

Angolan civil war escalates

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26 March 1999

The remaining United Nations peacekeeping force has pulled out of Angola, following its failure to stop the resumption of the civil war that originally began 23 years ago. In 1992 the UN first began negotiating a settlement between the Unita rebel movement of Jonas Savimbi and the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the governing party since independence in 1975. In 1994 the UN brokered the Lusaka Peace Accord between Unita and the MPLA, and a "government of national reconciliation" was created, monitored by UN troops.

The peace accord was heralded as the end of the Cold War in Africa--the Soviet Union backed the MPLA and the CIA and the South African apartheid regime backed Unita. But the UN occupation became a facade behind which both sides regrouped and prepared for further war. Despite having up to 7,000 troops present and spending \$1.5 billion, the UN allowed Unita to continue brutalising the local population in the Central Highlands region it controls.

Although the diamonds mined by Unita were placed under a UN imposed ban, together with arms sales, Unita still managed to purchase armaments to re-equip its 30,000-strong army. All that was required under the UN deal was for Unita to make pretence of handing in arms and demobilising. The MPLA regime, based in the capital Luanda, was pressurised by the US to coexist with Unita and accept its ministers in the national unity government.

According to the UN Humanitarian Assistance Co-ordination Unit (UCAH), Unita has now driven over 650,000 people from their homes, laying siege to a number of towns and cities over the last year. The government declared it has no budget to feed refugees fleeing from the countryside. They are totally dependent on aid relief, and a humanitarian tragedy is rapidly unfolding.

Malange, with a population of 200,000, has been

under almost constant shellfire since last December. Just 400 kilometres east of the capital, Unita sees it as critical to obtaining a border and landing strip for supplies from the Congo and Rwanda. They have set about driving out the population. Day and night shelling has killed nearly 1,000 people and destroyed 200 houses. Electricity supplies have been cut. The intention is to clear the city and use the airfield to launch attacks more effectively against the oil-rich coastal ports presently under MLPA control.

A major factor in the escalation of the Angolan conflict is the spilling out throughout the region of the Congo war. Angola, together with Zimbabwe and Namibia, sent troops to back the regime of Laurent Kabila in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In return, the countries backing the rebel forces in the DRC have supplied Unita with arms. Press reports state that Rwanda, Uganda, Togo and Burkina Faso have been providing logistical military support to the rebels. As the war with Unita intensified, the Angolan government was forced to withdraw their forces from the DRC, leaving the Kabila regime in a weaker position.

Angola's MPLA regime has also accused neighbouring Zambia of supplying Unita with arms. Zambia, which mediated the 1994 Angola peace deal, has denied the allegations, saying that they stem from its refusal to allow Angolan forces to attack Unita from its soil. As well as reports accusing officials in the Zambian government of making huge profits out of supplying arms to Unita, there is also evidence of business and mercenary backing from South Africa.

Unita's aim is no longer to capture cities as part of a strategy to overthrow the MLPA government. Neither is it concerned with its previous policy of "total independence for Angola". It has for some time abandoned any attempt to win support among the masses. With its new military technology, it is nakedly

pursuing direct control over sources of raw materials. Its recent military incursions were directed towards Lobita-Benguela, the port and rail hub on the west coast, in order to gain control of oil supplies.

If Unita is now concentrating entirely on the seizure of raw materials for its business backers, the MPLA regime has also become little more than an agency for world business interests, primarily in the sale of oil. Angolan oil production is one-third of Nigeria's output and is expected to overtake it in 10 years. At present the oilfields are exploited by French and US oil corporations--ELF, Exxon and Chevron. Wealth in the government-controlled part of Angola has become concentrated in the hands of a tiny elite of MPLA officials. A recent human rights report by the South African government stated: "The country's wealth continued to be concentrated in the hands of a small elite who used government positions for massive personal enrichment." A UN report in February noted that there has been no "evidence of a genuine effort to build political support by improving the basic living conditions of the population".

One reporter describes the capital: "But despite all this new wealth, poverty in Luanda is wretched, and the cost of living terribly high.... The school system has practically collapsed, and the national health system is rotting." Fernando Pacheko, director of a local development organisation, stated, "People are all citizens of this country--in theory.... There are large sections of this society, which are not even neglected or exploited--they are not noticed! Outside the city centre of Luanda exists a forgotten city."

The South African report states that in Unita territory civilians live under "a primitive and brutal form of economic feudalism. Their crops and other goods are subject to seizure by armed Unita elements, and they are vulnerable to forced labour, including military service." The MPLA police and officials have also been widely reported for human rights abuses in the areas they control. Since they are not paid, the report states that "the government gives tacit permission for security personnel to pay themselves through the extortion of the civilian population".

No state employees have been paid since last year, as part of an attempt to meet World Bank directives. Angola's foreign debt is now running at \$11 billion. Any hopes in the population that the oil fields may

bring some minimal improvements in health and job prospects have been dashed. The MPLA government is borrowing money against future oil revenues up to the year 2001, due to its defaults on previous debt repayments to the World Bank.



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