

## Angola's Pathology

Africa's arc of crisis, a string of contiguous conflicts from the Horn to the Atlantic, is a serious obstacle to the continent's renaissance. While Sierra Leone and Liberia illustrate the destructive effects of external economic rivalries in accelerating state collapse, ECOMOG's deployment has contained their spread. The recent coup in Côte d'Ivoire sent a frisson of fear through the Francophonie, but has not (yet?) proven contagious. The conflicts of the arc — between Sudan and Uganda, in the Great Lakes, the Congo's and Angola — are more disturbing, as they suggest the possibility of protracted mutual reinforcement. Among these, two stand out — those in Angola and Rwanda — neither of which has attracted broad African efforts at resolution.

Outsiders' reticence to prescribe solutions in Rwanda is understandable: the genocide wreaked on the small Tutsi minority by the Interahamwe in 1994, is seen to explain, perhaps even excuse, the resurgent Tutsi-based government's subsequent paranoia and reprisals. Paul Kagame, a former lieutenant of Yoweri Museveni in the latter's insurgency against Milton Obote, is seen, moreover, in many circles, as a reformer, one of those who will shape the new Africa. International embarrassment at the failure of the UN Security Council to respond to the Rwandan crisis in 1994 led to formal condemnation of the *genocidaires* and the creation of an international court, before which their leaders were to be brought. Tutsi-led Rwanda, like Israel three decades ago, has a discretionary margin of freedom not lightly accorded to others. Israel's subsequent experience is a cautionary tale, however.

Angola's case is more different than similar, but one parallel is important. Like the present Rwandan government, that in Luanda has been afforded a margin of discretion by international fiat, expressed by the triune of Lisbon, Washington and New York. Having failed to equip the UN observer mission to perform its task adequately in 1992, neither the troika (Portugal, the USA and Russia), nor the UN, saw any option but to find the elections 'reasonably free and fair' and to endorse the government as 'democratically elected'. Jonas Savimbi's UNITA was seen by a new administration in Washington as an awkward relic of the cold war, irredeemably linked to both 'apartheid South Africa' and the 'Reagan Doctrine'. Lisbon found it intractable, hostile to the restoration of Portuguese dominance in Angola and ostensibly closer to Paris, Washington and South Africa.

The deeper causes of the Angolan civil war — which

had been exploited by Havana, Moscow, Paris, Pretoria and Washington for their diverse purposes — and the merits of UNITA's various complaints, even after the massacre of tens of thousands of Ovimbundu (and some lesser number of Bakongo) throughout the country between November 1992 and January 1993, attracted neither analysis nor sympathy. Savimbi's Kagame-like penchant for reliance on an independent military capability, repeated reports of human rights violations in UNITA's ranks, and the undiplomatic stridency of its international rhetoric, also worked against it.

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Its early military successes — against minimal opposition — in 1993, afforded the government scope to ignore Savimbi's unilateral ceasefire in October that year and to press on in recapturing territory for some fifteen months, even after signature of the Lusaka Protocol in November 1994. When that agreement was under the greatest strain in June 1998 — both sides having repeatedly violated its provisions, though the government was subtler and was granted more leeway in the light of its 'democratic legitimacy' — the indefatigable **Maître Alioune Blondin Beye** died in an air crash in Abidjan. **Issa Diallo**, who succeeded him as UN Special Representative, was never allowed by the government to travel to see Savimbi. The die for what followed was cast, as neither the troika, nor the UN, called Luanda's bluff.

UNITA, persuaded that the government would attack again, began to rearm. Luanda had already acted forcefully to displace **Mobutu Sese Seko** and place **Laurent Kabila** in the Zairean capital before Pretoria's mediation could produce a dignified transition to a more stable and inclusive government. It had also invaded the Republic of the Congo, to remove **Pascoal Lissouba**, seen to be too close to UNITA and FLEC, and restore **Denis Sassou-Nguesso**. Zambia was under

threat for treating with UNITA, with explosions in Lusaka engineered by Luanda's security forces after verbal threats had failed to stop the flow of diesel and supplies across the border. Angolan politicians and generals were boasting that Luanda had displaced Pretoria as the regional power and the notion of a Pax Angolana had acquired the currency of hubris. Despite this, nothing was done to constrain Luanda.

UNITA had armed itself to a level above that to which it was accustomed. In the aftermath of the cold war, the price of even relatively sophisticated weapons from the former east bloc had fallen dramatically and purchases were easily arranged. Superpower patrons, as both sides have discovered in Angola, are no longer necessary to acquire and deploy modern weapons in bloody civil wars.

But its arsenal was nothing like that represented by Luanda's hawks. Defence Minister **Kundi Paihama's** extravagant claims about the number of tanks it had acquired and rumours of its having acquired MiG fighters, were crafted to justify the President's announcement at the IVth MPLA Congress in December 1998, of his decision to launch the 'last assault' against UNITA. They also facilitated the purchase of a huge quantity of new sophisticated equipment, which ensured large commissions for the courtiers and generals in the purchasing chain.

UNITA's apparent superiority in the early exchanges after the FAA attacked in December 1998 was due to the FAA Chief of Staff's disinclination to commit to an all-out war, and to the scale of profiteering that had characterised earlier arms purchases. Only after **General João de Matos** had regained control of the purchasing channel in April 1999 — and reduced the sums being diverted, by some 50% — did he build up the formidable capacity that forced UNITA out of the central highlands in October. Operation Restoration, as Matos styled his three-pronged offensive from Huambo, Kuito and Malange against UNITA's symbolic redoubt in Bailundo and its operational and logistics base in Andulo, was highly successful.

Matos' command, control and communications were greatly facilitated by his superior intelligence capability, which enabled him to read the situation on the ground accurately, deploy his forces effectively and mislead UNITA commanders with false communications into believing that his third column was unable to proceed on schedule.

*Savimbi had deployed young, inexperienced commanders who were apparently fearful of admitting that they were outgunned and outflanked. Matos believes that the poor quality of information*

Savimbi received, caused him to make further tactical errors. Eventually, persuaded that he would be sacrificing further lives to no avail, Savimbi ordered the withdrawal of his forces, abandoning both Bailundo and, more importantly, Andulo, with its airfield and fuel and ammunition supplies close by.

The FAA moved swiftly to secure Angola's borders with the DRC, Namibia and Angola. It has been largely successful in the north-east, and having secured permission from Namibia to attack UNITA units in Cuando Cubango from Namibian soil, it has penetrated far deeper into this remote province and caused more damage to UNITA's residual deployments there, than ever before. The Zambian border is the last target, and Zambian troops have been placed on alert to discourage either Angolan party from bringing the war into Zambia itself.

The human cost of the offensive in the central highlands is highlighted in a pastoral letter, 'Para que tenham vida', sent by the Bishops of Huambo and Malange on October 14, 1999.

**“Angolan politicians boasted that Luanda had displaced Pretoria as the regional power”**

Referring to the bombing — in which fuel air and incendiary weapons were used — and the artillery attacks, the Bishops note: 'the brothers in conflict are using arms of massive destruction, which are internationally banned... (t)he people are simply being exterminated... (!)t is extremely worrying that no real refugees emerge... Something very serious is happening. Especially when the very few who manage to escape simply shake their heads and say: "What goes on in there has never been seen, it will never be known or told". Such is the power of death against the Angolans.'

The Namibian campaign has been less intense, but also costly. Apart from the widely reported deaths of the French children and the attack on the Scandinavian aid workers on January 3, which the Namibian Chief of Staff attributed to UNITA, there have been UNITA mortar attacks from inside Angola that killed Namibian police and civilians, and numerous reports of abuses of Namibian civilians by FAA troops. Namibian nationals, including boys and young women, have been recruited into the FAA. Some 10,000 Angolan refugees have crossed the border into Namibia. FAA troops and the Namibian Special Field Force have been removing adult males from refugee columns and camps and allegedly summarily executing them on the Angolan side of the border.

Angola's war can be distinguished from that of the DRC, which has attracted more attention and efforts at resolution of late, in one important way. While the war in the DRC has a centripetal character, drawing in neighbouring and even more distant states, the

Angolan war is centrifugal and expansive, afflicting all the countries on its periphery. Many (DR) Congolese elites, with their particular geopolitical perspective, say that it is the Congo's weakness that facilitates war within and around its borders. Luanda, like **PW Botha's** South Africa, seems not to understand this, still believing that carrying the war to its neighbours will emasculate the rebels, and that manufacturing and sustaining a pliant pseudo-opposition at home, is sufficient to give it democratic legitimacy. Worse still is the fact that it has been encouraged in this foolishness over the past year.

The tolerance extended to Luanda's puppetry with the renovada faction of UNITA, led by **Eugénio Manuvakola**, the efforts by some Western embassies to champion a leadership challenge by **Abel Chivukuvuku**, and the SADC's connivance at Luanda's declaration of Savimbi as a 'war criminal', serve simply to defer the need to restart negotiations to end the war. Recent efforts by British and US officials to marginalise Savimbi within UNITA are counter-productive. It was Savimbi and those closest to him who called repeatedly for negotiations throughout 1999; it was UNITA's 'Foreign Secretary' **Alcides Sakala**, speaking on Savimbi's authority, who repeated UNITA's interest in negotiations late in January 2000. One does not, in any event, negotiate an end to a war with one's friends, but necessarily with one's enemy!

UNITA has not been destroyed, despite General Matos' plausible claim that over 80% of its conventional capacity has been eliminated. While

the UN sanctions campaign has no doubt had an impact, it will probably not prevent UNITA from conducting an effective guerrilla campaign. It has *already reorganised its forces and fired the first salvo*. More activity in Bié, Huambo, Uige and Zaire provinces may be expected. The FAA now faces a far more difficult task. Its forces are extended, with long logistical lines; keeping men in the field for many more months will be costly.

It is the politicians in Luanda who are disposed to go on. General Matos has said that he believes that a political negotiation should follow his military victory. If there is none, he will, no doubt, deploy his forces in strength when the rains stop in April, and seek a military closure, but the cost will be high in both financial and human terms, and the outcome uncertain.

Mounting evidence of deep-seated corruption within the Angolan presidency and high government circles has, meanwhile, caused senior Western politicians to conclude that President **dos Santos** should go once Savimbi has been removed, but the flaw lies in the sequential nature of this proposition. Corruption has been institutionalized in Luanda and removing one man and his personal entourage will not bring about a fundamental change. Transformation of the Angolan system will only follow a negotiated peace, and establishment of a solid framework for national reconciliation. It will depend on the existence of a strong opposition and an active civil society. A concerted effort to advance this agenda is overdue.