

## Is Nigeria Ripe for Break Up?

### The Mitigating Importance of Cameroon and France in the Survival of Nigeria's Territorial Integrity

Tindo Narcisse Saturnin Kaze<sup>1</sup>, Michael Ndobegang Mbapndah<sup>2</sup>

#### Abstract:

The major challenges which threaten the territorial integrity of Nigeria, black Africa's political and economic giant are very unsettling but appear insufficient to predict the country's imminent balkanization. Mindful of the threat from inside Cameroon and the vested role of France, there seems to be an uneasy reprieve that could make Nigeria the sick man of the West Central African region in the near future. This paper analyses how Nigeria's successful manipulation of her relations with Cameroon and France may help forestall the country's breakup. It argues that the support and friendship of other countries may not cure Nigeria's woes but plunge it into prolonged instability. The emergence of armed separatist movements known as "Ambazonia" in the northwest and southwest regions of Cameroon some of whom seeking alliances with their Nigerian as a result of their ideological and geographical proximity has potential fateful consequences. On the other hand, French economic and strategic interests which expose the marginalization decried by Nigerian secessionist groups sustain the disintegration agenda. How does Nigeria react in the face of outreach initiatives by Cameroonian separatist movements? How does Nigeria exploit France's privileged relationship with Cameroon to save itself from disintegration? This contribution concludes that Nigeria's relationship with other countries may not solve its problems but transform the country into a long-term theatre of instability.

#### Keywords:

Balkanization, separatist movements, Ambazonia, Biafra, Nigeria, Cameroon, France.

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<sup>1</sup> Assistant research fellow at University of Yaounde I, Cameroon;  
ORCID: 0000-0003-3456-6830; kazenarcisse@gmail.com.

<sup>2</sup> Associate professor of history at University of Yaoundé I, Cameroon; ndobs2002@yahoo.com.

## *Introduction*

Secessionist movements are a major threat to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the post-independent state in Africa. From a historical perspective, secessionist movements in Africa can be identified as originating from three perceptible periods. There are cases of secessionist movements created by or during colonial rule, post-colonial secessionist movements, and thirdly the case for retrieving self-determination (Bereketeab, 2012). For the purposes of this paper, our reflection is based on the second, which is the post-independent secessionist movement. In the case of Nigeria, such movements are fundamentally identity-based with the desire to achieve full self-determination on the grounds of differential identity.

During the first decade following its accession to independence, the Federal Republic of Nigeria was confronted with a secessionist movement that cropped up in the south-east of the country. In 1967, the Ibo people declared secession from the Federal Republic of Nigeria and proclaimed their independence by creating the Republic of Biafra. The immediate reaction was a deadly war opposing the Federal government and the armed branch of the Biafra Republic. The war which lasted from 1967 to 1970 ended with the defeat of the Biafra. Of the estimated one to three million Biafrans that lost their lives, only 10 percent died in military action and the rest as a result of famine (Norman and Ueda, 2017).

Today, separatist and or secessionist movements are spotted in all corners of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. In south-eastern Nigeria, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), which aims to establish an independent state of Biafra to the south-eastern part of Nigeria finds in its trail an increasing call by the Yorubas for the creation of a breakaway state known as the Oduduwa Republic. To south-south Nigeria are the Ijaws located precisely in the Niger Delta. The Ijaw complain that most of the oil wealth extracted from their land goes elsewhere, while oil production has severely damaged the Delta environment and destroyed traditional livelihoods based on fishing and agriculture. As such, a movement known as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) has been very active in its bid to defend the rights of the Ijaws.

The MEND carries out attacks on oil infrastructure, but it is more criminal than separatist. However, research studies have revealed that any balkanization of Nigeria would likely see an upsurge in Ijaw separatism. In the north, there are intermittent demands for the Arewa Republic, while some talk of the "north" as if it was a country within a country. Other groups are also emerging in the news including but seemingly not limited to the Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDPVE), O'odua Peoples' Congress (OPC), Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM), Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), Oduduwa and Niger Delta Republics, Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) under the leadership of Nnamdi Kanu (see annex) (Musah, 2021). In fact, this already murky situation is further complicated in north-eastern Nigeria by the Boko Haram terrorist group that seeks to create a caliphate covering northeast Nigeria, that would include the Far North region of Cameroon, part of Niger, and Chad.



Specialists in Nigerian politics have attributed the causes of the emergence and proliferation of secessionist movement in the country to structural and institutional challenges such as ethnic marginalization, bad governance, poverty, and excessive centralization of political power, ethnic-religious rivalries, insecurity, and the violation of human rights. Yet, Nigeria has still managed to conserve its authority and territorial integrity in all parts of the country. If internal structural and institutional challenges have not succeeded in breaking up Nigeria, could the break-up be stirred by external factors?

Against this background, this paper examines the question of Nigeria's relations with Cameroon and France, and how the nature of this relation could mitigate or exacerbate the rapid balkanization of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It is argued here that Nigeria's successful manipulation of her relations with Cameroon and France may help forestall the country's breakup. The paper suggests that the support and friendship of other countries may not cure Nigeria's woes but plunge it into prolonged instability. The growth of "Ambazonian" separatist movements in neighbouring Cameroon who find refuge in Nigeria and seek collaboration with like-minded groups has fateful consequences. French economic and strategic interests which expose the marginalization decried by Nigerian secessionist groups sustain the disintegration agenda. In light of this, the paper concludes that Nigeria's relationship with other countries may not solve its problems but transform the country into a long-term theatre of instability.

This article is divided into six parts. The first presents the background to the study; the second presents the conceptualization of secessionist agitations in Nigeria. A third section addresses the Franco-Nigerian relations nexus in the possible break-up of Nigeria. Section four examines Cameroon-Nigeria relations and their effects on the separatist movement in Nigeria. The last section presents the conclusion to the reflection.

## ***1. Socio-Political Overview of Nigeria***

The Federal Republic of Nigeria is the most populated country and without much doubt the largest and arguably the strongest economy in sub-Saharan Africa. As of 2020, the country's population was estimated at more than 200 million inhabitants which is equivalent to 2.64% of the world population (Worldometer, 2022). In terms of total GDP, in Africa (World Bank, 2021), Nigeria ranks second after Egypt with a total of \$1.14 trillion in 2021 (World Bank, 2021). Nigeria is a lower-middle-income, mixed economy focused upon petroleum and (to a lesser extent) agriculture. It is also an emerging market with growing financial, service, communications, and technology sectors (AFDB, 2021).

Unlike other African countries, Nigeria is one of the most ethnically and religiously diversified countries in Africa with more than 250 ethnic groups, more than 500 languages with English being the official language. The most populous and politically influential being Hausa-Fulani 29%, Yoruba 21%, Igbo (Ibo) 18%, Ijaw 10%, Kanuri 4%, Ibibio 3.5%, Tiv 2.5%

(USCIRF, 2016). As for religious diversity, the majority of Nigerians are (mostly Sunni) Muslims or (mostly Protestant) Christians, with estimates not very agreed about which religion is larger. There are a significant number of adherents of other religions, including indigenous animistic religions. Summarily, Nigeria can ethnically and religiously be broken down between the predominantly Hausa-Fulani and Kunari, in the Muslim northern states, the largely Igbo, and Christian south-eastern states, the predominantly Yoruba, and religiously mixed, central and south-western states, and the predominantly Ogoni and Ijaw, and Christian, Niger Delta region (Mustapha, 2005). This ethnic and religious diversity makes Nigeria a country that is potentially conflict-infested and secession-prone if inclusive and equitable development policies are not implemented by the central government.

African states are by their very nature multi-ethnic communities that were grouped by colonial rule. Before the grouping of communities to constitute what is known as today's modern state, (understand also what is known as a nation-state), pre-colonial sovereign communities known as chiefdoms, kingdoms, empires, and other variants existed under the authority of political authorities such as kings, and chiefs. These political authorities made laws, rules, and decisions, and enforced such within their communities (Nkwi, 1985). Cordial diplomatic relations existed among communities as is the case among nation-states today. Conflict and rivalry also existed among nations. The advent of colonial rule witnessed the merging of numerous sovereign communities under the canopy of colonies and eventually new nation-states at independence. The inter-community relations which understandably could be conflict-prone could only get worse because of the negative effects of colonial rule in what was emerging as the nation-state in the new Federal Republic of Nigeria. This situation did not characterize Nigeria alone, in fact many African new nations witness such at the dawn of independence.

According to Abdul Raufu Mustapha (2005), post-independent Nigeria today is characterized by a highly intense inter-ethnic division. Out of the more than 250 ethnic groups found in Nigeria, numerically – and politically – major ethnic groups are the composite Hausa-Fulani of the north, the Yoruba of the southwest, and the Igbo of the southeast. These three 'hegemonic' ethnic groups are popularly referred to by the generic term "wazobia" (Mustapha, 2005). Ethnic competition and claims for political, economic, and social privileges have generally been manifested by the Wazobia. The negotiation of alliances with less numerically strong ethnic groups and the instrumentalization of secessionist threats constitute some of the main strategies used by Wazobia to consolidate their ethnic rivalry. Inter-ethnic tensions have gradually been ideologized giving the impression among communities that their own culture is not respected within the post-colonial dispensations or is dominated by others (Keller, 2007).

The main cause of tense inter-ethnic rivalry in Nigeria has been attributed to the confiscation and privatization of political positions, nepotism, and unbalance development, corruption engineered and fuelled by the neo-patrimonial elite. The outcome has been the



emergence and proliferation of community-centred identity groups claiming to fight for the interest of their communities. In such situations, threats of secession are generally used as political instruments to obtain favours from the government or ruling authorities. In situations where the government has not responded to the demands of the community, violent armed groups have emerged as is the case in Nigeria today.

## **2. Conceptualizing Secessionism in Nigeria**

At the creation of the Organization of Africa Unity (OAU) in 1963, most African states that had obtained their independence before and after 1960, proclaimed the sacrosanct nature of territorial boundaries inherited from colonial rule. The territorial integrity of African states was consecrated and enshrined in Article III, Paragraph 3 of the OAU charter (Amate, 1986). This principle was affirmed in a resolution of the OAU heads of state at the 1964 summit in Cairo. The principle of *uti possidetis juris* was invoked, reaffirming the inviolability of colonial boundaries. This affirmation was seen as a guaranteed hedge against the potential emergence of self-determination and secession. What African leaders did not fully appreciate, or master was the fact that the law in itself was not sufficient to stop self-determination and secessionist tendencies in Africa.

A multi-ethnic state characterized by corruption, nepotism, inequalities, and marginalization will certainly see the cropping of ethnic identity groups and claims for self-determination and even separation from the state. That is why just after four years after the Cairo summit of 1964, the Federal Republic was rocked by a secessionist war that lasted nearly four years with the central government finally gaining the upper hand and maintaining the country's territorial integrity. That notwithstanding, and ever since then, Nigeria has been confronted with secessionist agitations in nearly all parts of its territory.

### **2.1 Ethnic-plurality as fuel to secessionism**

The multi-ethnic nature of most African communities at the moment of state formation constituted a major challenge to the survival of the modern state. With ethnicity as one major characteristic of independent African states, these nation-states seemed to have been born with their germ of destruction. Some scholars on African politics have affirmed that the inclusivist notion of citizenship that motivated the grouping of diverse ethnic communities into a nation-state and based on individual rights has been problematic in Africa not only because virtually all the countries on the continent are "ethnically split," (Balandier, 1970; Jinadu, 2007). The partition of Africa and the eventual carving of nation-states did not consider the fact that before the advent of colonialism, Africa was characterized by ethno-plural societies. The inter-ethnic relations among some of these societies were more or less conflictive. Even though traditional diplomatic relations among these early African communities were generally in the form of kingdoms and chiefdoms, conflict was not

excluded. Grouping communities that were not at peace with each other could not produce anything short from ethnic conflict at independence. This is not to say that inter-community differences were not resolved.

In contemporary times, ethnic conflicts have become pervasive and salient dimensions of political and social conflict in several countries and has tended to threaten the territorial integrity of some African states as is the case in Nigeria and Cameroon. Ethnicity itself can be managed with good governance and inclusive integration policies. Unfortunately, that has not been the case in most African countries. Rather, the neo-patrimonial elite has exploited and heightened the volatile ethnic-plural nature of African states. Evidence of this is the increasing ethnic agitations to bargain for power and access to increased state resources in the name of respective communities. Ethnic agitation has become a new method for political ascension for some politicians who secretly fuel and finance ethnicity and position themselves as the representatives of the community just in case the central government called for dialogue and negotiations. In many a case, secessionism is brandished as a threat to the central government in the case ethnic demands are not met or remain unfulfilled.

Even with the advent of multi-party elections in Africa in the 1990s, and since then, most political parties were and are still constituted on ethnic than ideological basis. In Nigeria for example a close look at the main ruling party indicates that the majority of its militants and sympathizers are from the same region or state of origin as the ruling president. This situation is not peculiar to Nigeria alone, but have become an African trademark. In fact in this period of multiparty competition ethnic and regional political interests have brought to the fore the viciousness of ethnicity and reawakened secessionist agitations.

## **2.2 The colonial factor**

Colonial attitudes and policies in Africa contributed tremendously in laying the foundation of secessionist agitations in post-independent Africa. In the colonization process, colonial powers mounted tribes against others in order to better control them. The Germans were known for the use of the divide-and-rule policy. Ethnic communities were made to detest each other as a means of avoiding collaboration against the colonial authorities. This policy was further amplified with indiscriminate and unbalanced socio-economic and infrastructural development. For instance, in Nigeria, which was under British colonial till 1960, the British adopted and implemented policies that later created problems at independence. According to Ayatse and Iorhen, the British colonial authorities in Nigeria deliberately introduced and propagated ethnic sentiments to attain political and economic imperialist objectives (Ayatse and Iorhen). In its administrative organization of the Nigerian territory, the British forcibly grouped ethnic groups to govern them in their diversity. Ethnic rivalry in the form of subservience to colonial authorities became a strategy inculcated by colonialists to use ethnic diversity as a factor of social intolerance.



Most infrastructural developments carried out in Nigeria were only geared at exploiting the country. That is why most infrastructures were only developed in areas where raw materials were found. As such areas witnessed rapid urban development, equipped with good roads, railways, hospitals, and schools. This of course created ethnic sentiments in other communities in Nigeria. At the same time, privileged communities started feeling superior to other ethnic groups. Disparity was also seen in the geographical locations of communities. In the case of Nigeria, communities that lay in the hinterland were further disfavoured as most “development” was carried out in the south to the detriment and disappointment of northward inland communities.

### **2.3. Post-independence Governance in Nigeria**

At independence, poor governance was one of the major ills that characterized the new African states. The "inheritance elite" took over after the colonial administrators gradually privatized the state for their interests. Corruption, embezzlement, nepotism, dictatorship, violation of human rights became the order of the day. Most especially the governance surrounding natural resources has been the main source of conflict in Africa including Nigeria.

Among the numerous causes of conflict in Africa since independence, is the question of the rational exploitation of natural resources (Aloa, 2007). Historically, natural resources have also been a source of conflict among political entities, even before the advent of colonial rule in Africa. Early states in Africa such as empires and kingdoms were known to have risen or fallen because of their victories or defeats in wars that were heavily laden with natural resource considerations.

According to Aloa (2007), the formation of modern nation-states, however, introduced more complex dimensions into the nature of resource politics, with issues such as disagreements over newly drawn geographical boundaries, protests over the forceful incorporation of hitherto autonomous units into new nation-state structures, creation of new national identities, and several other considerations, all becoming crucial factors that consequently changed the nature of the conflicts surrounding natural resources (Aloa, 2007).

Africa is one of the richest continents in natural resources on this planet. Paradoxically, the exploitation of these natural resources has not contributed to the development of African nations and specifically communities harbouring these resources. It is commonplace in Africa to observe that communities richly endowed with natural resources such as gold, crude oil, timber, and many others lack basic social infrastructures such as roads, hospitals, schools, potable water, just to name a few. The absence of development in communities endowed with natural resources in Africa has largely been attributed to poor governance (Ngayap, 2001). It is exactly on this premise that the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) has constantly sabotaged petroleum infrastructures because they claim the exploitation of crude oil in their land has not benefitted them in any way.

From a general perspective, the main determinants of secessionist conflicts in Africa and specifically the case of Nigeria are internally motivated. Does it mean that if the problems of governance, ethnicity, underdevelopment, democracy are resolved, can this suffice to stop the propagation of secessionist movements and its eventual threat to the disintegration of the territorial sovereignty of Nigeria? The answer is obviously in the negative because if Nigeria's foreign diplomacy does not weigh in, the threat can be realized. When foreign diplomacy weighs in, the dangers could hibernate or give a semblance of having been halted. Yet, they remain and looking for opportunities to show their ugly head again. It is important to note that most secessionist leaders are generally based abroad and at times exploit the poor diplomatic relations with the home governments to accentuate their pressure on the home government. Consequently, the prevention of Nigeria's break-up threatened by secessionist movements does not only necessitate an internal strategy, but also a strategic diplomatic approach with some partners such as Cameroon and France.

#### **2.4. France and Cameroon: Visible counterforce to Nigeria's territorial disintegration**

From a balance of power point of view, an internal armed or civilian movement may not sufficiently threaten the survival of a state without external support. Most African states for example despite structural and institutional weaknesses have the military and operational capacity to neutralize internal movements hostile to the governing authority, talk less of threatening the territorial integrity of the State. Nearly all African constitutions give the government the legitimate right to ensure the territorial integrity of the state and respond with the strongest force possible against secessionist agitations or movements. This will be enshrined in Article III, Paragraph 3 of the OAU charter (Amate,1986). This explains why the African Union which replaced the OAU will not accept any action directed towards the dismemberment of an African state. However, the highest threat to the break-up of a state can be influenced by other foreign political entities like states and international organizations or what Morgenthau refer to as the "international government" (Morgenthau, 1985).

Narrowing down to the situation in Nigeria, the question arises as to the extent to which France and Cameroon can contribute to facilitating the break-up or consolidation of Nigeria's territorial integrity, especially in the face of multiple secessionist agitations.

### ***3. Franco-Nigerian Relations: Friends for Convenience***

Historically, the relationship between the Federal Republic of Nigeria and France has been characterized by tension and friction. The tense Franco-Nigerian deteriorated to a point whereby threats to the break-up of Nigeria have been blamed on France (Aloa, 2006). The differences between Nigeria and France are founded on the Biafra war and regional control over West Africa.





### **3.1. Nigeria's condemnation of French nuclear imperialism in the Sahara**

France since 1945 became one of the privileged members of the five nations that make up the Security Council with veto power. Also, France was one of the founding members of the European defence organization otherwise known as the Northern Atlantic Treaty Organization. In order to affirm her military authority as a superpower, the French decided to test the atomic bomb in the Algerian Sahara on the 13<sup>th</sup> of February 1960 (Allman, 2008). Even though Algeria was still a French colony, many pan-Africanist and African states saw this act as a form of intimidation and excessive demonstration of force. Among the African countries that strongly condemned the French imperial move was Nigeria, which was more or less considered the African giant.

During the Casablanca Conference of 4-7 January 1961, many African states proposed and encouraged their fellow African states to break (diplomatic) relations with France, but no one did except Nigeria who was not an attendee of the Conference (Akinteriwa 1990:280). According to Ibe and Okpalaeke not even Ghana or Ethiopia could muster the courage and support Nigeria in her action against France. The entire continent of Africa left Nigeria to do the dirty job alone while they sat back and observed. Nigeria's warning to France over the testing of the atomic bomb in the Saharan Desert was perceived as a challenge to French expression of her power in Africa. To express her disdain for Nigeria, France decided to meddle in the Nigeria civil war that started in 1967.

### **3.2. France in the Nigerian Civil War**

During the Nigerian civil war of 1967, France meddled itself in the war by supporting the Biafra that had declared their independence from the Federal Republic of Nigeria. On 31 July 1968, the French government "officially declared its support for the separatist province of Biafra even though she categorically refused to officially recognize Biafra, a possibility President Charles de Gaulle ruled out as early as 14 December 1968," (Griffin, 2015) Phillip Effiong noted that Ojukwu the leader of the Biafra separatist province masterminded what was reported as French recognition for Biafra to help Biafra attract recognition from other countries around the world (Effiong, 2000). In fact, the goal was to create an enabling structure from whence to build further support.

To amplify support for Biafra, France instructed her West African colonies in the likes of Gabon and Ivory Coast to recognize Biafra (Ibe and Okpalaeke, 2019). Achebe posits that large arms shipments from France got to Biafra through Ivory Coast and Gabon, which were French colonies and still loyal to France (Achebe, 2012:100). Ivory Coast further demonstrated the depth of French support for Biafra when she granted Ojukwu asylum after the end of the war. To accord Biafra recognition as an independent state was the only thing France did not do for Biafra since France was in total support of Biafra, knowing that Biafra held the key for Nigeria to be weakened in the arena of international politics.

According to Ibe and Okpalaeke France's role in Nigeria's Civil War was no doubt enormous and critical (Ibe and Okpalaeke, 2019). To justify France's support for the dismemberment of Nigeria, Joe Garba opines that:

There is scarcely any area of our external relations, whether in Africa or in Europe, where we do not line up against the interference of the French. From the time of the French nuclear test in the Sahara in 1961, we have had the constant challenge of the French factor... France has at every turn frustrated Nigeria's attempt to draw close to her Francophone neighbours (Garba, 1991).

France's negative implication in the Nigerian civil war strained the relations between the two nations.

### **3.3. Struggle for control over ECOWAS**

Besides the sour relationship between France and Nigeria as a result of her support for its disintegration, another factor that degenerated the diplomatic relations between France and Nigeria was the fear for Nigeria's economic domination over the Economic Community of West African States, (ECOWAS) largely made up of former French colonies. France was determined to ensure control over the affairs of these countries, even after their independence. As a demographic and economic giant in West Africa, France feared they are colonial influence in West Africa was at stake. It perceived Nigeria as its main 'rival' in this objective, especially because Nigeria was intent on achieving a form of regional integration that would exclude erstwhile colonial masters. This ultimately resulted in Nigeria championing the cause of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

### **3.4. France as the *Robin Hood* to Nigeria's territorial Integrity**

Given that in international relations, states do not have permanent enemies or friends since friends of today could become enemies tomorrow and vice-versa depending on the interest at stake. The relationship between France and Nigeria in the past decades has witnessed some détente and materialized through a series of politico-diplomatic, economic, and security actions. This detente started in the 1970s following the politico-economic dynamics witnessed in international politics. In these politico-economic changes, Nigeria emerges as one of the richest oil-producing countries in Africa.

According to Jean-Pierre Cot, the petroleum boom of the 1970s was important as a catalyst in the economic and commercial relations between Nigeria and France (Cot, 1984). France discovered in Nigeria a reliable source of petroleum which is very far away from the turbulent Middle and the Far East. At the same time, Nigeria became a huge market for French products such as French cars. It is important to note that between 1973 and 1985, Nigeria occupied an important position among France's commercial partners in Africa, south of the Sahara. The



commercial exchange between the two countries grew from 1.2% to 1.7 percent of French external trade between 1975 and 1980, and from 14.3 to 22.3 percent of French external trade with Africa.

Franco-Nigeria relations have continued to ameliorate to a point that on no account will France wish the dismemberment of Nigeria. Economic prosperity cannot function in a destabilized country. France is capable of using its position at the Security Council to counter a move by a secessionist movement in Nigeria seeking international recognition or intervention. As of now, France has become the second-largest bilateral creditor to Nigeria, after China, through the *Agence Française de Développement*. It has invested more than €2bn (\$2.4bn) in the past 10 years, financing 35 development projects, according to Nigerian government officials (Olurounbi, 2021).

In December 2018, the French oil giant Total's Egina platform began production with a 200,000 barrel-per-day facility. In 2020, French energy company Axens signed a deal to help on the multibillion-dollar refinery being built for Nigeria's BUA Group 2020. Given all these economic interests with Nigeria, France will continue to maintain a strong security presence in Nigeria and its neighbours through sharing of security information, troop deployments, and engagement in regional security bodies.

### 3.5. Politico-diplomatic Interest

In the past years, anti-French sentiment has been witnessed in former French colonies in Africa. This is the case with some West African countries such as Mali and Burkina Faso. The population in these countries has often called on the French to quit their country accusing France of their misery and underdevelopment. Furthermore, the increasing presence of Russo-Chinese companies and investors in some West African countries has seriously threatened France's grip on her former colonies. This can be explained by the claimed presence of a Russian mercenary armed group known as the "Wagner" in Mali. In such a situation, France can count on Nigeria as the strongest economic giant in Africa and the most influential member of the ECOWAS to exercise her control over her former colonies. This explains why Nigeria's diplomacy has been very active in West Africa, especially in a crisis country. Good Luck Jonathan and Olusegun Obasanjo (two former Nigerian presidents) have frequently been mandated by ECOWAS to mediate in some West African countries stricken by political crisis. This is the case with Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea Conakry.

Diplomatically, Nigeria can count on France as an influential member of international organizations such as the United Nations, European Union, and partner of the African Union not only to legitimate Nigeria's fight against secessionist movements but to delegitimize secessionist movements in Nigeria. In summary, the normalization of Franco-Nigerian relations undermined French interest in wishing Nigeria's break-up. Rather given the huge

politico-economic stakes and interest France has in Nigeria, the continued sustenance and consolidation of Nigeria's territorial integrity cannot be in doubt.

#### ***4. Cameroon-Nigeria Cooperation: Bound to cooperate or disintegrate***

Many scholars and researchers on Cameroon-Nigeria relations agree that both countries have cordial and amicable relations (Funteh, 2015; Familugba and Ojo, 2013; Baliredum and Udeoji, 2020). Officially French Cameroon and Nigeria established diplomatic relations in 1960 when both countries accessed their independence. It was only in October 1961, after the plebiscite that British southern Cameroons after joining French Cameroon to form a federal state was integrated between the already independent Nigeria and French Cameroon. It was thus at this moment that Nigeria and Cameroon officially shared boundaries. As neighboring countries, Cameroon and Nigeria share a common border, people, and history (Funteh, 2015). Corroborating this assertion, Omede (2006:17) opines that despite the existence of Cameroon and Nigeria as two sovereign political entities, they remained a common people, particularly those in the border towns. Both nations have exploited the geographical and historical proximity to mutually benefit from each other economically, politically, and socially (Funteh, 2015a).

Many accords and agreements govern Cameroon-Nigeria relations. These include the Agreement of Friendship and Cooperation of February 6, 1963; the Memorandum of Understanding on the control of movement of persons and goods of February 6, 1963; the Cultural, Social and Technical Agreement of March 22, 1972; the Trade Agreement of February 6, 1963, revised on January 13, 1982 and April 11, 2014 in Yaounde; Air Services Agreement of May 19, 1978; the Agreement on Police Cooperation of March 27, 1972; Mutual Cooperation Agreement of March 27, 1972; the Memorandum of Understanding on the transnational highway project to facilitate transportation between Cameroon and Nigeria on March 29, 2006 in Yaounde; the Green Tree Agreement of June 12, 2006; the Cameroon-Nigeria Electrical Interconnection Agreement, signed on February 18, 2011 in Yaounde; Cooperation Agreement in the field of Sports and Physical Education, signed on February 18, 2011 in Yaounde; the Agreement Establishing Cameroon-Nigeria Border Security Committee signed on February 28, 2012 in Abuja, and these are by no means exhaustive.

However, the relationship between both nations shifted from friendly to a hostile one. According to Funteh (2013), the number of conflictive incidents that have occurred between both nations within a certain short period in the past could push Cameroon to wish for the break-up of Nigeria (Baliredum and Udeoji, 2020; Familugba and Ojo, 2013).

The main cause of this disharmony was the Bakassi peninsular question. Bassey (2010) remarked that unconducive and long but ill-defined colonial border (1680 kilometers or 1050 miles) constitute the conceptual and historical issues that engaged the attention of scholars since independence in the Nigeria-Cameroon diplomatic relations. The claims over the Bakassi



peninsular escalated to a serious armed conflict between Cameroon and Nigeria. Thanks to long diplomatic relations, and because Cameroon took the claim to the International Court of Justice which on 10 October 2002 ruled in favor of Cameroon, both countries decided to peacefully resolve the difference by signing the Green Tree Agreement which ceded the area to Cameroon. Historically, the claim over the Bakassi is the only misunderstanding between both countries since independence. But at the same time, Cameroon potentially served as a threat to Nigeria's break due to Cameroon's proximity with France.

#### **4.1. Franco-Cameroonians Relations as a threat to Nigerian Integrity**

According to Familugba and Ojo (2013), the deteriorating relations between Cameroon and Nigeria were largely influenced by Germany, Britain during the colonial period and largely dominated at the post-independent era by France. Among the European colonial powers that colonized Africa, France is the only colonial power that established very strong links with her former colonies even after the former independence of the latter. Since independence, France has maintained a strong grip and influence on most of its former colonies. France has virtually been able to make and unmake African leaders at their guise even with unorthodox means.

According to Charbonneau, (2008) "decolonisation did not mark an end, but rather a restructuring of the imperial relationship", and this is manifested through *Françafrique*; the political, security, economic and cultural relations that, though diminished somewhat, remain today. France has sought to maintain its interests by influencing African internal affairs, whether it be helping the likes of Cameroon, Gabon, and Senegal to avoid coups thanks to security guarantees (McGowan 2003, p.357), or when in 1993 France, via state-owned oil company Elf-Aquitaine, sought to influence the Congo parliamentary elections by denying essential loans needed to pay civil servants (Martin, 1995).

Former French African colonies had the obligation to support French international actions be it legitimate or not, and this was explicitly though discreetly enshrined in the infamous accords signed between France and her ex-colonies at independence. That is why Cameroon's position vis-a-vis the Biafra war was more or less ambiguous as she maintained a neutral position while former French colonies supported the Biafra movement. This was because France was in support of the Biafra secessionist movement as a revenge against Nigeria's opposition in her nuclear test in the Sahara. Musah (2021) remarks that Cameroon's position in response to the Nigerian Civil War was that of neutrality at the beginning when the war broke out. As events unfolded however, the Cameroon government for strategic internal and security reasons was against the secessionist tendency of the Biafrans (Musah, 2021). Contrary to former French colonial African states, Cameroon under President Amadou Ahidjo severely criticized individuals and nations that supported the Biafran secessionist war. To manifest his support to the Nigerian federal government, Ahidjo banned the shipment of arms, medicine, foodstuffs, and other vital supplies to the Igbos via Cameroon soil, prompting the French Ambassador to observe that 'Ahidjo had become more Nigerian than Nigeria

(Amin, 2020; Torrent, 2012). Ahidjo's position on the Biafra war was among the numerous causes that strained his relationship with the French until his resignation in 1982.

Some scholars have posited that Ahidjo's support against the Biafra war was because the President of Nigeria Yakubu Gowon, was a Northerner from Northern Nigeria, a region that is geographically, religiously, culturally, historically and linguistically attached to Ahidjo's Northern Cameroon.

#### **4.2. Two patients suffering from the same syndrome; Secession and Terrorism**

Besides the geographical, historical, and cultural ties binding Cameroon and Nigeria, both countries are suffering two major vices most African modern countries are confronted with; secessionism and terrorism. Historically, Cameroon just like her neighbor Nigeria has been confronted with secessionist tendencies. Secessionist manifestations in Cameroon started as far back as 1961 following the establishment of a Federal Republic to reunite British Southern Cameroons and French Cameroon that had separately evolved under two different, political, economic, and social cultures, those of Britain and France, their Mandate and Trusteeship Powers. Secessionist agitations in the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Republic of Cameroon have almost the same causes and threatened their territorial integrity.

Just a few years after independence was obtained in 1960, Nigeria was confronted with secession when the Igbo people one of the most dominant ethnic groups declared her independence with the name Biafra Republic in 1967. In response to this declaration, the federal government waged war against the Biafra Republic. The motivation for the declaration of the Republic of Biafra was justified by the differences in socio-economic developments, the *Tiv* riots of 1964, the flawed federal elections of 1964, the structural imbalances of the Nigerian federation, the 1965 Western regional crisis, the military coups of January 15<sup>th</sup> and July 29<sup>th</sup>, 1966 compounded by the killing of Igbos living in the North between May to September 1966 coupled with the asymmetric distribution of powers among the various ethnic geopolitical groups. The immediate cause of the war was the Igbo declaration of the independent Republic of Biafra named after the Bight of Biafra on May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1967 by Lt. Col. Odumegwu Chukwuemeka Ojukwu who was the Governor of the Eastern Region (Oyeweso: 1992). The war was principally between the Igbos and the Federal Military Government (FMG) of General Yakubu Gowon. The Federal military government determined to maintain the unity and integrity of the state responded by attacking the declared secessionist republic on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 1967.

on February 11, 1961, British Northern Cameroon decided to gain her independence by a plebiscite to join the independent Federal Republic of Nigeria, while on the same date, the Southern part of British Cameroon voted to obtain her independence by joining French Cameroon that had earlier gained independence in 1960 with the appellation as the 'Republic of Cameroon'. As the two Cameroons came together, the political elites of former British and



French Cameroons decided to adopt federalism as the form of the new state based on two equal states. The new country was baptised the Federal Republic of Cameroon.

The reunification and putting in place of the federal system of government in 1961 was principally geared towards preserving the accepted colonial legacies from British and French Cameroon. Dubbed an African experiment in nation building, it was extolled and greeted with much euphoria. However, just some few years after the reunification of British and French Cameroon, socio-political, and cultural problems linked to the colonial legacy of both territories and discernible attempts by the Francophone majority in the new Republic began to create cohabitation difficulties. Among the several factors responsible were the modification of the federal constitution of 1961 to transform Cameroon to a unitary state and the change of the name of the country.

In 1972, President Ahmadou Ahidjo abrogated clause 1 of article 47 of the federal constitution which reads: “any proposal for the revision of the present constitution, which impairs the unity and integrity of the Federation shall be inadmissible” (Kaze, 2021, Konings and Nyamnjoh, 1997.) As if that was not enough, on January 25, 1984 the Government under the leadership of President Paul Biya changed the official name of the country from the ‘United Republic of Cameroon’ to simply the ‘Republic of Cameroon’ despite strong protests that this was what independent Francophone Cameroon had been called by Ahidjo before reunification (Kaze, 2021). These politically symbolic acts were considered by some Anglophone elites as an attempt to complete assimilation, which in the long run led to the breakdown in many aspects of the political cementing across the French/English divide. As at today and spanning over a period of six years, there has been the outbreak of a violent armed conflict between the government and armed separatist movements in the North West and South West regions since 2016. The two regions are basically “ethnic” Anglophones, in the sense that it is the region where British administration was found during the period between 1916 and 1961. That is what is at the heart of the Anglophone Problem in Cameroon.

The Anglophone Problem which was more or less a pacifist confrontation transformed into a violent one in 2017. In October 2017, some Anglophone activists hoisted flags in major cities of the North West and South West regions to symbolize separation from The Republic of Cameroon and the regaining of their freedom and sovereignty. The explicit declaration of independence and hoisting of the ‘Ambazonia’ flag was perceived by the government as an act of subversion and destabilization of the State. Government security forces were deployed in the two English-speaking regions to normalize the situation, but unfortunately, the situation degenerated into a confrontation between government forces and the demonstrating populations. The outcome was fatal. Scores of people died in the early days of the conflict. Since then numerous deaths continue to be recorded as well as injured and arrested persons some of who were duly registered (ICG, 2017). It is very difficult to ascertain the number of people injured, killed or arrested as the area has been under conflict for close to six years. Also, most eyewitnesses and potential informants have fled out of the area. The hidden hand

of government in prosecution this war has been seriously decried by many groups including Human Rights Watch and the International Crisis Group.

In the course of the confrontation, some government forces were killed in the South West region of Cameroon by non-state armed groups. This has sparked huge military intervention in the North West and South West regions. A noted development is the emergence and propagation of numerous separatist groups claiming secession from the Republic of Cameroon.

Geographically, the secessionist groups in Cameroon and Nigeria are close to each other. The North West and South West regions of the Republic under secessionist claim share boundaries with South East Nigeria which is the stronghold of secessionist movements like Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM), and Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB).

In 2021, some Cameroonian and Nigerian secessionist leaders based abroad held a meeting on how to cooperate to attain their objectives. According to Jess Craig, in early April 2021, Cho Ayaba, the leader of the Ambazonia Governing Council, one of two major Cameroon Anglophone separatist groups, and the well-known Biafran leader Nnamdi Kanu appeared in a press conference, live-streamed on social media, to announce a strategic and military alliance (Foreign Policy, 2021). The scope of the alliance will include joint operations and training bases, as announced by Capo Daniel, the deputy defense chief of the Ambazonia Defense Forces, the military wing of the Ambazonia Governing Council (Foreign Policy, 2021). The groups will work to secure their shared border and ensure an open exchange of weapons and personnel, representatives of both the Ambazonia and IPOB movements.

#### **4.3. Nigeria and Cameroon: Mutual Cooperation against Secessionism**

Faced with the growing security threats posed by the increasing agitations of secessionist movements in southeast Nigeria and Northwest and southwest Cameroon, the Nigerian and Cameroonian governments have been collaborating against fighting secessionists movements. During an audience granted by Cameroon's Head of State to Nigeria's High Commissioner Designate to Cameroon on 7 December 2017, the Nigeria High Commission to Cameroon, Lawan Abba Gashagar has declared that his country was categorically against pro-secessionist activities.

To materialize this declaration, in 2018, Nigerian security forces located, arrested, and extradited ten Cameroonian separatist leaders residing in the country. The previous year, Nigerian security forces arrested more than 30 other Anglophone activists who were extradited to Yaounde, judged, and sentenced to life imprisonment. It worth noting that this extradition was condemned and considered illegal and unconstitutional by the Nigerian court, however the deed was already done and this move only reinforced Cameroon-nigeria's political cooperation. Since the beginning of the Anglophone in Cameroon, Nigeria has





frequently allowed Cameroonian security forces to pursue military operations against secessionist groups seeking refuge in Nigeria territory.

The increasing fatal attacks using sophisticated weapons like rocket-launchers in the past years have triggered a heightened response from both Cameroonian and Nigerian armed forces, which already work together to counter a Boko Haram insurgency in the northern regions of both countries.

## **Conclusion**

The foundations of secessionist agitations in some African states today have their roots from colonial rule. In a bid to achieve their colonial interest, the colonial administration did not hesitate to adopt and implement variations of divide-and-rule policies to enhance the control of their colonies and ensure a more profitable exploitation of the colonies. In Nigeria for example, the British colonial authorities favored the traditional elite of the Northern region that was not quite enlightened but ruled over large populations. The colonialists gave them important positions and duties in the politico-administrative apparatus of British colonial administration in Nigeria. Historically, the Yorubas and the Igbo who were very relatively more educated and economically more dynamic were marginalized by the British in the build up to the post colonial state dispensation. It even emerged that the northern elite was not in favour of Nigerian accession to independence in 1960 for fear of losing political control over the state. Meanwhile, the South made up of the Yorubas and the Igbo clamored for independence as it was one way for them to access political control in the emerging dispensation of democratic national politics. That is why parties that were created prior or in the early years of independence were ethnically based and thus a potential justification for secession.

There is no gain saying that a secession movement will find it tremendously difficult to defeat the central authority in any country without external support. This simply means that secessionist causes in Africa appear like lost wars before they are unevenly fought given the strength of the military and the diplomatic capacity of the central authority. The debate on the eminent break-up of Nigeria is as old as the Federal Republic of Nigeria itself. However, if up till now no secessionist movement has been able to carve out and successfully control a part of Nigeria's territory, it may be surmised that to a large extent this is a reflection of the diplomatic dynamics of the Nigerian central political or government authorities where even enemies of yesterday have become friends today.

To completely neutralize and mitigate the proliferation of secessionist movements in Nigeria, the Federal Republic of Nigeria beside her seemingly practical and reality-based diplomacy and her military capacity will need to put in place an inclusive governing policy that ensures equal development and fair political participation. For now, Cameroon and France in the current posture of their diplomatic considerations vis-a-vis Nigeria will continue to be important in the fight against the breakup of Nigeria. France for its economic benefits and

Cameroon for fear that the secessionist virus could be upgraded in the Southwest and Northwest Regions of the country. For as long as mutual interests remain assured, on the part of each of these two “partners”, Nigerian secessionists will keep Nigeria destabilized with all the consequences that can be discerned. The duration of this destabilization cannot be ascertained. In fact until Nigeria’s friends of today walk away from the diplomatic friendship, it will be difficult to find destabilizing allies from within Nigeria.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors hereby declare that no competing financial interest exists for this manuscript.

### **Notes on Contributors**

Tindo Narcisse Saturnin Kaze PhD is currently postdoctoral fellow with African Academy for Migration Research. Kaze holds a PhD in Political History and International Relations from the University of Yaoundé I –Cameroon and currently lectures at the Pan-African Institute for Development-West Africa (PAID-WA). His research interest is focus on African History and culture, forced migration, armed conflicts, and ethnic politics. Kaze is an author of two books and several scholarly articles.

Michael Ndobegang Mbapndah holds the B.A. (Honors) and Maitrise degrees from the University of Yaoundé, Cameroon, the M.A. and PhD degrees in African History from Boston University, U.S.A. A Fulbright Alumni, he has taught courses in African Political and Social history at the University of Yaoundé 1. A former Member of the Cameroon Parliament, his research interests are in African Social and Political History, History Didactics, Slavery and Heritage Studies. He is an Associate Professor of History, author of many scholarly articles in peer reviewed Journals and book chapters on Cameroon history.

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*From the table above, two typologies of movements can be identified; the first category is the economic-orientated movements and majority situated in the Niger Delta. Their objective is to constitute a nuisance to the government and multinational oil companies who have monopolized exploitation and profits. The second category is politically orientated with the finality of break-away to form a sovereign socio-political entity. This is the case with most groups in East-Central, South-Eastern, and Rivers states of the present Federation of Nigeria. The main revendication of the second category concurs with claims of separatist movements in the Northwest and Southwest regions of the Republic of Cameroon. The common denominator responsible for the emergence and proliferation of these movements is that of poor governance and lack of sincere national cohesion policies.*



Name of Armed group	Date of Creation	Current Leader	Territorial claim	Revendication
<b>Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)</b>	2012	Nnamdi Kanu, a British Nigerian political activist	East-Central, South-Eastern, and Rivers states of the present Federation of Nigeria	To restore an independent state of Biafra in the Old Eastern Region of Nigeria, comprising mainly today's South-East and South-South Regions of Nigeria; and also parts of the Middle Belt states of Nigeria such as Benue State and Kogi State, through an independence referendum.
<b>Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA)</b>	1990s	Alleged as Dokubo Asari. (chief priest of the Egbesu shrine)	Six southeastern states of Nigeria's Niger Delta Region	It is committed to the political goals of the Ijaw people
<b>Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVPF)</b>	2003	Alhaji Muhajid Dokubo-Asari	Delta State	To force oil companies out of the Niger delta or otherwise compel the Nigerian government to cede its control over the area to the local authorities.
<b>O'odua People's Congress (OPC)</b>	1994	Dr. Frederick Fasehun	Southwest region of Nigeria in the states of Lagos, Ogun, Osun, Kwara, Ondo, Oyo, and Ekiti	To protect and promote the interests of the Yoruba people
<b>Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND, a fractured group from the NDVPF)</b>	2005	Shadow leaders	Niger Delta	The group's efforts are directed towards knocking down oil production in the Niger-Delta region and claims to expose exploitation and oppression of the people of the Niger-Delta and devastation of the natural environment as a result of public-private partnerships between the Federal Government of Nigeria and corporations involved in the production of oil in the Niger Delta
<b>Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB)</b>	1999	Ralph Uwazuruike	East-Central, South-Eastern, and Rivers states of the present Federation of Nigeria	The recreation of an independent state of Biafra.
<b>Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM)</b>	2010	Benjamin Onwuka (In detention)	East-Central, South-Eastern, and Rivers states of the present Federation of Nigeria	For the restoration of Biafra and its independence from Nigeria
<b>Niger Delta Avengers (NDA)</b>	2016	Mudoch Agbinibo	Niger Delta	To cripple Nigeria's economy

Source: Author, May 2022.