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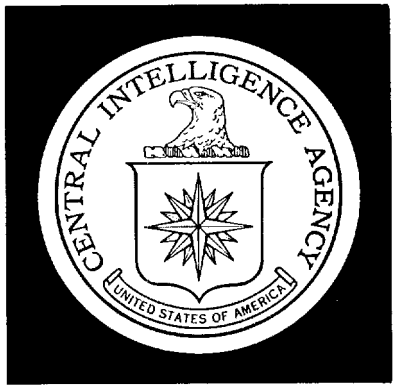

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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

WEEKLY SUMMARY

Special Report

Cameroon: Ten Years of Successful Independence

Secret

№ 13

9 January 1970
No. 0352/70B

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CAMEROON: TEN YEARS OF SUCCESSFUL INDEPENDENCE

Cameroon, a former UN trust territory and the first of 17 black African countries to become independent during 1960, will mark its tenth anniversary with major observances from 10 to 12 January. UN Secretary General Thant will be among the many foreign dignitaries in Yaoundé for the occasion. Although less well known than many of its sister states, Cameroon's record establishes it as one of the more successful and promising of the new African members of the world community.

From shaky beginnings, Cameroon has fashioned an increasingly stable political structure. It has integrated two territories with different colonial backgrounds into a workable federal system, although its many ethnic groups have a long way to go before they meld into a true nation. Economically, it has steadily improved its status despite the problems stemming from underdevelopment. In addition, a Communist-backed insurgency that plagued the country in the years immediately before and after independence has been virtually eliminated. In foreign affairs, Cameroon has established itself as a respected, moderate state whose voice in African councils has grown progressively more influential.

Among the factors responsible for these achievements, much weight must be given to the political acumen and determination of Cameroon's still youthful president, Ahmadou Ahidjo. A quiet person who appears to be the very antithesis of such flamboyant African leaders as Guinea's Sekou Toure, Ahidjo has nonetheless proved to be an effective organizer whose accomplishments have been impressive. As long as Ahidjo remains in office, Cameroon probably will maintain its stability and will continue its economic and political growth.

PROBLEMS AT INDEPENDENCE

Ten years ago, Cameroon faced a future that was uncertain at best. The common African scourge of tribalism was particularly acute there. Divided among some 200 ethnic groups, the population had different cultural heritages and languages, and a long history of rivalry and warfare. Deep religious divisions had also long existed in the country. Muslim Fulanis dominated the tradition-bound north, and Christians and animists predominated in the more progressive southern and coastal areas.

The first and most urgent challenge that President Ahidjo's administration faced was insurgent activity by the Union of the Cameroon Peoples (UPC), a Communist-supported nationalist political organization that had spearheaded the drive for independence in the 1950s. As early as 1955, the UPC had resorted to terrorism and violence in the hope of touching off a nationwide insurrection. Although the attempt failed, insurgency nevertheless remained very much alive in the southwestern area of French Cameroon throughout the remainder of the trusteeship era. On the eve of independence, some 3,000 armed

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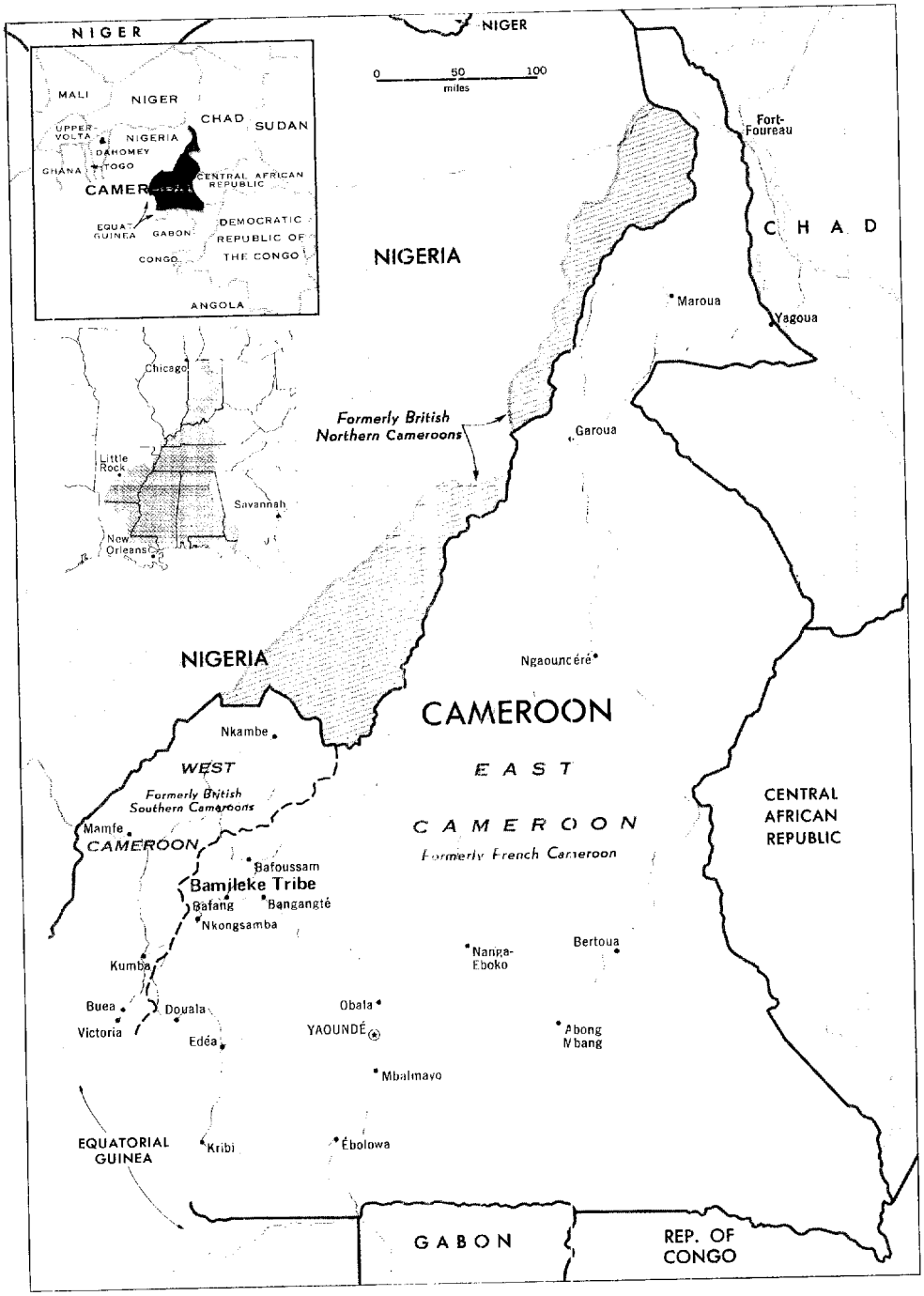

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FROM COLONY TO MODERN STATE

The present Federal Republic of Cameroon has developed from a complicated colonial history. From 1884 to 1915, the entire area was administered by Germany under the name Kamerun. During World War I, French and British armies invaded and overthrew the German protectorate. The Allies then divided Kamerun in 1916; France got four fifths of the area, and the UK took the remainder. French (later East) Cameroon and British (later West) Cameroons passed through phases as League of Nations mandates and as UN trusteeships. For administrative purposes, British Cameroons was further subdivided into northern and southern sections and grouped with the British colony of Nigeria.

On 1 January 1960, the anniversary now being commemorated, the French trusteeship terminated, and the Republic of Cameroon became a fully sovereign country under the leadership of President Ahidjo. The Federal Republic of Cameroon came into being in October 1961 following two UN-controlled plebiscites in British Cameroons in which the inhabitants of each section had the choice of uniting with the Cameroon Republic or definitively joining Nigeria, which had also become independent in 1960. The voting in Southern Cameroons was overwhelmingly in favor of reunification with the former French territory, and in Northern Cameroons it produced a sizable margin for staying with Nigeria.

guerrillas—whose primary aim had by then become the overthrow of Ahidjo, head of the colonial government since 1958—were severely taxing the capabilities of both the French and the newly organized Cameroonian security forces.

Another major preoccupation of the new government was the proceedings then under way to end the trusteeship in British Cameroons. To many Cameroonians, reunification of the former French and British territories was the most important goal after independence, so that the outcome of the UN-recommended plebiscites was of vital concern. Victory would give President Ahidjo the challenging problem of reintegrating two areas that had been administered by different colonial powers for over 40 years. Defeat, on the other hand, especially in the larger and more populous southern sector, would dangerously weaken the President's none-too-secure position.

Ahidjo himself appeared to have at least two strikes against him. At 32, he was the youngest and least experienced of the leaders of the many new black African states that had come into existence by the end of 1960. Moreover, he was a northerner who had been selected by the French in 1958 to head the government of a country traditionally dominated by southerners. Although he had successfully negotiated the final stages of French Cameroon's independence, he was still widely regarded both inside and outside the country as a French stooge.

A serious inherent weakness contributed further to the uncertainty that surrounded the new government. Unlike the administrations in Ghana and Guinea at independence, Ahidjo's government lacked a strong, country-wide political organization based on broad nationalist support. Indeed, the only real nationalist organization, the UPC, was actively opposing the President.

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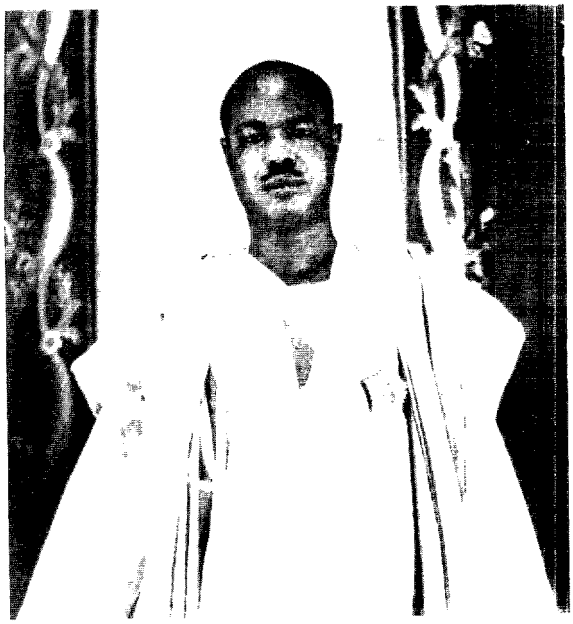
AHIDJO TAKES HOLD

Ahidjo scored some rapid successes in the first years after independence that not only increased his political stature but allowed him time to consolidate his power. By mid-1962, for example, the UPC rebellion had been brought under control, the hard-fought plebiscite in the vital southern sector of British Cameroons had been won, and the reunification negotiations had been successfully concluded.



President Ahmadou Ahidjo

To end the insurgency, Ahidjo's government relied on a program that combined aggressive military counterinsurgency, offers of amnesty, and propaganda campaigns to discredit the insurgents on their home territory. The UPC, its original nationalist appeal undermined first by independence and then by reunification, was reduced to feeding on less-inflammatory economic and social grievances, principally in the Bamileke-inhabited western party of the country. Violence declined markedly after 1962.

With the aid of the radical regime in Congo (Brazzaville), the UPC rebels established bases along the two countries' mutual border in 1965. Operating from these Congolese bases, the insurgents mounted sporadic, but unsuccessful, raids into southeastern Cameroon. The Cameroon Army crossed the border to destroy the bases in January 1968, conducting the maneuver so efficiently that the Brazzaville government withdrew further support from the rebels.

Formal reunification of the former French and British colonies was realized in the second year of Ahidjo's presidency. After extensive bilateral negotiations with native leaders of British Southern Cameroons, a constitution was finally agreed on. Although both sides made concessions to secure the merger, Ahidjo and his more populous state dominated the resulting federation.

The establishment of a national political party was a goal toward which Ahidjo worked for more than eight years. Since 1958, when he became premier of the French trust territory, Ahidjo has moved steadily and skillfully to disarm political opposition and then to absorb it. Beginning with the solid backing of northern politicians, Ahidjo gradually won over southern opposition leaders and their parties. As a result of his maneuvering in the early years of independence, Ahidjo's political organization became first the dominant and then the sole party in the area of the former French territory. Finally, in 1966, through a merger with three parties from the former British Cameroons, he established the present Cameroonian National Union.

What is probably Ahidjo's strongest weapon for political unity and continued stability,

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however, is his knack for maintaining an ethnic, regional, and religious balance within his government. Although many Cameroonians consider that his regime is dominated by northerners—especially because Ahidjo himself is a Fulani from Garoua—positions are actually carefully distributed among all major groups. The President encourages widespread participation in government, but he guards against the seizing of decisive power by any one faction, such as the Bamilekes.

Ahidjo has been similarly careful to ensure a tribal mix in the army, one of the more effective military forces in Africa and a major factor contributing to Cameroonian stability. Counterinsurgency campaigns have kept the army occupied in various parts of the country, affording military leaders little opportunity to become involved in political intrigue. Moreover, the minister of armed forces and the army commander are close associates of Ahidjo, and are considered loyal to him.

Ahidjo has also encouraged, as part of his program for national unity and stability, the establishment of other national organizations in addition to his political party. A new nationwide federation of labor unions formed in the fall of 1969, for example, helps consolidate power more effectively within the President's control.

CAMEROON TODAY: PROGRESS AND PROBLEMS

Cameroon's federation is dominated by French-speaking East Cameroon, with its population of 4.4 million as against that of 1.3 million in ex-British West Cameroon. Nevertheless, Ahidjo has taken pains to elevate West Cameroon's position and to integrate the areas economically and culturally. A network of tarred roads now links major towns in the two states. Increases in civil-service wages have accorded West Cameroonians comparability with East Cameroon federal employees, and the unification of currency and tax structures in the two states has measurably improved West Cameroon's economy. Bilingualism is being promoted in the schools by teaching both French and English in each state. In addition, bonuses are given to civil servants capable of transacting business in both languages.

Today, tribal and regional discontent poses much more serious problems for Cameroonian stability than do the vestiges of UPC insurgency. The UPC in Cameroon has been reduced to less than 150 guerrillas, armed mostly with locally manufactured shotguns and dependent upon banditry for survival.

The Bamileke tribe, an assertive and politically cohesive ethnic group, looms as the most significant potential adversary to Ahidjo's regime. No longer confined to their overpopulated home region straddling the East-West Cameroon border, the Bamilekes wield influence extending to the population centers of Yaoundé, the capital, and Douala, Cameroon's largest city and commercial center.

The largest single tribe, and the most adaptable to change, the Bamilekes have repeatedly expressed dissatisfaction with their share of the political pie. Albert Ndongmo, a Bamileke and the Roman Catholic bishop of Nkongsamba, serves as spokesman for the tribe. As the country's leading critic of Ahidjo, he represents the undercurrent of unrest that has yet to become a unified opposition.

FOREIGN POLICY

Cameroon's foreign policy understandably is keyed more to Africa than to other parts of the world. Regional association with neighboring African countries serves at least two of

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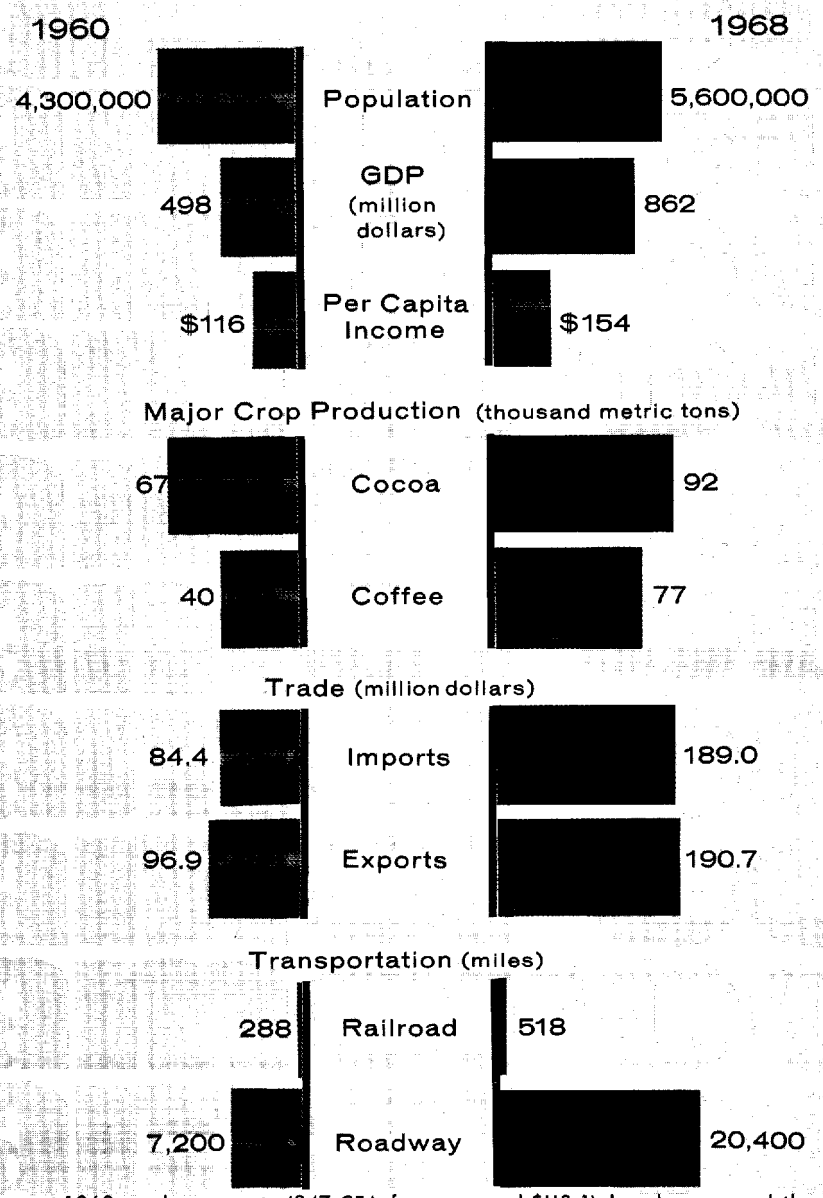
ESTIMATED GROWTH INDICATORS



97000 12-69 The pre-August 1969 exchange rate (247 CFA francs equal $US 1) has been used throughout.

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Cameroon's objectives: further development of its economy and broader cooperation among African states. Recently, Ahidjo has allowed himself to be drawn from his concentration on domestic priorities into accepting a broader role on the African scene. Last September, he was elected president of the 41-member Organization of African Unity, and in that capacity addressed the UN General Assembly. Ahidjo will also host this year's summit conference of the African and Malagasy Common Organization—the grouping of 14 French-speaking African states—which is scheduled to convene in Yaoundé later this month.

Of economic necessity, ties with France remain paramount. French support, which was the mainstay of Cameroon during its critical first years, has taken many forms. These have included important capital contributions to development projects and a variety of services, equipment, and personnel. Until 1966, Paris also provided a large direct budget subsidy. In the early 1960s, annual French assistance of all kinds totaled $40-50 million; it still amounts to about $10 million yearly.

Nevertheless, one of the most noteworthy aspects of Ahidjo's success story is the fact that Cameroon has moved significantly away from its former near-total dependence on France. At about the time that Cameroon no longer needed the French subsidy to balance its budget, other signs of lessening dependence also became evident. French export subsidies, for example, gave way to the progressive tariff equalizations of the European Economic Community. More important, Cameroonians gradually began to assume supervisory and technical positions in the administration and in the security forces, although a number of French advisers remained in key posts. Even before the budget subsidy ended in 1966, France had withdrawn its tactical military troops, leaving less than 100 French personnel attached to Cameroonian forces. Only three former French African territories—the others are Guinea and Mauritania—have survived the withdrawal of French troops without suffering a coup.

Cameroon's posture toward the major world powers can be characterized as "pro-Western nonalignment." Like many other developing black African countries, Cameroon is anxious to straddle the political fence, so as to be in a position to accept economic, technical, and military aid from all sources. On most international issues, however, the nation's position is close to that of the free world.

Ahidjo, moreover, is suspicious of the strings attached to seemingly generous Communist offers. He seeks to control implementation closely, and presses for the use of Cameroonians instead of Communist nationals wherever possible. For this reason, protracted negotiations with the Soviet Union for the construction of a 100-kilowatt short-wave radio transmitter outside Yaoundé broke down last month. It is likely that the whole project will be dropped because Cameroon objects to the proposed assignment of 30 Soviet technicians along with their families to the installation.

ECONOMIC PROGRESS

In the economic sphere, Cameroon has registered progress since 1960 which, if not spectacular, has been impressive for an underdeveloped country. This progress has been particularly noteworthy because it has been accomplished with considerably less foreign assistance than some more heralded "success stories"—notably that of the Ivory Coast.

Overall, the economy has grown steadily at about 4 percent a year (in real terms). Agriculture, the main sector, has shown substantial gains

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in both food and export crops. Production of cocoa and coffee, the two major commodities, has about doubled during the past decade. These two crops account for some 52 percent of agricultural exports.

The most dramatic progress, however, has been made in manufacturing. This sector, the most dynamic since the mid-1960s, has grown at an average annual rate of 11 percent. One of the more significant indications of the increasing importance of manufacturing is its performance as compared with that of agriculture. Despite agriculture's steady growth, its relative contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) has steadily declined. Agriculture now contributes only 37 percent to GDP, a rate much lower than that of most other African countries.

In addition to cocoa and coffee, Cameroon exports timber, cotton, rubber, bananas, palm products, peanuts, tobacco, tea, and some manufactured items. This diversity, most unusual in Africa, has freed Cameroon from dependence on a single commodity. As a result, the country has enjoyed a rising national income as well as a steady accumulation of foreign-exchange reserves and predictable government revenues.

OUTLOOK

The prospects for Cameroon's continued development are good as long as Ahidjo remains in office. There is no reason to believe that his methods of tribally and regionally balancing the government will be any less effective in the near future than they have been in the past. Ahidjo should, therefore, be able to maintain the country's present stability and to prevent any one faction from becoming too powerful. Economic progress, especially industrial development, is also expected to continue at its steady, if not spectacular, rate.

President Ahidjo should easily win re-election when his second term expires early this year. The voting pattern will probably be similar to that of his victory in 1965 when, running unopposed, he drew an overwhelming number of votes. Inasmuch as he is both the leader of the only national party and the incumbent chief executive, it is hard to imagine another candidate even attempting to wage a campaign against him. Nothing short of assassination or coup, therefore, is likely to prevent Ahidjo from continuing as president for at least another five-year term.

As for the possibility of violent overthrow, there is at present no organized intelligentsia, labor group, or religious organization that could serve as a focal point for dissent; nor is there any evidence that the army constitutes a danger to the government. The Bamileke threat is potentially the most serious, because that tribe is not only large but aggressive and politically cohesive. Ahidjo has proved himself a skillful and alert politician, however, who should be able to sense any political maneuverings and turn them to his own benefit. [redacted] 25X1

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