

PROBLEMS OF PEACEKEEPING IN ANGOLA 1992-2002

One could choose many examples in discussing the problems of peace keeping in Africa, including the ongoing conflict in Libya, where all kinds of nefarious motives led to the overthrow of a government recognised by the UN as legitimate, and to the brutal murder of its head of state. It is certainly not widely recognised in the West that the main motive for the overthrow of the Gaddafi government in 2011 was that it was seen to pose a threat to the Western-dominated international financial institutions. Yet I prefer to discuss the peace process in Angola because I witnessed at least part of these developments at close hand. Consequently, I feel that I can perhaps contribute some additional details or insights.

Angola

The independence struggles of the Portuguese colonies in Africa were coordinated by CONCP. This was the Portuguese acronym for the Conference of the Nationalist Organizations of the Portuguese Colonies, which was founded in 1961 in Casablanca, Morocco by the liberation movements of Guinea Bissau, Angola, Mozambique, and São Tome and Príncipe. This meant that it was possible to stretch the resources of the Portuguese army by intensifying the struggle in different colonies at different times. In general the armed struggle within Angola was not as successful as in other colonies, largely because it was the most important colony of great economic benefit to Portugal, and so received a greater share of military resources designed to suppress the independence movements. Consequently, the independence struggle led by the MPLA had only gained territory in the less well-populated territory in eastern Angola by 1975, the year of independence, and there were two other self-styled independence movements operating in the country, UNITA and the FLN. They had been a lot less successful militarily than the MPLA. The MPLA refused to share power with them at the time of the independence negotiations which took place mainly in 1974. The

Portuguese government recognised the MPLA as the official government, but the USA and South Africa did not.

At the time of independence in November 1975, the Apartheid government of South Africa had already invaded Angola in an attempt to prevent the MPLA from taking power. The leader of the MPLA, Agostinho Neto, had expected such an intervention and so in June 1975 he had secretly contacted Cuba to send military aid to Angola. The Cuban troops had arrived by the time that South Africa invaded, and they managed to halt the invasion not far from the capital city Luanda at the very time that independence celebrations were taking place there. South Africa and UNITA had diplomatic and covert military support from the USA (John Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*). This included logistical supplies from a secret air base in Zaire (Democratic Republic of Congo).

That phase of the post-Independence war continued for 13 years, with several separate South African invasions, and with UNITA at one point being incorporated into the South African Defence Force (SADF), receiving salaries and supplies, while nominally remaining an independent political organisation. Over time the MPLA army (with Cuban training and Soviet supplies) became much stronger and in the first half of 1988 it had achieved a stalemate on the ground and air superiority over the SADF at the battle of Cuito Cuanavale in southern Angola. There would have been extremely heavy losses on both sides if the battle had been fought to a conclusion, and instead the USA started negotiations with the Soviet Union, Angola and South Africa to withdraw South African troops on condition that there would be major changes in southern Africa, including the independence of Namibia from South African control. This also implied negotiations between the National Party (NP) government of South Africa and the anti-Apartheid liberation movement the African National Congress (ANC). These latter negotiations began with a secret informal meeting in the UK, but became more formal after a further meeting in the UK in September 1988, at which members of

the ANC were told by the Institute of African Studies, Moscow, that there was agreement between the governments of the USA and the Soviet Union for there to be negotiations between the ANC and the South African government.

As these negotiations progressed, the ANC leader Nelson Mandela was released from prison in South Africa and Namibia became independent in 1990. By May 1991, the Bicesse Accords signed in Portugal meant that there was a ceasefire between UNITA and the MPLA in Angola. These Accords provided for elections, but they were delayed until the end of September 1992, with the electoral registration process taking place in July 1992.

By coincidence, I was in Angola for three weeks in July 1992. I was working unpaid with a Dutch NGO called *Afriprojekt* but my real role was to be available during discussions between the Delegation for the European Commission and the MPLA government. I had already trained Mozambican civil servants in the workings of trade and aid agreements between the European Commission (EC) and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries that had signed such agreements. The Angolan government was interested in having me do the same training course there. For some reason, there was a problem with the negotiations and this course never took place. In the meantime, I was not allowed to talk to the Angolan government but I was encouraged to talk to all the UN agencies working in Angola because this was necessary for explain what forms of aid the Angolan government could access through the UN (albeit funded by the EC). So I learned a great deal about the workings of the UN in Angola, including about the activities of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) Margaret Anstee. I attended a general meeting of all UN agencies that was held under the auspices of the SRSG in the National Assembly building in Luanda.

In addition, I was staying in a house with the representative of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) an NGO that was mainly funded by the US State Department, and so I learned a lot from him. More importantly, I was

spending almost every evening with members of the National Electoral Commission (NEC) which was overseeing the election process. They were receiving daily reports from all over the country regarding the registration process and other problems.

Among the main problems were the following: the behaviour of the SADF which had arrived ostensibly to support the electoral registration process; the behaviour of the unofficial US ambassador to Angola; and the behaviour of UNITA.

South African Electoral Logistics Support

Although South Africa had not been readmitted to the UN, its transport planes arrived in Luanda with large UN stickers attached and they demanded to concentrate their logistics in the areas controlled by UNITA. Although they were forced to help elsewhere, they nevertheless managed to supply logistical support to UNITA areas. (I later confirmed from the ANC that this included clandestine arms supplies to UNITA in case it failed to win the election.) In addition, an SADF officer was caught red-handed with cameras spying on Angolan military facilities and equipment. This was not reported in the newspapers, but a few days later the main national newspaper reported that South Africa had a long-term strategy to minimise the effects of negotiating the end of Apartheid.

The first objective, to prevent the Namibian independence movement SWAPO from gaining a two-thirds majority in the election of 1990, had been achieved. This had involved some brutal atrocities to intimidate the electorate in various locations. The result was that SWAPO was prevented for some years from making any changes to the new Constitution. The second objective was to help ensure that UNITA won the 1992 election, and the third was to prevent an ANC victory in the first post-Apartheid election. I wondered how the information about this South African strategy had been obtained so quickly, but in April 1998 I discovered that the MPLA was probably consciously using the appalling conditions in Viana

prison to threaten people with long sentences during which they would probably catch dysentery and malaria.

US Meddling in the Angolan Elections 1992

Although the USA did not recognise the Angolan government, for the election it had sent in an emissary who acted as de facto ambassador, who was supported by a small team of intelligence agents. I discovered that this team was able to influence some UN personnel to follow US policy on various issues. The SRSB was unaware of this. Measures included the insertion of pro-UNITA propaganda into the supposedly neutral civic education leaflets encouraging people to vote. This was prevented by a Portuguese former military helicopter pilot who was determined to ensure a fair election. In addition a bribe was paid to someone in the Angolan Ministry of Defence in order to use its printing presses to print material related to the election. This saved the US money by getting high quality printing done more cheaply, and it was hoped that this scandal would be revealed so that the Angolan government could be accused of corruption during the election campaign, but that did not happen.

Although the US Senate had ceased to vote funds for UNITA in 1991, the disbursement of funds continued into 1992, and during July 1992 186 Humvees arrived in Luanda to be handed over to UNITA. The MPLA suggested that these could be used as ambulances for the general population, but UNITA refused this, and they were doubtless used in the war that broke out again after UNITA lost the election. Then UNITA managed to bus large numbers of people into Luanda for what was described as a 'Commissio' that is a public meeting to resolve problems. In fact although election campaigning was prohibited during the registration process, it was an election meeting for the UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi which I managed to gatecrash. A biplane appeared out of nowhere dropping election leaflets all over Luanda. If the MPLA complained about all this to the NEC, nothing was done. Yet UNITA was inadvertently giving itself a very bad image in

the cities because Savimbi had negotiated to have his personal protection unit of 2,000 soldiers admitted to Luanda and these personally heavily armed soldiers were throwing their weight around.

I had been advised by my research partner back in Belgium to contact a social scientist associated with the MPLA to see how the election was likely to turn out. Because I had worked in Mozambique with Acquino de Bragança who had earlier coordinated the independence struggles through CONCP in Algeria, I was told confidentially that the MPLA had conducted an opinion poll, contrary to the prohibition on election activity during the registration period, and it was clear that the MPLA was going to win. This was not the conventional wisdom at the time. When that evening my research partner phoned me to discuss research progress, he asked me what the outcome of this conversation had been. I pretended not to understand, and gave no indication of how the election might turn out. The next day, three Americans turned up at my office asking about the possible outcome of the election. Evidently my phone had been tapped, as I had suspected. I managed to joke about it and convey the impression that I knew nothing about the topic. Yet in September when back in the UK I wrote a piece for *Southern Africa Report* in Canada hinting strongly that the MPLA would win and that in those circumstances UNITA might return to war.

<http://www.africafiles.org/article.asp?ID=4704>

It was published in November 1992, when UNITA had already lost the election and had indeed gone back to war. By March 1993, some 300,000 people had died and UNITA had occupied a large part of Angola.

One important feature of international politics regarding Angola during the electoral registration period was the undeclared tension between the EC Delegation in Luanda and the group around the US emissary. The EC policy was one of support to the MPLA government which it recognised as the legitimate government in accordance with UN policy, whereas the USA did not recognise the

MPLA government and was attempting to secure an election victory for UNITA. The EC was determined to avoid this tension from coming out into the open, and this meant that the behaviour of the US team and the hidden agenda of the South African military support for electoral logistics were not openly challenged. The USA only changed to recognising the Angolan government some years later when, as Bill Clinton claimed, Nelson Mandela persuaded him to do so.

UNITA Arrogance and the Return to War

In July 1992 the leader of UNITA Jonas Savimbi had very bad relations with his main supporter the USA. This was evident from his arrogant performance during the election speech in Luanda that I had gate crashed. He was very arrogant and critical of the USA, while promising that there would be a 'new order, with new trousers' (meaning new UNITA people in charge). I was standing near two UNITA soldiers in the free-fire zone between the crowd and the stage where Savimbi was standing. There were a lot of other UNITA soldiers around, but I wondered if these soldiers deployed in the main city square surrounded by quite tall buildings were enough security during such a provocative meeting. I then discovered some years later that he had also been protected by UK SAS snipers because the UK was also worried about a possible assassination attempt. Thus the election meddling by the USA was also directly supported by the UK.

Savimbi had been assured by his advisors that he was certain to win the election, and that was presumably the basis on which he felt able to make demands of the USA and to criticise the USA publicly in this speech when he did not get what he wanted. The result was that it was very difficult to break the news to him that he had lost the election. Margaret Anstee the SRSG then spent a very difficult period in early October trying to persuade Savimbi not to return to war, but he had probably promised all sorts of patronage to his supporters and could not be persuaded to accept mediation.

Planning Food Aid March 1993

In March 1993 a Belgian agronomist and I were hired as consultants by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to conduct a Crop and Food Assessment Mission in Angola and Mozambique. This was an annual joint operation with the World Food Programme (WFP) in various Southern African countries, but our mission was especially important because the war had disrupted crop sowing in Angola. Both countries had been affected by drought in 1991-1992, and we knew from the FAO weather satellite data that the drought had continued in Angola into 1993. We spent about a week in each country.

On arrival the WFP head informed us of the operating difficulties caused by the war, which was a broadly conventional war with artillery, tanks, and jet fighters as well as infantry. Major cities were under siege and inhabitants would be attacked if they tried to venture out to collect food. Consequently people were being buried in large numbers in domestic gardens within towns and cities. WFP personnel who had visited UNITA camps to assess food needs had been held for up to 12 hours at a time, in a tactic to try to establish control over food supplies. This was because food had become a major source of control of people, especially UNITA troops who were starved when not on offensive and then fed well prior to an attack, stimulating a desire for conflict. The only way for the UN to communicate with UNITA was through the Catholic missionary radio. Small eight-seater planes that were used to ferry UN personnel around Angola were being shot at by UNITA. Nevertheless we flew to Lubango, the Provincial capital of Huila province. When I had asked if we would be supplied with bullet-proof vests, I was told that they had only just been ordered from South Africa and had not yet arrived.

The harvest statistics available to the FAO were rudimentary owing to the war, and there were almost no records at all available in the Ministry of Agriculture. For this reason we had agreed to go to Lubango to assess the situation on the ground. The crops there were in poor condition, and the city centre had been

seriously damaged by close tank fire from MPLA troops. We then travelled on by air to Ondjiva in Cunene Province right on the Namibian border, because of reports that the drought was very serious there. Some WFP personnel had bravely driven to Lubango and they then went on to Ondjiva, even though UN military intelligence did not know whether or not UNITA had entered that part of Angola (from Kuando Kubango Province into Cunene Province). Fortunately UNITA had not done so or we would probably all have been taken hostage. The drought was indeed serious there and food stocks were desperately low. Local administrative officials were conducting a census, and I obtained the preliminary results from the Ministry of Agriculture on returning to Luanda. That proved to be very fortunate.

Back in Luanda, I asked for a disk of UNICEF data on family structure, and for the full electoral registration figures, since there was no census to work with. I had brought a laptop computer with me (a rare object in Angola in those days). I knew from my visit in 1992 that the UNICEF data had resulted in estimates of family size for different parts of Angola, but generally the families consisted of two adults and three children. The electoral registration data was considered to have covered 90 per cent of the adult population, and so one could treat that as 40 per cent of the total population. I calculated how this worked out geographically by province and came up with a population estimate of 12 million. This was higher than the official Angolan estimate of around 10.5 million, and I worked out three different ways of estimating the population using the official figures, pointing to the problems of such estimates in a report that I submitted to the WFP. I argued that my estimate was more likely to be correct, since a large number of people had returned to Angola from other countries precisely to register for the election, since it had seemed as if the war was over.

I was able to check my estimated figures against the only other recent estimates. The Canadian NGO *Development Workshop* had been repairing and maintaining the water supply system for Luanda for some years, and they used water

consumption as a successful proxy for population. The Cunene Province figures formed the other source against which to check my own estimates. My new national estimate corresponded closely to these two other data sources, a fact included in my report to the WFP. These figures were checked and adopted as the official UN figures submitted to international donors for food aid. According to a later published commentary by a staff member at Chatham House the resulting aid operation in Angola saved 937,000 lives.

Human Rights Monitoring April 1998

In April 1998 I joined a team funded by the EC to evaluate various activities in Southern Africa that had been conducted by a Dutch NGO *AWEPA*. All of these projects had been funded by the EC. The team was led by a professor from SOAS in London. By this time the MPLA forces had regained much of the territory that they had lost in late 1992 and early 1993. The government control of oil and most of the diamond resources meant that it could fund the logistics and materiel for what had become a long conflict.

I was assigned to evaluate an *AWEPA* project monitoring human rights violations in Angola. This should have entailed interviews with both the MPLA and UNITA regarding various matters with which I was already familiar, having acted as an expert witness in UK refugee asylum appeal cases involving Angolans. Yet neither party attended agreed appointments and repeated efforts to arrange interviews failed. Yet there were UN documents that had been generated by the *AWEPA* project, and I interviewed some UN personnel. The *AWEPA* project had been generally successful, especially in Uige Province, and I was able to visit there because the *AWEPA* project worker was still living there after the project ended. He introduced me to key informants and showed me documentation that was not available in Luanda regarding public meetings called by the police, at which senior officers admitted that their staff had committed human rights violations and then worked to remedy the situation and improve behaviour. I was able to confirm

the impression that I had gained from UN documentation in Luanda that the UN itself was not making use of these positive experiences documented to generate national publicity on human rights and to campaign for further improvements, as had been agreed with *AWEPA*.

I stayed with a UN military observation post near Uige city that had Portuguese, French and Indian troops monitoring the situation for signs of a return to war. The Portuguese and French were very experienced in Africa, and the senior Portuguese officers were familiar with Uige because they had fought the MPLA there 20 years earlier. They knew local people from that time and were able to find out a great deal. This was a period of truce and peace negotiations that were meant to achieve a comprehensive peace agreement between UNITA and the MPLA, but it was obvious especially in Uige that war was going to restart within weeks or at the most months. UNITA troop movements of 1,000 or 1,500 at time were being recorded crossing roads, and other information confirmed that serious preparations were being made by UNITA for a return to war.

This was quite the opposite from the reports that the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan was delivering at that time to the UN Security Council (UNSC). The peace agreement was supposed to have been fully concluded by about the end of March, and Kofi Anna was telling the UNSC that the whole process would be completed about three weeks after the planned date. It became clear that this was because of misleading information that was being passed to the SRS in Angola, Maître Alouin Blondin Beyé. He was sending this mistaken news on to New York in good faith. Then on my return by small plane from Uige to Luanda, I was informed by an outraged UN official that there was a series of scandals in the UN mission to Angola, MONUA. They included large-scale theft of aviation fuel, and diamond and drug smuggling by UN officials. When complaints had been made to senior officials within MONUA, nothing was done. This echoed the inaction over human rights, but whereas the latter was probably owing to a desire to

maintain good relations between the UN, the MPLA and UNITA, this inaction over criminal behaviour seemed to be due to complicity in the corruption and theft. It fitted in with another scandal that I had been informed about before I had left for Uige, for which a special team had been flown out from Geneva to clean up the mess. Yet owing to the diversity of UN organisations in Luanda, that special team seemed to have no knowledge of the criminality in other parts of MONUA.

The only explanation for the systematic misreporting to the SRSG Blondin Beyé that seemed plausible was that the correct information, including about the viability of the peace process, was being blocked by someone that Blondin Beyé trusted. I was unable to gain access to this high level within the MONUA hierarchy. However, a few months later war did indeed break out again, and Maître Alouin Blondin Beyé died soon after that in a mysterious air crash in his home country in West Africa. I surmised that he had probably begun to find out what had been taking place, since he had presumably begun to realise that he had been misled regarding the state of the peace process. I was not very surprised when soon thereafter the Angolan government refused to agree to an extension of the mandate of MONUA. The war itself only ended when the UNITA headquarters in Kuando Kubango Province were captured in an attack spearheaded by Israeli troops, an attack in which Jonas Savimbi was killed.

Conclusion

Whatever its faults, the MPLA in Angola conducted an independence struggle from 1961 to 1974, negotiating an internationally recognised independence agreement with the Portuguese government that took effect in 1975. From that time on, it had been destabilised by a series of South African invasions, UNITA and FLN military incursions of varying impact, and then ongoing war with UNITA and a separate independence movement, FLEC, in the oil-rich Province of Cabinda. At one point, UNITA conspired with the then President of Congo-

Brazzaville to invade Cabinda in what they called 'Operation Mini-Kuwait' (referring to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1993). For most of this period, at least until the mid-1990s, the USA supported such efforts at regime change in Angola. So Angola has become adept at withstanding highly destructive conventional warfare, low intensity warfare and hybrid warfare.

Whereas it was once the fourth largest industrial economy in Africa, and produced a wide variety of agricultural products, very little of that industrial infrastructure has survived the decades of conflict. Agriculture (including in the most fertile areas such as the Central Highlands) is still restricted owing to the ongoing problem of landmines. At the onset of peace in 2002 it was one of the three most mine-affected countries in the world. It has coped with the debts built up during the wars by exporting diamonds and more importantly oil, although it was badly affected by the decline in the price of oil a few years ago. It is now developing a new strategy to diversify and modernise the economy and improve transport links including with landlocked African countries, thereby attracting Chinese investment. It remains to be seen how successful this new development path becomes.