

Conflict analysis: angola essay



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1) History & Context

This conflict analysis will look into Angola's violent civil war between the summers of 1998 and 2001.

There is no distinct explanation for the conflict that has engulfed Angola; a country that has had little experience of peace in twenty-six years of independence from Portugal. The violent conflict has evolved immensely over time, originally being driven by revolution (against colonialism) and then ideology (Socialism versus Capitalism) and in the latest phase ' a brutal competition between rival elites for a wealth of natural resources. 1'

Despite the conflict in Angola being a civil war predominantly between the governing MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) and the rebel group UNITA (Union for the Total Independence of Angola), it cannot be called intrastate. During the Cold War, the Socialist MPLA was backed heavily by Russia and Cuba, the latter of which supplied 15, 000 troops which secured the capital Luanda, and stabilised much of the countryside. UNITA was backed by the USA and South Africa, allowing it at certain times to control southern and eastern areas of the country. The end of the Cold War had a profound effect on the Angolan conflict, but it still remained very much interstate. Today the war not only affects and is affected by Angola's neighbour states, but international commerce (notably the oil and diamond industries) and international organisations, especially the UN, also influence it.

The character of the war changed in the 1990's. At the very start of the decade there was increased dialogue between UNITA's leader, Jonas

Savimbi, and the MPLA President Dos Santos. The early 90's also saw the one party MPLA government move away from Marxism/Leninism towards making Angola a democratic state, by allowing free elections (Bicesse Accords May '91). The Cuban troops left, and there was great hope for peace.

The elections, which the UN and foreign observers concluded to be 'generally free and fair'², gave Dos Santos 49.6% and Savimbi 40.7% in the presidential elections. Under Angolan law, the winner of the presidential election required at least 50% of the vote, and thus an election runoff was required. However this never came to pass. UNITA rejected the results, remobilised its forces and plunged the country back into civil war.

Despite UNITA at one stage controlling 70% of the country in late 1993, it was brought back to the negotiating table at Lusaka in November 1994 when the government had re-established control over 60% of the country. The Lusaka protocol aimed to produce a cease-fire, demobilisation under UN supervision and the incorporation of UNITA's troops into the national police³. Later in June 1995 Savimbi was offered the vice-presidency. Lusaka aimed to bring the two parties together into civil government. The Peace Process hung on a thread for several years. Throughout this time there were blatant violations of the process on both sides, especially in the realm of arms purchases to which the UN turned a blind eye⁴. As the two sides became better armed, so their attitude towards the peace process became weakened. Savimbi officially rejected the vice-presidency in August 96, and remained intransigent about letting government forces establish control in UNITA areas, despite the gradual introduction of UNITA ministers into government positions.

Angola is a large physically diverse country with copious natural resources, notably in oil and diamonds. There is also very good agricultural land, which made Angola a major coffee producer during the late colonial period⁵.

Though potentially the wealthiest country in Africa, the discrepancy of fortunes between Angolans and the ruling elites of the MPLA and UNITA is huge. The governing MPLA has enriched itself through oil deals and is very opaque about its financial transactions; corruption is rife. UNITA has owned many diamond mines, allowing it to make hundreds of millions of dollars on a yearly basis. With this money both sides can fund the deadly war, and thus many analysts view Angola's fabulous wealth in resources as a curse.

Ethnically Angola is mixed. The population of 13 million is divided into the Ovimbundu (two fifths of the country) and the Mbundu (one quarter).

However there is also a geographical divide between the coastal people consisting of both the mixed race peoples and the Mbundu, and the Africans of the interior who are predominantly Ovimbundu. This divide has been exploited by UNITA, which has assumed the position of representative of the Ovimbundu, pitting itself against the Mbundu and urban based people on the coast that are associated with the MPLA. There are historical tensions between the two groups, although it would be a grave mistake to view the conflict as having ethnic origins⁶. Years of civil war have created a huge population of internally displaced people, over four million in 2001, many of whom depend on international aid⁷.

2) Parties & Time Period

The two primary parties are the MPLA and UNITA. They are not democratic, rather they are both ruled in a rather dictatorial manner by their leaders Eduardo dos Santos and Jonas Savimbi. The MPLA was recognised as the governing party of Angola by the UN in 1976, and during the 1990's was recognised and increasingly supported by USA following the end of the cold war. For their survival, MPLA relies heavily on oil exports, while UNITA depends on the illicit trading of diamonds.

This fact draws the oil and diamond industries into the fold as secondary parties. In fact some analysts have identified that the intensity of fighting in Angola can be directly linked to the prices of oil and diamonds⁸. Via these avenues both sides have equipped themselves with very heavy weaponry, e. g. state of the art tanks and even fighter jets⁹.

Another secondary party is the UN, which has attempted to resolve the fighting between UNITA and MPLA without lasting success. Other secondary parties are all of the states that border Angola. Since 1998 MPLA has been involved with and aided by the Kabila regime in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). UNITA has used the DRC (formerly Zaire) to shelter its troops, smuggle out diamonds and bring in arms. Zambia has tolerated UNITA activity, to the frustration of the MPLA¹⁰. Namibia has been pro-MPLA, and has cracked down on UNITA activity within its borders. Congo has co-operated with UNITA, allowing UNITA weapons to be cached during the Lusaka peace process. Rwanda is also a secondary party, allowing the free flow of illegal UNITA diamonds for trade, while Togo has been used for stockpiling UNITA weaponry¹¹.

Outside of Africa we have further secondary parties such as Belgium, whose city Antwerp is the diamond trading capital of the world. The US is also a secondary party, now for commercial purposes rather than ideological ones. It is predicted that Angola will provide 15% of America's oil by 2010¹². Furthermore the USA, Russia and Portugal form a group called the Troika, who from the late eighties have been involved in attempting to broker peace alongside the UN.

The time period covered by this analysis will begin when the peace process started to collapse in July 1998. Although the violence continues today, a reversion to guerrilla tactics by UNITA in the first half of last year will mark the end boundary of this analysis.

3) Incompatibilities

The primary incompatibility between UNITA and MPLA concerns the issue of joint government. Following the failed elections in 1992, this is what the UN has been attempting to bring about. However after the fourth outbreak of war in 1998, it seems unlikely that the two parties will share power. MPLA will not allow UNITA into full power sharing until it demilitarises and incorporates its troops into the Angolan army or police force. So far UNITA has proved unwilling to do this.

The power-sharing problem also concerns the political leaders Jonas Savimbi and President Dos Santos. Getting them to meet has been an uphill struggle; both men refusing to leave their territories for fears of personal safety.

Following Lusaka, Savimbi was offered the vice-presidency twice and after a prolonged period he turned it down. Savimbi has directly demanded that he

should have power over at least some of the military and mining operations in Angola. This would be an impossible compromise for the MPLA, because it would give Savimbi too much destabilising power in the capital. However over the years of conflict it now seems that Savimbi would not have settled for anything apart from total control.

Non-party defined incompatibilities between MPLA and UNITA focus on the issue that despite peace being desirable as an ideal, the practical short term affects of peace on the two parties are difficult to resolve. Neither the parties nor their people have known anything but conflict since independence.

Peace presents problems such as how one reintegrates the largest standing army in Africa back into civilian life. Furthermore the economies of the two parties have totally adapted to wartime conditions. Peace brings about the problem of accountability. The government has used the cloak of war to cover up its corrupt finances. However this cloak is not entirely opaque and it is obvious to the world that there is a great deal of personal embezzlement occurring within the MPLA elite. Furthermore the middlemen in the arms and diamond trades have a big interest in keeping a chief client in conflict.

4) Symptoms

The Government of Unity and Reconciliation (GURN), inaugurated on 11th April 1997, saw the introduction of some UNITA members into office. Despite this positive behaviour GURN significantly lacked the presence of Savimbi.

The UN frequently pressed both sides for the full implementation of the Lusaka peace process¹³. However despite making numerous gestures over the following year, UNITA failed to follow through. Soon the attitude of

conciliation turned to condemnation on both sides. UNITA talked of cruel barbarity from the Angolan government forces (FAA)¹⁴, while the MPLA accused UNITA of amassing troops¹⁵. Both parties agreed in January, that the deadline for achieving Lusaka's terms would be February 28th. However, inflammatory language and allegations quickly undermined any progress towards this lofty goal. One MPLA minister stated " February 28th will be just another date of no consequence," while UNITA maintained that the FAA continued to brutalise its supporters, thus preventing demobilisation¹⁶. These negative attitudes were complimented by negative behaviour.

Immediately after the formation of GURN, violent outbreaks occurred because UNITA failed to co-operate with the extension of government control when the FAA moved into regions under UNITA's influence¹⁷. This led to UN sanctions upon UNITA, despite the UN turning a blind eye on other violations of the cease-fire by both sides. For example it was reported that during the latter half of 1997 the government was increasing the amount of arms it bought¹⁸. Furthermore the government was giving military support to help rebel movement in Zaire under Laurent Kabila, leading to the overthrow of the pro-UNITA president Kinshasha and the establishment of the DRC. This caused a major disruption in UNITA's supply lines and limited its ability to hide troops behind the DRC's border¹⁹. Additionally UNITA was clearly not disarming adequately; 40% of the weapons and ammunition handed in were either in poor condition or unserviceable²⁰.

With this poor record of co-operation on both sides throughout 1997, the aim at fully implementing the peace process by the end of February 1998 was unrealistic. Despite common knowledge to the contrary, UNITA declared it

had demobilised on March 6th. However the government accepted this statement and immediately legalised UNITA as a party, hoping to bring Savimbi to the capital, thus separating him from his troops. Savimbi of course was not willing to leave his secure position, without better status within the government, namely some military control. Government offers of 'special status' for Savimbi were all declined.

As had been the case prior to this time, both leaders failed to communicate, wanting only to meet each other in their own respective strongholds. The fact that there were numerous failed attempts to bring about meetings, caused more suspicion and distance to form between the opposing parties over the months before conflict seriously escalated.

March passed and UNITA continuously failed to meet deadlines, appealing for more time. It became clear UNITA was employing delaying tactics and that an explosion of violent behaviour was on the horizon. By June, the UN observers reported mobilisation of forces on both sides²¹. The death of the UN special envoy to Angola, Alioune Beye, on 26th June in a plane crash, was the breaking point of the Lusaka peace process. It undermined mediation efforts and caused widespread insecurity - UNITA reasserted itself in several parts of the eastern province of Moxico²².

5) Dynamics

Angola's fourth civil war gathered strong momentum from July 1998, with UNITA making extensive advances from the outset. Immediately UNITA captured 68 areas that it had ceded to the government during the peace process. There was escalation of violence throughout the country; the most

horrendous of which was a massacre in the mining village of Bula where 105 civilians were butchered²³. July also saw polarisation within GURN, when numerous UNITA members left the capital. Human Rights Watch reported that UNITA officials had been targeted and harassed since April²⁴. UNITA's return to a war footing prompted the external factor of UN sanctions, freezing UNITA's foreign bank accounts, banning its diamond exports and preventing UNITA air and water traffic. UNITA responded by pulling out of negotiations for two months, and in August the party became further polarised by ceasing to negotiate with the Troika, stating those nations were biased against it.

For the next six months the fighting continued to escalate, with the government struggling to gain any victories against a UNITA that had a military potential " far beyond what it had before." ²⁵ In August, UNITA consolidated what would be its primary stronghold of Moxico province, while the FAA conscripted males aged 15-34 and targeted demobilised UNITA soldiers and officials²⁶.

September saw further advances by UNITA, with its progression in both Malanje and Uige provinces. UNITA received external assistance from DRC rebels in Uige²⁷. During October, fighting intensified in these northern provinces, spilling into Lunda Norte and Lunda Sol. Strategically these provinces were the chief diamond producing zones of Angola, and were thus essential for funding UNITA's war effort. During this period there was significant polarisation with UNITA being suspended from GURN. However at this point a splinter faction of UNITA - the UNITA Renewal Committee (UNITA-RC) - was formed under the leadership of Jorge Valentim. This allowed the

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government to cut all ties with Savimbi's UNITA, although Valentim's movement received negligible support from UNITA members²⁸. In September the UN formally blamed UNITA for the present crisis²⁹; an external factor, which set the scene for the UN's expanded efforts to undermine Savimbi's UNITA regime.

By the end of the year, the violence had escalated to the level where it would stay for about a year. In December, prior to the government's congress, the FAA launched a big air attack on the UNITA strongholds of Bailundo and Mungo. UNITA retaliated by indiscriminately shelling and forcing the government to withdraw from these cities. This caused full polarisation during the government congress. President dos Santos called for the withdrawal of the UN observer mission and the end of the peace process, as well as the total isolation of Savimbi. These requests were followed through when the government branded Savimbi a war criminal and rejected Lusaka in January³⁰.

During late December and early January two UN C-130 Hercules aircraft crashed in suspicious circumstances, causing a deterioration of relations between the UN and the two warring parties. The UN deplored the lack of co-operation by UNITA³¹, and in a report, Kofi Annan stated that both the parties were to blame for the worsening situation. He stated that there was nothing left to do but to pull out the monitors and aid workers³². GURN was also officially brushed aside by a cabinet reshuffle and President Dos Santos assumed full control over the FAA³³. This internal factor brought more cohesion to the MPLA, who were in an increasingly weak position sustaining further losses to UNITA and facing low cash reserves due to falling oil prices.

From this point, due to poor communications within Angola and, above all, the absence of UN monitors, the details of the violent conflict become sketchier. However it is clear that UNITA was on top for most of the year. There were atrocities on both sides. The UN condemned UNITA in May, for the indiscriminate shelling of Huambo, Kuito and Malanje³⁴. The un/under paid FAA troops also caused misery for many people, looting, raping in various communities. One report told of a man that had been shot in the legs for not immediately offering his possessions to government troops³⁵.

By this time it was clear that the sanctions for restricting UNITA's ability to sustain its forces were not working, and the UN launched an investigation into UNITA's sanctions' busting³⁶. This external factor sought to tighten the belt around those supporting UNITA's illicit diamond trade by threatening to name and shame them. In August further external pressure began to limit UNITA's room for manoeuvre. The leaders of fourteen countries from Southern Africa met as the Southern Africa Development Community, all voicing support for dos Santos, though not offering tangible military assistance.

The government sustained further defeats over August, and there were civilian massacres in Bie and Melanje³⁷. However the situation suddenly turned around in October when the FAA began to successfully secure the towns of Melanje and Bailundo. This defeat for UNITA was coupled with the external factor of De Beers, the world's largest diamond trader, placing an embargo on Angolan diamonds³⁸. Another external development was the establishment of a UN office in Luanda.

The end of the year saw further successes by the FAA, who seized the town of Jamba, home to UNITA headquarters. Following this success the government reported that it had destroyed 80% of UNITA's military capacity as well as cutting a key supply route³⁹. At this time too, the Namibian government began to actively support the MPLA. Over the first quarter of 2000, the government's claims above seem justified. UNITA appeared disorientated, employing guerrilla tactics rather than large-scale military operations. As well as this internal factor, the UN sanctions' busting report was published, severely criticising seven African states as well as Bulgaria and Belgium for allowing the trade of UNITA's blood diamonds⁴⁰. This report intensified the problems for UNITA, making it harder to pass its diamonds through routes that had previously been non-problematic.

Over year 2000, heavy fighting became less pronounced and there was a certain degree of de-polarisation. President Dos Santos altered his hard-line attitude towards UNITA, by reaffirming the validity of the Lusaka Peace Process, and stating that Savimbi and his supporters would be forgiven if they renounced war⁴¹. This was in reaction to the internal pressure of both an Episcopal letter from the Catholic Bishops of Angola and an Ecumenical open-air service in Luanda. However conflict continued in numerous areas, notably around the borders of Zambia and DRC, with the government quashing numerous uprisings on the borders⁴².

September saw the beginning of high profile attacks by UNITA guerrillas, seeking international attention. Many of the attacks either targeted international structures or were at times when international officials were in talks with the government. In Soyo a Total/Elf/Fina oil well was destroyed⁴³.

UNITA was totally restricted to guerrilla tactics when it lost its last urban strongholds in October. This resulted in a major decline in conflict, despite numerous isolated incidences of violence still occurring. There are some key examples of this sporadic violence. During May 2001, and coinciding with a visit from the UN Secretary-General's special advisor on Africa, Ibrahim Gambari, 150 civilians were killed in a series of attacks, as well as the kidnapping of sixty children from a Danish orphanage in Caxito⁴⁴. In July, coinciding with a visiting US delegation, UNITA blew up a train 130Km from Luanda, spraying bullets at passengers fleeing the burning carriages.

External factors constantly aimed to limit UNITA's potential in 2001. The UN expanded its sanctions monitoring, seeing that the sanctions were beginning to take effect. However in April the UN Sanctions Committee issued reports stating that UNITA still had caches of hidden weapons throughout the country. There were some internal factors pointing to the significant de-escalation of conflict. Following a report by Savimbi that the FAA had routed his forces, the government declared the civil war had effectively ended. Significant also was the statement by President dos Santos, stating that he was not going to stand for the next election.

However UNITA clearly still had many weapons, and was not entirely dormant. The human cost of the war is hard to calculate, but was definitely colossal⁴⁵. The war was twice deadly; death resulted from fighting, but also from disease and hunger. This was aggravated by the huge number of internally displaced people, which peaked in 2001 at four million people (about a third of the population)⁴⁶.