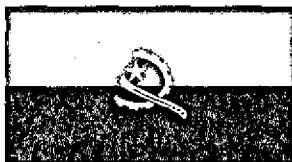




# Country Reports

## Angola: War without End?



**SAIIA ARCHIVE**  
**DO NOT REMOVE**

Country Report No. 2



The South African  
Institute of  
International Affairs

Established 1934

# **Angola: War Without End?**

Mark Shaw with Nthabiseng Nkosi

Copyright © 2001

All rights reserved

**THE SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

ISBN: 1-919810-27-7

**SAIIA Country Profiles No.2**

**SAIIA National Office Bearers**

Dr Conrad Strauss  
Gibson Thula • Elisabeth Bradley  
Brian Hawksworth • Alex Pienaar  
Dr Greg Mills

# Angola: War Without End?

Mark Shaw with Nthabiseng Nkosi<sup>1</sup>

*The guests of honour, UNITA and MPLA brass, stood awkward on opposite sides of the patio. If this was a measure of the new trust, Angola was damned. Colonel Jaime Nobre on the government side, whose job was to select UNITA men for the new army, was visibly nervous... 'I don't like them at all', Nobre said. He reached for another whisky from the waiter's silver tray. 'They're still the same bad men'.<sup>2</sup>*

*I have always tried to the best of my ability and courage to serve the interests of Angola and Africa. I am not a traitor to Africa and the hard days that we expect ahead will prove that I stand for my principles. In Angola might has made right but I will remain in the bush to cry for justice.*

Jonas Savimbi in a letter  
to President Kenneth Kuanda of Zambia, 1976.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> This study is based on a review of literature on the history of conflict in Angola as well as a series of interviews conducted both in Angola and South Africa during September and October 2000. The majority of interviews were conducted either off the record or as background. Where a direct quotation from an interview has been used, we have tried to give some indication of the position of the person as well as the date and place of the interview. While the report provides a broad overview of the political economy of the Angolan conflict, an attempt has been made to refer the reader to more detailed accounts of particular aspects.

<sup>2</sup> Matloff J, *Fragments of a Forgotten War*. London: Penguin, 1997, pp.298-299.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Stockwell J, *In Search of Enemies: A CIA Story*. London: Futura, 1979. pp.249-250.

## Introduction

Few states present such stark contrasts as Angola. On the one hand, the country possesses an abundance of natural resources; on the other, it is plagued by armed conflict and poverty. Over the last quarter century an estimated 1.5 million lives have been lost in a war which seems to have no end.

Angola's impressive deposits of minerals include prodigious amounts of diamonds, of which it is the world's fourth main producer by value. In addition, Angola has rich and largely unexploited offshore oil deposits, making the country the second largest producer of petroleum, after Nigeria, in sub-Saharan Africa.

Despite these riches, social and development indicators suggest that for ordinary people, Angola is one of the worst places in the world to live. The country's rate of child mortality, with more than a quarter of all children dying before they reach the age of five, is one of the highest in the world, and its average life expectancy is one of the lowest. Infrastructure has been badly damaged in the war, and social services such as health and education are poorly developed or non-existent.

The war itself has consumed a substantial portion of the country's resources while enriching only a small number of its citizens. This has not always been the case. Indeed, the nature and context of war in the country has changed significantly since the early 1970s.

The conflict in Angola has passed through a number of distinctive phases. It began as an anti-colonial war between the Portuguese and three main liberation armies. The colonial period ended suddenly and inconclusively, leaving the three main contenders to fight it out for control of the newly independent state. With each side backed by the resources and support of one of the adversaries in the Cold War, the conflict quickly developed into a fight between proxies of the major powers.

The end of the Cold War saw the beginning of negotiations to end the conflicts generated through it. Angola was no exception, except that the conflict there has proved remarkably resistant to any form of resolution.

The war has continued, partly because there is popular disaffection with the role of the Angolan government, and partly because both sides to the conflict can continue to fund their war-making through exploitation of the country's natural resources.

Unburdened of the ideological strictures of the Cold War, Angola has rapidly developed into a classic resource conflict, where one of the key objects of making war has become the control of resources and their exploitation. This has enriched some—generals on either side and a range of economic middlemen, many of them from outside Angola—but continues to impoverish ordinary Angolans.

The war has now reached an important turning point, with the rebels being forced to the west of the country. While the government now holds the major towns, the areas in between are effectively open for any side to exploit. The conventional capacity of the *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angolas* (The National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola—UNITA) for war making, which was probably exaggerated in the first place, has been shattered. UNITA has withdrawn to the bush and over the Zambian border, but continues to conduct hit and run attacks.

Even should the war be ended through a decisive defeat of UNITA (which on current evidence appears unlikely), or through some form of negotiated peace deal (the possibility of which has been excluded by the government, although statements to this effect are inconsistent), the reclaiming of the countryside and the delivery of even basic social services to the poor will be a massive undertaking. The weight of history in Angola is heavy. Even if the current war is driven by interests of profit and plunder, accumulated experience and a legacy of mistrust

compound the difficulties of attempts at peace making.

While the government has a new-found international legitimacy, outside the major towns in the interior rule through the barrel of a gun will prevail for the foreseeable future. International sanctions targeted at UNITA's sale of diamonds to fund its war effort, and greater austerity measures imposed by the newly implemented International Monetary Fund (IMF) monitoring programme will have the unintended positive consequence of granting fewer resources to those at the working end of the conflict. This in turn raises the possibility that the scope and the scale of the banditry intrinsic to warring in Angola will increase. These factors may change the war and perhaps restrict it to the hinterland, but probably not end it.

The war has given rise to a network of criminal operations, both inside and outside formal government structures, who supply and thereby sustain the conflict. Given the resources generated in this way, these operations have established themselves securely in the sub-continent, and will not be easily eradicated. One danger is that the end of the war will see an increase in purely criminal activities. Already on the war's front line—although this term is in itself alien to the fluid engagements fought in Angola—it is often difficult to distinguish the criminal actions of ordinary bandits from the activities of the warring parties.

Resolving the conflict is likely to be a long and painful process, and not a short and decisive victory on either the battlefield or at the negotiating table. The most appropriate strategy now must be to isolate the factors that drive the conflict, which must include much greater transparency in respect of how the country's oil resources are spent. However, there are some positive signs: an apparent willingness by UNITA to talk if the government wishes; to reciprocate a growing (although still muted) criticism of government by journalists, church and civil society groups; promises of a change in the constitution (which may in itself take the form of negotiations, albeit under a different guise); and the possibility of elections in 2001. These factors

suggest that the next couple of years in Angola will be decisive in determining whether or not the country can achieve a state of permanent peace.

## Country profile<sup>4</sup>

Angola is a large country, the fifth largest country in sub-Saharan Africa (after Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad and Niger), with a land area of 1.25 million square kilometres, which is about the same size as Spain and France combined. As a result the country has long (and difficult to protect) borders with four states: 2,511 kilometres with the Democratic Republic of Congo, formerly Zaïre (of which 220 kilometres form the boundary of the Cabinda enclave); 201 kilometres with the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville); 1,376 kilometres with Namibia; and 1,110 kilometres with Zambia (see annexure).

The country's geography—and as a result some of its key political and social divides—is dominated by a single feature. A narrow low-lying plain extends along the length of the coast in a band of between 50 to 100 kilometres, rising steeply into an escarpment, that levels out into a plateau, the *planalto*, which covers four fifths of the country and extends eastwards to the other side of Africa.

The coastal plain is generally hot and dry, while the *planalto* is cooler and receives far more rain. Angola also traverses a series of latitudinal climate bands—hot humid tropical conditions in the north give way to a cooler humid zone in the central *planalto* and finally a hot dry zone in

---

<sup>4</sup> This section is based on a number of documents that provide similar background information on Angola. In particular, we have made extensive use of an unpublished UNICEF report, 'Angola in historical perspective' which provided valuable data and insights. Also used, were: The World Bank Group, *Angola at a Glance*, 09/07/200; Angola, *The World Factbook 2000*; Turner B (ed.), *Southern Africa Profiled*. London: MacMillan, 2000; International Monetary Fund, *Angola: Statistical Annex*, IMF Staff Country Report No 99/25, April 1999; and, The Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Profile: Angola*, 1998-99.



the south, which becomes desert in the south-west.

There is a long rainy season, usually beginning in October and continuing until April. Almost no rain falls during the rest of the year. The rainy and dry seasons are important in determining the periods of greatest military activity in the country, with most government offensives taking place in the dry season, when the roads are passable.

The temperate climate in many parts of the country and the richness of the soil make Angola particularly favourable for agricultural production, with the country being potentially one of the richest farming areas in sub-Saharan Africa. Indeed, until the mid-1970s it was a large exporter of agricultural products, including food. Since then, however, Angola has become a net importer of food, with cash crop production having all but collapsed in most parts of the country due to the war. Arable land is estimated to be between five and eight million hectares, of which only about 1.5 million hectares are currently under cultivation. Along the 1,650 kilometres of coastline are some of the richest fishing waters in Africa. Over-fishing, mainly by foreign fleets, has seriously diminished these resources in recent years.

Angola is characterised by an impressive spectrum of mineral resources. These include deposits of gold, manganese, copper, lead, zinc, tin, wolfram, vanadium, titanium, phosphates, marble and granite. The country's interior, in particular the north-eastern provinces of Lunda Norte and Lunda Sul, have rich diamond deposits. These exist both in alluvial deposits, which are found in the beds and banks of rivers and former river courses, created over millions of years by river flow and erosion, and in kimberlite deposits, deep diamond-bearing shafts. The alluvial deposits are relatively easy to mine, requiring few skills and little capital. The diamonds represent an important source of income, not only for UNITA and government interests (including the Angolan army) but also for small prospectors working in the area. Some of the key engagements of the war have been fought over who controls access to the diamond-bearing areas of the country.

Whatever the richness of the country's natural resources, it is oil which is now the mainstay of the Angolan economy. Oil production is almost exclusively off-shore, and thus requires large scale capital and technical inputs. This has had two important implications. First, oil production has been almost untouched by the war, and while oil wealth dominates the economic activity of the country, it employs very few Angolans. Angola's oil is of a high quality (it is light, with a low sulphur content), and it is geographically well situated for transport at a low cost to the major markets of North America and Europe. Unsurprisingly there is considerable interest in the country's oil wealth; oil executives describe it as the 'hottest new place in the world to search for hydro-carbons'<sup>5</sup> with one prominent company describing Angola as 'The North Sea of the South.'<sup>6</sup>

Given the richness of the country's resources and the geographic size of the country, Angola had a relatively small population of just over 10 million in July 2000. This is, however, only an estimate, given that there has been no national census since 1970. A number of other sources, including some used by the United Nations, place the figure for the population in 1996 at 12.5 million.

Even more uncertain are estimates as to the changing geographic location of the population. The war-related displacement of the Angolan people has compounded the normal process of rural exodus present in other developing countries, resulting in very rapid urbanisation. The overall extent of this movement of peoples is unclear. It is estimated that by 1994 just over 40% of the population were living in urban areas, in contrast with just over 10% in 1960 and 14% in 1970. By 1996 some estimates placed the population of Luanda at around 2.5 million, a quarter of the total population. The city is now ringed by dense shanty towns, in which living conditions are appalling. One

---

<sup>5</sup> Interview deputy-general manager of major oil company, Luanda, 10 October 2000.

<sup>6</sup> The phrase is used by BP Amoco.

impact of the war is that there are significantly fewer young men than young women; in the 20–25 age group it is estimated that there are only 71 men for every 100 women.

Most of the population of the country is concentrated along the coastal plain and in the western *planalto*. While population densities range from 35 to 40 people per square kilometre in the west-central provinces of Huambo and Benguela (compared with just over 1,000 per square kilometre in Luanda), only two to three people per square kilometre live in the provinces of the east (Kuando Kubango, Moxico, Lunda Sul and Lunda Norte). The east of the country is characterised by large tracts of unpopulated land and forests, difficult to occupy in force for sustained periods and therefore conducive to guerilla warfare.

Angola has three broad ethno-linguistic groups, the Ovimbundu, Mbundu and Bakongo, although determining their actual size remains a matter for conjecture. Nevertheless, the three ethnic groups appear to remain important points of identity for ordinary Angolans, providing the core constituencies for the three main nationalist movements at the time of independence. Rapid urbanisation and the growing influence of the Portuguese language (ironically a trend which increased after independence) may have blurred some of these boundaries.

Ethnic identities remain important points of affiliation across the various political movements, however. This is most clear between those peoples along the coastal strip (the Mbundu in particular) who had the longest and most intense exposure to Portuguese language and culture, and who have traditionally supported the *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola—MPLA). Those in the interior, such as the Ovimbundu, whose heartland is the rich farming areas of the central-west *planalto* and the industrial cities of the west, have traditionally supported UNITA.

While social conditions are probably better for at least a proportion of

those who live in Luanda than for those exposed to the bleaker conditions of the interior, Angola's social indicators point to the extent of the social crisis in the country. Most badly affected are the vulnerable groups, particularly women and children. UNICEF's child risk measure, which takes into account factors such as the child mortality rate, the percentage of children underweight and the percentage of children not attending school, gives Angola the worst rating in the world (96/100). The under-five mortality rate is now generally accepted as providing an indication of the overall well-being of children. In Angola in 1992 there were in 274 deaths before the age of five for every 1,000 births, meaning that on average 25% of all children born in Angola never live to see their fifth birthday. In most developing countries child mortality figures are much higher for rural than urban areas. In Angola, a reflection of the rapid extent of urbanisation and the lack of social services is that rural and urban child mortality rates are equally poor.<sup>7</sup>

Epidemic emergencies and resurgent diseases represent a very real threat to the survival of children in Angola. These include measles, polio, tuberculosis, sleeping sickness, cholera, leprosy and meningitis. 'The threat of epidemics and resurgent diseases', a UNICEF report concludes, 'is closely linked to shortfalls in vaccination coverage, poor environmental hygiene and lack of information and capacity for implementing epidemic control measures'.<sup>8</sup>

Angola also faces an acute problem of malnutrition. By the end of May 2000, the World Food Programme was feeding an estimated 1.5 million people in Angola. The problem is particularly severe in areas that have been affected by the war. In the city of Melange in the central-north of

---

<sup>7</sup> The data on the position of children in Angola, including that on malnutrition, is drawn from an unpublished UNICEF document, *The Present State of Angola's Children*. The report is undated. See also UNICEF Emergency Campaigns, *Angola: Donor Update*, 22 September 2000.

<sup>8</sup> UNICEF, *The Present State of Angola's Children*, op. cit., p.8.

the country, which was besieged when the war resumed in 1992, the rate of malnutrition for children under five reached 34%, with 20% suffering severe malnutrition. While such figures are worrying, of greater concern is the long-term impact of endemic conflict on levels of malnutrition in the country. There are three main internationally accepted standards for protein energy malnutrition: stunting (low height for age); underweight (low weight for age); and wasting (low weight for height). The national rates for each of these measures among children in Angola in the mid-1990s are shocking: 53% stunted, 42% underweight and six percent wasted.

These measures provide only some insight into the social problems created by the war and government mismanagement in Angola. They are particularly severe because of two closely inter-related factors: the long-term nature of the ongoing conflict in Angola, and the dramatic economic and social collapse which occurred in the country in the early 1990s as the war resumed. The origins of the war, the failed attempts at peace and the causes of the country's social and economic implosion are examined in the sections that follow.

## **From colonialism to conflict**

The nature of the country's colonisation process, the subsequent hasty withdrawal of the colonial power, and super-power competition during the Cold War all had a decisive role in shaping the nature of the conflict in Angola.

A European presence in what is today Angola stretches as far back as 1482, when the Portuguese first reached and began exploring the northern Angolan coast. Just under 100 years later, a Portuguese settlement was established at Luanda. For the next three centuries the colonisers occupied and controlled a thin strip of territory along the coast north and south of Luanda at varying levels of strength. A few settlements were also established inland.

The central focus of the Portuguese colony in Angola was the slave trade, until slavery was eventually abolished in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During this period more than four million slaves were transported from what is today Angola to the New World and to Brazil. The slave trade caused deep internal strife among the various chiefdoms that controlled the area, as each chief sought to strengthen his rule and to profit economically from an increased output of slaves. Such tensions were exacerbated as growing amounts of arms and munitions were acquired by some groups.<sup>9</sup>

Paradoxically the slave trade contributed in two important ways to the formation of Angola. First, it destroyed the social and political organisations of the kingdoms of the interior; and second, it provided the broad boundaries of present day Angola, the geographic expanse of the country being roughly the area from which the Portuguese drew slaves over the centuries.<sup>10</sup>

More extensive European settlement was heralded by a decline in the slave trade; the requirement to make the colony economically more profitable; and increased competition from other European powers; as Africa was divided among them. When Angola's borders were defined through a series of treaties between 1880 and 1920, one small part of the country, Cabinda, on the north coast, was separated from the rest of Angola by a small sliver of land which gave the then Belgian Congo access to the sea.

The economic interests of the territory now focused on farming and the mining of diamonds. By the late 1940s, diamonds and agricultural products like coffee had become the colony's main exports. The

---

<sup>9</sup> For an overview see John Iliffe, *Africans: The History of a Continent*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1995, pp.127-158.

<sup>10</sup> Henderson L, *Angola: Five Centuries of Conflict*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1979, p.98.

Portuguese system of colonisation was one of 'direct rule', with the lines of authority drawn from Lisbon to the most remote village in the interior. There was little challenge to the system because of the 'divide and rule' policies practised elsewhere by traditional chiefs.<sup>11</sup> Taxes were imposed on ordinary Angolans with the dual aim of raising revenue to cover government expenses, and forcing people into formal economic activity.

From 1950, the Portuguese encouraged Europeans to settle in Angola. The colony had a population of just under 350 000 whites by 1974. Portuguese colonial policy effectively created different classes of citizens: Africans who attained a particular level of education were given the status of *assimilado*, which in theory made them equals of the white colonists. But the poor provision of education to ordinary Angolans (only 15% could read or write by 1970) meant that only a tiny and privileged few acquired any special status.<sup>12</sup>

Agriculture dominated the economic output of the colony, with coffee being the most important single export until the rise of the oil industry, which began with the start of oil production in Cabinda in 1968. By 1973, oil had become the most important export commodity, followed by coffee and diamonds.

In the period from 1920–1960, the Angolan economy succeeded in enriching only a small number of people, mainly whites and a tiny African elite, with the remainder of the population becoming increasingly impoverished. The overall standard of living of Angolans declined as the cash economy grew and as commercial farming reduced the land available for subsistence agriculture. Contract labour (combined with the price of goods in the formal sector) did not

---

<sup>11</sup> See Oliver R & A Atmore, *Africa since 1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

<sup>12</sup> UNICEF, 'Angola in Historical Perspective', unpublished and undated, p.8.

compensate for the loss of production in the subsistence economy.<sup>13</sup>

Angola and other Portuguese colonies were regarded as integral parts of Portugal, and no steps were taken to anticipate self-rule, despite armed resistance to the colonial occupation from the early 1960s. Political opposition was ruthlessly suppressed (as happened in Portugal itself), although by the early 1970s the war in Angola had reached a virtual stalemate and become a drain on Portuguese resources.<sup>14</sup>

Three movements, each with roots in different geographical locations in the country, and drawing supporters from different ethnic groups, fought the Portuguese (and to a lesser extent each other) to attain independence: the MPLA; the *Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola* (National Liberation Front of Angola—FNLA); and UNITA. In addition, a secessionist group, the *Frente de Libertação do Enclave do Cabinda* (Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda—FLEC) sought to establish the oil-rich Cabinda enclave as a separate country.

After centuries of engagement in Angola, the Portuguese departed with little advance warning. Portugal had little time (and no real inclination) to facilitate a smoother transfer of power. Following a coup in Portugal in April 1974 that overthrew the Salazar dictatorship, the successor government made hasty arrangements to dispose of the country's colonies, which had become an increasing economic burden. Angola was granted independence on 11 November 1975. The rival nationalist groups engaged in fierce fighting in the months before independence day, and foreign backers—the Soviet Union and Cuba in the case of the MPLA, and the United States in the case of the FNLA and later UNITA—provided resources, weapons and in some cases troops to their selected allies. As independence day approached and fighting

---

<sup>13</sup> Henderson, *op. cit.*, p.142.

<sup>14</sup> See Van Der Waals WS, *Portugal's War in Angola: 1961-1974*. Rivonia: Ashanti, 1993.



intensified, there was a large-scale exodus of Portuguese, who in many cases destroyed whatever they could not take with them.<sup>15</sup>

At independence day (which in fact took place twelve hours before the scheduled event), no mention was made of those competing for control of the country. The last Portuguese High Commissioner announced simply that the country was being handed over to 'the Angolan people'.<sup>16</sup> Zairean and South African troops intervened to assist a fragile FNLA-UNITA alliance, while Cuban troops arrived to assist the MPLA. Aided by massive transfers of Soviet arms, the MPLA gradually gained the upper hand. By early 1976 most of the country was under their control.

Holding Luanda was (and has remained) the key to MPLA strategy. By holding the capital, the MPLA ensured they would be perceived as the party in power. This enabled them to dismiss their opponents as rebel groups operating in the bush. 'He who holds Luanda holds Angola—Luanda is Angola' was the comment of an old observer of the country's continuous wars.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the MPLA seized control of most of the country's urban settlements. The huge tracts of land in between remained, if not contested, then free zones that nobody effectively governed. The existence of this hinterland has provided a territory in which any army can melt away, regroup and attack once again.

Having taken control of Luanda and the urban areas of the country, the MPLA established a one-party political system and centralised administration—greatly aided by the colonial model, but lacking any

---

<sup>15</sup> The classic account of this period is Kapuscinski R, *Another Day of Life*. London: Penguin, 1988.

<sup>16</sup> James WM III, *A Political History of the Civil War in Angola: 1974-1990*. New Brunswick: Transaction, 1992, p.64.

<sup>17</sup> Interview, company security advisor, Luanda, 11 October 2000.

of its administrative experience.

The hasty departure of the Portuguese meant that the new government seized all of the country's assets not only as a matter of ideology but of necessity. While there were some notable success stories—for example, school enrolment grew dramatically in the mid-1970s, and the vaccination of children against infectious diseases increased—the dead hand of the MPLA bureaucracy soon stultified economic growth. Some pragmatic economic decisions were made, however, leading to one of the ironies of the Cold War: the oil installations of Chevron-Gulf, a huge American oil company, were protected by Cuban troops against insurgent attacks covertly sponsored by the United States.

Cuban troops remained in the country following independence, and seemed to strengthen the Angolan army. South Africa carried out a series of incursions into southern Angola, often with the aim of destroying the capacity of the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) to wage war in Namibia, but also in support of UNITA, in a bid to destabilise the MPLA government.

By 1984 UNITA was active in every province in the country.<sup>18</sup> The struggle in Angola assumed the clear dimensions of competition between superpowers when, in the wake of their withdrawal from Vietnam, the United States began covertly supporting UNITA,<sup>19</sup> and Soviet arms supplies to the MPLA were increased to match this threat. The overall result was military stalemate on the ground. The FNLA ceased to be an effective fighting force after 1976, while the Cabinda separatists continued a lonely (and not very effective) struggle for the liberation of the enclave.

---

<sup>18</sup> A detailed if turgid overview of the military operations of the first Angolan civil wars is to be found in Turner J, *Continent Ablaze: The Insurgency Wars in Africa 1960 to the Present*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1998, pp.100-125.

<sup>19</sup> The classic account of this programme is Stockwell J, *In Search of Enemies*. London: Futura, 1979.

In areas under UNITA control the organisation boasted that it had established a 'sophisticated socio-economic infrastructure' which, while the range of the initiatives was exaggerated, included schools, health services and agricultural projects. Dozens of UNITA students were sent abroad to various universities. UNITA also established a 'capital', Jamba in south-eastern Angola.<sup>20</sup>

The country as a whole continued to suffer from the guerilla war and an economy driven by centralised planning. In 1985 earnings from oil production were in the region of \$2.2 million, of which expenditure on the military consumed approximately 70%, leaving precious little for the improvement of the social conditions under which ordinary Angolans lived.

The MPLA was deeply factionalised (as it remains), and the government was often harsh in its crackdowns on opposition. Throughout the 1980s, however, both Presidents Agostinho Neto and after him José Eduardo dos Santos adopted a pragmatic approach to diplomacy to the West and South Africa, attempting both to detach UNITA from its allies and to acquire much needed technology and capital investment. In this they were only partly successful, although in some cases commercial interests prevailed—Chevron-Gulf, for example, retained cordial relations with the MPLA throughout this period.

Unsurprisingly, the end of the Cold War altered the strategic position of the combatants in the ongoing Angolan war. The decline of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War allowed the superpowers to disengage, and with the help of the old colonial power Portugal, to push the parties towards a peace settlement. This was greatly facilitated by an agreement signed in December 1998 between Angola, South Africa and Cuba, which linked the holding of elections in Namibia to

---

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.97.

the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola.<sup>21</sup>

The Cuban withdrawal was completed by mid-1991 and monitored by the first UN verification mission to Angola, UNAVEM I. Prospects for peace in Angola and the Southern African region as a whole appeared to be significantly enhanced. It was not to be.

### Cycles of conflict<sup>22</sup>

Talks between UNITA and the MPLA in Bicesse in Portugal were completed in the course of 1991, and resulted in the Bicesse Accords. A ceasefire was agreed and acted on by both parties, and the UN established a new mission to Angola, UNAVEM II. However, deep mistrust remained between UNITA and the MPLA government, which cast a shadow over attempts to implement the Bicesse agreement. These problems were compounded by the UN intervention in the country, which, despite the large geographic area in which it would have to work, as well as the scope and difficulties of the task it was asked to carry out, had been assigned only 350 military and 125 police observers.

The provisions of the Bicesse Accords were also hopelessly ambitious for a country which had experienced almost non-stop civil war since independence. In a matter of only 16 months, a wide variety of individual procedures (each a tremendous challenge in its own right)

---

<sup>21</sup> For an insider's account with a melodramatic title, see Crocker C, *High Noon in Southern Africa: Making Peace in a Rough Neighbourhood*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1992.

<sup>22</sup> There are a number of accounts of the post 1990 breakdown in the peace process and subsequent conflicts: Anstee M, *Orphan of the Cold War*. New York: St Martins Press, 1996; Maier K, *Angola: Promises and Lies*. London: Serif, 1996; Matloff J, *Fragments of a Forgotten War*. London: Penguin, 1997; Brittain V, *Death of Dignity: Angola's Civil War*. London: Pluto, 1998; Human Rights Watch, *Angola Unravels: The Rise and Fall of the Lusaka Peace Process*. New York, 1999.

were to be completed. These included the quartering, disarming and demobilisation of troops; the forging of a new unified armed force; the re-establishment of state administration across the country; and the holding of presidential and parliamentary elections, a process which in itself was completely different to any form of governance hitherto experienced in Angola. Unsurprisingly, the implementation of the schedule agreed to at Bicesse fell hopelessly behind.

Most critically, no flexibility or alteration of conditions had been envisaged for the holding of elections in September 1992. These went ahead despite a situation where two rival armies remained intact, in occupation of particular areas, and easily mobilisable should either not achieve a satisfactory result at the ballot box. UN assistance to help organise the elections was minimal: 'A mere 89 civil servants were deployed for all electoral activities in the six regional centres and 18 provincial capitals throughout the country'.<sup>23</sup>

In spite of these difficulties, the elections were held. The MPLA won 54% of the parliamentary vote, UNITA 34% and an array of smaller parties 12%. Dos Santos won 49% of the votes in the presidential election, narrowly missing an absolute majority. Savimbi received 40% of the votes.

The peace process rapidly spiralled out of control. Although the UN declared the elections to have been largely free and fair, UNITA alleged widespread electoral fraud and remobilised its forces. The result was one of the most costly periods of conflict in the country's already bloody history. Between November 1992 and November 1994 at least 100,000 people were estimated to have been killed, thousands were displaced and the country's infrastructure was effectively destroyed.

---

<sup>23</sup> Jett D, *Why Peacekeeping Fails*. New York: St Martin's Press, 1999. Jett provides a useful overview and critique of UN peacemaking and peacekeeping efforts in Angola and Mozambique.

The 1992–1994 conflict marked a watershed in the history of war in Angola. Stripped of superpower support, both sides exploited the country's national resources to sustain the conflict, beginning a process where war and accumulation of resources became almost inseparable.

The war itself was marked by two important factors. First, the conflict shifted from the remote rural areas of the country where it had been contained before, to more heavily populated and developed areas such as the Bengo-Cuanza Norte border, Soyo, Cuanza Sul, the Benguela-Huambo-Kuito axis and northern Huíla. Second, UNITA effectively laid siege to a number of large towns, including Huambo, Kuito, Malange and Menongue.<sup>24</sup>

These two features caused immense suffering in the civil population, and also ensured that the dispensing of food and medical assistance (where available) became a highly politicised process, granted on condition of political support and withdrawn as punishment. Thousands of civilians died as a result of malnutrition, and many were severely injured or killed by landmines, deployed heavily by both sides during the course of the conflict.<sup>25</sup>

Formal talks to end the conflict began in Lusaka, Zambia, in late 1993. These continued, as did the fighting, until November 1994, when the Lusaka Protocol was concluded. During this period, the government spent enormous amounts of money on a formidable array of weaponry. By the time the Protocol was concluded, the military balance had shifted dramatically in the MPLA's favour, ensuring that UNITA was eager to conclude a deal.

---

<sup>24</sup> Covered in Turner, *op. cit.*, pp.151-165.

<sup>25</sup> See Winslow P, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth: Land Mines and the Global Legacy of War*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1997, which, despite the title, focuses on the landmine crisis in Angola.

However, the breakdown in the earlier peace process had left a legacy of mistrust. Voices on both sides (but particularly those of the government, given its recent military gains) argued for a continuation of the conflict until the opposition was crushed. The negotiations continued, however, and a deal was patched together. An innovation in the Lusaka Protocol which the MPLA recognised as an important incentive to a conclusion of a peace deal, was the inclusion of UNITA in a newly constituted government.

The process of implementation of the Lusaka Protocol was as complex as that of Bicesse. Given the high levels of distrust, both parties had requested a reinforced and more active UN presence. In February 1995, the Security Council authorised the establishment of UNAVEM III, with a maximum deployment of 7000 soldiers, 350 military observers and 260 police observers.

The peace process gave rise to two important oversight structures, one internal, the other external. A Joint Commission involving representatives of both the government and UNITA, and chaired by the UN secretary-general's special representative, was meant to monitor and remove obstacles to the peace process. A 'troika' of foreign observers from the United States, the Russian Federation and Portugal had observer status on the Joint Commission but also acted as vital behind-the-scenes players, cajoling the parties towards fulfilling their obligations under the deal.

Significantly, in neither the Bicesse nor the Lusaka agreements were there significant inclusions of outside interests, such as the church, in the peace process. This was a key oversight. There was little middle ground between the parties, and they had only their own interests to take into account when complying with the peace deal.

As it was, the basis for the establishment of democracy was weak. The activities of the fledgling free press were restricted; the economy remained on a war footing; few social services were provided to the

majority of the population; and both sides (especially UNITA) retained the option of returning to war should the peace process fail.

On top of all of this, the UN did not distinguish itself by its efforts. While the secretary-general's special representative, Alioune Blondin Beye, worked tirelessly (although his efforts were not always favourable received), it was clear that lessons from other peacekeeping operations had not been applied:

One observer in Luanda described the deployment of the various battalions as being for cosmetic purposes, largely in provincial capitals and without relation to the quartering areas for the demobilisation of troops or to routes of retreat should the fighting break out again.<sup>26</sup>

Earlier mistrust of UN interventions was reinforced, and remains strong among individuals on both sides to this day.

Implementation of the Lusaka Protocol occurred slowly. In April 1997, UNITA deputies elected in 1992 finally took their seats, and UNITA members entered a Government of National Unity and Reconciliation.

Even by this time, however, the critical military tasks of quartering UNITA troops, including selected UNITA personnel in the Angolan army, and the demobilisation of troops (including child soldiers) had not been fully completed. A review of a month-by-month account of developments shows how contested the process was.<sup>27</sup> UN officials warned again and again that the UNITA soldiers being confined to the quartering areas were often local militia, or just ordinary people press-ganged into doing so, and not the movement's most battle-hardened troops.

Although the overall extent of UNITA's conventional weaponry

---

<sup>26</sup> Jett, *op. cit.*, p.85.

<sup>27</sup> A detailed and useful month-by-month overview is available by consulting the *Angola Peace Monitor*. Action for Southern Africa, <http://www.anc.org.za/angola>



appears to have been consistently exaggerated, it was clear that the armaments being handed over to UN control fell far short of what UNITA possessed. Both sides were also documented as committing human rights violations during the period in which the Lusaka Protocol was being implemented.<sup>28</sup>

The death of UN special representative Beye in an air crash in Ivory Coast in mid-1998 marked the beginning of the implosion of the peace process. Intermittent but fierce engagements between UNITA and government troops escalated once more into outright civil war when UNITA mounted an assault in December 1998 and government troops counter-attacked. The country was again at war, and has continued so to this day.

Key dates in the rise and fall of the Angolan peace process	
22 August 1988	Angola and South Africa sign a ceasefire agreement, providing for a Joint Military Monitoring Committee. Two days later, the last South African troops pull out and the Cubans also pull back to agreed position.
22 June 1989	A ceasefire between MPLA and UNITA is formally signed on the Gbadolite Summit organised by Zairean President Mobutu Sese Seko.
31 May 1991	A peace agreement is signed in Lisbon.
27 September 1991	Jonas Savimbi returns to Lusaka for the first time since the start of the 16-year civil war.
23 January 1992	Angola and South Africa agree to establish formal diplomatic ties.
29-30 September 1992	The first multiparty elections take place, and are declared free and fair by the United Nations. The MPLA emerge the overall winners. Later UNITA rejects the results and fighting resumes.
27 November 1992	Dos Santos and Savimbi issue the Namibian Declaration, committing themselves to observing the Bicesse Peace Accords, to implementing a ceasefire and accepting the continued presence of UN troops in the country.

<sup>28</sup> Human Rights Watch, *op. cit.*

Key dates in the rise and fall of the Angolan peace process (continued)	
15 November 1994	A truce agreement, known as the Lusaka Protocol, is signed by MPLA and UNITA representatives in Lusaka, Zambia.
6 May 1995	Dos Santos and Savimbi meet to create conditions for the implementation of the Lusaka Protocol.
15-24 June 1995	Jonas Savimbi tours Ivory Coast, Benin, Gabon, Congo and Zaïre and states his willingness to accept the post of Vice-President.
15 July 1995	UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali visits Angola and declares that there is the political will to continue with the peace process.
10 August 1995	President Dos Santos and Savimbi meet in Gabon. Savimbi agrees to serve as one of the two Vice-Presidents.
1 September 1995	The government and UNITA issue a joint declaration on the free movement of people and goods, an expansion of the 1994 Lusaka Protocol.
1 March 1996	Dos Santos and Savimbi meet in Gabon and agree to form a government of National Unity in June.
October 1996	Dos Santos asks Southern African states to pressurise UNITA to implement the Lusaka Peace Protocol after talks on the revision of the constitution fail and there are threats of renewed fighting.
April 1997	A Government of National Unity and Reconciliation is sworn in at a ceremony attended by 13 heads of state. Savimbi is given a special role as leader of the official opposition, entitling him to question the President on political matters. UNITA has four ministers and seven deputy ministers in the cabinet.
June 1997	Fighting between UNITA and government forces breaks out in the diamond-rich province of Lunda Norte.
November 1998	Savimbi's special status as leader of the opposition is revoked symbolically, demonstrating the end of any further attempts at reconciliation.

Parallel to the war and intimately related with it, significant economic shifts have occurred since the conflict re-started after the failed election in 1992. These continue to have, a profound impact both on the nature and conduct of the war, and the prospects for peace.

## The political economy of war

Angola, despite its wealth, has been in economic crisis from the time of its independence. This is the result of a number of factors: the sudden exodus of the Portuguese; the poor management and consequently troubled process of immediate post-independence political transition; a long history of economic mismanagement; and ongoing war in the country, with available financial resources being spent on military equipment rather than on social services or on initiatives aimed at enhancing economic growth.

The immediate aftermath of independence saw a mass departure of those who had dominated the country's formal economic activity. Crop production declined, the rural marketing system collapsed, and a large number of factories closed. By 1977 (only two years after independence), the index of manufacturing production had fallen to only 28% of what it had been in 1973.<sup>29</sup>

The outcome of the government's programme of nationalisation during 1976 and 1977 was a large state sector which included a state oil company, a state diamond company, various agricultural concerns and a number of state manufacturing enterprises.

While nationalisation removed competition it was not, as in other communist countries, replaced by any formalised system of centralised planning or production targets. There was a dire shortage of skills, not only to complete the planning process but to manage the newly nationalised state entities themselves. In any event, there was little incentive to produce—operating deficits were simply financed from the central fiscus. An important exception was the economic pragmatism that prevailed in the oil sector, with foreign investors being encouraged to explore opportunities in Angola.

---

<sup>29</sup> UNICEF, 'Angola in historical perspective', *op. cit.*, p.15.

An extensive system of price controls was also implemented. These covered almost all available products, and, combined with an administratively set system of exchange rates (which did not change between 1977 and 1991), tried to stem inflationary pressures. The outcome was a massive distortion in prices and a shortage of food and products in parts of the country.

Such experiments with economic planning had two important and inter-related impacts. First, they created an extensive parallel, informal black market economy, which encouraged profit-making by individuals at the expense of the state. The overall result was the development of complex underground networks of economic exchange. Second, a massive and inefficient state sector charged with regulating all aspects of economic life, in the context of a declining economy, was a recipe for the growth of corruption extending to all levels of the society.

Continued growth in military expenditure as the war ground on, the financial bolstering of loss-making state enterprises, price subsidies, the low level of state income outside the oil sector, all resulted in large and increasing government budget deficits. These were financed by printing more money, ensuring the onset of hyper-inflation, which peaked at over 12,000% in 1996.<sup>30</sup>

A series of economic reforms was attempted, beginning in 1987 with the launch of the revealingly titled Programme of Economic and Financial Clean-Up, to rectify the economic collapse. In theory, the reforms aimed at curbing inflationary pressures and opening the economy up to private investment. In practice, the reform programmes were implemented in a piecemeal fashion: plans were announced, implementation was begun, and then new plans were drawn up.

There was one overall exception to this picture of economic

---

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17.

decline—the oil sector. The Angolan economy is highly dependent on income generated from oil. There has been an almost consistent increase in the amount produced annually since the early 1980s. The 770,000 barrel production per day in 1999 has risen to 848,000 in 2000, and is expected to jump to 940,000 in 2001.<sup>31</sup>

Oil has accounted for well over 80% of the value of Angola's export earnings, as well as being the single most important contributor to government finances over the last decade. Overall, oil accounts for a highly significant proportion of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (see Table 1 below). As a result, real GDP growth was expected to rise from 3% in 1999 to 6.5% in 2000 and 7% in 2001.<sup>32</sup>

Table 1: The importance of the oil sector in the Angolan economy, 1991–1999 <sup>33</sup>				
	1991	1992	1993	1994
Production*	497	549	505	551
% value of exports	93.9	93.2	97.4	96.2
% of govt. revenues	48.6	75.2	81.2	88.9
% of GDP	19.6	35.8	40.2	56.6
* in thousands of barrel per day				
** no data available				

<sup>31</sup> Fabricius P, 'Twenty-five years of war: Angola's perpetual problems', in *SA Yearbook of International Affairs* 2000/01. Johannesburg: South African Institute of International Affairs, 2000, p.276.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Data contained in the table are compiled and calculated from the following sources: UNICEF, 'Angola in Historical Perspective', *op. cit.*, p.19; International Monetary Fund, *Angola: Recent Economic Developments*, IMF Staff Country Report No 00/111, August 2000, pp.30, 33 and 41; and 'A crude awakening: The role of the oil and banking industries in Angola's civil war and the plunder of state assets', *Global Witness*, 2000. Unnumbered pages, but data contained under the heading, 'Significance of the oil industry to the Angolan economy'.

**Table 1: The importance of the oil sector in the Angolan economy, 1991–1999 (continued)**

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Production*	617	681	713	739	764
% value of exports	94.6	94	92.4	87.2	87.8
% of govt. revenues	86.9	89.2	82	75	**
% of GDP	53.8	58.1	47.9	37.4	61.3
* in thousands of barrel per day					
** no data available					

The largest source of oil production is located off the shores of Cabinda province. Crude reserves are also located onshore around the city of Soyo, offshore in the Kwanza Basin north of Luanda, and offshore of the coast north and south of Luanda. These areas have been divided into a series of exploration blocks. Foreign oil companies are expected to pay a non-recoverable 'signature bonus' for the right to operate in one of the blocks. In 1999, a total of \$900 million in payments for Block 31-33 helped to finance the government's military operations.<sup>34</sup>

The oil industry has introduced other distortions into the Angolan labour market. While it employs very few Angolans, and those mostly in administration and security positions, these people are disproportionately well paid in comparison with the rest of the population. An oil company secretary can earn in the region of \$1,000 a month, much higher than the wage in any other sector, no matter how skilled the labour. The presence of oil dollars has also raised prices and introduced a parallel (or more accurately, a dominant) dollar economy. Luanda, despite its grinding poverty, is one of the most expensive cities in the world in terms of cost of living.

The offshore nature of Angola's oil resources has meant that oil production, while helping to fund the war, has been largely untouched

---

<sup>34</sup> United States Energy Information Administration, *Angola*, July 2000, p.2.

by it. Oil revenues have been essential in funding the government's expenditure on military requirements for the war against UNITA. The financing of arms purchases and short term oil-backed loans have typically bypassed the accounting procedures of the central bank or finance ministry, and are channelled through the state oil company, Sonangol, and the presidency itself. International banking officials in 1999 estimated that a \$900 million windfall in oil earnings had not been recorded in the published budget.<sup>35</sup>

Table 2 provides some indication of the extent to which government revenues have been used for defence and security-related expenditure; on average this is around a third of the total budget. As the table shows, a significant proportion of this expenditure has not been recorded in the official budget over the last number of years. In contrast, only a small proportion of the national budget is used to fund much-needed social services such as health and education.

Critical to the Angolan government's ability to finance its war effort has been the necessity of securing lines of credit. Because of its history of defaulting on loans, the government has acquired short term loans at high interest rates which are mortgaged against future oil production. A significant proportion of the overall national budget, between 10% and 20% over the last five years, is used to service debt.

Unsurprisingly, an industry which is located off-shore and generates a phenomenal amount of wealth, which in turn is channelled through a small elite, has been a recipe for corruption. Nowhere is this clearer than in the linkage between oil money and the buying of military equipment. Equity partners in two of the exploration blocks (32 and 33) are more closely associated to the arms trade, than oil exploration. Senior generals in the Angolan army are also alleged to have made large profits by acting as middlemen for the purchase of military

---

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

supplies, and pocketing a handling fee. For a small elite within the Angolan government, the war is highly profitable.<sup>36</sup>

**Table 2: Angolan government expenditure 1995-1999<sup>37</sup>**

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
<i>Defence as % of total budget*</i>	31.4	33.5	40	27.2	41
<i>(Proportion of this unrecorded)</i>	-48.8	-26.3	-18.2	-13.8	0
<i>As % of GDP</i>	18	19.2	22.4	11.4	21.7
<i>Social spending as % of total budget</i>	14	9.3	13.4	11.8	9.4
<i>Of which education</i>	5.1	4.4	5	6.2	4.8
<i>Of which health</i>	5.7	2.9	3.1	3.3	2.8
<i>Debt servicing as % total budget</i>	18.9	20	10	16.6	10.7
* Includes public order					

Acquiring armaments has not been difficult. After the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, international arms markets were flooded with surplus weaponry, much of which was of East European origin. The economic constraints these countries suffered under in the post-communist era meant that weapons factories continued to produce at the same level as before. In addition, in order to meet treaty requirements and bring in much-needed hard currency, there was a need to dispose of weapons stockpiles. Reducing the supply of arms in Europe has paradoxically increased their availability and reduced their price in Africa.<sup>38</sup>

If oil revenues have been the almost exclusive funding source for the

<sup>36</sup> *Global Witness, op. cit.*

<sup>37</sup> IMF, *op. cit.*, August 2000, p.43.

<sup>38</sup> Shaw M, 'The cost of war and the price of peace: The political economy of crime and conflict in sub-Saharan Africa.', Unpublished paper, South African Institute of International Affairs, April 2000, p.3.



government's military campaigns, diamonds have been a key source of revenue for UNITA. The rebel movement has historically occupied the diamond-rich north-east of the country, and the stones have been sold to middlemen who pay in cash or in military hardware.

*Global Witness* has estimated that diamonds worth \$3.7 billion were sold by UNITA between 1992 and 1998, the money being largely used to buy arms.<sup>39</sup> The *Global Witness* figure is probably too high, however. While determining an exact figure is difficult, it is estimated that Angola's total production of diamonds per year has been in the region of \$600 million. Although UNITA's control of the diamond mining regions has fluctuated with the fortunes of war, observers close to events suggest that on average the movement controlled just over half of the country's diamond production, worth approximately \$300–\$320 million a year. As UNITA was never likely to be paid market-related prices in the murky world of sanctions busting and arms for diamond deals, it is probable that the organisation seldom earned more than \$200 million a year in diamond sales, given a total earnings of \$1.4 billion between 1992 and 1998. This comes out at much less than the *Global Witness* estimate, if these calculations are correct, but enough to run a damaging military campaign.

UNITA's position has shifted dramatically since then, and three recent initiatives are likely to limit the ability of the organisation to use diamond sales to fund its military campaign in the future. The first is an internationally-driven effort to ensure a system of certification for diamonds, so that stones from conflict-ridden areas cannot be sold on world markets. The global campaign on this issue, which has been skilfully conducted by *Global Witness*,<sup>40</sup> is highly successful, widely

---

<sup>39</sup> *Global Witness* press release, 'Is the price of diamonds too high? How Angola's return to war has been funded by the international diamond trade', 14 December 1998.

<sup>40</sup> See *Global Witness*, 'Conflict diamonds: Possibilities for the identification, certification and control of diamonds', June 2000.

supported in the West, and a diplomatic triumph for the Angolan government. Second, and closely related to the international efforts towards diamond certification, is the tightening of sanctions against UNITA. In April 2000, the UN Security Council voted unanimously to enforce more stringently the sanctions against the rebel movement, in response to violations of the Council's three previous sanctions resolutions against UNITA.

At the centre of this drive was a hard-hitting report by a committee, headed by Canada's ambassador to the UN, Robert Fowler, concerning sanctions-busting in support of UNITA.<sup>41</sup> While there have been few practical outcomes to the report, the publicity associated with it, and its technique of 'naming and shaming' perpetrators, may undercut UNITA's support still further. While the report contains a useful overview of the means through which UNITA acquired arms and other supplies, the committee was criticised for speaking only to UNITA dissidents, although it would presumably have been difficult to engage directly with UNITA supporters in the bush. Whatever its flaws, the report signified the growing international isolation of Savimbi and UNITA.

Third, and perhaps least important, given the chaotic nature of government administration in Angola, have been attempts to improve Luanda's own system of diamond certification. The system's weaknesses have allowed UNITA and private smugglers to sell diamonds through the official government buying network. There have long been suspicions of connivance between government officials and UNITA based on the profit motive.

Observers in Angola suggest, however, that while these interventions would make it much more difficult for UNITA to sell diamonds, the gaps can never be closed completely. Unofficial diamond prospectors

---

<sup>41</sup> *Report of the Panel of Experts on Violations of the Security Council Sanctions Against UNITA*, United Nations Security Council, March 2000.

(who could be linked to UNITA) will simply sell through the official system: 'You can't stop UNITA digging and you can't stop Ascorp [the official government agency charged with buying diamonds through 47 buying offices] buying. UNITA funds their war and the government funds its war, all within the same circle.'<sup>42</sup> As it is, the government's own certificate issuing system (despite the reforms) is vulnerable to corruption. 'It would not surprise me at all', said a senior UN security official who travels widely across the country, 'if UNITA is right now selling diamonds to the Angolan government in Luanda'.<sup>43</sup> Thus, while UNITA's capacity for waging war may have been undercut, it has not been dismantled altogether.

The capture of diamond-rich areas by government forces has ensured that new players have entered the market. Army generals are now said to control some of the mines, or indeed to have an interest in their successful operation; the army's chief of staff, for example, owns a private security company that protects one mine.

The war therefore continues to generate wealth for some, while leaving the majority of Angolans in abject poverty. A prominent member of UNITA's parliamentary group suggests that before 1990 the pilfering of state resources on both sides of the conflict was contained, given that the ideological differences between the opposing sides gave combatants and their leaders a clear vision to fight for. Now there is no such compunction.<sup>44</sup> An Angolan working for a donor organisation in Luanda put it this way: 'It is one thing when citizens break the law; it is quite another, when those in charge, meant to enforce the law, flout it—there is very little that we, as ordinary citizens, can do'.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> An employee on the Catoca diamond mine in Angola, quoted in Paulson L, 'Rich pickings in Angola', *Focus on Africa*, October–December 2000, p.36.

<sup>43</sup> Interview, Luanda, 12 October 2000.

<sup>44</sup> Shaw, *op. cit.*, p.5.

<sup>45</sup> Interview, Luanda, 10 October 2000.

## Recent developments in the war

Significant developments over the last few months have seen UNITA suffer some critical military reverses. However, as the conflict moves onto the borders of neighbouring states, new dangers in the form of a further regional expansion of the war could present themselves.

In the first exchanges after war broke out again in December 1998, UNITA acquitted itself well. The Angolan army had been weakened by recent profiteering from arms sales, which had diverted funds needed for the purchase of additional military hardware. By April 1999 this problem had been resolved: the purchasing of military equipment was placed in the hands of General João de Matos, the Angolan army's formidable chief of staff. Initial setbacks were soon reversed. De Matos then mounted a three pronged attack against the UNITA strongholds in Bailundo and Andulo which was successful. De Matos has subsequently been dismissed. While it is unclear exactly why, it is possible that this relates to his own expressed belief that at some point negotiations with Savimbi are inevitable.

Nevertheless, before De Matos' dismissal, the Angolan army's battle performance appeared to have been greatly improved through the acquisition and effective use of high quality intelligence information. In late September, the town of Cazombo, considered important because of the presence of an airstrip capable of receiving large quantities of supplies, was taken. The overall strategic aim of the government offensive has been to secure the country's northern, eastern and western borders. This has largely been achieved, and by late 2000 the Angolan army had advanced to the Zambian border.

Securing borders is always going to be difficult. While one western diplomat suggested that most road crossings could be monitored, preventing the crossing of heavier supplies, such as fuel trucks, a UN official familiar with the area said that the long border was porous in many places, and systems could be established to ensure supplies

would get through regardless. The October report of the UN secretary-general to the Security Council notes that UNITA has apparently 'opened a corridor' in the north-eastern region 'to move supplies from the Democratic Republic of Congo'.<sup>46</sup>

It is clear, however, that UNITA has substantially re-thought its strategy following its military and diplomatic reverses. (The latter are likely to prove more serious in the long run.) UNITA's approach now seems to have two parts. The first part is a return to hit-and-run guerilla tactics. As UNITA has been pushed back against the western border of the country, so attacks on food and military convoys in the centre of the country have increased. There is some evidence that UNITA commanders have been given the order to operate independently, and these spoiling actions are a result. There is also a critical requirement for supplies, hence the UNITA attacks on humanitarian convoys—although it is often difficult to distinguish these from ordinary cases of banditry or actions by Angolan army units, themselves short of supplies.

The Angolan army's capacity for counter-insurgency warfare is significantly less effective than for conventional forms of conflict. It has seldom distinguished itself in this role, and while it is said to have foreign advisors to assist (although from what country is not clear), the army's effectiveness against guerillas is unlikely to improve in the short to medium term. While morale is higher than usual following the success of the most recent campaign, these gains could be undercut in a long and morale-sapping guerilla struggle. Counter-insurgency will focus less on the purchase of fancy new equipment than on getting into the bush in search of guerillas—a prospect that will not appeal to most units of the Angolan army.

The second leg of UNITA's strategy appears to be to widen the war

---

<sup>46</sup> *Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Office in Angola*, United Nations Security Council, 10 October 2000, p.3.

beyond Angola's borders, to the advantage of the movement. A significant number of UNITA members appear to have crossed over into Zambia following the Angolan army's most recent advances. Observers suggest that in many cases UNITA did not put up much of a fight and simply 'melted away' rather than confront the advancing Angolan army head on.<sup>47</sup> It is possible that some attempt will be made to mount cross-border incursions into Angola—the country's long border being difficult to secure—and thus continue the war from outside.

These developments expand the Angolan conflict even further into neighbouring states. Already the Angolan army has intervened to the north in the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), to deny fall-back areas to UNITA. A successful campaign has also been fought from Namibian soil and (with the assistance of the Namibian army) against UNITA units in Cuando Cubango province.

Ominous warnings issued by the government to the Zambian authorities that they should not assist UNITA guerillas who have crossed over from Angola suggest that there is a very real danger that cross-border tensions on Angola's westernmost border will be exacerbated. Indeed, sources close to UNITA suggest that the organisation's strategy may be designed to achieve exactly that, an internationalisation of the conflict which will both bring publicity and force the Angolan government to violate the territory of a neighbour with whom Luanda has not always had cordial relations.

---

<sup>47</sup> Interview, UN security official, Luanda, 11 October 2000. The interviewee noted that there had been no 'collateral damage' which would have indicated that this and some other towns further west had been fiercely contested.

## What then are the prospects for peace?

On the face of it, none of this bodes well for peace. Yet there are some reasons for hope. Savimbi himself appears to have told outsiders who have seen him in the recent past that he is willing to negotiate. While this may well be a tactic to enable UNITA to regroup, it could also be a sincere expression of a belief that the country has been at war long enough (although past experience makes this seem unlikely).

Though the MPLA government has firmly ruled out any further negotiations with Savimbi, some options remain. Against this background, a recent statement by Dos Santos may be significant. He said that dialogue would be pursued 'with those who embrace peace, recognise the legitimate authority of the country and wish to contribute to the consolidation of democracy, reconstruction and development of Angola'.<sup>48</sup> While observers in Luanda have mixed feelings about the meaning of the statement (partly because of the contradictory positions taken by other senior government officials), it does leave the door slightly ajar. It seems clear that while the government may want to talk, it will be unwilling to 'renegotiate' the provisions of the Lusaka Protocol. But Dos Santos has also suggested that the country's constitution requires review. This, a senior western diplomat points out, may provide an opening which would allow the inclusion of UNITA without going through the formal rubric of negotiations. On the other hand, a territorial expansion of the war into Zambia might result in international pressure for some kind of engagement between the parties. It is too early to tell at this stage. Too much anti-negotiation rhetoric has tied the hands of most players, including the Security Council.

Without a formal ceasefire a decisive defeat of UNITA looks unlikely. According to observers, the organisation has the capacity to continue

---

<sup>48</sup> *Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Office in Angola*, United Nations Security Council, 10 October 2000, p.8.

a disruptive (although limited) guerilla war into the future, as UNITA remains in a position to raise some limited financing.<sup>49</sup>

However, the recent defeats of, and withdrawals by, UNITA suggest that all has not proceeded according to plan. One significant change, according to UNITA sources, is that the new commanders now being used by UNITA do not have strong relations with the local populace in areas where they have been operating. That suggests not only that UNITA is not the same organisation that it was when it scored decisive victories against the Angolan army in the early 1990s, but that UNITA itself may make a more concerted attempt to engage with the citizenry in areas where it operates. Paradoxically, the sustained government offensive to the east has shifted military resources out of the centre of the country, leaving it more vulnerable to attack by UNITA.

Savimbi's strategy then, according to one western official, will be to 'spoil the government's party'.<sup>50</sup> By all accounts that may not need much spoiling.

At the front, Angolan army units are more often predatory occupiers than liberating crusaders. Social conditions in the cities and towns remain frightful, and fledgling but significant opposition voices are emerging. In response, the government's tabling of a harsh new press law for discussion has been met with mixed feelings—almost all parties interviewed suggested that whereas the new willingness to debate policy with broader interest groups was to be welcomed, the contents of the law itself suggests 'old style authoritarian knee-jerk responses to criticism'.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> UNITA's continued capacity to wage war is explicitly recognised in the Secretary-General's October 2000 report to the Security Council.

<sup>50</sup> European Ambassador, Luanda, 11 October 2000.

<sup>51</sup> Almost the same phrase was used in three interviews, Luanda, 9-12 October 2000. This quote comes from a Western diplomat.



The strongest card in the MPLA's deck is that it has won some important diplomatic victories and has built strong relations with the West, particularly the United States, while effectively isolating UNITA. For its part UNITA often seems only too willing to act in ways which enhance its outcast status, including the perpetration of gross human rights violations such as the recent attack on an orphanage in the province of Huambo. There are also persistent allegations that UNITA abducts children for use as porters and eventually as soldiers.<sup>52</sup>

Obviously, better relations between the US and Luanda have not been driven exclusively by MPLA diplomacy. American strategic oil interests are at stake. It is predicted that eventually 10% of US oil consumption will be sourced from Angola. But America's friendly engagement may in itself pose significant challenges for the Luanda elite, whose own human rights record is shaky. While some in the Angolan government continue to believe that the US still has a soft spot for UNITA, and that this will be encouraged by a Republican administration, US support for Luanda is likely to be conditional. Senior American policy-makers point to the growing role of civil society and the church, the increasing stridency of the press and the importance of the Angolan government's engagement with the IMF as hopeful signs for the future. All of these developments are not greeted with unanimous applause by Angolans who benefit from the *status quo*.

Whatever its foreign relations successes, the Luanda government has always had a strongly authoritarian tendency. This is an inheritance from the colonial regime, as well as the subsequent period of Soviet bloc influence. Recent signs of the regime's opening up and appearing to be more tolerant of criticism are difficult to read, because often they have been followed by repressive measures, for example, the persecution of individual journalists. At least some Angolans suggest that there is an authentic will to evolve, even if this often has

---

<sup>52</sup> Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Office in Angola, United Nations Security Council, 10 October 2000, p.4.

contradictory consequences as internal factions in the government fight it out for influence. It is probably too early to tell whether the regime will adapt or not.

The implementation of an IMF Staff Monitored Programme, for example, has highlighted divisions in the always fractious MPLA. The IMF programme is critical to the longer term economic viability of Angola. If it succeeds it will lead to the rescheduling of the country's debt burden in a co-ordinated manner, opening the way for reduced interest payments and more concessional loans. Yet for the vested interests it holds some dangers, including an audit of the oil and diamond sectors and the privatisation of state-owned companies. Greater transparency in the public accounts is also likely to be a significant threat to the small coterie around the presidency itself.

It must be emphasised that the IMF programme does not stand alone; it is linked to the preparation of a World Bank-led poverty reduction strategy. The implications of the IMF programme are important: first, in principle, Angola will have access to development resources that will offset austerity measures and other reforms. Second, debt rescheduling will free Angola from relying on very expensive commercial credit, but will require increased financial transparency and accountability.

Whether the IMF process can be kept on track is far from clear; already the date for the mid-term review of the programme has slipped past, with no delivery from government. The minister of finance has changed due to a cabinet reshuffle (although the reasons for this in the byzantine politics of Luanda are difficult to discern). The introduction of austerity measures as agreed with the IMF may mean that significant costs are passed on to the already hard-pressed population over time. These will serve to undermine the position of the government further, undercutting government's will to implement the reforms.

Whatever the case, the Angolan government is often driven by a 'war

logic'<sup>53</sup>—that is, it is inclined to opt for immediate short term gains, rather than to formulate a clear economic or other strategy for the longer term. Thus, because negotiations with the IMF brought the benefit of improved external perceptions of the Angolan government at a time of critical diplomatic manoeuvring against UNITA, only time will tell whether the agreement will be honoured. Despite the oil windfall, the Angolan economy is in such a dire condition that foreign observers in Luanda almost unanimously agree that government 'has no choice' but to comply.<sup>54</sup>

Despite the massive oil wealth being generated, life for ordinary Angolans remains poverty-stricken. Many, particularly those living in conflict areas, survive on the hand-outs of aid agencies. However, the role of aid agencies in the conflict, while in many areas ensuring that ordinary Angolans do not starve to death, has unintended consequences. First, aid agencies provide a source of patronage to those who can influence where aid is distributed; second, the provision of aid frees the government of responsibility towards its own citizens. In a series of bizarre exchanges, the Luanda government has accused aid agencies of not supplying food and other essentials to citizens in distress. In at least one instance aid agencies have had to bring pressure to bear on government to repair landing strips, to ensure that the supply of food keeps getting through. The role of aid agencies will remain paradoxical—essential in the short term, but damaging to long term prospects in the country because it allows the government to relinquish some of its core responsibilities.

Much store is set by outsiders on the growing role of Angolan church and civil society groups in urging a peaceful resolution to the conflict. A Congress for Peace held in July 2000 in Luanda received international attention. Angolans are less sanguine, pointing to fragmented

---

<sup>53</sup> UN official, Luanda, 10 October 2000.

<sup>54</sup> Western diplomats, Luanda, 10-11 October 2000.

opposition politics and, more important, the degree of division within the church. Yet it is true to say that one of the missing dimensions to earlier attempts at peace was that they involved only those engaged in (and in many cases benefiting from) the war, and excluded the church and civil society. An essential element of continued foreign engagement with Angola must be dialogue with, and support of, these groups. The stronger their institutional base when opportunities for ending the war present themselves, the more useful the role they will be able to play. It is also true (and government seems to have realised this) that such groups are unlikely to go away, and may become more effective in mobilising the citizenry over time.

For the moment, long years of war have spawned powerful interests which support its continuance, and criminal networks which were generated by the conflict and profit from its continuation. Wider developments in Southern Africa suggest that criminal networks have assumed a prominent position in Angola. Criminal groups (in many cases just a loose affiliation of individuals seeking profit) vary in size, although they tend to be small, and based on family, community or tightly constituted ethnic links. Those generated by the war in Angola link neatly into this regional network. According to police intelligence sources, old connections between Portuguese nationals resident in South Africa and Angolans, or between old elements of the South African security establishment and their UNITA counterparts have been used to procure minerals, drugs and weapons.<sup>55</sup> There are thus important continuities between those operations which supplied UNITA in the past, and those that do so now.

The linkage between ongoing conflicts and criminal networks requires much greater attention. On current evidence it appears that a complex combination exists of individual military actors, external business operators and government officials. Discerning legitimate from

---

<sup>55</sup> See Shaw M, 'Dirty business: Southern Africa's network of organised crime', in *Traders: Journal for the Southern African Region*, October 2000-January 2001.

illegitimate activities in this context is difficult. This is even more difficult where informal or 'shadow' economic activities are the source of livelihood for many ordinary Angolans. It is too early at this stage of the investigation to provide an accurate typology of these networks, but it is clear that many have close links to South Africans or expatriates living in South Africa.

New profits are being from trade that occurs outside the war economy but that benefits from the instability generated by the conflict. For example, drugs coming from Brazil (with whom Angola has historic ties) travel through Luanda to the more lucrative markets in South Africa.<sup>56</sup>

Any weakening of these networks would play a significant part in undercutting the profits made from the war. One possibility would be strengthening regional policing arrangements. Some useful beginnings have been made with the high profile campaigns around 'conflict diamonds', but these are not enough to make sufficient impact. Public oversight of how oil revenues are accounted for and spent is the most important lever in improving governance and transparency in Angola, and it is for this reason that the IMF process is critical.

Outside the capital and at the working end of the war, different forces are at work. Lines of command between headquarters and the field have weakened, and the independence of local commanders has been greatly enhanced. The result is that the armies have become predatory (even more so than in the past), eking out a living in the field, each side fighting the enemy for the control of resources as well as to conclude (locally brokered) 'peace' agreements, ambushing humanitarian convoys, and bartering with each other for food and fuel.

Ironically, the advances of the Angolan troops right onto the eastern

---

<sup>56</sup> Lewis G, *Mission Report: Angola*. Pretoria: United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, March 2000.

border has brought them into sparsely populated areas where, insiders say, there are few resource advantages to be gained. At the limit of their logistical supply chain, and with few profits to be found for themselves, government troops cannot be maintained indefinitely.

This fragmentation of troops on either side, and the increased distances between the capital and the front line, will make the war harder to resolve and in the longer term may finally reduce the conflict to its most basic form—organised banditry in the country's hinterland, continuing Angola's centuries-old tradition of economic plunder. This suggests that the conflict may over time degenerate into a much more complex series of 'turf' wars between warlords or criminal groups. Perhaps the most important indicator of this development will be the loosening of lines of command between army headquarters in either case, so that field commanders, not only plan military operations but ensure their own economic survival. The removal of Savimbi himself, given his almost mythical talent for survival, would probably weaken UNITA considerably, but, in the words of a humanitarian aid official working in the east, could also lead to 'a few little Savimbi's who carry on his work'.<sup>57</sup>

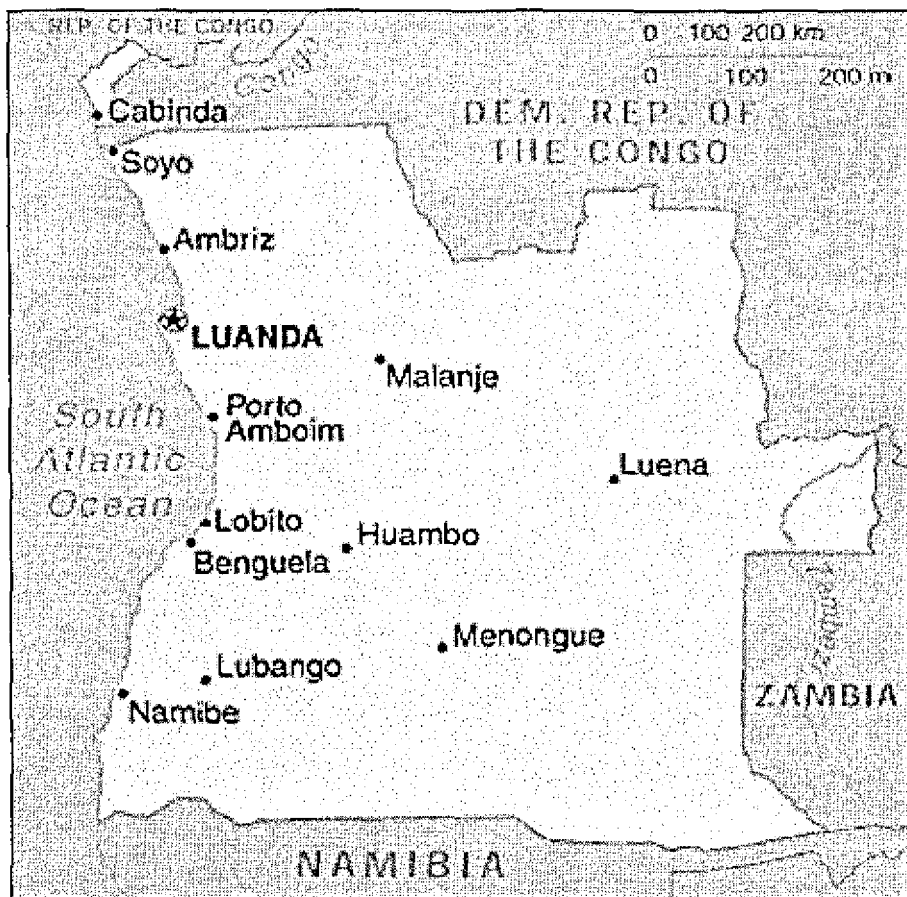
Ending the war on a formal level will probably (although now it is almost a ritual to deny it) require some kind of peace deal between the parties, even if this does not take the form of structured negotiations. Dos Santos' promise of an election in 2001 appeared to be an attempt to encourage a belief that the Luanda elite would pursue a democratic course. However, this speculative offer has already been withdrawn, based as it was on the condition that the internal situation had stabilised. This is far from the truth, and the MPLA government appears less ready to test public opinion on its (non) performance than many outsiders had hoped.

---

<sup>57</sup> Interview, Luanda, 12 October 2000.

For the moment, however, the war in Angola has expanded beyond its borders. Angolan army troops have played an important role in propping up the regime of Laurent Kabila in the DRC, and troop levels have been reinforced following the assassination of Kabila and the instalment of his son as the country's ruler. Both the DRC and Angolan wars are lapping over the frontiers of Zambia, and the possibility remains that the regional dimension of the war may expand further. What is clear is that the region's conflicts are closely connected. Zimbabwe, whose economy is now beginning to collapse, is an ally of the Luanda government and also has troops in the DRC. Analysts link a resolution of the crisis in Zimbabwe and the conflict in Angola to the achievement of peace in the DRC.

On current evidence, achieving peace in the Congo and thus resolving the impasse in Angola and Zimbabwe does not look likely. Close ties between Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe and Dos Santos and a joint suspicion of South Africa as the regional superpower, complicate the region's politics. Pretoria may be allowed to act as a regional mediator only once parties to all of the conflicts agree that peace is desirable. In the DRC it does appear that the Angolans and Zimbabweans (particularly the latter, given the growing crisis at home) wish to withdraw. But so far attempts at peace have yet to bear fruit.



Source: CIA, *World Factbook*



## Recommended reading

Anstee M, *Orphan of the Cold War: The Inside Story of the Collapse of the Angolan Peace Process*. New York: St Martin's Press, 1996.

Birmingham D, *Frontline Nationalism in Angola and Mozambique*. London: James Currey, 1992.

Brittain V, *Death of Dignity: Angola's Civil War*. London: Pluto, 1999.

Cilliers J & C Dietrich (eds), *Angola's War Economy: The Role of Oil and Demands*. Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2000.

Davidson B, *In the Eye of the Storm: Angola's People*. New York: Doubleday, 1973.

Henderson L, *Angola: Five Centuries of Conflict*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979.

Heywood L, 'UNITA and Ethnic Nationalism in Angola', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 27, 1, 1989.

Human Rights Watch, *Angola Unravels: The Rise and fall of the Lusaka Peace Process*. New York: HRW, 1999.

James WM, *A Political History of the Civil War in Angola*. New Brunswick: Transaction, 1992.

Kapucinski R, *Another Day of Life*. London: Penguin, 1987.

Marcum J, *The Angolan Revolution, Volume I: Anatomy of an Explosion*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1969.

*The Angolan Revolution, Volume II: Exile Politics and Guerilla Warfare*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1978.

Matloff J, *Fragments of a Forgotten War*. London: Penguin, 1997.

Minter W, *Apartheid's Contras: An Inquiry into the Roots of War in Angola and Mozambique*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1994.

Pycroft C, 'Angola: "The Forgotten Tragedy"', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20, 1, 1994.

Roque FM, *Building Peace In Angola: A Political and Economic Vision*. Lisbon: Edições Universitárias Lusófonas, 2000.

Sommerville K, *Angola: Politics, Economics and Society*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1986.

Stockwell J, *In Search of Enemies: A CIA Story*. New York: WW Norton, 1978.

Turner J, *Continent Ablaze: The Insurgency Wars in Africa 1960 to the Present*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1998.

Wolfers M & J Bergerol, *Angola in the Front Line*. London: Zed, 1983.

Winslow P, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1997.

A useful month by month account of the Angolan conflict is provided by *Angola Peace Monitor* found at [www.anc.org.za/angola/](http://www.anc.org.za/angola/)

## **About the authors**

**Dr Mark Shaw** is a Research Fellow at the South African Institute of International Affairs.

**Nthabiseng Nkosi** is a Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Research Intern at the South African Institute of International Affairs, Johannesburg.



The South African Institute of International Affairs  
PO Box 31596 Braamfontein 2017 South Africa  
Jan Smuts House, East Campus,  
University of the Witwatersrand  
E-mail: [saiiagen@global.co.za](mailto:saiiagen@global.co.za)  
Tel: (+27 11) 339-2021  
Fax: (+27 11) 339-2154