

Ambazonia Defense Forces

AT A GLANCE

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HOW TO CITE

Mapping Militants Project (MMP). “Ambazonia Defense Forces.” Last modified April 2019.

SUMMARY

Formed: September 2017.

Disbanded: Group is active.

First Attack: September 9, 2017: The Ambazonia Defense Forces claimed an attack on a military camp in Besongabang, southwest Cameroon. (3 killed, 0 wounded).¹

Last Attack: April 1, 2019: The ADF is suspected to be responsible for an unclaimed attack on a security checkpoint at a market in Penda Mboko, a municipality in the francophone Littoral Region. This attack came a week after the ADF declared that it would expand its operations into the French-speaking areas of Cameroon for the first time. (0 killed, 3 wounded).²

OVERVIEW

The Ambazonia Defense Forces (ADF) is an anglophone separatist militant organization in Cameroon. It is one of the most active players in that country’s civil conflict, known as the Anglophone Crisis. Since late 2016, this conflict has pitted Cameroon’s English-speaking minority against the predominantly French-speaking national government based in Yaoundé. Serving as the armed wing of the separatist Ambazonia Governing Council, the ADF has fought for the independence of Cameroon’s anglophone Northwest and Southwest administrative regions since September 2017, when the Anglophone Crisis escalated violently. The ADF’s ultimate goal is to form a new state, which it calls Ambazonia, for Cameroon’s English speakers. The group is led by Lucas Cho Ayaba, who has been a separatist since the 1990s and is living abroad in exile as of April 2019. In pursuit of its goals, the ADF utilizes guerilla tactics to prevent the Cameroonian government from projecting power in the Northwest and Southwest regions. The group lacks extensive resources, leading it to turn to traditional magic and beliefs known as *Odeshi* and the finances of the Cameroonian diaspora for support in its fight against Yaoundé. Thought to be the most active of about a half-dozen anglophone separatist militant organizations, the ADF largely operates independently from its peers.

NARRATIVE SUMMARY

The Ambazonia Defense Forces fights for the independence of Cameroon's western anglophone region, which is called "Ambazonia" by separatists. Its roots lie in a longstanding conflict between the English-speaking minority of Cameroon and the francophone government based in Yaoundé.

English speakers comprise 17 percent of the population and inhabit two of the country's 10 administrative divisions, the Northwest and Southwest Regions.³ Cameroon refers to its major administrative units, akin to provinces, as "Regions." Germany originally colonized Cameroon, but it lost this territory to the French and the British after the end of World War I. In 1916, Cameroon was divided between France, which assumed control over most of the territory, and Great Britain, which took the western region. The French colony of Cameroon gained independence in the 1960s and formed the Republic of Cameroon. Most of the British colony joined this newly independent state soon thereafter, making the country officially bilingual.⁴ Today, Cameroon is one of the most linguistically and ethnically diverse countries in Africa. The colonial languages of French and English came to serve as lingua franca, and the country's ethnic groups aligned according to a French-English cleavage.⁵

The imbalance between the number of English and French speakers generated disparities in the distribution of political power. The central government predominately consists of French speakers, and the office of the presidency has been occupied by a francophone individual, Paul Biya, since 1982. Cameroon's anglophone minority has often complained that the regime discriminates by denying English speakers government jobs and access to official documents published in their language.⁶ Moreover, English-speaking regions contain valuable petroleum and natural gas resources whose benefits are not made available to local populations.⁷

In December 2016, these tensions erupted as anglophone lawyers and teachers went on strike. Their grievances included claims that the Yaoundé government failed to staff their schools with teachers fluent in English and their courts with judges trained in the English common law tradition (the rest of the country follows French civil law).⁸ A wave of protests followed the strike and ultimately incited an armed conflict that became known as the Anglophone Crisis. The national Cameroonian government instituted a fierce crackdown. The government killed protesters and arrested many moderate leaders of the demonstrations, leading the movement to be co-opted by activists with more extreme views, including separatists calling for the full independence of Cameroon's anglophone regions.⁹ Calls for anglophone separatism had long simmered in the Cameroonian diaspora community but became more mainstream in the wake of the government's efforts to silence dissent.¹⁰

Throughout 2017, the government intensified its response to the protest, including banning civil society organizations implicated in protests and escalating violence against civilians. Observers have accused it of resorting to scorched-earth tactics, such as beating and jailing suspected separatists, burning homes, killing prisoners, torturing minors, and blocking communications networks.¹¹ The president's elite fighting force, the Bataillon d'intervention rapide (Rapid Intervention Battalion), actively participated in the suppression of the uprising.¹² Armed conflict between the government and separatists rapidly escalated. As of March 2018, over 180,000 people were displaced as a result of violence between the government and separatists.¹³

In response to the government's brutal efforts to put down the rebellion, a constellation of groups emerged to advocate for anglophone separatism, some peacefully and others by force. One of the most prominent of these organizations was the Southern Cameroonians Ambazonia Consortium United Front (SCACUF). The group originally called for civil disobedience, diplomacy, and limited self-defense.¹⁴ Moreover, the SCACUF opposed launching an insurgency against the Cameroonian government. However, its successor organization, the self-proclaimed Interim Government of Ambazonia, later reversed this position.¹⁵

At the same time, another separatist organization emerged in 2017 to advocate the use of armed conflict as a means to gain independence.¹⁶ This group, led by Lucas Cho Ayaba, was known as the Ambazonia Governing Council (AGC).¹⁷ Ayaba had advocated for independence of Cameroon's anglophone population since he was a student at the University of Buea in the 1990s.¹⁸ While SCACUF continued to resist calls to take up arms, the AGC readied itself to begin an insurgency against the Yaoundé government. In early September 2017, it deployed a new armed wing to fight for anglophone separatism, known as the Ambazonia Defense Forces (ADF).¹⁹ The AGC's core membership includes activists and other political figures, while militants supportive of the AGC are organized in the group's militia, the ADF. In its announcement, the AGC affirmed that the ADF would provide security to the anglophone regions of Cameroon while fighting for those regions' full independence. Only then would the ADF lay down arms.²⁰ Appealing to social and economic grievances of anglophones, the ADF has actively recruited from local English-speaking communities.²¹

On October 1, 2017, SCACUF declared the independence of Cameroon's Northwest and Southwest Regions, naming its desired English-speaking state Ambazonia.²² The name comes from the Amba Bay in southern Cameroon, itself the site of a 19th-century settlement for freed slaves.²³ It was coined in 1985 by an early anglophone separatist, lawyer Fon Gorji Dinka, testifying to the deep historical roots of the circumstances in which the ADF was founded.²⁴ After the declaration of Ambazonia's independence, SCACUF's leader, Sisiku Julius Ayuk Tabe, presented himself as the president of the new nation and transformed SCACUF into the Interim Government of Ambazonia.²⁵ Despite this declaration of independence, the ADF has continued to operate outside the purview of the Interim Government. The ADF promotes anglophone separatism through military force, in opposition to SCACUF and the Interim Government's initial more nonviolent stance. Roughly half a dozen other separatist militant groups pursue the same objective as the ADF, but these groups all operate independently of each other.²⁶

Although the ADF has operated as a militant group for less than two years (as of April 2019), it has grown rapidly during its brief existence. At its founding in 2017, the ADF operated in only two departments within Cameroon's anglophone provinces, the Northwest and Southwest Regions. The next year, it established a presence in nearly every department, Cameroon's term for administrative subunit below the level of the Region, within the Northwest and Southwest, and in early 2019, it announced its expansion to the francophone regions of Cameroon.²⁷

The ADF's quick growth did not come without challenges, however. Lacking adequate supplies and weaponry, the ADF was heavily outarmed and outnumbered by the Cameroonian military. To compensate, ADF militants have turned to a traditional magic known as *Odeshi* in order to obtain spiritual protection from the government's bullets.²⁸ The disparity in military capabilities between the two sides has led the ADF to adopt guerilla-style tactics. Operating from small bases hidden in inaccessible rural areas, militants executed quick strikes on targets before disappearing again beyond the reach of the Cameroonian armed forces.²⁹ Initially, the ADF limited its attacks to government officials and military personnel, but in 2018 it began targeting civilians as well.³⁰

Funding has proven to be a significant hurdle for the group, which is mainly made up of English speakers from lower socioeconomic classes.³¹ In its initial statement on the deployment of the ADF, the AGC called on the anglophone Cameroonian diaspora to provide financial support.³² It has pursued online crowdfunding and claims that the diaspora has played a key role in securing resources for its militants.³³ Especially in its early days, the ADF has also utilized kidnapping for ransom as a means to fundraise. This tactic led to a public breach with the Interim Government of Ambazonia. In April 2018, one of the ministers of the Interim Government issued a public letter condemning Ayaba for the kidnapping of the Cameroonian government official Anim Bom Aaron Ankiambom, who has not been seen since his disappearance at the hands of ADF militants.³⁴

After the ADF's emergence onto the field of battle in late 2017, the Anglophone Crisis reached a stalemate in 2018.³⁵ The ADF and other separatist militant organizations lack extensive resources to contribute to their fight against the government, while Yaoundé has been unable to quench the rebellion.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

A. LEADERSHIP

Most of the ADF's leaders have given interviews to the news media and self-identified with the ADF, while others' roles within the organization have been attributed by reporters.

Lucas Cho Ayaba (2017 to present): Ayaba is the leader of the ADF's parent organization, the Ambazonia Governing Council (AGC).³⁶ As the ADF is the armed wing of the AGC, Ayaba has been identified by the news media as the ADF's highest commander in chief. He lives abroad and reportedly leads the ADF remotely. As leader for the entire AGC, Ayaba oversees its armed wing, the ADF, but it is unclear how involved Ayaba is in day-to-day ADF decision-making. Ayaba also serves as a sort of spokesman on behalf of the ADF, as he frequently gives interviews to international news outlets. He has opposed the Cameroonian government and advocated Ambazonian separatism since the 1990s, when he was expelled from the University of Buea for protesting tuition increases. He is known to have attended the university with Ebenezer Akwanga, the leader of another anglophone separatist militant group.³⁷

Benedict Kuah (2017 to present): Kuah also serves as a leader of the ADF under the title Chairman of the Ambazonia Defense Council (ADC).³⁸ The ADC serves essentially as a sort of defense ministry for the Ambazonia Governing Council (AGC), the parent organization of the ADF.³⁹ Like Ayaba, Kuah has also played a public role, giving interviews to the news media, publishing op-eds, and advocating for the group publicly.⁴⁰ Kuah seems to work more closely on the ADF's day-to-day operations than Ayaba and appears to be subordinate to him.⁴¹ To use an analogy, he acts as a defense minister to Ayaba's position as commander in chief.

General Ivo (2017 to December 2018): The ADF's battlefield commander, known by the nom de guerre General Ivo, led the group on the ground until his death in a raid by the Cameroonian government's elite Bataillon d'intervention rapide (Rapid Intervention Battalion) forces in December 2018.⁴²

General Efang (December 2018 to present): Formerly a brigadier general in the ADF, "General Efang," as he is known, replaced Ivo as battlefield commander following the latter's death.⁴³

Ambe Simon (February 2018? to present): Simon serves as the financial director for the ADF and manages the influx of funding from the Cameroonian diaspora community. It is unclear when he assumed a leadership role in the ADF but has held his position since at least February 2018, when he was interviewed by Reuters.⁴⁴

Tanku Ivo Tapang (Unknown to present): Tapang serves as a spokesman for the ADF.⁴⁵ A former journalist now living in exile in the U.S., Tapang also attended Ayaba's alma mater, the University of Buea.⁴⁶ In early 2019, a Los Angeles law firm led by the son of a former member of Cameroon's cabinet filed suit against Tapang in California, accusing him of "international terrorism."⁴⁷

B. NAME CHANGES

There are no recorded name changes for this group. The name of the Ambazonia Defense Forces is, however, often spelled “Ambazonia Defence Forces” according to the conventions of British English. The group is often identified by French-language sources as “Forces de défense de l’Ambazone.”

C. SIZE ESTIMATES

- About 100 (The New Humanitarian)⁴⁸

Given that the ADF is an insurgency, it is difficult to make accurate estimates of its membership. In June 2018, a reporter with The New Humanitarian spent a week embedded with the ADF in Cameroon and kept a tally. This estimate, however, only reflects the number of militants personally seen by the reporter and may underestimate the ADF’s actual size.

The BBC estimates the total number of militants fighting for anglophone separatism in Cameroon to be about 500-1,000. The ADF is reportedly the most active militant organization in this movement, but it is unclear which percentage of total fighters belong to the ADF.⁴⁹

D. RESOURCES

The ADF, drawing its membership from poor farmers and others with grievances against the francophone national government, lacks extensive resources. Militants are generally only armed with single-shot firearms, shabby hunting rifles, machetes, and improvised explosives. They often resort to fashioning guns and other weapons themselves in order to carry out attacks.⁵⁰ The ADF reportedly sources firearms manufactured across the border in Nigeria.⁵¹ It also steals weapons from the Cameroonian forces and government facilities.⁵² In addition, English-speaking soldiers from the Cameroonian national military are believed to desert and join the ADF.⁵³

While the ADF is known to conduct politically motivated kidnappings as part of its fight for independence, it also reportedly takes hostages for ransom in order to raise funds. Ransoms usually amount around 100,000 to 1,500,000 CFA francs (\$170-\$2,500).⁵⁴

E. GEOGRAPHIC LOCATIONS

Disclaimer: This is a partial list of where the militant organization has bases and where it operates. This does not include information on where the group conducts major attacks or has external influences.

Note: Cameroon refers to its major administrative divisions as Regions. They can be considered akin to provinces in other countries. Departments are administrative subunits below the level of the Region. Each Region has several departments; the exact number varies from Region to Region.

The ADF originally operated in the two anglophone provinces of Cameroon, the Northwest and Southwest administrative Regions. In 2017, its activity was confined to the Manyu department of the Northwest Region and the Mezam department of the Southwest Region. In 2018, the ADF’s field of operations expanded to include the majority of both Regions. In the Northwest Region, the ADF is present in three of seven departments: Mezam, Boyo, and Momo. In the Southwest Region, the ADF is present in five of six departments: Manyu, Fako, Lebiam, Ndiang, and Koupe-Manengouba.⁵⁵ In early 2019, the ADF announced that it would expand its activity to Cameroon’s francophone regions after previously operating only within the anglophone Northwest and Southwest Regions.⁵⁶

As a separatist militant organization, the ADF prioritizes gaining control over geographic areas (see Strategy section below). As a result of rural Cameroon’s lack of developed roads and infrastructure, the

ADF has been able to hold large swaths of territory in the countryside of Northwest and Southwest regions inaccessible to government forces.⁵⁷

STRATEGY

A. IDEOLOGY & GOALS

The ADF's self-declared objective is to secure the independence of Cameroon's anglophone regions and form a new state known as Ambazonia.⁵⁸ Activists originally preached nonviolence in 2016 and 2017, but that creed began to lose salience in the wake of the government's brutal repression of the protest movement. As a result, the ADF and other groups adopted a doctrine of separatism through violence. The ADF explicitly denounces peaceful protest and civil disobedience as ineffective to protect the interests of Cameroon's anglophone regions.⁵⁹ The organization's more immediate goals include the protection of Cameroon's English speakers from the government's crackdown.⁶⁰

Greatly outmatched in numbers, armaments, and supplies in its conflict with the Cameroonian government, the ADF has turned to an alternative source of strength: traditional practices of sorcery. ADF militants believe in a magic known as *Odeshi*, in which charms such as amulets and necklaces are held to possess protective powers. The charms are usually produced by traditional medicine men and healers and are designed to guard poorly armed ADF militants from the bullets of Cameroonian government forces.⁶¹ Each charm is thought to produce a specific effect, such as invisibility of the wearer or the jamming of the opponent's gun. In order for *Odeshi* to be effective, believers must follow a set of rules, such as fighting for a righteous cause or adopting a particular diet.⁶² The ADF militants' belief system also includes a potion known as *juju*, which is held to confer similar protection in combat.⁶³

B. POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

Although the ADF's membership includes political activists, the group as a whole has not participated collectively in the political process of Cameroon; rather, it seeks to divorce itself from that process. In that respect, the ADF staged attacks in order to disrupt the October 2018 presidential election and prevent citizens in the anglophone regions of Cameroon from voting.⁶⁴ The ADF has also refused to cooperate with the Interim Government of Ambazonia, the self-proclaimed government of the Ambazonian state.

C. TARGETS & TACTICS

Disclaimer: It is necessary to distinguish the ADF's targets and tactics from those of unorganized anglophone separatists and other militant organizations advocating for the independence of the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon. The ADF is only one player in a complex and constantly evolving conflict. Many high-profile attacks and abductions featured in the news are demonstrably the work of other actors or cannot be attributed to the ADF with a high degree of certainty. For example, the well-publicized kidnappings of schoolchildren in November 2018 and February 2019, as well as the kidnapping of a school soccer team in March 2019, are believed to be the work of anglophone separatists but not necessarily the ADF.⁶⁵

The ADF aims to erode the ability of the national francophone government to exercise authority in the Northwest and Southwest regions. Taking advantage of rural Cameroon's lack of developed transportation infrastructure, the ADF seeks to expand its own control of territory and block Yaoundé from projecting power in the country's anglophone areas (see geographic locations section above).⁶⁶ Indeed, in an interview with the *Guardian*, ADF leader Lucas Cho Ayaba declared that the group's goal was "to make Ambazonia ungovernable. We must try to raise the cost of the occupation to higher than the profits they get here."⁶⁷

In pursuit of this objective, ADF militants have utilized tactics including kidnappings, attacks with firearms, and forced closures of francophone schools.⁶⁸ The ADF's operations generally comprise guerilla-style attacks with hunting rifles, small guns (often locally produced), and knives.⁶⁹ Militants operate from bases hidden in the jungles and hills of rural western Cameroon, which allows them to execute attacks quickly and then disappear.⁷⁰ While the ADF's most common targets include Cameroonian government officials, soldiers, and security personnel, the group is also known to target civilians, albeit not as frequently.⁷¹ For the first few months of its existence, the ADF appears to have refrained from attacks on civilians but began to do so in 2018.⁷² The ADF's code of conduct prohibits targeting "innocent civilians," although this definition is unclear. In its targeting of civilians, the group is thought to aim its fire at those perceived to be acting counter to its mission, such as individuals supportive of the government.⁷³

With much of its leadership living in exile in the U.S. or Europe, the ADF experiences difficulties in coordinating attacks and operations. The group's activity within Cameroon often occurs on an ad-hoc or informal basis, based more on availability of members and vulnerability of targets than a longer-term strategic vision. Relations between different units of the ADF can thus be chaotic.⁷⁴ Most communication within the group occurs via encrypted messaging apps, although cell reception in the rural areas where the ADF operates is poor.⁷⁵

The ADF frequently uses social media to galvanize support and accuse the government of overreach; these tactics have included disinformation campaigns. For example, militants and sympathizers have shared old videos of Cameroonian military abuses in the conflict against Boko Haram, claiming that they depicted recent atrocities directed against English speakers. In another case, a video of a house fire in the United States was falsely suggested to be an attack on an anglophone village.⁷⁶

MAJOR ATTACKS

Disclaimer: These are some selected major attacks in the militant organization's history. It is not a comprehensive listing but captures some of the most famous attacks or turning points during the campaign.

Over its nearly two-year history, the ADF has a consistent pattern of rarely claiming attacks. The below attacks have all been formally claimed by the ADF or attributed to the group with a high degree of certainty.⁷⁷

September 9, 2017: The Ambazonia Defense Forces claimed an attack on a military camp in Besongabang in the Southwest region of Cameroon (3 killed, 0 wounded).⁷⁸

November 29, 2017: The ADF attacked Cameroonian government soldiers in the Manyu district of the Southwest region. One soldier was kidnapped; his fate remains unknown (4 killed, 0 wounded).⁷⁹

December 18, 2017: Separatist militants attacked Cameroonian paramilitary soldiers in the city of Kembong in Manyu. They are also believed to have set several villages on fire. The ADF did not claim this attack, but local sources attributed it to the group (4 killed, 0 wounded).⁸⁰

February 24, 2018: The ADF kidnapped Animbom Aaron Ankiambom, a delegate for social affairs for the Northwest region. On March 10, the ADF released a video demanding that the government prove that separatist leaders in its custody were still alive, or else Ankiambom would be killed. Ankiambom has not been seen alive since (1 possibly killed, unknown wounded).⁸¹

September 9, 2018: In an effort to disrupt Cameroon's presidential election, ADF militants blockaded traffic and burned buses in Bamenda, the capital city of the Northwest Region (0 killed, unknown wounded).⁸²

November 13, 2018: The ADF attacked a government army truck in the city of Nkambe in northwest Cameroon (13 killed, unknown wounded).⁸³

December 15, 2018: The Cameroonian government reported that the ADF and another anglophone separatist group, the Tigers, clashed violently over control of the environs of Batibo, a city in the Northwest region. This was the first, and to date, only, known fight between two anglophone separatist militant organizations (unknown killed, unknown wounded)⁸⁴

April 1, 2019: The ADF is suspected to be responsible for an unclaimed attack on a security checkpoint at a market in Penda Mboko, a municipality in the francophone Littoral region. This attack came a week after the ADF declared that it would expand its operations into the French-speaking regions of Cameroon for the first time (0 killed, 3 wounded).⁸⁵

INTERACTIONS

A. DESIGNATED/LISTED

The Ambazonia Defense Forces is not designated as a terrorist organization by any countries or international organizations without a vested interest in Cameroon's civil conflict. The government of Cameroon, perhaps unsurprisingly, has officially labeled all anglophone separatists as "terrorists."⁸⁶

B. COMMUNITY RELATIONS

The ADF appeals to grievances and anger over discrimination and the Cameroonian government to attract support from the local anglophone population.⁸⁷ Many of its fighters are young men who applied for jobs with the Cameroonian government, including the army, police, customs, and public health services. The applicants to these government positions underwent extensive entrance examinations known as *concours* before being rejected. Some of those rejected believed they were turned away for being English rather than French speakers. Facing a lack of profitable economic opportunities, these disaffected Cameroonians turn to the waiting arms of the ADF.⁸⁸ The group also recruits refugees fleeing violence and destruction in their home villages in Cameroon's anglophone regions.⁸⁹ For these communities, the ADF offers an opportunity to regain dignity and fight back against perceived overreach and human rights abuses by the government of Cameroon.

Given its name, Ambazonia Defense Forces, the ADF takes pride in serving as a guarantor of security for Cameroon's anglophone community. Lucas Cho Ayaba, leader of the ADF, reiterates this point in his frequent media interviews: "You kill our people, we will pursue you to the gates of hell."⁹⁰ The ADF presents itself as representing the interests of Cameroonian English speakers. As a result, Ayaba has mandated an extensive list of rules of engagement intended to keep community relations stable and positive. This code includes prohibitions on rape, theft, torture, and killing of innocent civilians. Exactly what constitutes an "innocent civilian," and whether being a French speaker is disqualifying to meet this standard, is unclear. Local ADF commanders are responsible for responding to infractions.⁹¹

The ADF's relations with communities are not seamless, however. Residents of Bamenda, a city in Cameroon's Northwest region, report that the ADF has pressured locals to support its operations and responded violently to those who do not comply. Those who do not adhere to the ADF's separatist mission are branded as traitors.⁹²

C. RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER GROUPS

Due to the constantly shifting situation on the ground in Cameroon, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about the relationships between the ADF and other militant organizations in the area, especially given that many of these groups have existed for only a few months or years. Nevertheless, a general outline is attainable.

Although the ADF is the most active anglophone separatist militant group, it is not the only actor involved in the Ambazonia insurgency, which lacks a single clear leader.⁹³ The self-proclaimed Interim Government of Ambazonia is currently led Samuel Ikome Sako and has established a skeleton government in exile. While it claims to speak for Cameroon's anglophone community, the AGC and ADF operate separately from it. The AGC originally formed in opposition to the Interim Government's former stance against the use of violence to achieve independence. While the Interim Government now endorses the use of armed force against Yaoundé, the AGC continues to keep a distance from it.⁹⁴ The ADF's use of kidnapping as a tactic triggered a major breach with the Interim Government when the self-proclaimed Ambazonian minister of communication, Chris Anu, publicly condemned Ayaba in April 2018 for the his group's abduction and possible assassination of Cameroonian government official Animbom Aaron Ankiambom.⁹⁵

About a half dozen militant organizations emerged in parallel with the ADF in 2017 and 2018, and several appear to have distinct targets and tactics. While the ADF has pursued military, government, and civilian targets alike, a group known as the Vipers has repeatedly burned government buildings, and another, the Manyu Tigers, generally targets military checkpoints.⁹⁶ A group called the Red Dragons is active in the Southwest region's Lebialem region and claims to have shot down a government helicopter, although this assertion is contested.⁹⁷

Several other separatist militant groups have joined a loose confederation, known as the Ambazonia Self-Defense Council (ASDC), in which the ADF does not take part. Founded by the self-declared Interim Government of Ambazonia in March 2018, the ASDC is comprised of the Ambazonia Restoration Army, led by Paxson Agbor; the Tigers of Ambazonia; the Southern Cameroons Defense Forces (SCDF), led by Nso Foncha Nkem; and the Manyu Ghost Warriors.⁹⁸ Analysts consider this conglomerate to be the largest anglophone separatist militant organization in Cameroon in terms of number of members, though the ADF is thought to be the most active.⁹⁹

A second separatist militant organization operates under the name Southern Cameroons Defense Forces seems more likely than peer groups to cooperate with the ADF. Led by Ebenezer Akwanga, this group uses the abbreviation SOCADEF. While some observers consider Nkem and Akwanga's groups to be the same one, they are in fact commanded by different individuals and act separately.¹⁰⁰ Akwanga attended the University of Buea with Lucas Cho Ayaba, leader of the ADF, in the 1990s; together, they founded a student group to advocate for Ambazonian independence through the use of force.¹⁰¹ They continued this activism through years of exile until their present involvement in the Anglophone Crisis.¹⁰² Despite Ayaba and Akwanga's shared history, no currently available information substantiates a relationship between their groups. It is possible, though, that such a relationship may exist.

The ADF's exact level of cooperation with other separatist groups is unclear. The Cameroonian government has reported that in December 2018, the ADF and Tigers battled over control of the areas around the city of Batibo in the Northwest region.¹⁰³ As of April 2019, this is the only recorded instance of intra-separatist fighting. Apart from the Tigers, the ADF does not seem to clash violently with peers, instead aiming its attacks at Cameroonian government forces. The ADF and the other separatist groups collectively share the same tactics and ultimate goal: the use of violence to achieve independence of

Cameroon's anglophone regions. Some analysts believe their leaders, who largely live in exile abroad, may coordinate to some degree.¹⁰⁴

Despite shared interests, anglophone separatist groups in Cameroon have tried and failed to unify in the past. Leaders of militant organizations met several times in Nigeria throughout 2017 to examine the possibility of joining forces. Each, however, claimed popular support from Cameroon's anglophone community and proved unwilling to cede power, ultimately preventing the organizations from unifying under a single banner.¹⁰⁵

In late March 2019, representatives from several pro-anglophone civil society groups met in Washington, D.C. to pursue the creation of a united front.¹⁰⁶ The ADF did not participate.

Simultaneously with the Anglophone Crisis, the Cameroonian government is waging a conflict against the Islamist militant organization Boko Haram in the northern part of the country. There is no relationship between Boko Haram and the Ambazonian Defense Forces or any other anglophone separatist group.¹⁰⁷

D. STATE SPONSORS AND EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

The ADF does not enjoy state sponsorship, but members of the global Cameroonian diaspora community reportedly provide the organization with support and resources.¹⁰⁸ Emigrants supply the ADF with funding, coordination, and publicity and outreach via social media.¹⁰⁹ The ADF's financial director claims that the group received \$50,000 from these sources between its founding in September 2017 and February 2018.¹¹⁰ According to analysts, support for the anglophone independence movement online is largely driven by members of the diaspora, who actively share pro-separatist content impugning the francophone government.¹¹¹

The ADF maintains a website on which it pursues crowdfunding in the model of Kickstarter in order to raise money for militants' salaries, weapons, and other supplies. It accepts donations via Bitcoin, PayPal, and bank transfers. The ADF uses its own social media accounts, including YouTube and Twitter (as well as Facebook before it was banned from the platform), to publicize its fundraising attempts.¹¹²

It has been rumored that Nigeria has provided the ADF with support; however, the group's leader, Lucas Cho Ayaba, has denied this claim.¹¹³ In late 2018, Nigeria extradited nearly 50 leaders of the anglophone separatist movement to Cameroon, where they have since been imprisoned, raising questions about the veracity of conjectures concerning potential Nigerian sponsorship of the ADF.¹¹⁴

Maps

- Not included on any maps at this moment in time

¹ "Incident Summary." Global Terrorism Database. July 2018. Web. 15 March 2019.

<<https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/IncidentSummary.aspx?gtdid=201709090018>>.

² "Cameroon: Three gendarmes injured as suspected Ambazonia fighters attack Littoral region again." Journal du Cameroun. 2 April 2019. Web. 2 April 2019. <<https://www.journalducameroun.com/en/cameroon-three-gendarmes-injured-as-suspected-ambazonia-fighters-attack-littoral-region-again/>>.

³ "What Languages Are Spoken in Cameroon?" World Atlas. 25 April 2017. Web. 15 March 2019. <<https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-languages-are-spoken-in-cameroon.html>>.

⁴ The section of British Cameroon that did not join with the new Republic elected to join the newly independent state of Nigeria, a former British colony.

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