# Angolan Conflict Analysis: A Lesson for Africa's Emerging Leaders

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*Abstract -* **After 15 years of liberation struggle, Angola attained independence from Portugal in 1975. Almost immediately, the country descended into a civil war as power struggle ensued between the three former Liberation Movements namely, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) (which took over state rule after independence), the National Union for Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), and the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA).The civil war attracted the intervention of conflict entrepreneurs. Angola became a cold war zone with superpowers like United States of America, Union of Soviet Socialist Republic and France gaining ground for testing their weapons among other economic interests. South Africa's drive for regional hegemony, and Zaire's desire to establish influence in the area were examples of how seriously the rivalries and peace spoilers were bargaining for power at the expense of peace and sustainable development in Angola. The civil war was being funded by sales of diamonds and oil to United States of America, United Kingdom, France, Russia and Cuba in exchange for weapons and military personnel (mercenaries).Findings from research, indicated that fundamental issues underpinning the civil war ranged from power politics and control of resources. Deep ideological and strong ethnic differences, low literacy in the society, poor economic policies and corruption were also causes of the protracted conflict, making peace initiatives impossible. The Angolan civil war period can be divided as 1975-1991, 1992-1994, 1998-2002 with each period characterised by break-down of a fragile peace (Ferreira 2006). About 8 peace agreements were signed without success with the civil war escalating each time an agreement is signed, resulting in about 1.5 million people dying and more than 4 million people internally displaced (Amnesty International 2001).The death of the UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi in a battle in 2002 and the surrender of UNITA, signalled the signing of a memorandum of understanding between Armed Forces of Angola (FAA) and UNITA which brought the Angolan civil war to an end. The ceasefire and peace agreement, which outlawed any hostile interventions, triggered the demise of all external actors and peace spoilers as well as bringing to light a massive humanitarian crisis in which over 18 million people needed food assistance, more than 4 million displaced families needed repatriation, and over 85000 UNITA soldiers demobilized and more than 43000 family members became dependent on government and the international community (Kibble and Steve 2003). The focus on new Angola is now on post-conflict reconstruction, peace-building, respect for human rights and sustainable development.**

*Key words:* **goal incompatibility, peace, power politics, conflict entrepreneurs, peace spoilers**

## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper makes an analysis of the Angolan conflict looking at the background of the conflict, how it evolved right up to its end, fundamental issues underpinning the conflict, actors in the conflict, their interests and attempts made to resolve the conflict. The paper views the Angolan civil war as a conflict that resulted from both internal and external political, social and economic factors. The civil war fought from 1975 to 2002 between the MPLA and the FNLA-UNITA coalition to succeed Portuguese colonialism in Angola, was described by Ferreira (2006) as involving the intervention of conflict entrepreneurs on behalf of both parties. Ferreira observed that the MPLA and UNITA had different roots in the Angolan social fabric and mutually incompatible leaderships, despite their shared aim of ending the Angolan colonial rule. The lesson learnt in this civil war is that the zero-sum game philosophy is too costly both in terms of human life and property. Due to the way in which the peace spoilers modified the nature of the internal dispute, they became an intricate part of the origins of the conflict itself as the civil war served as the surrogate battle ground for the cold war and large-scale direct and indirect international involvement by competing powers (Ferreira 2006; Hodges 2001). Their intervention accelerated the power dynamics at play in terms of relationships between and among the conflicting primary parties.

According to Amnesty International (2006) the interaction between the internal conflict and external rivalries contributed significantly to the severity of the civil war resulting in several peace pacts being violated and an estimated 1.5 million people being killed and over 4 million people displaced. This paper concludes by looking at how the conflict was financed, the death of Savimbi and the ultimate peace accord, and finally the effects of the war even to today and the way forward for Angola's growth and prosperity in an environment of peace and tranquillity.

## II. BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT

Angola, officially the Republic of Angola, is a country in Southern Africa. It is the seventh largest country in Africa, bordered by Namibia to the south, the Democratic Republic of Congo to the north, Zambia to the east, Botswana south east and the Atlantic Ocean to the west. The exclave province of Cabinda borders the Republic of then Congo and the

Democratic Republic of Congo. The capital and largest city of Angola is Luanda. Although inhabited since the Palaeolithic Era, what was now Angola was moulded by Portuguese colonisation. It began with and was for centuries limited to coastal settlements and trading posts established starting in the 16th century. In the 19th century, European settlers slowly and hesitantly began to establish themselves in the interior. The Portuguese colony that became Angola did not have its present borders until the early 20th century, because of resistance by indigenous groups such as Cuamato, the Kwanyama and the Mbunda.

From 1961 to 1974, Angolans opposed Portuguese colonial rule by violent, revolutionary struggle. The main actors in the Angolan armed struggle, according to Ferreira (2006) were United Union for the Liberation of Angola (UNITA,) led by Jonas Savimbi, Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) led by Holdern Roberto and Movement for the Liberation of the People of Angola (MPLA) led by Agostinho Neto. The FNLA and UNITA were being assisted by China and the MPLA by the USSR and Cuba during the liberation struggle, with the aim of expanding the socialist and communist philosophies.

The Angolan armed struggle against the Portuguese colonial rule ended with the fall of the Portuguese Salazar's regime in a leftist military coup in 1974 in Lisbon. After the Carnation Revolution in Lisbon and the end of the Angolan War of independence, the parties to the conflict signed the Alvor Accords on 15 January 1975 (Bender 1978). In early July 1975, the MPLA adopted azero-sum approach that violently forced the FNLA out of Luanda, and UNITA voluntarily withdrew to its stronghold in the south. Bender states that by August 1975, the MPLA had control of 11 of the 15 provincial capitals, including Cabinda and Luanda. According to Le Billon (2001), United States President Gerald Ford approved a covert aid to UNITA and FNLA through operation IA Feature on 18 July 1975 granting an initial US$6 million. Ford granted an additional US$ 8 million on 27 July and another US $25 million in August 1975 (Le Billon 2001). These interventions continued until the death of Savimbi in year 2002 and the signing of the final peace accord.

As reported by Gordon (1999), South Africa intervened on 23 October 1975, sending between 1500 and 2000 troops from South West Africa now Namibia into southern Angola in order to support UNITA and FNLA. Zaire, in a bid to install a pro-Kinshasa Government and thwart MPLA's drive for power, deployed armed cars, paratroopers, and infantry battalions to Angola in support of FNLA (led by Mobutu's son – in –law Holdern Roberto).Gordon (1999) states that within three weeks, South Africa and UNITA forces had captured five provincial capitals, including Novo Redondo, and Benguela.

In response to the South African intervention Cuba sent 18,000 soldiers as part of large-scale military intervention nicknamed Operation Carlota in support of MPLA (Ohlson and Stedman 1994). Cuba had initially provided MPLA with

230 military advisors prior to the South African intervention. The Cuban intervention, according to Ohlson and Stedman, proved decisive in repelling the South African and UNITA advance. The FNLA was likewise routed at the Battle of Quifangondo and was forced to retreat to towards Zaire.

The defeatof the FNLA, according to Ferreira (2006), allowed the MPLA to consolidate power over the capital Luanda. Ferreira states that, Agostinho Neto, the President of MPLA declared the independence of the Portuguese Overseas Province of Angola as the People's Republic of Angola and the exclave Cabinda on 11 November 1975. UNITA declared Angolan independence as the Social Democratic Republic of Angola based in Huambo, and the FNLA declared the Democratic Republic of Angola based in Ambriz, while Front for the Liberation of Cabinda (FLEC), armed and backed by French Government, declared independence of the Republic of Cabinda from Paris.

The FNLA and UNITA forged an alliance on 23 November 1975 proclaiming their own coalition Government based in Huambo, with Holdern Roberto and Jonas Savimbi as co-Presidents and Jose Ndele and Johnny Kinnock Eduardo as co-Prime Ministers.

## III. HOW THE CONFLICT EVOLVED AND HOW IT WAS FINANCED

Just after the anti-colonial struggle, the civil war broke out and it became linked to cold war politics and eventually was tied to the fighting throughout central Africa not only for political control, but also for control of natural resources, particularly oil and diamonds (EAAF 2003).

Immediately after the fall of the Lisbon government and the simultaneous independence of Angola in July 1975, MPLA 's violently driving of FNLA, and UNITA's voluntary withdrawal from Luanda without extending power sharing initiatives, thus opting for a zero-sum game ,angered the rival parties and triggered deadly conflict(Tvedten 1997). Pre and Post-independence political differences and fragmentation into three major opposing groups marked the conditions within which peace was no longer possible. External support which soon materialized for each of the two sides made matters worse. Angolan civil war escalation was rooted in the desire to control and own power dynamics and resources.

On the society side, being the supporters of the conflicts, the reason for the escalation was that, they have not received their fair share of scarce resources (wealth, power and recognition) and that many of them continued to live in abject and perpetual poverty. Peace scholars like Herbert (1983) and conflict analysts Bartos and Wehr (2002) believe that the use of human reason, basic needs fulfilment and functioning democracy can build the architecture of peace as the highest public good. They argued that, maximum distribution of this public good in society is consistent with physical survival and moral aspirations of human beings.

Incompatible goals of the warring parties led to increased conflict behaviour and more conflict groups were formed. Among the conditions which favour their formation is not only incompatible goals but also high group solidarity and non-availability of resources as witnessed by Bartos and Wehr (2002). According to Amnesty International (2002) a lack of sense of accountability by MPLA Government and UNITA persisted throughout the civil war, in which both parties avoided investigations of abuses and ignored calls to implement preventives measures.

The civil war was being funded by sales of diamonds found in territories controlled by UNITA (Ferreira 2006). Ferreira states that UNITA had strong alliances with apartheid South Africa, the USA, the UK and France who were the customers of the blood diamonds, while the ruling MPLA was supported by the USSR and Cuba. Later in the conflict MPLA sold oil to finance its war efforts. According to some who studied the conflict, such as Alec Russell(2004), by the mid-nineties what had been the archetypal Cold War conflict had become a cash of minerals-the oil of the MPLA against the diamonds of Savimbi's control of the north eastern part of Angola reportedly provided UNITA with an estimated US$400-500 million a year to fund the war.

## IV. THE PARTIES TO THE CONFLICT AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS

Tvedten (1992) asserts that the civil war in Angola was protracted due to the combination of Angola's violent internal dynamics and massive foreign interventions. The local parties in the conflict were three guerrilla movements, MPLA, UNITA and FNLA. FNLA later disbanded at the end of 1979, leaving the two in competition for power. Tvedten argued that South Africa's drive for regional hegemony, USA, Russia and Cuba's internationalism and Zaire's attempts to establish influence in the area were the causes of such nasty and uncalled for interventions. The war become a cold war struggle, as both the superpowers along with their respective allies, provided significant military assistance to parties in the conflict. Moreover, the Angolan conflict became intertwined with the second Congo war in the neighbouring DRC as well as the South African Border war.

Cilliers and Dietrich (2000) of the South African Institute of security studies gave an account of events prior and during the South African involvement; illustrating that the South African government of John Vorster initially became involved in an effort to counter the Chinese presence in Angola during the liberation war, which was feared might escalate the conflict into a local theatre of Cold War. In 1975, South Africa Prime Minister B.J Vorster authorised Operation Savanah, which began as an effort to protect engineers constructing the dam at Calueque, after unruly UNITA soldiers took over. The dam was paid for by the South African government and was felt to be at risk. The South African Defence Forces (SADF) despatched an armoured task force to secure the dam and it ultimately clashed with Cuban forces assisting the MPLA.

The SADF further sent additional 2000 troops from Namibia into southern Angola in order to support UNITA and FNLA.

At regional level were Zaire and apartheid South Africa. At international level, the civil war was being funded by interested parties like USA, USSR, Cuba, France and UK whose main focus was believed to be commercialising the war in exchange for oil and diamonds (Ferreira 2006).

## V. FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES UNDERPINNING THE CONFLICT

The Angolan conflict began as a struggle for national liberation from the Portuguese colonial power during early 1961 (Ferreira 2006). Ferreira asserts that even during the Angolan liberation struggle, the guerrilla movements would fight each other, when they clashed in the battle fields against the Portuguese soldiers. However, by the time of independence, 11 November 1975, rivalries between the three main nationalist groups had grown into intra-state war. The situation was rendered even more difficult than that faced by other newly independent countries in that the Portuguese colonisers abandoned their promise to facilitate elections prior to independence and fled the country, leaving three large factionalised liberation movements isolated, with little common ground between them.

Amnesty International (1996) observed that Angolan society was riddled with divisions long before it launched an anti-colonial movement, with each of the three groups representing different ethnic bases and ideological tenets, for example, UNITA supporters were Ovimbundu ethnic group, while MPLA was supported by the Mbundu tribe and FNLA the Kikongo, the largest ethnic groups in Angola. The pattern of colonisation emphasised division and differences and effectively moulded and hardened the latent conflict between these three independence movements (Zaki and Laidi 1990).

From 1975 until the late 1980's Angolan society, according to Zaki and Laidi, was moulded along classic Marxist-Leninist lines. They argued that ideological differences further worsened the Angolan conflict. The MPLA's political ideology and vision of centrally planned economy made things worse. The political system was based on rule by a single Marxist-Leninist party and excluded people from participation in the country's destiny. The Indigenous economic activity was very low, as was indigenous level of education and socio-economic achievement coupled with lack of promotion of indigenous capacity building. Capital assets were confiscated and the nationalisation of private industry was announced. Except for oil and diamond sectors, the private industry was edged out (Kibble and Steve 2003).

Great numbers of skilled workers of the Portuguese origin left the country. As the civil war spread in the country side, military effort increased against the background of poor economic policy resulting in sharp economic decline. For instance by 1991 the average value of industrial production was only one third of what it had been in 1975 (Ferreira

2006). Ferreira argued that Angola's incapacity to formulate sound economic policy in times of civil war should be understood in the context of its political and economic system. The need for hard currency (US$) to finance imports, industrial goods, military efforts and equipment led the MPLA to ask oil companies based in Angola from USA and France to increase oil production. According to the World Bank (1991) the attractiveness of crude oil production to finance military needs and imports of consumers goods, led MPLA Government to neglect its duties towards the nation as a whole. It established that, a rigid hierarchical network of vested interests emerged inside the state and the party thereby triggering increased opposition campaign/competition.

The World Bank noted that, private business, with exception of the activities of foreign oil companies, was restricted. The state controlled the media and constrained the emergence of civil society organisations. The economic and political system amounted to the identification of state with party (the MPLA).

The Word Bank (1991) states that the ruling party over saw an increasing repressive and corrupt state sector. It argued that the major sources of conflict were lack of transparency and bad governance, which got worse overtime. The "Dutch disease" phenomenon continued, as did rent-seeking, by far the easiest way to profitably accumulate wealth. The economic nepotism favoured the groups closely related to MPLA the ruling political party. Public enterprises were privatized from manufacturing industry to agriculture and commerce, but essentially benefiting a small group of emergent entrepreneurs and economic groups closely related to MPLA. These people received privileged access to credit and hard currency which they would sell in parallel foreign exchange market or used it to guarantee themselves lucrative import business, in the process driving out those who were genuinely interested in the recovery of domestic production. Corruption and embezzlement were at the centre of criticism from multilateral institutions and from Angolan's civil society (World Bank 1991).

## VI. ATTEMPTS MADE TO RESOLVE THE CONFLICT AND OUTCOMES

The United Nations (2002) illustrates that the Angola civil war periods is divided as: 1975-1991, 1992-1994, 1998-2002, broken down by fragile periods of peace. With civil war at its worst, the Gbadolite Zaire Ceasefire signed on 24 June 1989 failed without implementation. The Alvor Peace Accords, signed in1989 in Bicesse Portugal collapsed in May 1991in little more than a year, reigniting the fighting. The peace agreement signed between the government and Unita was supported by the Soviet Union, United States and Portugal and paved the way for United Nations monitored general presidential elections which were held in September 1992.When UNITA lost the 1992 elections, it rejected the results, claiming that they were unfair, and resumed the civil war. Neither the Lusaka second peace agreement signed in 1994 nor the third peace agreement signed in 1997, which

sought the creation of Government of National Unity and Reconciliation put an end to the war. The intensity of the fighting between October 1992, when war resumed, and February 1995, when a cease-fire negotiated at Lusaka came into force, was unprecedented.

On the failure of peace initiatives in Angola, peace researchers Knudsen, Mundt and Zartman (2000) argued that, conventional wisdom maintains that for a conflict to be susceptible to effective mediation efforts and de-escalation, several elements must be present: the "ripe" moment requires valid spokespersons: a perception of futility in continued violent conflict (a mutually hurting stalemate); requitement : and a way out for each party. According to Knudsen et al. these elements, particularly a sense of requitement and a way out for each party after elections, were absent in the Bicesse Accord.

As a result of the rejection by UNITA and the resumption of fighting, the United Nations Security Council imposed an arms embargo along with petroleum sanctions on UNITA in 1993 (Anstee 1993). In November 1994, according to Amnesty International (2001) the government and UNITA supplemented the first accords with the Lusaka protocol, which was supervised by The United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM111). The new accords called for disarmament, demobilization, the release of political prisoners, the training of the police on human rights issues, and the incorporation of UNITA soldiers and leaders into the Angolan Armed Forces (FAA) the police, and other government posts at all levels including more than 70 sets of the National Assembly. The protocol also established a Human Rights Unit within its political division. The accords called for the Angolans to forgive and forget the offenses resulting from the Angolan conflict and face the future with tolerance and confidence. Many viewed the signing of the Lusaka protocol as stemming more from international pressure than from the political will of UNITA and the Angolan government to achieve peace.

UN (2002) reported that even while the initial negotiations were taking place in Lusaka, the two groups continued military operations with disastrous consequences for the civilian population, especially in Kuito, Huambo and Uige. The United Nations reported that Unita refused to comply with the accord. After four years of attempting to implement the Lusaka accords in 1998, full scale war returned, heaping further suffering on people who had already endured over 35 years of conflict. Reasons for the resumption of fighting ranges from impunity for war crimes to the uneven implementation of the Lusaka Protocol, in particular with regards to Unita's failure to give up control over Unita liberated areas, and the government's failure to disarm civilians.

During that year, the war became increasingly linked to other wars in the region, exemplified by the August 1998 movement of thousands of Angolan troops into the DRC in support of

President Kabila, presumably to preventing Unita from using the DRC as a base Camp (Angolan Human Rights 1999). Unita was reportedly rearmed and regrouped through the illicit sale of diamonds to arms traders who disregarded sanctions. Again the United Nations responded to the renewal of fighting with more sanctions, adopting two resolutions which prohibited countries from importing Angolan diamonds without a certificate of origin issued by the Government of Angola and imposed further financial restrictions on UNITA (United Nations 2002).

According to UN (2002) two quite different and important characteristics of this renewed turmoil need emphasising: First, the war now spread throughout the entire country and for the first time it included towns. Unita's access to diamonds mine increased, permitting it to become self-sufficient financially and to acquire and use heavy military equipment. Second, Angola involved itself militarily in the internal affairs of its neighbours, the Republic of Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo (ex-Zaire) in December 1998 after the death of President Kabila, the MPLA dominated Government launched a large-scale offensive against Unita, which ended in year 2002 when Unita surrendered after the leader Jonas Savimbi died in a battle. The FAA and Unita signed a Memoranda de Entendimento in April 2002 that finally brought the tragic civil war to an end and formally declared peace in August 2002. According to, Amnesty International (2002) over 1,5million Angolans died in the civil war and more than 4 million people were internally displaced.

The ceasefire and peace agreement brought to light a massive humanitarian crises in which an estimated 18 million people needed food assistance, more than 4 million people were internally displaced and 85000 demobilized .UNITA soldiers and their 430000 family members had become dependent on Government and international community (Kibble and Steve 2003)

## VII.CONCLUSION

Angola's strategic position in Southern Africa and its wealth of natural resources, made it a sought after prize in both the regional and the cold war. International interests in, and support of different factions prolonged the conflict. When political instability degenerate into civil war or military confrontation, life becomes difficult and people's grievances continue to spread unattended resulting in serious protracted conflicts.

To avoid the return to civil war, Angola must address the concerns of its people mainly the need for fair distribution of wealth across all ethnical divides. Democracy must be unrestricted, respecting all political parties, and encouraging the involvement by the civil society. In democracy, social pressure, such as stemming from civil societies like trade union labour strikes are legitimate forms of contest that must be welcomed and protected. The Angolan destiny is in the hands of the Angolans themselves to make positive peace by resolving all existing class, ethnic, regional and gender

problems through the restructuring of Angola state, guarantee of human rights and democracy, normalisation of relations, inclusive social transformation and implementation of a common development concept (Bartos and Wehr 2002).

Post-conflict reconstruction strategies must embrace political stability and sound economic policies. Further, barriers that impede development agencies must be removed so as to allow investment into the country for economic growth, human rights and sustainable development.

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