

Angola: Jaw-Jaw or War-War?

Three questions currently stand out over Angola: First, what is the military situation? Second, what are the possible options for both UNITA and the government MPLA? Third, what can be done to make a political solution more likely? Regional and international policy shifts, including re-opening contact with UNITA, may help to steer both the Angolan rebels and the MPLA towards peace and compromise.

The Status Quo

The following recent trends and events in the Angolan political and security situation should be noted:

- There has been a significant deterioration in the security environment along the border area between Namibia and Angola.
- Fighting between FAA and UNITA guerrilla elements in the Cuando Cubango province has intensified.
- There have been renewed efforts by the Namibian government to establish contact with the UNITA leadership in order to discuss the security situation in northern Namibia.
- The third session of the MPLA Central Committee took place between 24–26 February in Luanda. Anti-UNITA sentiments were reportedly very evident, and the meeting felt that the military option remained the only possible solution to the ongoing crisis. There was apparently consensus that neither Luanda nor Windhoek should bow to international pressure to enter into negotiations with UNITA.
- On 26 February 2000, a special meeting of the so-called 'Strategic Cabinet' (the inner circle of President José Eduardo dos Santos) occurred in Luanda for the purposes of assessing and discussing the security situation, especially in the Cuando Cubango province, and Namibia's possible discussions with UNITA. Here the activation of a second front was agreed upon, with a FAA force to advance from Mucusso towards Mavinga via Luenge in addition to the forces currently in the vicinity of Rivungo north of Jamba. An effort would also be made to advance FAA units southwards towards Mavinga from Lucusse via Lumbala Nguimba (Gago Coutinho), and deploy additional FAA units to the Cuando Cubango.
- A fresh FAA military offensive is due to commence in late May or early June.

The failure to find a long-term political solution to end the conflict in Angola not only makes a lasting

peace very difficult in that country but, at best, complicates both the search for stability in the Congo and also the regional integration project in southern Africa. It also illustrates the split between two regional camps: that headed by South Africa involving Botswana and Zambia favouring diplomatic engagement; and that involving Angola and Laurent Kabila's Congo along with Namibia and Zimbabwe, the latter two which have committed forces in support of Kabila.

Angola's war has, of course, now sucked in Namibia (fighting on the side of the MPLA government), and Zambia which has become a sanctuary for UNITA as well as around 30,000 of the 1.2 million Angolans fleeing the fighting. Overall, the number of people currently receiving humanitarian assistance from the World Food Programme (WFP) in Angola totals 1,135,594. The WFP is supporting approximately 250,000 internally displaced persons in Malanje, 205,000 in Huambo, and more than 200,000 people in Bie.

Despite recent Angolan government military successes, the absence of a political solution means the war looks set to drag on. Why?

First, although much was made during 1999 of UNITA's conventional capabilities, including the alleged possession of Mig-23 fighters and helicopters, it is now clear that this was either propaganda on the part of Jonas Savimbi's rebel forces or, more likely, by Luanda as a way to justify its arms build-up and military offensive.

Indeed, given the relatively small income that UNITA has had to operate with since 1994 (no more than US\$250 million per annum from diamond sales with the high premiums payable to middle-men) and the substantial costs of running its army in terms of fuel and food costs, it is likely that only a modest upgrade to its war-fighting capability happened during this time. This is substantiated by the fact that the MPLA

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has, despite its successes, captured little in the way of conventional arms. No more than 15 UNITA T-54/55 tanks and eight D-30 cannons plus quantities of small arms and ammunition (mainly from the dump outside Andulo) have reportedly been captured. The most devastating seizure by the MPLA was of computers and documentation from UNITA bunkers outside Andulo. UNITA did not put up a conventional-type fight which, if it possessed the capability, it certainly would have done over Andulo/Bailundo and, subsequently, Jamba.

Second, despite recent military setbacks, there are indications that UNITA is preparing for another of its guerrilla campaigns to which Savimbi and his soldiers are no strangers. UNITA has apparently completed the restructuring and redeployment of its forces, including units in the Cuando Cubango Province, and a significant part of its conventional forces north of the Kwanza River in the area northeast of Mussende and southeast of Malange. Following a special planning session in mid-December 1999 attended by most of the regional commanders, the UNITA leadership has given the local military commands carte blanche to initiate a guerrilla war.

Indeed, far from being a defeated force, UNITA appears to be stepping up its activities.

There are reports of continuous UNITA operations in the provinces of Uige, Cuanza Norte, Cuanza Sul, Bie, Huambo, Benguela, Huila, Cuando Cubango and Cunene. In the latter case, on 24 February UNITA elements attacked and captured the town of Chiede, 50km north of the Namibian border and 40km southeast of Ongiva. The aim of this is apparently to threaten the strategic route from Lubango to Namibia via Ongiva, Xangongo and Cahama.

Moreover, the FAA movement towards Likua and Mavinga is experiencing difficulties and progress is slow. The extensive use by UNITA of mines and its guerrilla actions along with other problems such as logistical shortages, high personnel losses from fighting and disease (especially malaria), and heavy rains are all impeding the advance.

However, critical to the current phase of the operations is control of the area between Munhango (the birthplace of Savimbi) and Cuemba, a traditional UNITA stronghold. Between these two towns and east of Cuito Bie is the town of Luando, known to the old South African Defence Force (SADF) as 'the gate' — a strategically vital resupply point for air drops to UNITA. UNITA's loss of control of this area could have major, negative ramifications for its military capability.

Possible Options for Peace

Under the circumstances, three options stand out:

Negotiate with UNITA and Savimbi: The MPLA refuses to consider this on the grounds of Savimbi's past record of breaking agreements. In this, they have been supported by the international community despite South Africa, most notably, calling for an inclusive political process. SA Foreign Minister Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma is reported in February calling for negotiations between the MPLA and UNITA, and rejected Luanda's US-backed stance that it would talk to the rebels only if Savimbi was sidelined. She noted that the MPLA 'has not won the war for 30 years and is not about to win it now'. In February, Minister Zuma, SA Defence Minister Mosiuoa Lekota and former president Nelson Mandela issued a warning against seeking a military solution in Angola. Zuma said 'Irrespective of who wins the war, peace will not thereby be created in Angola.'

Negotiate with UNITA without Savimbi: The question here is with whom and on whose authority will they be operating? As the MPLA refuses to negotiate with the Angolan rebel leader, can a peace deal be brokered without him given his apparently continued support within UNITA. If he insists on being a part of a negotiated solution, three alternative scenarios emerge:

"the issue of succession to Savimbi remains a major stumbling block"

- *First*, the MPLA accepts his participation perhaps with the guarantee that he will step aside once an agreement is negotiated. This, however, is unlikely.
- *Second*, he is killed. Although the pressure on him at this time is reportedly very great, the MPLA has been trying this option for some time and the signs are that, bad luck notwithstanding, Savimbi will continue to evade capture or assassination by government forces. This does not, however, totally discount renegade UNITA elements turning against *O Mais Velho* (The Eldest One) as Savimbi is known.
- *Third*, a place of exile is found for him.

Will Savimbi accept exile or even a negotiated withdrawal from the political stage?

This is apparently unlikely for two reasons:

First, it will be difficult to find a suitable secure place for him either inside or outside Angola, especially now that King Hassan of Morocco, one of his great supporters, has passed on. More positively, South Africa may not be such an improbable choice; however, if this option becomes a reality: it could provide the security necessary for Savimbi and this

gesture may even serve to warm relations with Luanda.

Second, the issue of succession to Savimbi, who turns 69 this August, remains a major stumbling block. Of the most likely contenders, the UNITA Vice-President **Antonio Dembo** is geographically dislocated in the north among the Bakongo; the Chief of Staff General **Altino Sapalalo Bock** and Secretary-General **Paulo Lukamba Gato** have a great personal dislike which could threaten to tear the movement apart; **Isaias Samakuva** is in exile in France; and **Abel Chivukuvuku** remains isolated from the centre of power in the UNITA parliamentary faction in Luanda.

A Military victory: This, as suggested above, is not only unlikely but probably undesirable given that political accommodation has to be found for those who have in the past supported Savimbi, particularly among the Ovimbundu. A total military collapse by UNITA will probably make Luanda less likely to accommodate alternative political views.

Making a Political Solution More Likely

In the light of the above, the debate must turn to how to make a political solution stick.

A number of issues are clear:

- *First*, while the two-pronged pressure on UNITA via the international sanctions campaign and the FAA military initiative has succeeded in placing UNITA in what is arguably its worst military position since 1976, there is a danger that the political opportunity created will be lost. International (especially American) support for the MPLA and measures against UNITA have played into the hands of the hardliners on both sides.
- *Second*, the Angolan situation cannot be reduced to a simple morality play between the MPLA and the transgressors UNITA. Currently there is no way for Savimbi to prove his or his party's political

bona fides, and there is no pressure on the government to strike a political bargain.

- *Third*, there is no reason (nor record) to suggest that Luanda will deliver on rhetorical commitments to reform its governance structures, even in the unlikelihood of the military campaign successfully ending the conflict.
- *Fourth*, despite President Dos Santos' promise to hold elections in 2001, these will be meaningless without political accommodation.

In summary three questions stand out:

- *First*, how can the parties be encouraged to negotiate — with whom and through whom?
- *Second*, what are the mechanics of this process? Will this include, for example, a time frame for another internationally-supervised election?
- *Third*, what is the role for the international community and, especially, the Southern African Development Community (SADC)?

A number of policy shifts by regional and international actors could be used to steer both UNITA and the MPLA towards peace and compromise. Put crudely, in both cases there is a need to retain both elements of the carrot and stick. Currently the latter is being used against UNITA in the form of sanctions and international isolation; the former almost exclusively with the MPLA in the (vain) hope that Luanda will see the light and enter into political negotiations and ultimately reform its governance structures.

Here, contact with the UNITA hierarchy, as was demonstrated by the South African transition, could be a relatively cost-free means of steering the course of events and in encouraging moderate behaviour. There may also be a need to explore the possibilities of a permanent place of exile for Savimbi with the necessary guarantees that UNITA will, in his absence, be a part of the political process.