



HISTORICAL SECURITY COUNCIL – RESEARCH REPORT I

Addressing the Situation in Angola and External Intervention (1975)

Introduction to the Topic:

The Angolan Civil War, spanning from 1975 to 2002 with several intermittent periods of political transition and attempted peace deals, remains as one of the most prolonged and complex internal conflicts in modern Sub-Saharan African history. More than 20 years after the cessation of hostilities, the case of Angola presents itself as a key example of the challenges faced by the international community in supporting conflict resolution in contexts shaped by deep running political divisions and conflicting external interests.

The conflict erupted from the failure of Angola's three main liberation movements and anti-colonial guerillas – MPLA, UNITA, and FNLA – to compose a united front after Angola gained independence from Portuguese colonial rule in November 1975. What began as a domestic competition for political legitimacy and authority between rivaling movements quickly intensified into a full-scale civil war in which each faction, aided and abetted by their own network of foreign supporters, sought to fill in the vacuum caused by the sudden collapse of colonial authority and assert their control over Angola's fragile post-independence landscape through military means. In the chaotic climate of the Cold War, Angola's internal struggle would draw in the direct involvement of global superpowers, regional forces, and foreign armies, intensifying the conflict into a major proxy war theatre that would last for almost 3 decades.

Background information

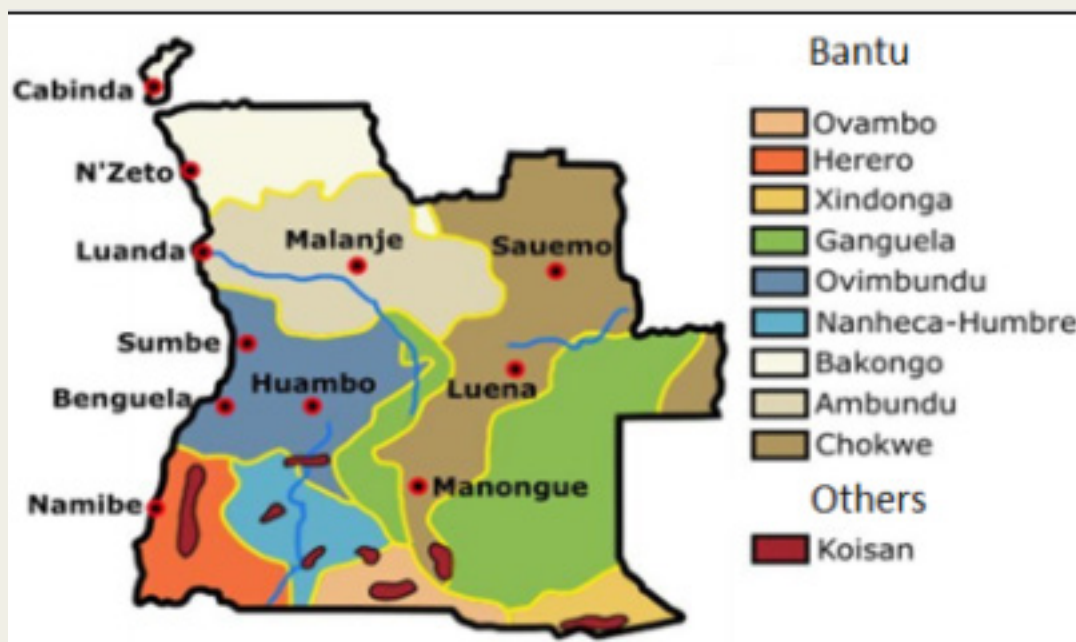
A. Ethnic divisions

Although the Angolan Civil War was not primarily motivated by ethnic tensions, the country's ethnolinguistic divisions would significantly influence the recruitment strategies, bases of support, and leadership strategies of the major liberation movements.

The MPLA drew much of its early support from the Kimbundu-speaking Ambundu people of Northwestern Angola and the multiracial academic class of major cities like Luanda, Benguela, and Huambo. UNITA, on the other hand, found its strongest base of support in the Ovimbundu people of central and western Angola, who were largely marginalized under Portuguese rule and were thus largely supportive of UNITA's promises of local autonomy rather than the MPLA's Marxist-Leninist doctrines, which were perceived as favouring the urban elites of Luanda and as a threat to traditional Ovimbundu authority structures. The Ovimbundu were the largest ethnic group in the country, comprising roughly 30% of the total population. The FNLA enlisted the support of the less populous Bakongo people of northern Angola and was initially committed to the restoration of the historical



of the Kongo that extended into the modern-day Republic of the Congo and Democratic Republic of the Congo (known as Zaire during the event of the Angolan Civil War).



B. Portuguese Colonialism

Portuguese explorers first came into contact with the Kongo Empire in the late 15th century. Colonial presence along the Angolan Coast remained limited between the 16th and 18th centuries, with settlement efforts being launched solely for the purpose of developing the Atlantic Slave Trade by purchasing slaves from intermediary African kingdoms. In the 19th century, however, largely owing to the decline of the Atlantic Slave Trade and the independence of Brazil, the Portuguese became more interested in advancing into the continental interior of Africa. During the "Scramble for Africa", the territorial occupation of the interior of the continent became a primary concern for the Portuguese, and so several military expeditions rushed to obtain as much territory as possible. By 1960, Portugal held effective military control over Angola, and almost 200 000 Portuguese settlers, most of whom came from impoverished rural backgrounds, lived there.

C. Angolan War of Independence (1961-1974)

In 1961, the MPLA, based in the Republic of Congo, and the FNLA, based in the Republic of Zaire, launched a guerilla campaign against Portuguese rule, marking the start of widespread armed resistance. The Portuguese responded with a counter-insurgency campaign that would escalate the insurgency into a bloody anti-colonial war. Over the next decade, guerilla activity expanded across multiple provinces as the liberation movements increased their territorial reach, enlisted the support of the local populations, and gained international visibility. Although each movement independently fought against the Portuguese, they often clashed in competition for political legitimacy, resources, and ideological prevalence (further information on the ideological differences between the factions can be found in the Parties Involved section). As the conflict intensified, it drew in the involvement of external actors and acquired international dimensions much due to the Cold War context of the time. The MPLA received political recognition and limited military assistance from the Republic of Congo, the Soviet Union, and several countries of the Eastern Bloc. By 1965, Cuba had become the MPLA's most proactive ally, committing several military advisors to assist its war effort against the



C. Angolan War of Independence (1961-1974)

The FNLA, in contrast, secured the political sponsorship of the Republic of Zaire and unofficial backing of the United States, though Portugal's NATO membership inhibited Washington from formally assisting it. In 1966, Jonas Savimbi, an FNLA dissident that had grown disillusioned with the movement's dependence on U.S. support and openly accused FNLA leader Holden Roberto of following an imperialist policy, founded UNITA as a separate liberation front rooted in Maoist principles. The movement's ideological direction enabled it to secure the support of the People's Republic of China.

The anti-colonial insurgencies in Angola, coupled with simultaneous wars in Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique, proved devastating for Portugal's economic and political stability and severely strained its international prestige. As the Portuguese Colonial War dragged on with no clear prospect of victory, public dissatisfaction for the authoritarian Estado-Novo Regime surged and morale within the army ranks rapidly deteriorated, culminating in the Carnation Revolution of April 1974, whereby a peaceful military coup in Lisbon overthrew the authoritarian regime. The newly established revolutionary Portuguese government pursued a policy of rapid decolonization, removing all elements of its colonial forces across Africa and agreeing to a swift handover of power to the nationalist movements.

D. Buildup to Civil War (1974-1975)

The MPLA had been the movement that most benefitted from the erosion of Portuguese colonial authority, seizing control of 11 of Angola's 16 provinces between April 1974 and January 1975. Its control over the capital city of Luanda, however, was severely undermined by a series of internal power struggles and Portuguese military presence. In a bid to counter MPLA presence in Luanda, the FNLA began airlifting troops into the city from their military bases in neighbouring Zaire. By November, Luanda was on the verge of becoming a battleground between MPLA, FNLA, and UNITA supporters. However, on the 5th of January 1975, under the initiative of the Organisation of African Unity, the leaders of the MPLA (Agostinho Neto), FNLA (Holden Roberto), and UNITA (Jonas Savimbi) movements met in Mombasa, Kenya, where they agreed to a permanent truce and formally undertook to negotiate the transition of power with Portugal.

Two weeks later, on the 15th of January 1975, the three nationalist leaders met with the Portuguese government in Alvor, Portugal, to deliberate the terms of Angola's independence. Under the resulting Alvor Agreements, a transitional coalition government composed of MPLA, FNLA, UNITA and Portuguese Armed Forces representatives was to govern Angola until November 11th 1975, upon which democratic elections would be held.

The interim coalition government would soon face a series of severe challenges. In the months up to the transition in power, most of the country's 500 000 ethnic Portuguese-Angolans, who made up the bulk of Angola's skilled workforce in agriculture, industry, and public administration, fled the country, plunging the national economy into recession. Moreover, the absence of a functional transitional framework, combined with the liberation movement's competing ideological outlooks and mutual distrust, produced an uneasy political environment. Instead of coordinating to guide the country toward a united path to nation-building, each movement scrambled to assert itself as the legitimate successor government and forcefully claim its hold over Angola's fragile post-independence landscape.

Within 24 hours of the Alvor Agreement's ratification, fighting broke out between FNLA and MPLA supporters in Luanda. In March, the FNLA carried out a series of failed assassination attempts on high-ranking MPLA party members and began attacking MPLA bases in Luanda.



The following week, a contingent of 500 MPLA troops drove into the capital to join the fighting. Between March and July 1975, the FNLA, assisted by some 1 200 Zairian troops

E Present Situation (1975)

In July 1975, the MPLA, strengthened by mounting support the Soviet Union, Cuba and the Portuguese Communist Party, violently forced the FNLA out of Luanda, prompting the collapse of the transitional government and pressuring Savimbi's UNITA, the weakest of the three nationalist movements in the military standpoint but with the greatest electoral potential given its predominantly Ovimbundu support base, to relocate to its strongholds in the south.

In October, the conflict was further intensified when South Africa launched Operation Savannah, a large-scale military incursion into southern and central Angola that sought to strengthen and legitimize the FNLA and UNITA by ejecting MPLA, Soviet, and Cuban military presence from the country before the scheduled date of independence. Within the span of one month, South African-UNITA forces had successfully ejected the MPLA and its allies from 5 provinces, weakening the faction's hold over southern and central Angola and effectively securing UNITA control over Huambo, Angola's third most populous city. In response to South African intervention, Cuba greatly expanded the scale of their military assistance to the MPLA, committing 18 000 combat troops under Operation Carlota, thereby shifting the balance of power in favour of the MPLA.



As the scheduled day for independence loomed, each movement made a violent bid to seize control of Luanda and thus assert their international legitimacy. Between the 5th and 8th of November, the FNLA, strengthened by US, Zairian, and South African aid, carried out a series of incursions into Luanda, but were repulsed by the MPLA, Cuban, and Soviet forces. On the 10th of November, the day prior to the proclamation of independence, the FNLA, assisted by South African troops, made one last strategic attempt to seize Luanda from the MPLA at the Battle of Quifandongo. The resulting MPLA victory dealt a devastating blow to the FNLA, which was forced to retreat towards the border with Zaire, and secured MPLA control over Angola's northern provinces, enabling it to retain its hold over the capital city of Luanda at the crucial moment of independence. That same day, the Portuguese Armed Forces permanently withdrew from Angola without formally transferring sovereignty to any of the liberation movements.

On November 11th, 1975, as envisioned by the Alvor Accords, the MPLA declared the formation of the People's Republic of Angola. Having consolidated its control of the capital, it was recognized



the definite collapse of any hopes for a unified transition into independence and mark the conflict's full transition into an internationalized civil war.

From a humanitarian perspective, the factional violence that occurred between 1974 and 1975 had brought about the displacement of thousands of civilians and drastically undermined access to essential services across affected provinces. The collapse of economic and administrative capacity disrupted the provision of basic infrastructure, healthcare, and food distribution, further intensifying the social and economic instability of Angola's post-independence landscape.

By December 1975, Angola had become a major Cold War battleground. Although FNLA presence in the northern provinces had been largely neutralized, South Africa, in coordination with UNITA, continued to advance in the central and southern provinces in an attempt to oust the MPLA from power, often clashing with Cuban and Soviet troops. The US, the People's Republic of China, Zaire and other regional UNITA-FNLA allies indirectly supported the Democratic People's Republic of Angola, whilst Cuba and the Soviet Union provided extensive political and military backing to the MPLA-governed People's Republic of Angola.

Focus of the Debate

The timeframe for debate is set for December 1975, in the immediate aftermath of Angola's conflicting claims to national independence and the effective collapse of the Alvor Accords. Delegates are encouraged to respond to emerging humanitarian needs, facilitate diplomatic engagement between rivaling factions and external actors, and prevent a further internationalization of the conflict, whilst actively considering the limitations and power dynamics of the United Nations during the early stages of the conflict.

Significant Parties Involved

People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA): Dominant governing and military authority following the proclamation of the Angolan independence in November 1975. Declared the formation of the international recognized People's Republic of Angola upon defeating the FNLA in the northern provinces and consolidating control over the capital city of Luanda. Ideologically aligned with Marxist-Leninist principles. Led by Agostinho Neto.

National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA): Sought to challenge MPLA authority following the proclamation of independence. Benefited from diplomatic and military aid from South Africa, the United States, and the People's Republic of China. Declared the formation of the Democratic People's Republic of Angola alongside the FNLA. Ideologically aligned with Maoist principles and inspired by the Chinese Communist Revolution (peasant-based revolutionary approach). Led by Jonas Savimbi.

National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA): Sought to challenge MPLA authority following the proclamation of independence. Benefited from diplomatic and military aid from the Republic of Zaire, the United States, the People's Republic of China, and South Africa. Declared the formation of the Democratic People's Republic of Angola alongside UNITA. Ideologically committed to the restoration of the historical Kingdom of the Kongo. Led by Holden Roberto.

Republic of South Africa: Intervened militarily in support of the FNLA and UNITA movements to prevent the establishment of a Marxist-aligned Angolan state under the MPLA through Operation Savannah.



Republic of Zaire (now Democratic Republic of the Congo): Supported the FNLA's bid to recapture Luanda from the MPLA by providing logistical and military assistance.

United States of America (USA): Provided covert military and financial support to the FNLA and UNITA movements in an attempt to counter Soviet influence in Sub-Saharan Africa. Shipped weapons and combat troops to the FNLA through Zaire between 1974 and 1975.

Soviet Union (USSR): Provided extensive military aid and political support to the MPLA in an attempt to extend the scope of Soviet influence in Sub-Saharan Africa and counter U.S. interests in the region.

People's Republic of China: Provided logistical, military and political support to the FNLA and UNITA during the mid 1970s in strategic competition with the Soviet Union for influence in liberation movements across Africa. By 1975, as a result of the FNLA's declining military strength and political significance, Chinese influence had been greatly diminished.

Cuba: Provided logistical military aid and political support during the Angolan War of Independence. Deployed combat troops in order to legitimize the MPLA's position prior to Angolan independence by countering South African military intervention (Operation Savannah) and defeating the UNITA and FNLA movements.

Portugal: As Angola's former colonial power, oversaw the transition to independence under the terms of the Alvor Agreement. Portugal's inability to impose a viable solution to factional fighting and civil unrest between 1974-1975 and its refusal to formally transfer Angolan sovereignty to any of the nationalist movements helped create the power vacuum that would eventually culminate in civil war.

Eastern Bloc States: Indirectly contributed to the MPLA's war effort through coordination with the Soviet Union. East Germany (GDR), Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria provided logistical military support to MPLA forces in the form of intelligence assistance and military training.

Israel: Provided covert logistical and military aid to the FNLA during the Angolan War of Independence (1961-1974) and later shipped arms to the FNLA through Zaire with the aim of ejecting the MPLA from Luanda.

Glossary and Key Terms:

Civil War: An armed conflict between citizens of the same country. It receives the same kind of treatment as war between different countries in international warfare regulations set by the 1949 Geneva Convention.

Rules Based International Order: Post-WWII international framework of global norms, treaties, institutions, and laws that governs interactions between countries. It is based on the liberal internationalist doctrine and seeks to promote international cooperation by introducing multilateral institutions like the United Nations (UN), International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to solve international disputes without force. Led largely by the United States, it encourages security and monetary cooperation, human equality, free trade, and democracy.

Cold War: A period of open yet restricted geopolitical, ideological, economic, and technological rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies, which began in the aftermath of WWII and ended with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Instead of direct fighting between the two superpowers, the Cold War was waged on political, economic, and propagandistic fronts, with both sides supporting opposing factions in regional proxy wars.



Proxy War: An armed conflict in which one or more third parties support state or non-state actors in order to influence the conflict's outcome either to advance their strategic interests or undermine those of its opponents. Third parties are not directly involved in the fighting to any significant extent, enabling major powers to avoid direct confrontation whilst actively upholding their interests and competing for influence and resources.

Eastern Bloc: A group of eastern European nations that were politically, economically, militarily, and ideologically aligned with the Soviet Union between the immediate post WWII years and 1990. These countries were said to be under the Soviet sphere of influence.

Carnation Revolution: Military coup carried out by members of the MFA (Armed Forces Movement), that overthrew the authoritarian Estado Novo Regime and brought about the end of Portuguese Colonial War.

Organisation of African Unity (OAU): An intergovernmental organization tasked with promoting economic integration among African states and the eradication of colonialism that acted as continental Africa's primary multilateral political institution between 1963 and 2002, when it was succeeded by the African Union (AU). It was composed of 33 signatory governments but lacked the appropriate means to enforce its decisions in the absence of a peacebuilding force.

Alvor Agreement: treaty whereby Angola was granted independence from Portuguese colonial rule set for the 11th of November 1975 and a transitional coalition government headed the Portuguese High Commissioner and the leaders of the MPLA, FNLA and UNITA movements was set up in Luanda.

Operation Savannah: South African military incursion launched from Namibia into southern and central Angola that sought to eject the MPLA, Soviet, and Cuban military presence out of Southern Angola and Luanda in order to legitimize and strengthen the position of UNITA before the proclamation of independence on the 11th of November 1975, thereby ensuring that an anti-communist government friendly to South Africa and the U.S. was established. It was launched under the pretext of protecting South African interests in the Calueque hydro-electric facility in southern Angola, which supplied water to northern Namibia, then under South African occupation.

Operation Carlota: large-scale Cuban military incursion launched in support of the MPLA that sought to pacify Angola by warding off the South African-UNITA advance in the southern and central provinces and defeating the FNLA in the northern provinces.

Battle of Quifandongo: engagement between FNLA-South African troops and the MPLA that occurred in the day prior to the proclamation of Angolan independence, on November 10th 1975. Resulted in a decisive MPLA victory which enabled it to retain effective control over Luanda and strengthened the international legitimacy of the MPLA-led People's Republic of Angola.

People's Republic of Angola: Internationally recognized Marxist-leaning government of Angola after the proclamation of independence in November 1975. Led by the MPLA and based in Luanda. Became a UN member state in June 1976.

Democratic People's Republic of Angola: Huambo-based rival government under the UNITA and FNLA movements. Sought to challenge MPLA authority through military and political action. Lacked international recognition but was heavily assisted by external actors.



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