members of the BIR and other forces have clashed several times. In April 2010, a dispute between BIR troops and policemen of the rapid intervention team (*Equipe spéciale d'intervention rapide*) degenerated into a gunfight in Bamenda in which four BIR soldiers were wounded.⁶¹

By favouring specialized security units, rather than encouraging a unified army; and by turning some commanding officers into businessmen, Biya has created an institution unlikely to challenge his authority. But this strategy could also backfire, due to the frustration felt by many officers and the lack of discipline in some units. Security forces could, for example, be quickly overwhelmed in the event of a large, organised popular uprising, having neither the competence nor the weapons to handle it. The BIR, trained for combat, would quickly be overwhelmed as they are neither prepared nor equipped for crowd control.⁶²

B. INDISCIPLINE AND CRIME

A lack of resources, ties with business and impunity have all contributed to indiscipline and involvement in criminal activity among the security forces. Commanding officers are well aware of this problem. The Minister of Defence, Edgar Alain Mebe Ngo'o, implicitly acknowledged it in 2009 when he declared, "a position of command, no matter how elevated, cannot become a tool for enrichment or influence peddling".⁶³ In January 2010, the head of the gendarmerie also criticized the behaviour of certain gendarmes accused of "involvement with organized crime", "petty dealings with dangerous criminals" and "harassing citizens". He also criticised "the shameful lack of motivation within the ranks as a result of rampant indiscipline".⁶⁴

⁵⁶ Crisis Group interviews, expert on military issues, Yaoundé, March 2010.

⁵⁷ Israeli involvement in the president's security dates back to the attempted coup of 1984. Doubting the loyalty of the French, who handled his security until then, Biya turned to the United States, who informally subcontracted the opportunity to Israel. Presidential Guard troops have the same uniforms as the Israeli army, and BIR troops the same as Israeli special forces. Colonel Sirvan probably has the backing of Tel Aviv, as Israel's presence in the security market in Sub-Saharan Africa is increasing.

⁵⁸ It was created in 1999 under the name Bataillon léger d'intervention (BLI) prior to changing its name in 2001.

⁵⁹ Crisis Group interview, member of the security forces, Yaoundé, March 2010.

⁶⁰ Crisis Group interview, member of the security forces, Yaoundé, March 2010.

⁶¹ See "Bamenda, une ville sous pression", *La Nouvelle Expression*, 10 April 2010.

⁶² Crisis Group interview, member of the security forces, Yaoundé, April 2010.

⁶³ See "Le commandant Jules César Eso nouveau commandant de la légion du Littoral installé", *Cameroun Tribune*, 4 September 2009.

⁶⁴ See "Bokam accuse les gendarmes de trafic d'armes", *Mutations*, 27 January 2010. In July 2008, Jean-Baptiste Bokam had already accused the gendarmerie of "dangerous" connections with "robbers apprehended and questioned, then released on false grounds". See "Cameroun: la gendarmerie accusée de 'collusion' avec le banditisme", Agence France-Presse, 14 July 2008.

The period of military confrontation between Nigeria and Cameroon (1993-2002) for the control of the Bakassi Peninsula gave rise to many abuses. A large portion of the budget allocated to the military in the field was embezzled at army headquarters in Yaoundé. Senior officers stationed in Bakassi seized the remaining funds, which were not distributed to the troops. Some officers were also involved in smuggling fuel and arms between Nigeria and Cameroon via small organized crime groups. The Bakassi conflict ultimately became a commercial opportunity and a substantial source of income for some officers. The attacks and hostage taking that occurred in the peninsula between 2007 and 2009 by small armed groups, whose objectives have never been clear, were partially the result of manoeuvring by certain political and military leaders to prolong the instability and justify troop and funding levels.⁶⁵

The various branches of the security forces are affected by this criminalisation. An increasing number of officers have been suspended for corruption, trafficking, influence peddling and embezzlement, although seemingly to little effect. In May 2008, the head of the border police was dismissed for corruption in passport and visa delivery.⁶⁶ In November 2008, two policemen were dismissed and charged with cooperating with a foreign intelligence service for accepting money to kidnap a refugee political opponent from Equatorial Guinea and deliver him to the country's embassy in Yaoundé. Even more serious is the fact that police officers are known to rent out their weapons at night to criminals or participate directly in robbery. In 2007 a police officer was suspended for armed assault. In late 2008, a policeman was arrested after robbing a private home in Yaoundé.⁶⁷ In the country's forest reserves, some gendarmes rent their weapons to smugglers of protected species.⁶⁸

There are also serious irregularities in recruitment methods. Some candidates pay substantial bribes to be selected. In 2009, a colonel in charge of medical evaluations for army recruitment was suspended for soliciting bribes from applicants. Between 2009 and 2010, 300

gendarme and police trainees were dismissed for using forged diplomas or birth certificates for the admission test. In 2002, 7,000 candidates were recruited for the police following an admission process that should normally have yielded around 1,000. Insufficient resources and personnel devoted to training exacerbate the problem.⁶⁹

Several examples show that some in the security forces are selling their skills to the highest bidder or putting their criminal interests above following orders. In November 2007, unidentified armed assailants attacked a military post in Bakassi, killing 21 soldiers. The authorities initially attributed the attack to rebel Nigerian pirates, however, other sources pointed to arms deals involving senior officials in the Ministry of Defence and senior officers. According to these sources, the objective of the attack was to eliminate witnesses to trafficking.⁷⁰ The results of the inquiry into the affair were never made public. However the subsequent dismissal of the commander of the Cameroonian army detachment in Bakassi gives credence to the theory of a power struggle within the army. In an open letter to Biya, a group of non-commissioned officers accused the dismissed commander, another army officer and the Minister of Defence at the time, Rémy Ze Meka, of involvement in the attack.⁷¹

The authorities also suspect that senior officers and officials were involved in the September 2008 attack on Limbe, in the South West Province.⁷² A group of 40 men armed with combat weapons and explosives took control of a section of the city for five hours, robbing three banks and killing one person before escaping by sea. The results of the subsequent enquiry were never made public. A month after the attack, the commander of the Limbe naval base and the commander of the gendarmerie in Limbe were replaced for neglect of duty.⁷³

The BIR is also experiencing an increasing number of discipline problems. In 2009, a report by the National Commission on Human Rights, an official body, revealed abuses perpetrated by BIR members, and criticised them for arbitrary arrests and abductions. In March 2010, sixteen BIR soldiers were discharged following violent acts against civilians in Limbe. According to official accounts, 24 people had been wounded, three seriously. A few days

⁶⁵ Crisis Group interviews, expert on security issues; member of the security forces who described their own participation in illegal activities in Bakassi; source close to the military, Yaoundé and Douala, March 2010.

⁶⁶ The head of police asked his successor to clean up and "put a stop to the chaos" within this branch "where the most dubious practices are taking root". See "*Cameroon: le chef de la police des frontières limogé pour corruption*", Agence France-Presse, 15 May 2008.

⁶⁷ See "*Police: encore cinq policiers suspendus*", *Le Messenger*, 5 March 2007; and "*Odza, un policier braqueur sous les verrous*", *Cameroon Tribune*, 7 January 2008.

⁶⁸ Crisis Group interviews, head of NGO, member of security forces, Yaoundé, March and April 2010.

⁶⁹ Crisis Group interviews, expert on military issues, Yaoundé, March 2010.

⁷⁰ Crisis Group interviews, source close to the military, Douala, November 2007; member of the security forces, Yaoundé, April 2010.

⁷¹ See "*Tuerie de Bakassi: la vérité des sous-officiers*", *Le Messenger*, 11 December 2007.

⁷² Crisis Group interview, member of the security forces, April 2010.

⁷³ Crisis Group interview, source close to the military, April 2010.

later, fifteen or so BIR soldiers accosted several motorcycle taxi drivers, beating them with truncheons.⁷⁴

While Cameroonian security forces are still in a far better state than other African forces - such as the Guinean army after Captain Dadis Camara took power in December 2008 - their impunity, division, criminalisation and the economic and political interests of some officers could lead to more serious abuses. Moreover, the security forces currently find themselves in a paradoxical situation: they are aware that the regime relies on them to stay in power, yet large sections feel obsolete. This contradiction could lead some to reassess their loyalties. Furthermore, the agreement between Colonel Sirvan and the presidency renders the position of the GP and the BIR unclear. No one really knows if these two entities are protecting Biya the person or the presidential institution, or what their allegiance would be in the case of a coup, especially since the majority of GP soldiers are originally Beti, like the president.

IV. THE STREET: RISING DISCONTENT

Strangely calm, even apathetic, since the opposition-led general strike of 1991, Cameroon's apparent stability was shattered in February 2008. A transport strike, sparked by an increase in fuel prices, degenerated. This added to the population's anger over the rising cost of living, and over Biya's plan to abolish the constitutional limit on presidential terms. Over four days, hundreds of young people in several cities took to the streets.

Taking the authorities by surprise, citizens improvised protests, blocked traffic with barricades of burning tyres, looted businesses and set fire to cars, businesses and public buildings.⁷⁵ Starting in Douala, a city with a tradition of rebellion, the disorganised protest movement soon reached the usually peaceful capital Yaoundé. Young demonstrators got as far as the gates of the presidential palace, creating panic in the state's security forces. According to an official count, 40 people were killed, but some NGOs estimate the actual number to have been at least 139. The first victims were killed by gunfire in the early hours of the protest.⁷⁶

This urban violence, among the most serious in the country's history, was the result of two factors. First, Cameroonians' exasperation with the regime; for many, the amendment to the constitution indicated that the president would stand for re-election in 2011, meaning that their economic and social woes, which they blame on Biya, would continue.⁷⁷ The determination of the demonstrators, who braved a security force known for its brutality, was commensurate with their disgust. Second, politicians also played a part. According to Crisis Group's sources, some members of the CPDM, who oppose the president and were against his project to amend the Constitution, attempted to use the popular anger to their own advantage.⁷⁸ Some politicians, including a few who still hold

⁷⁵ For the sequence of events, see Appendix C. According to the authorities, damages resulting from the riots in 31 cities were estimated at 10 billion CFA Francs (€15 million). Around 30 petrol stations were burned.

⁷⁶ A collective of national human rights NGOs stated that security forces had "used weapons repeatedly and inappropriately". Equipped with AK47 rifles as well as "light machine guns positioned on pick-ups", forces "opened fire indiscriminately and without warning, aiming shoulder high or at rioters' vital organs (head and abdomen)". See Observatoire national des droits de l'Homme du Cameroun, report published in February 2009. No independent inquiry was carried out to shed light on the events or establish responsibility for the violence.

⁷⁷ "Paul Biya must go" was one of the slogans chanted by demonstrators. Observation of a Crisis Group researcher.

⁷⁸ These barons may also be motivated by a desire to avoid possible arrest under the Epervier operation. Crisis Group in-

⁷⁴ See "Kumba: un commando des BIR et de la garde présidentielle attaque la population", *Le Jour*, 22 March 2010.

positions of power, also asked opponents to encourage the rioters, and even escalate their protests, with the aim of destabilising the regime.⁷⁹

The risk of another violent explosion is still very high, as the basics of the situation have not changed since 2008. The cost of living continues to rise, the regime has not undertaken any fundamental reform and the people still have no response to their frustrations nor any outlet to express them. The climate of corruption and poverty makes them vulnerable to manipulation, while the absence of hope gives young people the feeling they have nothing to lose.

A. GREAT SOCIAL TENSION

The February 2008 events unfolded in a context of extreme tension, especially in urban areas. Large cities, such as Douala and Yaoundé, suffer from overcrowding and a burgeoning underclass. Living conditions are worsened by numerous infrastructure problems, including recurring water and electricity shortages. The salaries of civil servants are barely enough to live on⁸⁰ and the need for a second source of income feeds the climate of generalised corruption - those in charge of public spending take a portion of the money that they deal with, and others extract money from any member of the public trying to get an administrative request processed.⁸¹

Conditions for young people are particularly alarming. According to the United Nations more than half of Cameroonians are under the age of 20. The general census published in 2010 found that 43.6 per cent of the total population is under 15. In Douala, 22 per cent of young people are officially unemployed.⁸² The actual figure is probably much higher. People mostly work in the informal sector, in jobs such as motorcycle taxi drivers or as “call-box” owners: offering telephone calls on the streets, in return for meagre incomes. Most of them have higher

education. Under-employment among people with a higher education, which has reached 75.8 per cent, is a source of great frustration. In Douala, where there is the highest concentration of unemployed educated people, 80 per cent of the 50,000 motorcycle taxi drivers in the city have at least their high school diploma and half hold a university degree.⁸³

The country’s nepotism and corruption aggravate the malaise of young people, and contribute to their loss of confidence in the state. It is widely believed to be impossible to gain entrance to a university or find a job without the support of a powerful sponsor or without bribery. Young graduates are aware that many people with university degrees are unemployed while less qualified workers get jobs through nepotism.⁸⁴ Access to loans and training programmes is also dependent on contacts. Many cannot afford to enter the university system due to rising fees.⁸⁵ In Douala, residents see Yaoundé as benefiting from the economic activity of their entrepreneurial city, and see Yaoundé’s civil servants embezzling state funds while leaving them without roads or electricity. “Sixteen million out of a total of twenty million Cameroonians feel excluded”.⁸⁶

The authorities refuse all dialogue, reinforcing the feelings of exclusion and bitterness. In 2009, officials in Yaoundé refused to meet with representatives of the informal sector during an extensive cleanup of the stalls of hundreds of street vendors.⁸⁷ Used and manipulated by the elite, the media also does not offer a satisfactory outlet for expression.⁸⁸

interviews, members of the CPDM, Yaoundé and Douala, March and April 2010.

⁷⁹ On the third day of rioting, Biya declared enigmatically in a televised and radio broadcast speech that their objective was to overthrow him and accused “sorcerers’ apprentices” of “manipulating” the demonstrators. See “*Cameroon: les violences visent à renverser le pouvoir (Biya)*”, Agence France-Presse, 27 February 2008.

⁸⁰ Since the 70 per cent salary decrease in 1993, salaries have only been increased once: by 15 per cent after the events of February 2008. According to a study by the Institut national de la statistique “*Inflation et pauvreté au Cameroun en 2006*”, food and fuel prices increased by 10.5 per cent between 2000 and 2005.

⁸¹ See “*Cameroon, les fonctionnaires ne sont plus des privilégiés*”, Agence France-Presse, 15 December 2007.

⁸² See “*Enquête sur l’emploi et le secteur informel (EESI)*” carried out in 2005 by the Institut national de la statistique.

⁸³ The Cameroonian INS’s definition of underemployment is as follows: “Visible underemployment concerns people who work less than 35 hours per week and affects 12.7 per cent of the working population. Invisible underemployment concerns working people whose incomes are inferior to the guaranteed minimum wage (the equivalent of 23,500 CFA Francs per month for 40 hours of work per week). This form of underemployment affects 69.3 per cent of workers. 78.2 per cent of working women are underemployed compared with 60.7 per cent of working men”.

⁸⁴ Crisis Group interviews, former students, Yaoundé and Douala, March 2010.

⁸⁵ Universities ended free enrollment in 1993: tuition fees are currently 50,000 CFA Francs (€6) per year. Crisis Group interview, academic, Yaoundé, March 2010.

⁸⁶ Crisis Group interviews, member of the CPDM, Douala, March 2010.

⁸⁷ Crisis Group interview, trade unionist, Yaoundé, March 2010.

⁸⁸ Since press offenses are still punished under criminal law, journalists working in the so-called “scandal” press are regularly questioned and some are even sentenced to prison terms, often without all aspects of their case being clarified.

The security forces frighten people more than reassure them. In February 2008, young people chanted “Give us weapons to defend ourselves against the police!”⁸⁹ Since people cannot count on the police, nor on a justice system undermined by corruption, residents of neighbourhoods in large cities have set up self-defence committees to deal with commonplace theft and violence. Criminals avoid prison by paying off magistrates, leading angry citizens to spontaneously take justice into their own hands. In 2009, the press identified eighteen deaths by summary execution, with victims having been either beaten or burned. In March 2010, a presumed thief was lynched and burned alive in Yaoundé.⁹⁰ In Douala, solidarity between motorcycle taxi drivers leads them to react immediately and sometimes violently when a dispute arises with other road users.

Popular justice can also be found in rural districts. In forested areas, residents often block roads to protest against logging companies that damage roads or do not keep their promises to help construct local infrastructure. In 2006, villagers from the northwest assassinated a traditional chief accused of selling off agricultural land. In March 2010, a land dispute between farmers and a foreign fruit company resulted in one death at the hands of a gendarme. The incident occurred in a small village in the southwest after residents lost their land to the company. Since these residents were not compensated as promised, and since none of the elements of compensation agreed upon materialised, villagers armed with homemade rifles and machetes attempted to prevent company employees from occupying the farmland. In April 2010, high school students vandalized their school and attacked their headmaster, accusing him of embezzling their examination fees.⁹¹

In their frustration, young Cameroonians increasingly look abroad.⁹² Others engage in low level criminality, which is prevalent in large cities. Many citizens turn to religion, joining one of many evangelical churches, where they seek answers to their questions and find a source of social solidarity that has become rare elsewhere, as worsening living conditions have eroded traditional social ties.⁹³

These outlets, along with corruption, are major safety valves for the regime, but are insufficient for venting all discontent.⁹⁴ In the February 2008 violence rioters attacked and destroyed the premises of a company in Douala rumoured to belong to Biya’s son and burned buildings that symbolized the state.⁹⁵ According to residents, “We don’t like destruction, but one must understand that people are pushed to the limit. Nothing is right, we are constantly being dragged down when we all know that our country is rich”. “Kill us, we are not afraid to die, we are already dead”, chanted young demonstrators in February 2008. Their dissatisfaction is such that they did not need leaders or clear orders to take to the streets, their mostly improvised protest gathered its own momentum, spurred on by the violent provocation of security forces.⁹⁶

B. STATE VIOLENCE

Attempts at collective action on the part of citizens are held back by difficulties of internal organisation and an unfavourable environment.⁹⁷ Those in power keep a close watch over citizens: civil servants are scrutinised by their hierarchy and others via the security and intelligence services. State employees must avoid all criticism of the regime if they want their careers to advance. Security forces have informants in universities and in student groups, and armed militias at the service of university presidents are present on campuses.

Opposition parties, NGOs and associations often acknowledge having been infiltrated by the regime, and that this reduces their organisational and operational capabilities. As in the past, the regime uses corruption and encourages informants in order to divide its opponents. It has made suspicion of other people, a prime characteristic of police states, present in every sphere of society. People are suspected of not being who they say they are, or not working for who they say they do, and people avoid sensitive political issues over the phone, for fear of surveillance by

⁸⁹ “Cameroun: tensions à Douala après les violences de samedi”, Agence-France-Presse, 24 February 2008.

⁹⁰ See “Un suspect brûlé vif”, *Cameroon Tribune*, 2 March 2010.

⁹¹ See “Un mort dans un affrontement entre gendarmes et civils”, *Le Jour*, 2 April 2010; 2007 Amnesty International Annual Report, “Emeutes sanglantes au lycée de Moulvoudaye”, *Le Messenger*, 21 April 2010.

⁹² A small group, the Association de lutte contre l’émigration clandestine (Alcec), conducted a survey of 500 young people in Yaoundé and found that 83 per cent of the 15 to 35 year olds surveyed intended to leave Cameroon. Illegal emigration, which was rare in the 1990s, is on the rise. Most young people who leave do not return, contrary to the 1980s.

⁹³ Crisis Group interviews, sociologist and psychologist, Yaoundé and Douala, March 2010.

⁹⁴ See Olivier Vallée, op. cit., according to whom corruption permits laws to be circumvented and allows some citizens to avoid taxes, for example, thus offering a compromise between the regime and parts of the population, allowing a certain flexibility in its relations with citizens.

⁹⁵ In several cities, the tax bureau, sub prefecture and City Hall were targeted. In Douala V, City Hall was burned down. “Trois morts dans de violents incidents à Douala”, Agence France-Presse, 25 February 2008.

⁹⁶ Direct observations of a Crisis Group researcher in 2008.

⁹⁷ Civil organisations are numerous but weak; they lack human and material resources and are often affected by corruption and leadership issues. Few work to promote social change. However, some, especially student organisations, have gained prominence in recent years for their organisational and operational capabilities.

security services, or inside a taxi in case the driver is an informant of the security forces.⁹⁸

Authorities systematically refuse to authorise demonstrations by opposition parties or associations that are not close to the regime. In January 2008, when criticism against the project to amend the Constitution was mounting, the governor of the Littoral province prohibited all public demonstrations in his area. Between 2009 and 2010, workers in the informal sector were repeatedly denied authorisation to march to Yaoundé to express their discontent with the municipal authorities.⁹⁹ In Douala, the SDF was denied authorisation in February 2010 for a memorial ceremony for the victims of the February 2008 events. According to an opposition leader, the regime is increasingly clamping down: "In the 1990s, we could organise meetings. Now it's no longer possible".¹⁰⁰

The regime is quick to resort to physical violence, as demonstrated by the brutal response to the 2008 demonstrations. At the end of that same year, the police also suppressed a peaceful meeting of the members of a large NGO, the Association citoyenne de défense des intérêts collectifs (AcDic), which criticized the embezzlement of state funds in the farming sector at their headquarters in Yaoundé.¹⁰¹ Two people were wounded and ten others arrested. In late November of 2007, two trade unionists in the public service were questioned in Yaoundé after a peaceful demonstration of fewer than 300 workers requesting salary increases. The president of a worker's union explained to Crisis Group that he was regularly questioned and even physically assaulted.¹⁰²

This violence often results in deaths. In April 2005, two students were killed by police in Buea (South-West region) during a national university demonstration. At the end of 2006 there were two additional casualties when police fired on another university demonstration in the same town. A strike by prison guards demanding pay rises in January 2007 turned violent, resulting in the deaths of at

least two prisoners in confrontations between security forces and Yaoundé prison guards. In September 2007, two young people who participated in a demonstration against electricity cuts were also killed in Abong Mbang (East region), and two more for the same reason and under the same circumstances in Kumba (South-West region) a few weeks later. In October 2007, two young motorcycle taxi drivers were killed and a woman was wounded by security forces in Bamenda (North-West region) while protesting against police harassment in front of a police station.

The regime increasingly uses judicial repression, which attracts less criticism from international human rights organisations and the international community. In 2005, the leaders of a student demonstration received suspended sentences for "breach of peace and inciting rebellion".¹⁰³ Following a demonstration against corruption organized at its headquarters at the end of 2008, two ACDIC leaders were given suspended prison sentences for illegal demonstration. During the incidents that shook the country in February 2008, more than 1,500 people were arrested. Some lawyers denounced what they called summary justice and procedural violations. Although Biya granted a reprieve on these sentences, a few months later, the dreadful prison conditions endured by those incarcerated made them very reluctant to participate in further demonstrations.¹⁰⁴

By pressuring civil society and by constantly emphasising ethnic identity, the regime has succeeded in fragmenting and partially demobilising civil society. During the 2005 student strikes, student leaders were approached by politicians of their own ethnicity and asked to withdraw from the movement on the pretext that it served the interests of other ethnic groups to the detriment of their own. In exchange they were offered money or scholarships to study abroad.¹⁰⁵

Despite its efforts to suppress protest, the regime has not succeeded in completely extinguishing Cameroonians' capacity for reaction and resistance, as demonstrated by the 2008 events. The regime's stance, specifically its refusal to engage in discussions, only exacerbates the discontent. By prohibiting demonstrations in Douala in 2008, thus preventing citizens from expressing their frustrations in a democratic fashion, the regime helped encourage a violent reaction. This behaviour on the part of

⁹⁸ Crisis Group heard several people describe this climate of suspicion and the extent of the use of paid informants by security forces, for example, in universities. Crisis Group interviews, sociologist, heads of NGOs and trade unions, Yaoundé, March 2010.

⁹⁹ Crisis Group interview, trade union leader, Yaoundé, March 2010.

¹⁰⁰ Crisis Group interview, elected official from the opposition, Yaoundé, March 2010.

¹⁰¹ According to AcDic, funds are embezzled by the Ministry of Agriculture via shadow bodies created by civil servants and which absorbed 62 per cent of subsidies allocated to corn growers in 2008. These figures were confirmed in a report by the Commission nationale de lutte contre la corruption (Conac), which was however never officially published.

¹⁰² Crisis Group interview, trade unionist, Yaoundé, March 2010.

¹⁰³ Crisis Group interview, former head of the Association de défense des droits des étudiants camerounais (Addec), Yaoundé, March 2010.

¹⁰⁴ Crisis Group interview, demonstrator arrested and jailed for several weeks, Douala, July 2008.

¹⁰⁵ See "*Des étudiants moins faciles à manipuler*", *Syfia*, 29 September 2005. Crisis Group interview, former head of Addec, March 2010.

leaders ultimately feeds discontent, which seems ready to overflow at any moment. Many Cameroonians believe that there is currently no conventional solution to the country's catastrophic governance problems.¹⁰⁶ Since opposition parties are in disarray and voting has been discredited, citizens have only the street left as a venue for expression.¹⁰⁷

V. AVERTING A CRISIS

Many uncertainties weigh on Cameroon in the near future. The fact that Biya refuses to make clear his intentions for the presidential elections; his gradual loss of authority over his party; constitutional uncertainty; and the frustrations of the population and a segment of the ruling class and the army, could all add up to trouble. However, solutions to avert a crisis and achieve a smooth democratic transition do exist, for instance, establishing the missing institutions and ensuring transparency in the electoral process. The international community must support these reforms.

A. POSSIBLE SCENARIOS

Cameroon may face several interconnected crises at the same time. Most observers agree that the country is characterised by great uncertainty, and that the unexpected can happen suddenly. Constitutional uncertainty could be particularly dangerous in the case of President Biya's death or incapacitation. Although such a transition crisis is not inevitable, the possibility is already central to the internal politics of the regime. The amended constitution adopted in 1996 stipulates that the president of the Senate takes over should the president be incapacitated or die in office, a responsibility previously assigned to the president of the National Assembly.¹⁰⁸ However, the Senate has yet to be created. The 1996 text does specify that "the National Assembly has full legislative powers and is entrusted with parliamentary prerogatives until the Senate is in place", but is silent on the role of the president of the Assembly, which could give rise to differing interpretations and therefore challenges.¹⁰⁹

The issue is the same for establishing that the office of the president has become vacant. The Constitutional Council, which has yet to be created, is empowered with that responsibility, and the constitution requires that an election be held within forty days. The time frame stipulated to prepare elections would probably be insufficient to address the various obstacles that will arise, even in a peaceful transition.

¹⁰⁸ The 1972 Constitution stipulated that in the case of an interregnum the president of the National Assembly would serve in the interim. In 1979, an amendment to the Constitution made the prime minister the direct successor, the president of the Parliament being third in line should the head of government be unable assume this role. In 1984 a constitutional amendment abolished the position of prime minister. It is therefore once again the president of the National Assembly who serves in the interim should a vacancy occur.

¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, there is an ongoing debate between Cameroonian lawmakers as to whether the many constitutional alterations since 1972 should be considered changes, revisions or modifications.

¹⁰⁶ See Nsame Mbongo, "Éléments explicatifs d'un soulèvement populaire", Pambazuka News N°46; Crisis Group interviews, Nsame Mbongo, Douala, May 2009.

¹⁰⁷ Crisis Group interview, academic, Douala, May 2009.

Contests could also arise due to the discrepancy between constitutional provisions and the realities of power.¹¹⁰ There is the risk of a crisis if, for example, the constitutional successor, the president of the National Assembly, has no political legitimacy, which is the case for the current president, Djibril Cavayé Yéguié. In 2004, amidst rumours of Biya's death in Switzerland, Cavayé Yéguié failed to return to Yaoundé from his home area in the north. Had the rumour been true, his absence from the capital could have had serious consequences, leaving the door open for a military coup.

It is therefore vital to establish both the Senate and the Constitutional Council, for two different but connected reasons. First, in order to avert the chaos that Biya's death or inability to exercise power could precipitate, the Constitution must reflect political reality. Second, both institutions have an important role to play, assuming they function properly. The Senate traditionally examines national legislation, while the Constitutional Council rules on electoral disputes by virtue of its competence to officially announce electoral results, a potentially crucial role with regard to the risks around the 2011 election. The Constitutional Council is also mandated to establish the president's incapacity in the case of serious illness. Biya's refusal to create these two institutions are due to his wish to maintain the political uncertainty that allows him to use a discretionary power in his own interest, as well as to prevent any political opponent or potential successor from establishing a political base.

The issue of succession and its uncertainties will also have consequences within the CPDM. According to the party's statutes, only the president can convene the political bureau and the central committee, which in turn convene a congress to designate a party president, and, if necessary, a candidate for the presidential elections. If Biya were to die today, the CPDM would find itself paralyzed, especially since the party's texts do not stipulate a procedure for determining succession in such a scenario.¹¹¹

In the run up to the 2011 election, the country will feel the weight of uncertainty surrounding Biya's potential candidacy. The April 2008 amendment to the Constitution and several of his speeches seem to suggest that he has no intention of relinquishing power and that he intends

to run in 2011. The fate of his predecessor, Ahmadou Ahidjo,¹¹² who chose Biya as his successor, probably does not encourage him to retire. However, other signs indicate that he is thinking of life after power: one of the constitutional amendments adopted in 2008 (Article 53) stipulates that "the acts committed by the President of the Republic in pursuance of Articles 5, 8, 9 and 10 above shall be covered by immunity and he shall not be accountable for them after the exercise of his functions". As so often, the president, who sees himself as someone "who deals in ambiguities", is trying to keep people guessing as to his intentions.

A Biya candidacy in 2011 would probably be a source of acute tension, considering his unpopularity with Cameroonians, as well as with some members of the CPDM. If he were to retire before or even after the elections by handing over power to a designated successor,¹¹³ as certain national and international players believe will happen, his appointee will surely be contested from within the party, whose main leaders seem unable to work together. Trapped by the divisions he has himself created, unable to trust even those close to him and fearful of his or his family's possible prosecution were he to relinquish power, Biya will probably seek to remain in office indefinitely, even if he would, in theory, prefer a managed transition, as was the case in 1982.

Although few Cameroonians actually invest any hope in democratic change, organising the 2011 presidential elections represents a major risk of conflict. Everything must therefore be done to avoid the results of the poll being contested. However, the electoral process has already been highly problematic.

The new electoral body, Elecam, theoretically independent, should have advanced the interests of transparency. But instead it has been mired in problems and controversy. The SDF abstained in the vote which set it up, in protest at the provision that the president appoints its twelve board members. The appointment of pro-regime members at the end of 2008, which went against the provision that politically neutral people should have been chosen, was criticised by the opposition, civil society and international financial backers. In 2010, the amendment of the law on Elecam, which again gave the administration a role in the organisation of elections, also proved

¹¹⁰ Crisis Group interview, academic, Yaoundé, March 2010. The Cameroonian Constitution, modeled on that of the French Fifth Republic, has never represented the reality of power in the country. See Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, *L'Etat du Cameroun 2008* (Yaoundé, 2009), Chapter I.2: "Simply an instrument for domination", the Cameroonian Constitution "seems tailored to the president's exclusive or predominant needs. He modifies, amends and manipulates it for his sole advantage".

¹¹¹ Crisis Group interview, member of the CPDM, May 2010.

¹¹² Accused of an attempted coup, President Ahidjo was sentenced to death in absentia in August 1983, ten months after voluntarily relinquishing power. He died in exile in Senegal, where he was buried, in 1989. Although he was pardoned in 1991, the authorities have always blocked the return of his remains.

¹¹³ By creating the Senate, for example, and placing his successor there. The president of the Republic must directly appoint 30 per cent of the members of this institution.

controversial.¹¹⁴ Since then, the SDF is demanding that Elecam be dissolved, as its procedures seem unclear and have not been harmonised with the electoral code, which still refers to the Observatoire national des élections (Onel).¹¹⁵

There is also uncertainty regarding the electoral timetable, generating further complications. At the end of 2009, some CPDM members launched an intense media campaign asking that the presidential election be organized as early as 2010.¹¹⁶ Even though this now seems very improbable, uncertainties remain. Elections have been brought forward several times in the past: in 1992, Biya, who likes taking people by surprise, advanced the date of the presidential election, after a similar media campaign by his party.

Biya's insistence on remaining in power, the regime's efforts to control the electoral process - reinforced by the conservative stance of the international community, which seems to have given up on a democratic transition¹¹⁷ - and the regime's open disregard for the law and for its own citizens all make a violent scenario possible in the short or medium term. Such violence may come from the street, from members of the regime, from the army or from all three at once.

¹¹⁴ While the previous text stipulated that public authorities could lend their support to Elecam upon its request, the new text removes the electoral body's leeway by stating that "public authorities collaborate with and support" the electoral body. The new text removes the requirement to consult with civil society; it stipulates that Elecam "organizes consultations with the administration, justice, political parties and *possibly* civil society in managing the electoral process". Under the former text it organized "consultations with the administration, justice, political parties and civil society".

¹¹⁵ Prior to Elecam's creation, the government managed the electoral process and operational supervision was entrusted to the Observatoire national des élections (Onel), whose members had, since 2001, all been appointed by the president.

¹¹⁶ See "Au Cameroun, le président Biya et son parti déjà en campagne électorale", Agence France-Presse, November 25, 2009.

¹¹⁷ Crisis Group interviews, diplomats, Yaoundé, March 2010. Many members of the international community in Yaoundé therefore support the idea that Biya must "choose a successor". Some even claim that Cameroon is not made for or "not yet ready" for democracy, thus ignoring the 1992 presidential elections that were won by Biya in the official tally, but were actually won by the SDF candidate John Fru Ndi, as acknowledged by certain members of the CPDM. A member of the international community told Crisis Group: "We don't see how the president (Biya) could lose the election. We must simply ensure that things are done according to normal procedures". Western diplomats even go as far as claiming "Cameroonians are not yet ready to have a Bamilike president" thereby espousing the regime's conservative, divisive and tribalist rationale.

The street. Given the extent of popular anger, had the discontent of the February 2008 riots been politically channelled the regime may well have been threatened. Many Cameroonians believe that the electoral process cannot be relied upon and that only violence will bring about change. The street can therefore quickly be mobilised, even without a clear rallying cry. With the manipulation of ethnic identity, any eventual social disorder could well be used by unscrupulous politicians to set communities against each other. Such divisions could easily align with the usual fractures ingrained in Cameroonian society. Many members of the Anglophone minority, who deeply resent what they see as unequal treatment by the authorities, could be tempted to intensify militant action, including the use of violence.¹¹⁸

The regime's barons. The frustration of some CPDM elites with elders who do not want to relinquish their position and, conversely, fear of losing their own privileges or being subject to reprisals, could drive them to violence in order to maintain control, prior to or during a transition. Some could, for example, influence relatives or business colleagues in the military. Those who received heavy sentences (including life) in the Epervier operation, but whose networks are still partially active, along with anyone who feels threatened by the anti-corruption drive, could also be tempted to organise a coup. Money could play a major role, as some observers believe that the wealth accumulated by some dignitaries could allow them to "finance a war".¹¹⁹ Porous borders and arms trafficking between Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad could facilitate such a scenario.

The army. If there is political uncertainty, a Guinea-type scenario, where a group of officers seized power, possibly manipulated by politicians, cannot be ruled out. It is unlikely that such a scenario would unfold peacefully. In 1984, the army had only one general and was relatively well structured. Now, with 21 generals, an uncertain command structure and internal fractures, its solidity is far from guaranteed. General Semengué still has the troops' affection but at the age of 75 it is not sure that he can control the army. Although the Cameroonian armed forces are still far from the deteriorated state of some others in Africa, the population's exasperation could provide an officer the opportunity to appear as the one who could "sweep the house clean", as happened in Guinea.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ For additional details on the Anglophone minority, see Crisis Group Africa Report, *Cameroon: Fragile State?*, op. cit., pp. 21-23.

¹¹⁹ Crisis Group interviews, academics, members of the CPDM, Yaoundé, March 2010.

¹²⁰ Cameroonians were very enthusiastic about Captain Dadis Camara, at least until the violent 28 September 2009 events in Conakry. In a Crisis Group interview (Douala, May 2009), a

The frustration and sense of injustice felt by certain officers and soldiers in Bakassi coupled with the enrichment of some generals aggravate these risks.

If Biya remains in power, which seems to be his intention, everything revolves around what will happen the day he dies, whether in the near or distant future. Such a scenario has already occurred in neighbouring Gabon in 2009, Côte d'Ivoire in 1993 and Guinea in 2009, with a different outcome in each case, related to how well the country is prepared for a transition process and the level of compliance with the Constitution.¹²¹ How the CPDM is structured when the president dies or is incapacitated is vital - much will depend on the climate within the party, the individual ambitions of its members, the power struggle between the so-called progressive camp and the faction of elders, as well as relations with the army.

B. ACTIONS TO AVOID A CRISIS IN 2011

Potential conflict in Cameroon is related to its mode of governance - clientelist, centralized, weakly democratic - which shows no sign of improvement. As in any transition, initiating a true democratic process involves risk, but no more than maintaining the status quo. The task facing national and international actors to put the country on a better track will take time, and will be resisted by the regime, which knows very well how to control the reform process through manipulation and distortion.¹²² It is also

youth leader who participated in the February 2008 events expressed great admiration for him.

¹²¹ A key difference between Gabon and Cameroon is that Biya does not have any children who could potentially take over. His eldest son Frank is a businessman without political ambitions. He also lacks a known successor within his ethnic group, as was the case in Côte d'Ivoire when Bédié succeeded Houphouët-Boigny in 1994.

¹²² Fighting corruption was one of the major conditions the international community placed upon the Cameroonian government in order to reach the completion point of the HIPC initiative, which failed a first time in 2004 due to poor management of public resources. To persuade the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to reconsider its decision, the government approved the national governance programme in 2005, which prioritised the fight against corruption. It has also created the Commission nationale de lutte contre la corruption (Conac), the Agence d'investigation financière (Anif), adopted the bill on the declaration of leaders' assets in application of Article 66 of the Constitution and launched the Epervier anti-corruption operation. These commitments helped the country reach its completion point in April 2006. But once achieved, the government slackened its efforts. Directly dependent on the presidency, Conac has proved as inefficient as Anif, which is under the tutelage of the Ministry of Finance. The provisions of article 66 have not been applied. The Epervier operation was, to all appearances, later used for political ends. See Appendix D.

important to note that beyond the restricted circle of power, many Cameroonians are afraid of change since they do not know what to expect and would be compelled to change how they do business were the system of redistribution of resources to undergo significant modification. Many citizens, and some of the country's supportive international partners, who participate in corruption, will consider true reform a threat.

As long as Cameroon maintains the appearance of stability, it is unlikely that its principal international partners will sanction or isolate the regime, both for commercial reasons and because international aid donors do not wish to disrupt flows of aid funds.¹²³ Concerned about protecting its economic interests, the international community has until now shown extreme indulgence with Cameroon. The international community is trapped in a game of cat and mouse: pressures for reform bring superficial change, but once international attention shifts, the regime empties the reforms of their substance, or uses them to its advantage. International pressure against corruption illustrates the point. The international community acts at the technical level (help with setting up institutions), while the embezzlement of state resources in the higher spheres of government, such as those of the SNH, is never mentioned.

Despite the currently very weak political will on the part of the regime to fight corruption, the international community continues to fund an anti-corruption programme, "Changer d'habitudes, Opposer la Corruption" (Choc) and also contributes financially and technically to the establishment of Elecam, even though Elecam has not fulfilled the conditions initially laid down. The European Union (EU) also funds companies that flout trade union laws, are recognized as being involved in corruption and are known to have ties to the regime.¹²⁴ While Cameroon is not significantly dependent on foreign aid (5 per cent of the gross domestic product¹²⁵), the contributions of international donors are in fact substantial, as gross embezzlement reduces the amount of public funds actually available. By continuing aid, the international community in part lends its support to the regime.

France's highly scrutinized position as the former colonial power and its substantial economic presence in Cameroon are a concern.¹²⁶ France is criticised by many Cameroo-

¹²³ An increasing number of multinationals hold interests in the fast developing mining, oil and gas sectors.

¹²⁴ Crisis Group interviews, head of NGO, Yaoundé, March 2010. See also "Coup de torchon à la bananeraie", *Le Monde*, 10 June 2008; and "Au Cameroun, une exploitation de bananes au goût amer", *Libération*, 18 May 2009.

¹²⁵ Crisis Group interviews, diplomats, Yaoundé, March 2010.

¹²⁶ Around 140 subsidiaries of French companies (oil, wood, cement, telecommunications, logistics, agribusiness) operate in

nians for supporting the Biya regime¹²⁷ and by other members of the international community who believe France keeps the country “under its thumb” to the detriment of democracy and the Cameroonian economy.¹²⁸ The close-knit economic and political ties between France and Cameroon are reminiscent of those between Abidjan and Paris prior to the Ivorian conflict at the beginning of the last decade.

This indicates that acute anti-French sentiment in Cameroon could degenerate into a crisis, as in Ivory Coast in 2004.¹²⁹ During the events of February 2008, gas stations of the French oil company Total, booths of the company offering bets on French horse races (the *Pari mutuel urbain du Cameroun*, PMUC) and outlets of the French telecommunications operator Orange were specifically targeted by rioters in Douala. Some hurled threats against Europeans, specifically the French.¹³⁰

Even if national and foreign interest groups believe that a disruption of the status quo would be detrimental to them, the current situation requires major reforms if chaos is to be avoided, a chaos that would negatively impact everyone concerned. The authority’s “stability” threat (“nothing must change or the country will explode”), echoed by

some members of the international community, cannot be sustained much longer.¹³¹

In the short-term, to avert a crisis in the case of the president’s incapacity or death, the constitution must be complied with and the Senate and the Constitutional Council quickly created. In the medium term, discussions on the constitution must be initiated with the opposition and civil society to adapt it to the realities of Cameroon. It is essential to ensure that the 2011 presidential elections are transparent. Therefore, the Cameroonian authorities must reassess Elecram, along with the electoral code, in order to ensure that the whole process is legal and that Elecram is independent of the executive branch. Authorities must work to establish more inclusive and reliable electoral lists.

On the level of governance, the authorities must set up an anti-corruption commission independent of the executive branch and must reassess the Epervier operation, which has been ineffective in reducing corruption.¹³² They must also take care to remain within the legal framework, ensuring that the criteria for selecting investigations and legal proceedings are transparent and their functioning comprehensible to the populace. Cameroon’s partner countries which are party to the Anti-Bribery Convention of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), or participate in efforts to fight money laundering within the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), must apply these agreements and ensure that the funds they contribute are not embezzled.

Cameroon’s international partners, such as the European Union or the World Bank, must lend their expertise to help Cameroon trace state funds that are embezzled and invested abroad and to recover these funds whenever possible. Since they partially finance its implementation, they must also exert pressure to modify Elecram. Since the regime is very sensitive about its image abroad, international partners must apply leverage, and end their silence over the authorities’ evident reprehensible actions. They should begin considering now whether to send an international observation mission for the presidential elections. The international community must consult in view of maintaining common positions and joint reactions during the presidential elections and in case of a crisis situation.

Cameroon, making France one of the country’s main foreign investors. France is also Cameroon’s main military partner. See www.diplomatie.gouv.fr.

¹²⁷ In 2004, French President Jacques Chirac congratulated Biya on his re-election when the official results of the presidential vote had not yet been made public. Biya also routinely uses French advisors, usually for public relations. The former French ambassador to Cameroon between 1984 and 1993, Yvon Omnès, became one of the president’s advisors, while holding interest in a banana company in Cameroon backed by French capital. French industrialists have established many close ties with Cameroonian politicians. Robert Fabre, president of a Marseille-based fruit company with a subsidiary in Cameroon, attended the inauguration of Biya’s private pineapple plantations in 2000, for example. In 2008, a group of French industrialists lent financial support to first lady Chantal Biya’s anti-AIDS foundation. See “*Michel Roussin à l’immeuble Etoile*”, *Cameroon Tribune*, 20 February 2008.

¹²⁸ Its partners condemned France for attempting to prevent a joint European Union declaration in early 2009 critical of the appointment of Elecram members. The statement project ultimately passed in Brussels. Crisis Group interview, diplomats, Yaoundé, May 2009.

¹²⁹ Several thousand westerners, the majority being French, left Côte d’Ivoire after several days of anti-French demonstrations and looting directed against French interests. See Crisis Group Africa Report N°90, *Côte d’Ivoire: The Worst May Be Yet to Come*, 24 March 2005.

¹³⁰ Observations of a Crisis Group researcher.

¹³¹ Several of Crisis Group’s contacts among the international community in Yaoundé repeated the argument that true political reform in Cameroon would be dangerous or not suited to the country.

¹³² “One day a minister is arrested but people in his ministry continue as before”. Crisis Group interview, member of the international community, Yaoundé, March 2010.

France and the United States, which lend Cameroon financial aid and have capacity strengthening programmes in the security sector, must ensure that criminal and violent acts on the part of the security forces are acknowledged and sanctioned by the authorities.¹³³ The French initiative to train gendarmes in crowd control techniques is important. However, violence perpetrated by the security forces has a political dimension and the authorities have never established responsibility for the violence in February 2008. International partners must therefore exert diplomatic pressure to compel authorities to accept the legitimacy of popular demonstrations and recognize acts of brutality perpetrated by security forces acting on their behalf. Everything must be done in 2011 to avoid a repeat of the chaotic and disproportionate repression against the February 2008 demonstrations.

VI. CONCLUSION

With the 2011 elections approaching and tensions rising over the president's succession, Cameroon's ambition to remain an island of stability in the region will not endure for long. In the initial phase, it is imperative that both Cameroonian leaders and international players ensure that the 2011 vote occurs in a peaceful environment. The best way to guarantee this is to make certain that elections are free and equitable, limit the administration's backing of the ruling party and keep security forces neutral.

In the long term, the role of national authorities and the international community is to implement true reforms that would allow Cameroonians to see their role in public life as more than just receiving the piecemeal handouts of a corrupt system. These reforms will inevitably generate multiple reactions, and may be risky. However, choosing to maintain the status quo ultimately carries far greater risks.

Dakar/Brussels, 24 June 2010

¹³³ Via the history that binds the two countries, France is often considered Cameroon's main partner, influencing other countries, particularly those within the European Union, to follow France's political lead. The United States is also an essential partner for Cameroon, specifically in the security sector, having agreed on a protocol to train soldiers for participation in peace-keeping operations under the Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance Program (ACOTA). The first of eight projected battalions was trained in N'Gaoundéré in late 2008. The U.S. also provided other assistance, such as airport security, with training and equipment. Economically, the U.S. is the largest investor in Cameroon, especially in the mining and oil sectors and in its electric company, AES-Sonel. See reports by the Economist Intelligence Unit; and Crisis Group interviews, international financial backers, Yaoundé, March 2010.

APPENDIX A

MAP OF CAMEROON



APPENDIX B

ACRONYMS

ACDIC	Association citoyenne de défense des intérêts collectifs. A large association for consumer rights.
ADDEC	Association pour la défense des droits des étudiants du Cameroun.
ALCEC	Association de lutte contre l'émigration clandestine.
BIL	Bataillon léger d'intervention. Predecessor of the BIR.
BIR	Bataillon d'intervention rapide. Elite anti-banditry squad created in 2001.
ANIF	Agence d'investigation financière. National body in charge of investigating financial crimes.
CHOC	"Changer les habitudes, opposer la corruption" Programme.
CNC	Conseil national de la communication.
CONAC	Commission nationale de lutte contre la corruption.
CPDM	Cameroon People's Democratic Movement. The ruling party, its name was changed from CNU in 1985.
CPTMO	Centre de perfectionnement aux techniques de maintien de l'ordre.
CSID	Cours supérieur interarmées de défense.
EEM	École d'état-major.
Elecam	Elections Cameroon. An organisation created in 2006 for organising and supervising elections.
EMIA	École militaire interarmées.
"G11"	"Génération 2011". Name given to an ostensible group within the CPDM, preparing to seize power.
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries [Initiative].
IMF	International Monetary Fund.
INS	Institut national de la statistique.
ONEL	Observatoire national des élections.
PG	Presidential Guard.
SDF	Social Democratic Front. The strongest opposition party, created by John Fru Ndi in 1990.
SNH	Société nationale des hydrocarbures.
SONARA	Société nationale de raffinage.
UPC	Union des Populations du Cameroun. The liberation movement of the 1950s, crushed in the 1960s, and now a vehicle for minor opportunistic politicians.

APPENDIX C

TIMELINE OF THE FEBRUARY 2008 EVENTS

Monday, 31 December 2007: in his year-end speech, President Paul Biya announces an upcoming modification of the Constitution. According to Biya, Article 6-2 of the fundamental law, which stipulates that “the president of the Republic is elected for a seven-year term, renewable once”, poses “a limitation to popular will that is incompatible with the very notion of democratic choice”.

Thursday, 17 January 2008: the governor of the Littoral province, which includes the economic capital of Douala, prohibits “public meetings and demonstrations” until further notice when opposition parties and civil organisations announce they will demonstrate in protest of the proposed modification of the Constitution.

Wednesday, 13 February 2008: in Douala the police suppress a march against the constitutional amendment organised after the main opposition leader, John Fru Ndi, of the SDF, holds a press conference.

Saturday, 16 February 2008: an attempt to demonstrate against the modification project on the part of Mboua Massok, one of the initiators of the “ghost town” operation in the early 1990s, degenerates into confrontations between youths and the security forces in Douala.

Thursday, 21 February 2008: a private television station, Equinoxe TV, in Douala, is shutdown by the state for “illegal exercise of the profession of audiovisual communications broadcasting”. This measure is seen as proof of the authority’s intention to suppress any opposition to their project to modify the constitution.

Saturday, 23 February 2008: two people are killed by the police in violent clashes with the youths of the Madagascar neighbourhood in Douala following the cancellation of an SDF meeting because of a strong police presence. According to journalists who witnessed these events, the security forces turned hoses and tear gas on the neighbourhood, although there were no activists gathered there.

Monday, 25 February 2008: marks the beginning of a transporter’s strike in protest of an increase in fuel prices. While in Yaoundé only taxis are affected, no vehicles, public or private, operate in Douala. Violence flares at 9 A.M. in several neighbourhoods in Douala, with the intervention of small groups of very mobile rioters. Shops immediately close. Demonstrators erect barricades in several neighbourhoods around the city, in protest the high cost of living, the shutting-down of Equinox TV and the project to modify the Constitution, and demand that Biya step down. Late morning, the media reports that security forces have killed at least two people in Douala. State radio later announces that several administrative buildings in Douala’s fifth arrondissement, including city hall have been destroyed. Incidents also occur in cities in the west, southwest and northwest, where the transporters’ strike had spread.

Tuesday, 26 February 2008: clashes between the security forces and demonstrators continue in several cities, particularly Douala. In the evening, the transporters’ union obtains a decrease in fuel prices and announces the end of the strike.

Wednesday, 27 February 2008: the atmosphere remains chaotic. In Douala, gunfire is heard in several neighbourhoods. On the bridge across the Wouri River, the police use water cannons and tear gas to disperse protesters. According to witnesses, some protesters fall in the water. On a private television station, a local elected official from the ruling party states that eight people are dead in Njombé and Loum, two cities north of Douala. The violence reaches Yaoundé, where businesses are closed, while groups of young people block gas stations and roads. According to the Agence France-Presse, at least seventeen people have died since the start of the unrest. In the evening, President Biya declares in a speech on television and radio that the purpose of the violence was to overthrow him and accuses “sorcerers’ apprentices” of “manipulating” demonstrators.

Thursday, 28 February 2008: the army is deployed in Yaoundé. While traffic gradually resumes in the capital, the streets of Douala are deserted and shops remain closed. The security forces now shoot into the air to disperse any gatherings of young people.

Friday, 29 February 2008: businesses reopen and traffic resumes in Douala. The security forces remain a visible presence in Yaoundé and Douala until April.

Wednesday, 5 March 2008: the Maison des droits de l’Homme, an NGO, reports that security forces have killed more than 100 people in the events of late February.

Friday, 7 March 2008: the government announces the suspension of customs duties on several essential commodities and a 15 per cent increase in the salaries of civil servants.

Monday, 10 March 2008: after an initial body count of 24, the authorities announce that 40 people were killed and over 1,500 people arrested in the violence.

Thursday, 10 April 2008: the Assembly adopts the Constitutional amendment. Fifteen SDF parliamentarians leave the room when the vote is cast in protest at a “constitutional coup”.

APPENDIX D

“THE EPERVIER OPERATION”

The Epervier operation was launched at the end of 2004 under pressure from international financial backers. The authorities sought to demonstrate to these institutions their willingness to progress in terms of governance, a condition set for reaching the completion point of the HIPC initiative. Cameroon had failed a first attempt earlier in 2004 due to poor management of its state finances.

A first wave of arrests occurred in early 2006: three former heads of state-owned companies, Gilles-Roger Belinga of the Société immobilière du Cameroun (Sic), Emmanuel Edou of the Crédit foncier du Cameroun (CFC) and Emmanuel Gérard Ondo Ndong of the Fonds camerounais d'équipement inter-communal (Féicom), and some accomplices were arrested, including two parliamentarians from the ruling party. All were charged with corruption and embezzlement of state funds. The minister of Energy, Alphonse Siyam Siwé, who had been abruptly dismissed a few days earlier, was also jailed.

After lengthy trials, they were given heavy sentences: Siyam Siwé was sentenced to life imprisonment on appeal for embezzling €53 million with twelve accomplices when he was head of the port of Douala. Ondo Ndong was sentenced to twenty years in prison and ordered to pay, along with his accomplices, 26 billion CFA Francs (€39.6 million) in damages to Féicom. He was found guilty of embezzlement via shadow missions and substantial discretionary bonuses, the use of Féicom funds for personal purposes and payment of “contributions” to charities, including the Fondation de lutte contre le sida (AIDS) created by first lady Chantal Biya.

The second wave of arrests took place in 2008, all of the arrested had previously been dismissed from government positions in the September 2007 reshuffle: Polycarpe Abah Abah (Finance Minister and former Director General of Taxes), Jean-Marie Atangana Mebara (Minister of Foreign Affairs and former Secretary General of the Presidency) and Urbain Olanguena Awono (Minister of Health) were all charged with embezzling state funds. Abah Abah was accused along with accomplices of embezzling 4.9 billion CFA Francs (€7.4 million) collected by the tax directorate for the CFC. Mebara Atangana is suspected of having embezzled funds for the 2003 purchase of the Albatross presidential plane. Olanguena Awono along with six others was charged with embezzling over 750 millions CFA francs (€1.1 million) from AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis programmes. The trials of Abah Abah and Olanguena Awono began at the beginning of 2010.

Each wave of arrests was highly dramatized and received intense media coverage. In May 2008, the Director General of the Chantier naval et industriel du Cameroun, Zacchaeus Mungwe Forjindam, accused of embezzling €1.47 million, was arrested in front of television cameras upon leaving a special board meeting during which he had been dismissed. Olanguena Awono was filmed in his prison cell at the judicial police, though he had not yet been formally charged.

In early 2010 a third wave of arrests culminated in the incarceration of the former Minister of primary Education, Haman Adama the former Minister of the Budget, Henri Engoulou the former Minister of Secondary Education, Catherine Abena and nearly 30 others.

In total, by May 2010 the Epervier operation had led to the incarceration of at least 100 people, including nine former ministers, seven former heads of state-owned companies, one former ambassador and a former member of Parliament. A former finance minister and former CPDM parliamentarian, André Booto à Ngon, serving a 40 year sentence for embezzlement from the CFC, passed away in February 2009 while in detention.

APPENDIX E

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Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a twelve-page monthly bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in all the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on the website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

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Crisis Group's international headquarters are in Brussels, with major advocacy offices in Washington DC (where it is based as a legal entity) and New York, a smaller one in London and liaison presences in Moscow and Beijing. The organisation currently operates nine regional offices (in Bishkek, Bogotá, Dakar, Islamabad, Istanbul, Jakarta, Nairobi, Pristina and Tbilisi) and has local field representation in fourteen additional locations (Baku, Bangkok, Beirut, Bujumbura, Damascus, Dili, Jerusalem, Kabul, Kathmandu, Kinshasa, Port-au-Prince, Pretoria, Sarajevo and Seoul). Crisis Group currently covers some 60 areas of actual or potential conflict across four continents. In Africa, this includes Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe; in Asia, Afghanistan, Bangladesh,

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