ANGOLA'S TORTURE
From New York to Lusaka and beyond:

UOUS ROAD TO PEACE

Convincing Angola's former warring parties to exchange the bullet for the ballot is going to take some time.

By Hussein Solomon

There have been various attempts to end Angola's long-running civil war. Each of these attempts has been met with failure. With the death of National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola (UNITA) leader Dr Jonas Savimbi in February 2002, many have felt that Africa's long-running civil war has finally come to an end. Such optimism, it will be argued, is misplaced. Much needs to be done if violence is not to be revisited upon Angola's long-suffering people. The purpose of this paper is to provide a broad overview of the Angolan conflict, as well as to provide some input as to why the various agreements have failed to end the conflict. Understanding past failures is imperative if current efforts to secure peace in this war-ravaged country are not to flounder.

The Road to War

For nearly forty years, Angola has been in a state of almost continuous war. In 1961, a bloody armed struggle from Portuguese colonial rule began. By November 1975, independence was granted. Even before the former colonial power had withdrawn from its erstwhile colony, however, war broke out amongst the various politico-military formations of Angola: the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), and the National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola (UNITA). Holden Roberto's FNLA was largely destroyed in the ensuing war. At the political level, too, support was switched by regional backers such as President Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire from the FNLA to UNITA. According to a United States Institute for Peace (USIP) report during 1975, more than 50 000 people died in the fighting and 300 000 Portuguese fled Angola, taking much-needed skills out of the country. In addition, tens of thousands of Angolan refugees fled into neighbouring Namibia and Zambia.1

Angola's political situation was further complicated during the Cold War, when all world affairs was seen through the lens of the titanic struggle between the capitalist United States and the communist Soviet Union. Thus the internationalisation of the Angolan conflict witnessed the Marxist MPLA of President Jose Eduardo dos Santos receiving assistance from Moscow and Havana whilst Jonas Savimbi's formerly Maoist UNITA, which was now portrayed as pro-Western, received support from the United States and apartheid South Africa.2

The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and the subsequent ending of the Cold War released the world from the constraints of global bipolarity and world politics seems to now be following a more turbulent trajectory. In Angola, this has meant that both the MPLA and UNITA have embraced the free enterprise system, but this has resulted in more obstacles than opportunities for peace. Thus what was once regarded as an ideological struggle has now been transformed into an ethnic one.

For what can War, but endless war still breed?

JOHN MILTON

There never was a good war, or a bad peace.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN
Savimbi, for instance, portrayed himself as the representative of the largest ethnic group – the Ovimbundu – and the Chokwe, whilst characterising the support base of the MPLA as being Mbundu and Mestico (those of mixed descent).

The Elusive Peace
Since 1988, various attempts have been made to end the Angolan conflict – peace, however, has proved to be elusive.

The New York peace accord of 1988 was agreed upon amid a changing global scenario. The Cold War was winding down and the superpowers' interest in the Angolan conflict between UNITA and the MPLA was waning. The New York accord made provision for the complete withdrawal of South Africa and Cuba from Angola, the expulsion of the African National Congress and the South West African People's Organisation from Angola and the independence of Namibia. This removed the external players from Angola, and it was hoped that this could provide the breathing room for peace among domestic actors. But this was not to be, as each belligerent saw the departure of the other's external supporters as a means to prepare a fresh military offensive. In addition, years of fighting against each other resulted in a tremendous mistrust and such disharmony was not conducive to prospects for sustainable peace.

The Gbadolite agreement of 1989 was then brokered by Zairean President Mobutu Sese Seko and provided for a cease-fire which was to begin on 24 June 1989. According to Knudsen et al., Mobutu was more concerned with gaining international prestige than with finding a viable and workable agreement between the two parties. Moreover, UNITA and the MPLA came to the discussions with differing agendas: UNITA wanted a government of national unity, multiparty elections and a cease-fire, while the MPLA wanted a one-party system, the exile of Savimbi and an end to US aid to UNITA. Behind closed doors, Mobutu told each party that the other had agreed to its demands, and when they found out that Mobutu had misrepresented the facts, any chance of an agreement broke down. In addition, the distrust between the parties increased.

The Bicesse accords of 1991, brokered by Portugal, the Soviet Union, the USA and the UN, were seen as the most promising accord by far. These provided for multiparty elections, with UNITA and the MPLA recognising each other as legitimate political parties. Bicesse also provided for a cease-fire and the disarmament and demobilisation of soldiers on both sides, with the United Nations Verification Mission (UNAVEM II) overseeing the process. The formation of a national army was also agreed upon, with the MPLA taking charge of government until the elections that were set for 29–30 September 1992.

Things began to go wrong even before the elections, however, with accusations of reneging on the cease-fire being hurled from both sides. The MPLA accused UNITA of trying to create instability before the elections. In April 1992, UNITA defector, General M N'Zau Pana, claimed that 20,000 UNITA soldiers, hidden near Luena, would be mobilised should UNITA lose the elections. Savimbi denied all claims and both parties assured anyone who would listen that if they won the elections, they would create a government of national unity. But Savimbi lost the elections. As a result, soon after the elections had taken place, Savimbi accused the MPLA of rigging the elections, although
observers declared it relatively free and fair with any irregularities being the result of inexperience as opposed to any deliberate attempt at electoral rigging.

When the results came out, there was no longer any hope that the Bicesse accord would be adhered to. Dos Santos won 49.57% of the presidential vote, just short of the 50% required to avoid a second round of elections, and Savimbi won 40.07% of the vote. In the legislative elections, the MPLA received 53.74% of the vote (70 seats) and UNITA 34.10% (44 seats). Ten other parties shared the remaining sixteen seats.

Savimbi went back to war, refusing to take up UNITA’s seats in parliament or take part in the government. In defiance of their leader’s will, in February 1993 ten of the seventy UNITA members of the National Assembly took their seats, “choosing peace and dialogue over war”. In March 1993, the UN Security Council accused UNITA of being solely responsible for the resumption of the conflict and UNITA was pressured to accept the results of the elections. Despite numerous attempts to reach agreement between UNITA and what was now recognised as the legitimate Angolan government, the civil war raged on.

The Lusaka Protocol of 1994 was finally reached after numerous ‘agreements’ and provided once again for a cease-fire, recognition of the election results, a timetable for incorporation and disarmament and demobilisation as well as quartering of UNITA soldiers, all overseen by the UN, national reconciliation and the continuation of the electoral process.

Almost immediately accusations of violations of the cease-fire were recorded, but, despite sporadic fighting, things finally seemed to be coming together. Savimbi was offered a Vice-Presidency, which he seemed willing to accept. In September 1995 the government and UNITA issued a joint declaration on the free movement of people and goods, an expansion of the 1994 Lusaka Protocol. Unauthorised checkpoints were to be removed. At a donors’ conference in Brussels, hosted by the European Commission, Dos Santos and Savimbi together pleaded for international financial support to rebuild Angola’s war-ravaged economy. Pledges totalling US $1 billion in aid and reconstruction were made.

On 1 March 1996 President dos Santos and Jonas Savimbi met in Gabon and agreed to form a Government of National Unity within four months. The two men also discussed military demobilisation and the formation of a unified armed force.

By 1996, however, UNAVEM III was growing considerably more anxious over the slow process of implementation of the Lusaka protocol, especially with regard to UNITA’s troop demobilisation. By May 1996 the United Nations had accused UNITA of dragging its feet as, since November 1995, fewer than 23 000 of the 63 000 UNITA troops had moved to the quartering areas and demobilisation camps. On 28 May 1996, UNITA radio reported that the Angolan Armed Forces (FAA) were violating the Lusaka Protocol by not returning to barracks. Although both the government and UNITA had reached the targets set for reducing their armed forces – a quarter of the forces had been demobilised by 18 June 1996 – there had been consistent reports that elite forces from both sides had been kept out of the process, together with heavy arms.

By October 1996, relations between UNITA and the government were becoming strained, with Savimbi having refused the vice-presidency and casting doubts on the guarantee of his safety in Luanda. US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, on a visit to Angola, stated that the US would not tolerate any resumption of conflict by UNITA. He placed the onus firmly on Savimbi, but also criticised the government for not confining to quarters a feared paramilitary force known as the Rapid Intervention Police.

The much delayed Government of National Unity was finally sworn in in April 1997 with Savimbi given special status as leader of the opposition – but even this could not stem the tide of UNITA aggression. Despite reports that UNITA members were very active within government and the FAA, Savimbi started a purge against senior colleagues who joined the government. As a result, UNITA split between moderates and hard-liners, with the hard-liners remaining with Savimbi. Moderates found themselves in Luanda engaging with government and calling themselves UNITA-Renovada.

In June 1997 it was reported that 90% of Angola’s 2.500km border with the Congo was still under UNITA control. At a conference, a colonel who had deserted from UNITA warned that UNITA maintained 75% of its forces outside the quartering areas and estimated that the total number of troops at Savimbi’s immediate disposal was 60 000. In July 1997, it was reported that UNITA was planting mines on roads recently opened or cleared by the UN. By 1998, the cease-fire broke down irrevocably and all-out war resumed.

Prospects for Peace After Savimbi

On the afternoon of 22 February 2002 Jonas Savimbi’s bullet-riddled corpse was put on display by the Angolan Armed Forces (FAA) after a fierce gun battle between UNITA and FAA forces in Moxico province. Shortly after the shock announcement of Savimbi’s death, there was more bad news for UNITA when on 6 March the death of Savimbi’s deputy – General Antonio Dembo – was announced. Militarily defeated, severely weak-ened by malnutrition and demoralised by the deaths of their leaders, the remaining UNITA leadership sued for peace.

By 4 April 2002, the surviving leadership of UNITA, now constituting itself as the management committee until the next UNITA congress, signed a ceasefire agreement entitled Memorandum of Understanding Addendum to the Lusaka Protocol for the Cessation of Hostilities and the Resolution of the Outstanding Military Issues Under the Lusaka Protocol with the government. Under the terms of this agreement, both parties accepted the 1994 Lusaka Protocol as the legitimate framework for peace in Angola. In addition, the ceasefire agreement made provision for an amnesty law for all crimes committed within the framework of the armed conflict, and the demobilisation of UNITA military forces, some of whom were to be integrated into the FAA. Others were to be provided with vocational skills and reintegrated into civilian life.

At first glance the agreement reached seems to represent a milestone in Angola’s tortuous path to peace. In addition, the fact that by the end of July there were over 80 000 UNITA troops in the quartering areas together with 300 000 of their family members provides room for optimism. Whilst both the ceasefire agreement and the rapid pace of the demobilisation process need to be welcomed, one needs to be mindful of lessons learned from earlier failures to secure peace in this troubled land. Three immediate problems confront Angola’s peace process and need to be overcome in the short term if peace is not to falter.

One of the lessons learned is that the inability to implement the Bicesse and the Lusaka Accords as a result of limited capacity often undermines trust and exacerbates acrimony amongst the belligerents.
has been that there are problems of food supply to the quartering areas where UNITA's troops and their families reside. By early May 2002, analysts were already warning that the government's inability to provide for UNITA troops and their families could undermine the demobilisation process.

Shortly thereafter, their dire prediction seemed to come true when the Catholic station, Radio Ecclesia, reported that the lack of supplies in cantonment areas in Kwanza-Norte province had led to UNITA troops stealing from surrounding villages. Indeed, since then various humanitarian agencies have reported incidents of spontaneous looting and banditry all over the country committed by starving UNITA troops, arguing that this may be their only option if they are to meet their basic needs and those of their families.

It is also clear that the inability to materially support UNITA soldiers and their families in quartering areas is undermining the broader peace process – UNITA's management committee has even argued that the inability to properly cater for UNITA forces is a violation of the terms of the agreement signed between the government and UNITA. Clearly, this situation needs to be rectified if sustainable peace is to be achieved, and the support of the international community is crucial here.

In this respect the 125 million Euros provided by the EU and US $497 000 provided by Canada for food assistance is to be welcomed, especially in the context of the drought and famine which is currently afflicting much of Southern Africa.

Another problem that continues to beset the current Angolan process, as it has frustrated earlier peace efforts, is the lack of trust between the parties. Two incidents underline this problem well. In April 2002, groups of UNITA troops in southern Angola walked for two weeks and hundreds of kilometres to cross the border to Namibia to surrender to the Namibian Defence Force (NDF) rather than to the FAA. This incident highlights the fact that fear, rather than trust, currently characterises the relationship between UNITA and the MPLA/FAA. That this is so, is hardly surprising given the decades of enmity between these protagonists. But it is also clear that if peace is to be sustainable, then Angola's leadership needs to act soon and decisively to bridge these divides of fear, enmity and distrust.

This distrust can be shown more graphically and more ominously in the allegation that UNITA may still be in possession of large numbers of sophisticated weapons – as it was in the run-up to the 1992 election. According to Joao Porto, “...concerns have been raised pointing to a worrying discrepancy between the number of troops in assembly areas and the number as well as the quality of weapons that have been handed over. Observers of this process fear that UNITA may be delaying the surrender of weapons to guarantee that the process will be dealt with properly, meeting its needs. Eyewitness accounts of the situation in the camps also indicate that some of the armaments handed over are obsolete and do not represent UNITA's real armaments.”

If violence is not to be revisited upon Angola's people, all arms caches need to be surrendered and destroyed. Once again, given the capacity problems of the Angolan state, the international community needs to step in to ensure the success of the demilitarisation process.

In this regard, the decision by the United Nations Security Council to support UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's call for an expanded UN mandate to provide vital support to ensure the success of the peace process and to strengthen humanitarian assistance needs to be welcomed. This new mission is called the United Nations Mission in Angola (UNMA) and would focus on two broad areas.

First, it would cover political, human rights and military aspects, and secondly humanitarian, economic recovery and development issues. Whilst this is a positive development, the six-month mandate given to UNMA from 16 August 2002 to 16 February 2003 may be too short to accomplish a complex task that needs to be seen as a long-term project. For those who raise the question of costs in relation to donor fatigue, it should be borne in mind that the world threw an estimated US $25 billion worth of bombs on a small corner of south-eastern Europe in 1999 within three months. From a moral perspective, why could not a fraction of this amount find its way into a vast corner of south-western Africa? Many are asking, are Angolan lives cheaper than those of Kosovars?

The third problem confronting Angola's peacemakers is intimately related to both the demobilisation process and the economy. Of the over 80 000 UNITA troops in the 35 cantonment areas, only 5 000 are to be integrated into the FAA. The overwhelming majority, then, together with their 300 000 family members, are to be provided with vocational skills and re-integrated into civilian life. The chances of these actually finding employment in a depressed, war-torn economy such as Angola's is, however, remote.

Given the fact that for the majority of these former UNITA rebels war-making skills may be the only ones that they have honed and that many may still have access to arms caches, there are fears that a large number could turn to banditry rather than face unemployment. It is for this reason that the restructuring and revitalisation of Angola's economy is of such vital importance for the future of Angola's peace process.

In addition to these three problems in the short-term, there are two additional problems that need to be overcome in the medium-term. The first of these relates to whether the UNITA leadership can successfully transform itself from a rebel force into a political party. Two recent events, however, suggest that this is far from happening.

First, both Eugenio Manuvakola, the leader of UNITA-Renovada, and Abel Chivukuvuku, the former leader of UNITA in parliament, have been sidelined by UNITA's management committee. Both these men have the necessary skills to transform UNITA into a viable political party and yet they have been sidelined by UNITA's management committee under the leadership of General Paulo Lukombo "Gato".

Second, the current constitution of the UNITA management committee simply reflects UNITA's military structure. In addition to General Gato, the committee consists of generals Kamortêu, Samy, Dachula, Sakala, Chitombi, Black Power, Kisanga and Chiwale; and commanders Antoninho, Calias, Samavuka, and Mulato.

Clearly if UNITA wants to remain a force in the changing Angolan political landscape then it needs to have more political visionaries ...

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Tony Hodges in his book.

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countries in the UN Development

current status quo may threaten their
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Security

an economic system that

intelligence; rapid reaction services (such as co-called hot extrac­tion, casualty evacuation and medical emergency services): arms

procurement; transport and protection of personnel and cargo: and

protection for diamond mines and oil fields.

Some of the private security companies known to be operating

in Angola include Saracen International; Sterling’s Mat Tech

International; Santex; Gray Security Limited; Ibis Air; Alpha

Bravo Associates; Alpha 5; Tele Service Sociedad de

Telecomunicacoes Securanc­a e Service; Mamboji; Gurkha

Security Guards; Special Gurkha Services Limited; Military

Professional Resources Incorporated; Vinell Corporation; Betac

Corporation; DynCorp; Romeo and Science Applications

International Corporation; AirScan; International Defence and

Security Limited; International Security Consultants; and Eurisc

Limited.21

These PSCs are the wild cards in the Angolan peace process.
They can, as the case of Executive Outcomes in Angola between
1993 and 1995 revealed, radically alter the military balance of
power. If the current military balance of power is changed, it
could adversely impact upon the prospects for sustainable peace
in Angola. Some private security companies may also have a
vested economic interest in the perpetuation of war. This relates
to the fact that some PSCs have been paid with lucrative oil and
diamond concessions and may be fearful that any change in the
current status quo may threaten their assets.22

In the longer term, if sustainable peace is to be realised in
Angola, economic and political restructuring of the country needs
to occur as a priority. At the economic level, Tony Hodges in his book, Angola from Afro-
Stalinism to Petro-Diamond Capitalism refers to an economic system that “...cultivates cronism
and arbitrariness and requires opaqueness in the management of state resources”.23 Such a
system results in a tiny economic elite linked to the ruling party benefiting from state resources
whilst the overwhelming majority of citizens are poverty-stricken.

As a result whilst Angola received some US $3.18 billion in
total oil revenues for 2001, it still ranks only 146th out of 162
countries in the UN Development Programme’s Human
Development Index. Commenting on these social contrasts, a
recent IRIN report noted:

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good and responsive economic governance is essential within the
broader rubric of post-conflict reconstruction and sustainable
peace.

The need for a radical political restructuring stems from two
inter-related reasons. First, the political system of Angola is
extremely closed and repressive with scant respect for human
rights. In its annual review of human rights, the US Department
of State has this to say of the ruling MPLA government:

The government’s human rights record continues to be poor,
and it continues to commit numerous serious abuses. Citizens have no effective means to change their govern­ment. ... Members of the security forces committed numerous extra-judicial killings, were responsible for numerous disappearances, and tortured, beat, raped and otherwise abused persons ... [T]he government took no effective action to prevent security personnel from supplementing incomes through the extortion of the civilian population. ... The judiciary, subject to executive influence, only functions in parts of the country, and does not ensure due process.25

As a result, the restructuring of the political order would need to result in a government responsive to the needs of ordinary citizens where human rights as opposed to oligarchic interests become the measure of a stable polity.

Second, and concomitantly, international observers often
make the mistake in their analysis of focusing their attention solely
on the MPLA and UNITA whilst ignoring the existence of other political formations in the country. Though these are, for the moment, minor players, given the fluidity of the political context in Angola, they are by no means marginal. One such actor is the

Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (FLEC).

Whilst small in numbers they cannot be discounted given the
strategic importance of Cabinda, where approximately 90% of
the country’s oil exports emanates from.26 The fact that FLEC
has recently increased their attacks on oil targets in the Cabinda
district highlights the point that they need to be accommodated
within a more inclusive political structure.

Moreover, there are other political players that, while having
no military wing, are increasingly extending their influence. One
of these is the opposition Progressive Democratic Party (PDP). The party has been staging various sit-ins and other forms of peaceful demonstration in the capital Luanda and is rapidly increasing its popular support. Other parties include Alexandre Andre’s Pajoca Party and Bengui Pedro Joao’s Social Democratic Party. Furthermore, May 2000 witnessed the further consolidation of opposition politics when 17 opposition parties united to form the United Front for Change.27

These initiatives need to be supported by the international community. Ultimately, support for a bipartisan system consisting merely of the MPLA and UNITA is politically and morally irresponsible given the decades of death, despair and destitution these two parties have brought on Angola’s people.

Conclusion

The cease-fire agreement of 4 April 2002 is certainly a step forward on Angola’s tortuous road to peace. Obstacles, however, do exist and these need to be identified and overcome in the short to medium-term with the assistance of the international community, if history is not to repeat itself in the form of the failures of Guadalupe, Bicesse and Lusaka.

In the process, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU) also need to involve themselves more constructively in the search for Angola’s peace alongside the existing troika of Portugal, the Russian Federation and the United States. These external actors would do well to remember that, given the length and complexity of Angola’s civil war, they need to see their involvement in Angola as a long-term project.

As such, over and above the measures outlined above, a great many other issues need to be addressed:

- Encouraging a culture of human rights and respect for the rule of law. This can be done at various levels from ensuring media freedom to training members of the security forces about their responsibilities to citizens.
- Bridging the ethnic, class and urban-rural divides at all social, economic and political levels.
- Demining needs to continue so as to open up fertile land for farming, while the use of fertilizers and crop rotation needs to be encouraged so that agriculture can become economically sustainable. This will help to prevent a situation where 200 Angolans starve to death every day.
- Fostering trust and reconciliation within and between communities by using churches and NGOs whose membership cuts across the divides.
- Training a corps of mediators to impart mediation and dispute resolution skills to local community leaders, as components of a more holistic peace process.
- Demilitarising Angolan politics, as no political party should have an armed wing.
- Building institutional capacity to meet the needs of ordinary people. In this way, good governance can itself become a conflict resolution mechanism.

Closely related to this is a radical restructuring of the political system of Angola, with the emphasis on decentralisation and power-sharing, so that all feel part of and no section of the populace feels alienated from the political system.

A concomitant of the latter point is that members of political parties need to be trained in the art of politics so that ultimately the politics of the ballot is seen to be superior to the politics of the bullet.

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Notes & references

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