

Cameroon-Nigeria relations – Trends and perspectives

Carlson Anyangwe*

A Review of the book

Osita Agbu & C. Nna-Emeka Okereke (ed.), *Cameroon-Nigeria Relations – Trends and Perspectives*, Lexington, 2022

There is always a temptation to paint and present a politically-correct picture of the neighbourly relations of states, and, in this case, the Nigeria-Cameroon relations. This volume does no such thing. A constant in international relations is that each country unapologetically pursues policies that serve its national interests. Those interests could be antagonistic, complementary, or accommodating. In the pursuit of national interests in foreign policy relations, no favours are conceded to another state.

The relations of the 1960 nascent states of Nigeria and Cameroon remain complex to this day. This is due to the enduring, but thinly veiled, mutual suspicion between the two countries. Much that is at the centre of

that suspicion is the territory of the former UN Trust Territory of the British Cameroons sandwiched between Nigeria and Cameroon. The trust territory was, for administrative convenience, administered for almost half a century from the adjacent British territory of Nigeria. In a self-determination UN plebiscite conducted in the trust territory in February 1961, the Northern part opted to join Nigeria while the Southern part voted “to achieve independence by joining” République du Cameroun. The just-established diplomatic relations between those freshly independent states got off to a chilly start. They became frosty and were congealed.

* PhD in Law, University of London (England, United Kingdom). Professor at the Faculty of Law, University of Fort Hare (South Africa); [carlany2001@gmail.com]; [https://orcid.org/0009-0002-6844-0515]

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According to Cameroon, Britain, with the complicity of Nigeria, rigged the Northern Cameroons vote in favour of joinder to Nigeria. At the UN, there were veiled acrimonious exchanges between the delegations of both countries. Cameroon challenged the results of the Northern Cameroons vote in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and lost. On June 1, 1961 the Northern Cameroons joined Nigeria. Cameroon responded by declaring that date a day of national mourning. It asserted, analogically, that the Northern Cameroons was Cameroon's 'Alsace-Lorraine' and served notice that the territory would in future be retaken from Nigeria. Cameroon thus came to see Nigeria as hegemonic and potentially an imperialist state with territorial ambitions in the Lake Chad Basin area, in other parts of Cameroon, and even over the Southern Cameroons (Ambazonia). Relations between the two countries went icy.

Just when it was thought the ice was beginning to thaw, Cameroon imposed stringent controls on Nigerians and Nigerian goods entering the adjoining territory of the Southern Cameroons (Ambazonia). The outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War, the hostility and physical aggression towards resident Nigerians and the practice of destroying their merchandise *in situ*, the sovereignty dispute over the Bakassi Peninsula, the Boko Haram transborder terrorist insurgency in the shared northern border area of both countries, the Ambazonian war of independence from Cameroon colonization, the resurgence of Biafran separatist agitation in Southeast Nigeria, and maritime insecurity (cabotage, piracy, and kidnapping for ransom) in the adjacent waters of the two countries have

further complicated and bedevilled relations between both countries, dampening any expected real normalization in those relations. A developing irritant is the flood disaster in parts of *north-central, northeast, southeast and south-south geo-political zones in Nigeria* resulting from the release by Cameroon of water from the Lagdo Dam across the border in northern Cameroon.

Currently, the relations between the two countries swing between enduring mutual suspicion and studied collaboration, to a measure of rapprochement alongside what each advertises as evolving security threats to its stability and national interests. The post-Bakassi measured rapprochement between both countries does not conceal the somewhat roller-coaster Nigeria-Cameroon relations periodically punctuated by self-interested intervals of accommodation. These are attested by the conclusion of a number of agreements which for the most part remain unknown and un-implemented. Relations of friendliness and good neighbourliness do not just arise *ipso facto* as a result of geographical propinquity. They have to be developed and nurtured.

Cameroon-Nigeria Relations – Trends and Perspectives (2022) is primarily about trends and dynamics in Nigeria-Cameroon relations since 1960. It is a contribution to the broader field of Nigerian foreign policy studies and practice. The book deals with a broad range of related topics: diplomatic relations before and during the Nigerian Civil War, cross-border crimes, border delimitation issues, dispute over the Bakassi Peninsula and its aftermath, maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea, and functional cooperation between the two cou-

ntries. It is the fruit of the labours of a pool of 21 contributors with demonstrated knowledge of their chosen topics. These contributions provide a diverse and enriching perspective.

This is probably the first book that focuses on Nigeria-Cameroon relations and in such a comprehensive manner. It is a fascinating book that commends itself to anyone interested in accessing the minds of the policy framers of Nigeria-Cameroon relations. The account is both historical and aspirational on a subject that has so far eluded academic attention. It is a noted contribution to Nigerian foreign policy relations generally, and to Nigeria's complicated relations with the contiguous French-

speaking state of Cameroon in particular. The volume navigates the intricate minefield of the fluctuating fortunes of Nigeria-Cameroon relations over a period of some 60 years. It is informative, well-organized, well-researched, and well-written. The account is presented with unique insight, in a style that is clear and direct, and with clarity though the context in which some contributors use the words 'cession', 'secession' and 'separatist', and the appellations 'Cameroon' and 'northwest and southwest regions of Cameroon' may not be apposite and legally correct. Students of inter-African foreign relations and politics will find this book of value.