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BACKGROUND TO THE ANGOLA CRISIS: WHAT WENT WRONG.

A Fragile Peace

By December 1990 the year-long Portuguese brokered mediations bore fruit. The US Secretary of State, James Baker, and his then Soviet counterpart, Eduard Shevardnadze, met MPLA and Unita representatives in Washington and pressured them into negotiations.

The ceasefire of May 15 1991 resulted in the Bicesse Accords. Unita's former allies, the USA and South Africa, no longer driven by Cold War imperatives, now had an interest in a settlement. Both established relations with the previously Marxist MPLA and began assisting more broadly the democratic process. On May 31 1991 the two week ceasefire was developed into the Estoril Peace Accord, witnessed by: the US and Soviet Foreign Ministers, the UN Secretary General, Javier Perez de Cuellar, and Ugandan President and OAU Chairman, Yoweri Museveni. The MPLA and Unita undertook to ensure that:

- the ceasefire be jointly monitored by MPLA and Unita representatives along with the USA, the USSR and Portugal.
- general elections be set sometime between September and November 1992.
- Unita and the MPLA forces be amalgamated, under British, French and Portuguese supervision, into a new 50 000 strong national army (FAA).
- a UN peace-keeping force be sent to Angola to help monitor the truce and elections.

Problems with the peace

The Estoril Peace Accord failed, however, in defining a legal framework to guide the process. As an afterthought the Political-Military Commission was established. This body, in turn, established the Verifications Committee to prevent violations of the Accord. And in yet another *ad hoc* measure the UN Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM), headed by the UN Secretary General's special representative to Angola, Miss Margaret Anstee (UK), was appointed.

The UN contingent monitoring the demobilisation and the elections was too small to control the process. Compared to Namibia, which in 1989 had ten times the number, the peace-keeping force in Angola was greatly over-stretched. As early as May 1992 diplomats noted that there were too few observers to guarantee elections free of fraud and intimidation.

While the Accord called for soldiers and guerillas from the rival armies to report to 50 assembly points, the over-stretched UN observers reported privately that they had no idea whether all forces were reporting and suspected that both sides were preparing arms caches.

Nonetheless a seemingly suitable compromise was reached: a Unita commander headed the army while MPLA men headed the air force and navy. Then, undermining this already tenuous compromise, Savimbi stated that all Unita members in the new national armed forces would, despite amalgamation, consider themselves Unita for some time. By June 1992 only 14% of the MPLA forces and 2.1% of Unita fighters had been demobilised.

Observers noted that the MPLA was sinking all its resources and skills into its own campaign. Unless more resources were made available to other groups the poll would lack credibility. To ensure genuine democratic competition assistance was needed for the emerging political parties and presidential candidates. Despite it being obvious that the MPLA government's internal capacity to manage and share resources was enormously limited the international community failed to provide enough assistance to other parties.

Another weakness in the Estoril Peace Accord was that it was negotiated at a very senior level. The foreign mediators, so intent upon a settlement between Savimbi and dos Santos, ignored the consequences of an elite settlement. Hence while party heads might have reached consensus, this was very difficult to transfer to the provincial level, where cooperation remained nonexistent.

The Peace Deficit

Only 50 000 of the estimated 250 000 armed men in Angola were absorbed into the new national army. Demobbed soldiers were sent home with clothing and a mere US\$ 20 in cash. 200 000 unskilled men and their dependants landed, overnight, on the job market. Unemployed ex-soldiers have resorted to crime and banditry as a means of survival.

The end of hostilities also brought freedom of movement. Urban migration placed a huge strain on the infrastructure of the major centres, resulting in general infrastructural collapse.

Poor infrastructure put at least 10-20% of the electorate out of reach by any means other than aircraft while too few vehicles were available to reach that 80-90% accessible by road. As inaccessible areas were generally Unita strongholds Savimbi claimed the polling unfair. To these accusations of manipulation the MPLA charged that in Unita-controlled territories entire populations were being held ransom to a successful Unita outcome. The understaffed UN, unable to verify these reports, was powerless to restore calm, let alone exercise credible independent authority.

Already resettlement of the 215 000 refugees who returned from Zaire will cost US\$ Angola 55m. More refugees are expected from Zambia, Zimbabwe and Namibia, adding to the over 800 000 internally displaced Angolans.

Refugees and smuggling have added to market insecurity. Rates are continually undercut by the realities of a black market completely beyond fiscal control. While the MPLA abandoned Marxism in favour of a market-led economy and deregulation has made basic goods available, the removal of price controls has caused living costs to soar. Private international capital's capacity to promote stability and lead to restructuring will depend on peace.

While a strong desire for peace is present among the population, the peace dividend will only impact once a political settlement is reached and the World Bank and IMF open credit facilities. In a Catch-22 situation, aid that would have prevented the political settlement being overwhelmed by structural weaknesses and tensions was not forthcoming, until, ironically, peace could be shown to be lasting.

Multi-partyism is not Democracy

While around 20 parties emerged, the main contenders were the MPLA government and Unita. MPLA inexperience with the democratic system led it to assume, and indeed encourage, a 'two-party winner-takes-all' contest. A sizable third party preventing a zero sum contest never emerged. Instead the MPLA ended up with a 'nothing-to-lose' Unita resuming the armed struggle.

In spite of the democratic facade, security remained the primary concern with both parties having double agendas and preparing fall-back positions. Accusations that Unita was secretly withdrawing its best soldiers to bases in the bush in case of an unfavourable election result provided the MPLA with an excuse to break the spirit of the Peace Accord and unilaterally establish their own 'reserve' force; the 'Anti-motim' or riot police. Ostensibly there to ensure the smooth running of the election process, this MPLA 'para-military' force, in turn, provided Savimbi with the opportunity to cry foul and hence justify his secret bases and arms build up. Neither the ill-equipped indigenous structures nor the understaffed international outfits were in a position to mediate.

The Campaigning

The MPLA government's National Electoral Council democratically approved the election of Eduardo dos Santos as presidential candidate under US, Portuguese and Russia supervision. Unita, despite having split from the MPLA in 1975 owing to the inflexibility of the MPLA's one party system, developed no internal democratic structures. Power became highly concentrated, personalised and authoritarian producing an inflexible and repressive internal structure. Even with peace Unita never made the transition from an authoritarian guerrilla movement into a democratic political structure capable of appealing to a civilian electorate. Attempts by Unita officials Tito Chingunji and Wilson dos Santos to introduce internal democracy ended in their and their families' execution. The killings of Chingunji and others tipped the balance in the towns back towards the MPLA as well as robbed Savimbi of the very men who could have carried Unita's case effectively to the urban constituency.

Both parties traded too heavily on the personalities of their leaders. Policy formulation was non-existent and no real issues emerged. Neither party was democratically sophisticated enough to develop real policy formulation mechanisms and in lieu of being able to resort to the easy ideological positions of the Cold War no real democratic debate emerged. In the absence of any real policy difference the leaders' merits were proposed as political virtue and a dangerous populist debate ensued.

On the one real issue of the Economy, both the MPLA and Unita subscribed to the free market structural adjustment policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

The MPLA's non-ethnic appeal remained broadly inclusive and ethnically diverse. Savimbi's support base was almost exclusively from the Ovimbundo tribe. The support of the smaller Woyo tribe was lost when their Chief, former Unita General Miguel N'Zau Puna, defected along with General Tony da Costa Fernandes after clashes with Savimbi over the absence of internal party democracy.

Unita's undemocratic internal structure, its ethnic appeal, its severe human rights abuses, its messianic propaganda based on the cult of the increasingly megalomaniac Savimbi, awed peasants but failed to appeal to the educated urban populations.

The Election

The 29 and 30 September election took place at 5 800 polling stations for a 223 member legislature and a president chosen from 11 candidates. Considering that half the 10m inhabitants are under 14 and that 4,5m people voted, the poll was high. The percentages of the legislative votes won translated into 129 seats for the MPLA and 70 for Unita. In addition dos Santos gained 49.57% of the presidential votes while Savimbi secured 40.07%. According to the peace accord in the event a presidential candidate not winning more than 50% of the votes in the first round a second ballot was to be held within 90 days.

The re-run issue is presently contributing to the stalemate. Unita has lost Parliament regardless. While it can insist on a re-run of the Presidential poll it is likely that dos Santos will win again, this time with over 50% of the vote. Hence, to date, Savimbi has refused a settlement, alleging fraud.

The pre-election agreement to form a government of national unity by dividing power according to the election outcome never materialised as the MPLA and Unita failed to extend this cooperation to a structural level. There was almost no dialogue, and still less cooperation, between Unita commanders and MPLA governors. Dos Santos had relied too heavily on a personal deal struck between himself and Savimbi.

Conclusion

The salience of the Angolan crisis for South Africa lies in its illustration of how an internationally supervised democratic process based on compromise between elites can be rendered meaningless by the realities of the real power relations within the broader society.

Jan Smuts House
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