



BRIEF REPORT 6/91

## ANGOLA: ELUSIVE PEACE?

War-racked Angola – still in the destructive grip of 16 years of civil war and internecine conflict – seems to have the prospect of peace at last. But, why has this seemingly intractable conflict lasted this long? What are its underlying roots? What are the prospects for peace?

### ROOTS OF CONFLICT

To understand the roots of the Angolan conflict, one has to grasp the social formation in that country. In some respects, Angola is a typical case of the 'African crisis', with peculiarities of its own.

The ruling MPLA Party controls a soft, centralised authoritarian state attempting to engage in nation-building and development – as is the case in many African countries. There is also an alienation of civil society, as well as of marginal groups – intellectuals, students, the urban Lumpenproletariat and the rural underclasses. Angola, too, has a parallel or 'shadow economy' but oil revenues make the undemocratic Angolan state relatively independent of the population. Thus, while there is a rejection of the state as such, oil revenues and external military assistance have enabled it to continue in the face of domestic opposition and internal crisis.

In response to the internal crisis, the ruling Party responded with a dual strategy: structural adjustment [largely IMF-induced] and limited democratisation. Both of these strategies have their roots in the internal dynamic of Angolan society. But increasingly both the ruling MPLA and UNITA are unable to shape internal developments, which are to a far greater degree being determined by global and regional factors. Correspondingly, intellectuals are having more of a say.

### MEDIATION

Since the peace accords of December 1988 which led to Namibia's independence in March 1990, international mediation in the Angolan conflict has been given a new thrust. In September 1989 the United States and the Soviet Union – parties with a patron-client relationship to the two warring groups – agreed to "end expensive commitments peripheral to their interests". Significantly, this statement, which signalled a phased disengagement by both Great Powers from Southern Africa, created additional space for Portuguese and African mediation in the conflict.

Thus, while the Soviets under the direction of their astute former foreign minister, Eduard Shevardnaze, renewed their diplomatic efforts

to reach a settlement in Angola – Shevardnaze met with UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi in December 1990 – the Portuguese government deepened its mediation, especially since late 1989. At the time, the United States, too, met with high-ranking Angolan officials in an attempt to restore momentum to the mediation.

Developments inside Angola – notably the Third MPLA Congress in December 1990 – when the ruling party changed ideological direction and became Social Democratic, shedding its Marxist-Leninist baggage – as well as developments within the Soviet Union, bolstered the prospects for peace. The ruling MPLA Party now accepts the primacy of private property, as well as of multi-partyism and the need for restructuring its ravaged economy along the new orthodoxy of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Domestic paralysis within the Soviet Union, meant that the Soviets became hostages of their own military support for the MPLA. Angola is an example of the failure of Soviet high-handed bureaucratic policy. The Soviets have little option but to support Portuguese, African and American mediation. Moscow is no longer a principal player.

In December 1990, the ruling MPLA and the rebel UNITA movement agreed in principle to free and fair elections following the signing of a cease-fire. Two conditions however, were stipulated: UNITA must recognise the existing legal order and the right of the MPLA to continue governing until elections are held, while the MPLA in turn must acknowledge the right of opposition parties to operate freely and make the required constitutional changes.

The mediators – Portugal, the United States

and the Soviet Union – met in Lisbon in mid-January to assess the situation. This meeting was especially important for the Americans, for it came after the resignation of Soviet Foreign Minister, Eduard Shevardnaze. At the meeting, the Soviets reiterated their commitment to the peace process and urged both parties to settle.

Significant progress came earlier in December 1990, following a meeting between US Secretary of State James Baker and former Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnaze. They agreed on the signing of a cease-fire, the Soviets would halt military assistance to the MPLA (valued at some US\$6 billion over a decade) and the US would halt covert military aid to UNITA (valued at US\$60 million annually). Both Great Powers also agreed to furnish political as well as military guarantees. To underline the policy shift Shevardnaze held a historic meeting with UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi.

The signing of the cease-fire between the two warring parties in Lisbon in January would have restored hope to that war-torn country and to the southern African region. Sadly, it was not to be. There are, however, grounds for cautious optimism. The patron-client relationship between the two Angolan adversaries and the US and the Soviet Union respectively, enhances the prospect of a cease-fire holding, and culminating in democratic elections. Unlike Mozambique, the US and the Soviets (not forgetting South Africa) have some influence over the warring parties.

The groundwork for the current ongoing attempts to reach a cease-fire has also been far better prepared than the abortive Ghadolite cease-fire in 1989 when Zaire's President Joseph Mobutu Seso-Seko failed to measure up to the role as an honest broker.

The cease-fire, if implemented, will come only months before the last Cuban forces leave Angola. During the past six months, the remaining Cuban forces numbered some 12,000. (They once numbered 50,000). Havana has indicated that there will be full withdrawal before the July deadline. The cease-fire will prepare the way for the formation of a single national army (comprising elements of both adversaries) and opposition parties, as well as the holding of a general election for the purpose of electing a new government.

#### NEW DYNAMIC

It was a new dynamic within the country as well as within the region, that made possible seven direct interactions between the two warring parties. Angolan President Eduardo dos Santos realises that it would be futile for his country to swim against the near universal tide of democratisation. The December Congress sanctioned the opening of the MPLA, the separation of party and state, and the removal of the military from exclusive party control. The details have yet to be worked out by another MPLA congress due to be held in April or May.

The Angolan military, one of the most formidable in southern Africa, suffered a political setback in December 1990 with the dropping of Defence Minister Pedro Maria Tonha Pedale from the 12-member politburo.

Serious problems and obstacles remain, however, not least of which is the unpreparedness of the ruling party to open up the political realm - a phenomenon known as *transparencia*. There is still fighting between the two rival armies, with Angolan pilots displaying fairly

unimpressive navigation skills!. There is also talk of the emergence of a 'third force' - which could form the nucleus of a Christian Democratic Party - around the recently legalised Civic Association of Angola (ACA) led by the intellectual Pinto de Andrade. Angolan watchers however, are divided on the potential significance of the ACA. Soviet analysts, for example take the prospect of splits within both the MPLA and UNITA seriously. German and Portuguese analysts, however are more skeptical.

Bilateral agreements between Angola and newly-independent Namibia, as well as with the United Nations' special relief programme for Angola, which has received guarantees of safe passage for food convoys for both the MPLA and UNITA, have facilitated communication between the two warring parties. But the spectre of mischief-making remains. Most recently, there have been unconfirmed reports of covert South African and CIA assistance for UNITA. In the interest of peace, one would hope that such reports are unfounded, for there is simply too much at stake - also for South Africa - to undermine current mediation attempts.

Finally, an end to Angola's 16-year old civil (uncivil) war could mean immediate savings of more than US\$1 billion a year for the country's torn social fabric. According to the United Nations, Angola's war effort - at its peak in 1988/89 - consumed over 60% of the country's foreign earnings of more than US\$2 billion annually.

Angola, potentially one of Africa's richest countries, deserves lasting peace.

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