

Portuguese mediation and the peace talks

Publicação: [Cadernos do Lumiar Nº 3](#)

Data de Publicação: 1994

Portuguese mediation of the Angolan conflict was the result of a strenuous effort by Lisbon to redefine its post-colonial relations with lusophone Africa. Relations with Angola in particular had for the most part verged on the catastrophic since the MPLA's declaration of independence in 1975. President Ramalho Eanes had attempted to develop better relations with Angola in the late seventies, but his efforts were countered by the pathetic and totally deluded diplomatic demarches of other leading politicians. However, the arrival of prime-minister Cavaco Silva, and his African policy architect from 1987 onwards, then secretary of state and now foreign minister Durão Barroso, initiated a new phase in Portugal's post-colonial relations with Portuguese-speaking Africa. Mediation of the Angolan conflict had been carefully planned and demonstrated how far Portugal's relations with the Angolan regime had come in such a short space of time.

The peace process received an important impulse with a meeting between US and Soviet foreign ministers James Baker and Eduard Shevardnaze in Washington, in December 1990. Delegations from both belligerents were in the American capital but did not attend the meeting. At this meeting the USSR bowed out of Southern Africa and gave the United States carte blanche to solve the Angolan conflict on its terms. The MPLA was clearly told by Washington that American support for UNITA would not cease until a negotiated settlement had been reached with the rebels. UNITA was also warned: US support for the rebels would cease if they proved the only barrier to a negotiated peace agreement. The MPLA and UNITA then agreed to a number of political principles in the Washington document - among the most important was UNITA's guaranteed political existence after a cease-fire.

In parallel to the military and political front against UNITA and the on and off approach to negotiations there was another process of political change underway in Angola that was also designed to have its effects on UNITA. The December 1990 MPLA Congress approved the abandonment of the one--party state adopting in its place a multi-party system. The Congress also abandoned Marxism-Leninism as the official ideology and undertook a purge of the central committee aimed at removing diehard hardliners and

replac-ing them with younger reformist-oriented cadres. The groundwork had been laid for a western-style democratic: system of government in Angola.

Although these political changes reflected the post-Cold War international trend against authoritarian and Communist regimes, the MPLA's moves were also designed to undermine UNITA's primary justification for war - the appearance of democratic rule in Angola. Naturally, the MPLA hoped that this masterstroke would weaken the guerrilla's internal and inter-national support while bolstering its own standing. Alas, the move had come too late.

After a year of tough negotiations under Portuguese mediation, and with constant pressure from the United States and whatever pressure the Soviet Union could muster, the MPLA and UNITA signed the Bicesse peace agreement in 31 May 1991. They had done so under great duress. In April, the MPLA also adopted Democratic Socialism as the official party ideology and removed the term "Workers Party" from the official party name.

The agreement, hope and betrayal

The Bicesse peace agreement established a new framework for Angola's transition from armed conflict and single-party rule, to peace, stability and a multi-party democracy. The transition rested on the demobilisation and disarmament of the MPLA/UNITA armies and the creation of new unified Angolan Armed Forces, the formation of a representative police force, and the holding of elections under international supervision including a role for the United Nations. The agreement also involved a triple-zero clause that prevented both sides from acquiring weapons.

Aside from the political steps outlined in the agreement, Bicesse also enshrined a number of dispute-resolution and organisational structures designed to oversee and facilitate the implementation of the peace accord. The most important of these was the Joint Political and Military Commission. The CCPM was made up of representatives of the MPLA and UNITA together with members of the troika of foreign, observers, Portugal, the Soviet Union (later Russian Federation) and the United States. It was the role of the CCPM to investigate allegations of cease-fire violations and to ensure compliance by both the MPLA and UNITA with the responsibilities they had assumed at Bicesse. The CCPM was in essence the high authority responsible for the entire political transition until the holding of elections. It began functioning, as did the other commissions, when the cease-fire came into force.

The Commission was basically a confidence-building mechanism in that both belligerents, irrespective of one being the party in government, had equal control over the transition. As a result, decisions could only be taken on the basis of a consensus between the MPLA and UNITA. In essence, the country's entire transition rested on the goodwill of the belligerents, with no third party recognised as having the authority to impartially control investigations, and enforce the accords. According to the agreement the troika countries "would" (or at least should) "be heard" in the CCPM decision-making process.

Although Bicesse stressed that the CCPM was not a substitute for the government, the Commission was also designed to allow UNITA a modicum of power during and over the transition. UNITA may not have been willing to form an interim government, as unpopular and pressing decisions may have risked alienating voters, but it was certainly not prepared to relinquish a formal and institutional degree of political power during the transition. In recognition of the opportunity which the CCPM offered UNITA, its delegation to the Commission tended, at least initially, to be larger and made up of higher ranking officials than the MPLA's.

The accords also gave birth to the Verification and Monitoring Commission, which as its name implies was responsible for monitoring the cease-fire and the redeployment of forces from both sides. This body was made up of representatives from the MPLA and UNITA, along with members of the three observer countries, and an invited representative of the United Nations. Another commission established by the accords was the Joint Commission for the Creation of the Single Army, whose role was to monitor and assist the creation of the single army. This Commission was made up of members of the two armies, the FAPLA (MPLA) and FALA (UNITA), along with representatives from the three countries involved in assisting the creation of the new force, Portugal, France and the United Kingdom.

Bicesse was hailed by many as a model for similar transitions elsewhere. Despite some significant clashes between opposing forces in the summer of 1992 in Malange and Bié and a series of largely unnoticed minor skirmishes the cease-fire held extremely well. The elections of 29 and 30 September took place in what most observers considered an exemplary fashion. Initial results put out by the state-run media pointed to an overwhelming MPLA victory in both the legislative and presidential elections.

However, it all proved an illusion. On 3 October, UNITA leader Savimbi claimed, when it looked as if the MPLA had indeed won both the legislative and presidential elections, that there had been widespread and systematic fraud in the elections. On 5 October, a

serious breach of the peace agreement occurred when 11 UNITA officers withdrew from the new single army, in support of Mr. Savimbi's position. Following a series of investigations, the UN secretary-general's special representative announced on 17 October that the elections had generally been "free and fair". The MPLA won the legislatives with 53.74 percent of the vote, and UNITA obtained 34.1%. President J. E. dos Santos received 49.57 percent, and Mr. Savimbi 40.07 percent; since neither got a dear 50 percent or more, a second round is required by the electoral law.

On 30 October a shoot-out between government and UNITA forces took place at Luanda airport. The government claimed the rebels had attempted to take the airport. The following day the tension rose even more between the two broke out in the capital. Many top UNITA leaders and hundreds of UNITA supporters were killed. Heavy fighting also broke out in Malange, Lobito, Cafunfo, and Benguela. UNITA forces throughout the country began to flex their muscle and by mid-December UNITA occupied two thirds of Angolan municipalities. Civil war had returned to Angola.

What went wrong? This requires a multi-faceted answer as there was not just one reason but a complex interplay of several factors finked to the very nature of the fundamentals outlined in the peace agreement. While outwardly there were very few signs of real trouble, the flaws in Bicesse the allowed the two main actors, the MPLA and UNITA, to jointly undermine the entire transition framework.

The most basic flaw, but probably what made the agreement possible in the first place, was the fact that it conferred on the belligerents equal custodianship for the implementation of the peace accord. The animosity and distrust which each party harboured against the other following sixteen years of civil war was only natural and would make collaboration between the two a difficult exercise in itself.

But with both parties distrustful of each other, and in the absence of a third party capable of enforcing the provisions of Bicesse and of offering security guarantees to one in case of non-compliance by the other, the agreement only fuelled the need to be on guard against any moves by the partial to the adversary which might lead to unfair political and military advantages, if not even military decapitation or political oblivion. In essence, both sides wanted to hedge their bets. They would cooperate with the peace process inasmuch as they had signed it, but not without securing a guarantee in case it all went wrong. It was another self-fulfilling prophecy.

The MPLA's suspicion surrounding UNITA's depth of commitment to the peace process were evident from the onset of the peace process. The arrival of the UNITA's CCPM delegation headed by UNITA general Salupeto Pena, and not the organisation's vice-

president Chitunda, sent waves of distrust through the MPLA. At the same time, UNITA became increasingly distrustful of what it saw as a pro-MPLA United Nations. This was mostly due to the fact the UN verification mission was based in Luanda. The spirit of animosity and rivalry between the MPLA and UNITA was further exacerbated by the prospect of upcoming winner-take-all elections. The race for electoral victory fanned the spirit of rivalry and hostility between the two. Both sides knew that the elections were not just about establishing representative government in Angola, but that they would also declare the winner of 16 years of civil war and reward it with legitimate political power - something alien to both. And the race for political power brought with it a serious problem - propaganda.

The May 1991 peace accord called for an end to hostile propaganda; yet, it simultaneously encouraged the phenomena by the phased link contained in the agreement between peace, elections and political power. The electoral campaign started almost immediately after the peace agreement was signed. Neither the MPLA or UNITA had any intention of waiting for the beginning of the official electoral campaign (due to start on 10 August and to end on 26 September) to bolster their electoral support through the use of propaganda. Peace was in and the race for power was on.

Although both sides complained almost on a daily basis of the other's aggressive propaganda in the CCPM, neither party took advantage of the commission created to deal specifically with the issue. In fact, no official complaint was ever formulated by either the MPLA or UNITA in the propaganda commission. Both sides realised the powerful potential of propaganda in harnessing political support and were evidently not prepared to relinquish it easily.

The state-owned media, namely the Jornal de Angola, the television station, the radio service and the official news agency ANGOP, displayed flagrant disrespect for impartiality and free reporting. These were not only partial to the MPLA but they at times seemed to foment and encourage hostile anti-UNITA propaganda. In similar fashion to the incumbent regime, UNITA used its own means of communication, to hurl abuses at the adversary. The guerrilla movement continued to keep its famous Vorgan radio broadcasting and to publish its newspaper, Terra Angolana. UNITA was certainly not willing to stop its radio transmissions in a country where the illiteracy level and the lack of television sets makes it a powerful means of political mobilisation. This is particularly true in rural areas, where most of UNITA's supporters are located.

Under such conditions the bitter resentments accumulated throughout sixteen years of fierce war were only too easily used and abused to the further detriment of any spirit

of national harmony. The pre-election campaign "shunned the peace process ideal of national reconciliation in favour of blatant intimidation." In the words of UN secretary general, Boutros Boutros Ghali, in early 1992, the inflammatory nature of the hostile propaganda practised by both sides gave rise to "great concern" on the part of observers.

While mistrust and the desire to win political support bred virulent and aggressive propaganda, so this in turn fanned further mistrust and led to yet more propaganda and greater animosity. The interplay between this growing spiral of distrust, suspicion and hostility, and the three key-areas outlined in Bicesse proved lethal to the peace agreement.

The single army

The first of these key-areas was the extinction of the two rival armies and the creation of a new unified Angolan Armed Forces (FAA). One day before the elections, on 28 September 1992, a new 8,000 strong Angolan Armed Forces was officially announced. At the ceremony, general António dos Santos França (FAPLA/MPLA) and general Arlindo Pena (FALA/UNITA) were sworn in as joint deputy chiefs of staff and both FALA and FAPLA were officially declared extinct. This new military force was to prove little more than an official declaration. The fiasco behind the single army's creation was dearly revealed when 11 former UNITA military officers walked out on 5 October.

Bicesse stated that the process of disarming, demobilisation and creation of the unified army was to begin with the entry into force of the cease-fire and to be concluded by the elections. The peace accord stipulated that both the MPLA and UNITA were to have their forces assembled at the respective paramilitary locations sixty days after the entry into force of the cease-fire. There was a total of 151,900 troops to demobilise; 114,000 from the government and 37,000 from UNITA. The new army was to achieve a strength of 40,000 with each side contributing 20,000 men from their respective army. The 6,000 strong air force and the 4,000 strong navy were to come solely from the MPLA's ranks as UNITA did not possess these types of military forces. Although a form of participation for UNITA in both of these structures was to be found by the CCPM.

The timetable turned out to be overly ambitious due to a number of reasons. There were the technical difficulties. The entire process of demobilisation, disarmament and the eventual establishment of the single army (DDS) was significantly delayed by a lack of adequate quantities of "civilian clothes, funds, vehicles and aircraft" necessary to the exercise. The devastation which the war caused in Angola meant that the lack of social infrastructure such as roads, bridges and telecommunications only further hampered the fulfilment of the timetable for DDS.

Severe lack of medical supplies, food, clothes and the general poor state of living conditions in the assembly areas caused further problems. On a number of occasions delays in demobilisation coupled with the poor conditions in the camps sparked off bouts of violence and unrest as patience was exhausted and tempers frayed.

In government assembly areas the situation was worsened by lack of both pay and leadership. This led not only to violence but to the spontaneous exit of large numbers of non-demobilised soldiers from their assembly camps. Soldiers even stormed aerodromes demanding to be put on planes to Luanda while others stormed government regional offices demanding their demobilisation papers. The frustration felt by many of these men, who knew little more than fighting as a profession, over their uncertain futures further aggravated the anxiety felt by many soldiers. The existence of unhappy and hungry armed soldiers and the possession of arms by large sectors of the population contributed to a general increase in the level of crime and insecurity in the country. If the technical difficulties did not facilitate the timely conclusion of the process of DDS then the reluctance of the two belligerents to disarm undermined it. In March 1992 the MPLA began to transfer an elite contingent of its demobilised military into a new special riot police squad. This paramilitary force quickly became known as the "ninjas" because of their swift and powerful tactics and were operational by the time of the Pope's visit to Angola in mid-1992. While UNITA claimed this was a serious violation of the peace accord, the MPLA stressed this was normal standard practice. According to the MPLA the new anti-riot police numbered little over one thousand and were scheduled to reach a strength of 1,516 by the end of December 1992. Interestingly the MPLA also claimed that a total number of 4,080 former armed services personnel had been integrated into the regular police force.

The MPLA's attempt at hedging its bets in case the peace process was derailed paled in comparison to UNITA's. The rebel movement concealed large numbers of undeclared troops and weapons throughout the vast Angolan territory. UNITA declared the existence of 37,330 guerrillas under its command, although on previous occasions Savimbi had claimed the existence of troops in the region of 50,000 to 70,000. On one occasion alone, and after repeated Government accusations, a CCPM investigation found several hundred undeclared UNITA troops in Cuando Cubango.

Demobilisation did indeed accelerate as the elections drew closer. And by 7 October, a total of 96,620 government troops had been demobilised, representing 80 percent of the projected figure. However, a much lower figure of (at best) around 10,000 to 15,000 of the ex-FALA troops were demobilised. This meant that while the government had

significantly scaled down its military capacities UNITA was left with around two thirds of its initially declared guerrilla force. Even those UNITA soldiers which had been demobilised either never quite left the assembly camps or remained on their outskirts. In some cases, entire families linked to a UNITA soldier set up home outside the respective assembly camp. UNITA had in fact never really disbanded. It had, albeit in a disguised manner, kept its military machine semi-intact and ready for war. Hence once Savimbi and his inner circle took the decision to return to war it did not take UNITA to reconstitute its forces into a fully-fledged army.

Even without these insurmountable hurdles the creation of a credible single army within the confines of one year was questionable from the beginning. The appearance of a real esprit de corps between soldiers, accustomed to fighting each other for sixteen brutal years wherein one side is bound to have killed a family member on the other side, is a deep psychological barrier to overcome. Leaving aside the psychology of creating a single army under these conditions, there is also the real problem of integrating two groups of soldiers used to differing tactics and operational doctrines. The traditional military tactics, of the FAPLA were clearly different from those used by UNITA's guerrilla forces. A single army is clearly not created simply through the holding of an official swearing-in ceremony. Rather, successfully integrating soldiers from formerly opposed armies requires the establishment of a real climate of reconciliation, with the political leaders from all sides truly committed to the task of national reconstruction.

A representative police force

Policing proved another bone of contention between the MPLA and UNITA. The peace agreement provided for the creation of a joint MPLA/UNITA mechanism to monitor the neutrality of the Angolan Police and for the establishment of a "representative police force". Tension over police matters was initially fuelled by UNITA's refusal to recognise the authority of the police force when any of its followers were involved in criminal acts or complaints. However, the real source of friction between the two parties lay in the creation of the "representative police force". UNITA initially demanded that 7,500 to 8,500 of its members be incorporated into the force. The government conceded a UNITA intake of 04 1,200. In the late summer of 1992 the row over the representative police force reached new heights; only 39 members of a 183 strong UNITA contingent undertaking training were accepted in the new civil police force. UNITA claimed that the MPLA was creating artificial obstacles to its participation in the new civil police force by setting impossible criteria such as length of schooling. This situation only contributed to what was already at the time a growing gulf between the two. Severe communications,

logistic and accessibility problems in many areas of the country also prevented the joint policing mechanism from fulfilling its task.

Extension of government authority

Under the terms of the Bicesse accord central administration was to be extended throughout the whole of Angola. Like the two processes described above, this problematic exercise both reflected and contributed to the growing spiral of mistrust and hostility between the MPLA and UNITA. The process of extending government authority to all parts of the country got seriously underway in November 1991. UNITA's reluctance to allow the enemy into its privileged domain severely questioned the viability of this process, and increasingly vexed the MPLA. UNITA-controlled areas were only very slowly opened to government administration. In June the government had penetrated into all but one of Angola's 165 municipalities and all but 90 of approximately 600 communes; by 2 September the extension of central administration had improved significantly but there were still 52 communes under UNITA's exclusive grip. The existence of destroyed bridges and mined roads further hampered the pace of extending central administration. The difficulties involved in extending government authority were especially problematic since voter registration was to be carried out by the government. Any citizen eligible to participate in the elections but that had his access denied to registration forewent the exercise of his right to vote. Again a lack of resources such as food, accommodation, land and air transport delayed moving personnel and materials to the registration centres dispersed throughout the country. Poor communications also inflicted delays on the ability to transmit data obtained in the field.

A mixture of technical and political difficulties experienced by the government in extending central administration raised serious doubts as to the viability of the registration process in the provinces of Moxico, Cuando Cubango and Uíge. Further doubts on the efficacy of registration were raised in the Cabinda enclave. Because of intimidation by both government forces and the local separatist movements (FLEC and FLEC-Renovada) only about one third of the eligible population registered to vote. The National Electoral Commission also decided not to register some nearly half a million Angolans living abroad due to a lack of registration materials. Yet, at the end of the day the registration process which lasted from 20 May to 10 August was considered a success: 4.86 million voters registered, representing some 92 percent of an estimated voting population of 5.3 million.

A transition within a transition

Another factor adding to the complexity of the Angolan scenario was the transition within a transition, which involved not only the emergence of a new political system and new power relationships, but also the two belligerents undertaking transitions from authoritarian structures to democratic political parties. The MPLA proved remarkably successful at adapting to its new environment. It shook off its dirigisme and learnt the art of political persuasion and multi-party competition. As its electoral campaign demonstrated, it learnt to substitute a leading role in society with political consumerism and electoral appeal. Although its control of the state media still displayed a liking for old habits.

UNITA's transition from guerrilla movement to democratic political party proved far more difficult. Initially it seemed UNITA had all the right credentials needed to facilitate its own political transition. The organisation had a political programme, a charismatic leader, qualified personnel, popular following, and an international support network that included the planet's most powerful nation. Yet, in the end the transition proved somewhat more difficult than expected. The process of metamorphosis from guerrilla warfare to democratic multi-party civilian political life involves a complete change in the guerrilla psyche. No longer can the guerrilla rely on force to quell opposition or achieve ends, rather he must immerse himself in the art of political canvassing, diplomacy, negotiations, compromise, and political persuasion. Above all, the guerrilla must learn a complete anathema to all he was taught - to accept defeat. The incapacity of a sophisticated guerrilla movement like UNITA to adapt to electoral scrutiny and democratic party politics only reveals the level of difficulty concerned in this type of transition.

A non-emergent third force

A total of 16 political parties emerged in the run-up to the elections to compete with the MPLA and UNITA for political power. These third forces were guaranteed financing from the state along with 10 minutes daily airtime on state-owned television and a twenty-minute daily slot on the state-run radio service. Yet, in real life the parties never got off the ground. Money was of course a number one consideration. None of the new parties were able to find the millions necessary to compete with the electoral campaigns undertaken by the MPLA and UNITA. The new parties were also absolutely dwarfed by the privileged access; enjoyed by both the MPLA and UNITA to media resources. The third forces could hardly project their existence or manifesto while the MPLA and UNITA constantly used their means of communication for exclusive propaganda. In fact one of the most stringent criticisms levelled by some quarters, mostly those associated with the smaller political forces in one way or another, is that Bicesse hampered the process of

peace and democratisation by failing to provide the non-belligerent forces with an institutionalised place in the country's transition. As a result, some of the small parties tried to make up for this by calling for a national conference such as those seen in a number of francophone African states.

The main argument put forward was that the conference would check the powers and actions of an unaccountable government during the transition. In January 1992, president J. E. dos Santos did indeed call a multi-party conference. But the Conference was abruptly called off when the smaller political forces demanded an institutionalised conference with greater powers over the state. This conference would have allowed the small parties a guaranteed slice of power. The president considered this not proposal to constitute an outright coup d'état. While the MPLA, unwilling to have any upstarts curb its power over the state apparatus snubbed such a position, the same was true of UNITA. UNITA disliked the idea of a national conference wherein it was little more than other parties which were deemed insignificant, not least because they had not taken part in the civil war.

Under the Angolan scenario would the existence of a national conference have prevented a resumption of the war? It seems doubtful. A conference may have checked the powers of the MPLA; it may have limited the funds available to its campaign; it may have limited its access to air waves and even tamed its propaganda. But for all the misdemeanours carried out by the MPLA in the transition period, the problem in the end lay with UNITA. Had UNITA still lost the elections with a conference in place would the movement have accepted the results? Would the conference have forced UNITA to demobilise? The answers to both appear negative.

Aside from the difficulties and the inevitable bipolarisation after sixteen a years of civil war between the MPLA and UNITA, the third forces also failed to appear because of their own shortcomings. Some of the new parties were perceived as little more than MPLA or UNITA creations from the beginning. Initially, a number of new parties tried to maintain an equidistant position in relation to UNITA and the MPLA. But as the conflict between the MPLA and UNITA gathered momentum in the run-up to the elections the parties increasingly took sides. In essence, bipolarisation was as much encouraged by the very behaviour of the non-armed forces as it was by the Bicesse agreement. They clearly had no intention of forming a united front against the two main actors. As Angolan intellectual Joaquim Pinto de Andrade points out, many of the new parties were based on little more than "personal ambitions" and lots of opportunism. Even their manifestos were similar and differed very little from the MPLA's own electoral program.

To have or not to have elections?

Bicesse had two main and inextricably intertwined objectives: the termination of armed conflict and the consolidation of a multi-party democracy in Angola. The elections were supposed to be the centre-piece not only of Bicesse but also of the process of political liberalisation set in motion by the MPLA in 1990. The peace accord presumed the cessation of hostilities would create an environment propitious to the holding of elections wherein the Angolan people could for the first time in their history choose an electorally accountable government.

A winner's conviction

While both belligerents moaned and complained about each other's non-compliance with the terms of Bicesse, they had no intention of allowing the increasingly tense and volatile political climate from preventing the holding of elections. Set on gaining the ultimate political prize available - legitimate political power, both shut their eyes to alleged cease-fire breaches and other serious infringements of the peace agreement. The importance and significance of the elections had turned them into a contentious issue between the MPLA and UNITA even during the negotiations. The MPLA had proposed a three-year time gap from the cease-fire to the holding of elections during which a power-sharing national unity government would rule the country. UNITA argued in favour of a one year time frame and no transitional government. The MPLA had stated its preference for separate presidential and legislative elections while UNITA demanded holding them jointly. No agreement was forged in relation to the existence of a transitional government, but a compromise time frame of 15 to 18 months for the holding of elections was finally agreed upon.

UNITA's shorter time frame stemmed from a conviction that it would have inevitably win the forthcoming elections. The movement wanted to capitalise on the euphoria generated by peace and what it believed to be an MPLA capitulation. The MPLA in turn wanted a longer time span to increase its popularity ratings and to wear down the rebels as a credible political force. UNITA also argued for the simultaneous holding of presidential and legislative elections so that it could use Savimbi's charisma to bolster UNITA's electoral standing. The MPLA put forward the reverse exactly because it wanted to separate the presidential candidate J. E. dos Santos from the MPLA's party candidacy. The MPLA saw president J. E. dos Santos as more likely to triumph than the party and thus hoped to avoid a complete marginalisation from political power.

The incumbent MPLA regime began to see its electoral chances increase only as time went on, although some within the regime were from the onset far more optimistic about

the MPLA's chances. As one MPLA minister allegedly stated, the MPLA controlled the media, the Bank of Angola and the finance ministry, so how could it lose the elections? According to one eyewitness, several thousand containers of food imported via Luanda further aided the MPLA's electoral campaign. UNITA was initially far more confident about victory in the country's first ever unfettered elections. The movement had for long thought that sixteen years of war against one of Africa's most Stalinist regimes had assured it to of popular support and political power. The support UNITA could muster among the country's most numerous ethnic group, the Ovimbundu, was also viewed as both crucial and decisive.

The canvassing contest

In the early part of 1992 events took a turn for the worse. In March, two leading longtime UNITA figures, Miguel N'Zau Puna and Tony da Costa Fernandes, defected. Their defections brought revelations of Savimbi's cruel and lethal witch-hunts and the death of various prominent UNITA cadres who disagreed with the movement's leader. UNITA believed, as it does today, that these defections were part of a carefully hatched plan by the MPLA to undermine the movement's standing with the electorate. One source claimed that these defections were paid for with money from the Sonangol office in London. Their defections and subsequent revelations could not have come at a worst time. Even worse, the defectors were listened to and believed by Washington. As a result, UNITA began to close in on itself and to demonstrate a hardened and more aggressive posture towards the outside world.

Around the same time, the growing belief within UNITA that there were and MPLA factions that planned to have Savimbi assassinated only added to their suspicion of the Luanda regime and the outside world as a whole. UNITA's resentment and aggressive behaviour throughout 1992 went on to increasingly undermine its electoral standing and bred a great deal of anxiety among city populations, especially in Luanda. Savimbi's ethnic rhetoric became increasingly bellicose. At rallies Savimbi's speech appealed to the Ovimbundu's historically felt injustices and grievances. He almost seemed to incite his brethren into an Ovimbundu take-over with phrases such as "now it is our turn". In Luanda and other cities UNITA increasingly adopted heavy handed tactics such as arbitrary roadblocks. In the capital alone UNITA placed some 3-5,000 heavily armed soldiers and almost closed off the Miramar and Alvalade sectors of the city. It is worth noting that the exact number of men UNITA commanded in Luanda is difficult to assess, since many of these may not have been in uniform . UNITA's authoritarian streak, which caused so much anger in Luanda, was highlighted when one of the movement's

roadblocks even forced the Portuguese foreign minister to take an alternative route to the Portuguese embassy . UNITA, in what was interpreted as a test of the MPLA's reaction capabilities, even decided to search the house of its secretary-general! It seems that Salupeto Pena may have been responsible for much of UNITA's heavy-handed approach to life in the city.

By the summer of 1992, revelations of UNITA's political and militaristic attitudes together with revelations surrounding its "dirty tricks and human rights abuses" began to alienate the better educated voters who might have felt tempted to vote for change . In addition to which uncommitted voters were unanimous in stating that they would sooner expect reprisals from a victorious UNITA than a triumphant MPLA. One Angolan typified the election as a contest between a thief (MPLA) and a murderer (UNITA) and asked, who would you vote for? In stark contrast to the former rebels, the MPLA conducted a smooth and professional campaign with the help of a Brazilian group of consultants. UNITA's general behaviour also aided the eventual MPLA's success. In the face of UNITA increasingly authoritarian and worrying behaviour the MPLA began to be viewed as the only force capable of preventing UNITA and its menacing leader from attaining power.

While Savimbi's posture helped undermine UNITA's electoral standing, J. E. dos Santos had the opposite effect on the MPLA's. The president was successfully projected as a peacemaker and a man of moderation capable of handling the challenges of building a modern Angola. In contrast, Savimbi never entirely overcame his image of an aggressive tribal warrior. Notwithstanding the deeply hostile state of relations between the MPLA and UNITA, reports of voter intimidation and with the main provisions of delays Bicesse in tatters, the elections still managed to take place in a sea of calm. The fact that both belligerents were convinced of electoral victory greatly contributed to this situation.

Sensing the perilous situation which had been reached by August 1992, and the increasing reality that UNITA was not going to win the elections, the troika began running around between J. E. dos Santos and Savimbi seeking assurances that they would accept the election outcome and agree upon a power-sharing arrangement. J. E. dos Santos agreed to the proposal on the condition that representatives from other parties were chosen on the basis of their qualifications for a particular post . According to one diplomatic source, Savimbi was somewhat more ambivalent on the issue. After a number of efforts by the troika he finally "seemed" to accept the idea of a government of national unity on the condition that he alone chose the other party's representatives.

Still convinced of the inevitability of an electoral victory, UNITA remained highly hesitant over a power-sharing arrangement which granted the losers, the MPLA, a slice of political

power. Jorge Valentim made this clear when he referred to the troika's efforts, and especially to those of Durão Barroso, over a power-sharing agreement, as an attempt, particularly by the Portuguese government, to help its ally the MPLA avoid a complete marginalisation from power. The troika's efforts appeared to have paid off with the signing of three agreements between J. E. dos Santos and Savimbi a couple of days before the elections. In those agreements, the MPLA and the UNITA leader pronounced the former rival armies extinct, accepted the creation of a government of national reconciliation after the elections, and committed themselves to accepting election results no matter what. In the end the only real stars of the election turned out to be the Angolan people, whose behaviour allowed the elections to proceed in an exemplary fashion. Many voters walked miles in the baking sun to deposit their vote. With a turnout of over 90 percent, the people demonstrated that they clearly understood and desired the concept of democratic rule - even if their leaders did not.

Worried by events and the growing animosity between the MPLA and UNITA on the eve of the multi-party elections, the Partido Renovador Democrático held a press conference in early July 1992. The PRD denounced the significant delays registered in the three key areas, and argued that these delays constituted a solid reason to postpone the crucial centre of Angola's transition - the elections. The preoccupations aired by the PRD did not belong to the party alone, but were shared by a great many number of Angolans and foreign observers alike. Yet, the three-country troika, and especially the United States, had other ideas.

The International dimension of the settlement

The international dimension to Bicesse was another factor which contributed decisively to the failure of the peace process in Angola. Bicesse conferred on the troika the formal role of observer and advisor in the transition. It was however obvious to all and sundry that the real influence that could be exerted by the troika stemmed not from the official role assigned to it by Bicesse, minor as it was, but through individual bilateral channels. Undoubtedly, the United States was by far the most powerful, of the three. The lack of formal responsibility given the troika in the Angola peace accord, as both UNITA and the MPLA obviously wanted, made it easier for the three countries to distance themselves from any central responsibility should the process go horribly wrong - as it did. It allowed the diplomatic prestige of involvement in the process without risking the price of failure or embarrassment. While this suited, the three states well it did little to provide real and/or automatic international guarantees when and if the process went wrong - as it did. The troika could perhaps have been a high judge, instead it played the role of consort.

In the face of non-compliance of the peace accord by the MPLA and UNITA and the growing signs of political tension which risked derailing the whole process, the troika adopted a passive stance of public silence. It is however unfair to say that the troika's attitude was solely driven by of a desire to secure the diplomatic prestige from involvement in the Angolan peace process without burning its fingers. As one British diplomat pointed out the troika was caught in the "Tinkerbelle syndrome". In other words, the troika states were firmly convinced that if they believed hard enough in the process and avoided criticising the parties, which might have led to increased dissatisfaction and tension, the country's political transition would be successful.

The troika's faith in the goodwill of the belligerents was strengthened by the relatively successful holding of the cease-fire during 18 months. They believed that this signified the will of both parties, despite their mutual distrust and reluctance, to comply promptly with the terms of Bicesse. While it was acknowledged that there were "great reservoirs of mistrust, rivalries and even hatreds" in Angola, the troika believed or at least wanted to believe that there was a "deep feeling in Angola that any recurrence of hostilities would be self-destructive and fatal" to the country. As one source later stated, "we were convinced that for all the problems, the peace process was irreversible. And as a result we gave them too much leeway." Furthermore, in the period 1991-92 there was still a general mood of euphoria surrounding the post-Cold War inevitability of peace and democracy. It seems the troika got caught up in the "end of history" thesis, which suggested that the changed international conditions militated in Angola, as in other trouble spots, against a resumption of the civil war. After all, neither side could now exploit the support which came from international superpower rivalry. This naive belief in the "moment of history" led the troika to significantly underestimate the thoroughly important internal power struggle which had for so long formed the dynamics behind the Angolan conflict.

However, not to denounce the irregularities which began to characterise the peace process and to candidly hope for the end of the conflict was one thing, allowing the elections to go ahead as scheduled in September under clearly adverse conditions was quite another. The United States insisted with sheer and absolute determination that the elections should go ahead no matter what. Washington was tired of Angola and it had other more pressing issues to resolve. Moreover, UNITA, the United States's longstanding ally in Angola, was expected to win the electoral act by a longshot. Under a UNITA-win scenario the military equation was also important to Washington. A UNITA electoral victory was expected to prove the weakness of the MPLA's electoral stance and to place in power the belligerent with the strongest military capacity. The MPLA was

therefore not expected to risk a military challenge against UNITA. In Washington's reasoning this meant the war was definitely over.

In this light it is not surprising that the United States; condoned UNITA's non-compliance with demobilisation or its failure to - declare the exact number of troops under its command. Whatever happened to the MPLA and its supporters in the post-electoral period was to be an internal matter. Although the United States must accept primary responsibility for the debacle that followed, the passivity with which the two other troika states accepted Washington's position implies they too must share a degree of responsibility for subsequent events. But a number of questions arise; what could the troika have done? Would public denunciations have changed the end result? Would the troika have been able to exert sufficient influence to postpone the elections bearing in mind the determination of both belligerents to hold elections no matter what?

Is the war an ethnic conflict?

Some observers have insisted the Angolan conflict is another African tribal war and that its solution rests on the creation of some kind of ethnic federation. UNITA and Savimbi have been at pains to portray this version of events. The attack on the Bakongo which occurred in January 1993 in Luanda and other cities together with the hunt for the Ovimbundu on the now famous night of 31 October 1991, has been seized upon by some as living proof of this. However, while ethnicity is important, both to contemporary politics and the on-going conflict, there is no ethnic conflict as such in Angola. As a Zambian parliamentarian and former cabinet minister, Baldwin Nkumbula recently stated, "Savimbi is going back to ethnicity because he has problems .

The Ovimbundu. UNITA's large Ovimbundu support-base has been taken as the primary justification for labelling the Angolan war an ethnic conflict, but the situation is not that simple. During the colonial times, regarded Luanda as a distant power centre in which creoles and mestiços had a privileged position in the colonial administration. After independence these grievances were aggravated by what was seen as a creole take-over of power that brought few tangible economic benefits to the south of the country. This has allowed UNITA to fan traditional Ovimbundu grievances and suspicions of the Luanda elite, while securing for itself a guaranteed constituency.

Yet, although UNITA commands, or at least commanded a large degree of Ovimbundu, support before the renewed war, there has never been a widespread conflict between the Ovimbundu and any other ethnic group in Angola. Following independence large numbers of Ovimbundu moved from the south to other parts of the country and mainly to Luanda. The Ovimbundu have never been subject to persecution or forced from their

new homes whether in Luanda or anywhere else by ethnic feuds. In the capital, the Ovimbundu have even become an important part of the city's economy. The fresh agricultural produce available in Luanda is produced mainly by Ovimbundu living on the outskirts of the city. Since independence the Ovimbundu have also taken up jobs in the state apparatus, although their representation within the MPLA has always been weak. Moreover, many of the single army's soldiers, which have been busy fighting UNITA over the last 18 months, are members of the Ovimbundu ethnic group. At the moment the country's prime minister Marcolino Moco is an Ovimbundu, in a clear effort by the elected government to attenuate the marginalisation felt by this ethnic group in relation to political power.

The Ovimbundu massacres which took place in the fall of 1992 in Luanda and other cities were not linked to an ethnic feud, but to the Ovimbundu's identification with UNITA. Swiftly armed by the government to prevent a perceived UNITA take-over sometime shortly before the night of 31 October, the citizens militia sought revenge on all those associated with UNITA. The Ovimbundu were an easy target because of their known links to Savimbi's movement. Yet, the excesses of violence witnessed left many non-Ovimbundu bodies littering the street. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that the armed militias were composed by any one ethnic group in particular with a tribal grudge against the Ovimbundu. Purposefully or not, the government seems to have reacted rather slowly in curbing the carnage. Weakened by military impotence, it had little choice to rely on the armed population of Luanda to prevent what it presumed was a UNITA take-over. One source also claimed that the ferocity of UNITA feeling directed at the Ovimbundu, particularly in Luanda, was so intense that even president J. E. dos Santos had difficulty in making his authority felt, let alone anyone else.

Thus, although traditional Ovimbundu grievances of alienation from power motivate support for UNITA and provide the conflict with an ethnic dimension, there is not a set ethnic feud between the Ovimbundu and any other ethnic group in Angola. The Ovimbundu have not live segregated from the rest of Angolan society. However, the longer UNITA's war lasts, the greater the danger of it becoming an ethnic conflict. Other ethnic groups may well be tempted to channel their anti-UNITA feelings against what are perceived as the movement's main supporters - the Ovimbundu, even if widespread support among this ethnic group for UNITA's renewed war is highly questionable.

The Bakongo. In January of 1993 hundreds, possibly thousands of Bakongo and Bakongo regressados were killed in a massacre similar to the one experienced by the Ovimbundu. Some observers and UNITA quickly seized upon this to reaffirm the ethnic

nature of the conflict in the country. However, the massacre against the Bakongo and especially the regressados was motivated by a linkage between a number of political and economic factors and the state of war and economic poverty.

Large numbers of the Bakongo fled to Zaire with the onset of the colonial war in Angola in the early sixties. Following independence many returned to Angola and mainly to Luanda. The regressados, as they came to be known, quickly caused a great deal of resentment among other sectors of the population. Firstly, they returned with an open preference for the French language and other francophone habits acquired while in Zaire. They began to be seen more as foreigners than nationals. In addition, the Bakongo's and especially the regressados' ties with Zaire associate them in the minds of many with Mobutu's support for UNITA. In an MPLA stronghold such as Luanda this does not command great sympathies or loyalties, instead it raises uneasiness and suspicion. Secondly, and possibly what has caused most friction in cities such as Luanda, is their natural flair for private enterprise. The Bakongo and especially the regressados dominate the black market and what there has been of a private sector; they are street-vendors, shop-owners, taxi-drivers, etc.

The regressados also found "niches" in the state apparatus through connections and the odd bribe. In Luanda the regressados are seen as having obtained the best apartments in central Luanda through bribery and because one of their own had responsibility for allocating property left by the Portuguese. The natural flair for commerce and business naturally associates the regressado, and to a large extent the Bakongo in general, with money and wealth. As the economy deteriorated following independence so this social group increasingly became the target of envy and resentment from various quarters and ethnic groups.

In January 1993 the two motives of anti-regressado, anti-Bakongo CONGO resentment came together. UNITA had stepped up its military action and occupied most of the country; the economy was disastrous and Zaire was strongly supporting UNITA. In Luanda anti-UNITA hatred was at a premium. But the pogrom was not spontaneous. Somebody somewhere had orchestrated the anti-regressado attack which quickly gathered momentum leaving hundreds, possibly thousands, dead.

A number of explanations have been put forward, ranging from official government complicity, to officials who resent the Bakongo and regressado wealth, to an alliance between a radical pro-Independence Bakongo Luan movement and UNITA aiming to fan anti-MPLA hatred among the Bakongo and increasing their own support amongst that ethnic group. But whatever the real explanation for the brutal events of January 1993, it

is clearly more linked to the relationship between the Bakongo regressados and the situation of war and economic hardship which affects Angola than to any long-term or festering ethnic conflict. One thing is for sure, the Bakongo and the regressados have not stopped trading or left Luanda.

Ethnicity and elections

It was outlined above that the conflict underway in Angola is not an ethnic one, but that it includes an ethnic dimension. As demonstrated by the country's first ever free elections, a similar situation appears to hold true for the relationship between ethnicity and political behaviour. Naturally, it is a relationship which will influence the future development of the political system in this country. The elections provided a curious picture of the role of ethnicity in moulding political and electoral behaviour. In the case of the Ovimbundu, the elections demonstrated the existence of a clear and strong link between ethnicity and political behaviour and mobilisation. Around 60 percent of the Ovimbundu, vote cast was in support of Savimbi's UNITA. The remaining 30 percent voted for other parties, mostly the MPLA, and 10 percent registered blank or invalid votes.

In contrast, the electoral behaviour of the Bakongo, demonstrates a completely different picture. The Bakongo vote was actually split almost 50- 50 between the MPLA and UNITA. Interestingly, the ethnic group displayed little interest in voting for Bakongo-based parties in the election, of which there were eleven. Of these, the FNLA got the best electoral score with 2.40 percent of the total vote. It clearly failed to win a proportion of votes commensurate with its historical significance. Even its historic leader, Holden Roberto, got only a mere 2.21 percent of the votes cast in the presidential elections. As far as the Bakongo are concerned, the ethnic card is clearly not of primary political value. The electoral gains of the Partido de Renovação Social turned out to be a real surprise. The party carried out an electoral strategy aimed at seeking the support of the Chokwe people who are concentrated mainly in the Lundas of north-east Angola while supporting MPLA candidate J. E. dos Santos in the presidential elections. The strategy worked and the party elected six deputies to the new parliament.

The Angolan Ovambo who live mainly in the southern province of single Cunene demonstrated another variant of ethnicity translating into politics. The Ovambo in Angola are part of the Ovambo ethnic group which resides primarily in northern Namibia and who have always supported SWAPO. UNITA's South African links caused widespread resentment against the movement among this ethnic group, and influenced their outright support for the MPLA in the elections. Out of a total of 102,958 valid votes in Cunene,

the MPLA obtained. 90,253 and UNITA 4,714. Ethnicity clearly played a decisive role in influencing the Ovambo's electoral behaviour. But the Ovambo's electoral preference rested on their position on the MPLA/UNITA conflict and not on a desire to seek increased ethnic representation in the political system. The relationship between ethnicity and political behaviour in Angola seems to indicate that although ethnicity can decisively influence political behaviour, it does not necessarily lead to demands for greater ethnic and representation in the political system. The strength of the link between ethnicity and political behaviour also appears to depend on the particular ethnic group in question. While the Chokwe and the Ovimbundu sought greater political representation for their ethnic group, the Bakongo and the Ovambo were not attracted to the idea.

The potential power of ethnicity in influencing political behaviour has not gone unnoticed in Luanda. Many intellectuals and politicians alike now admit the need for a decentralisation of the political structure and place a new emphasis on strengthening local power. Furthermore, the gulf which has developed in the perception of many Angolans between the peaceful haven of economically and politically privileged Luanda and the rest of the poverty-stricken, war-torn country is another important factor urging an end to the centre's monopoly on power.

The political and intellectual elite have begun to understand that the task of modern nation-building in Angola and the legitimacy of the state itself is closely linked to a shift in political power away from the centre towards local government. No future system of representative government in Angola can expect legitimacy or success unless it ensures greater and more equitable participation by all of the country's ethnic and social groups. In clear contrast to past practice, the political emphasis is now on bringing the people into the government as opposed to imposing government on the people. UNITA's demand for increased participation in local government structures, mainly in the central plateau, and the fact that the grievances outlined above are most acutely felt by the Ovimbundu, the country's largest single ethnic group, will make decentralisation an important pre-condition for any future peace agreement.

The future course of democratisation

Despite the renewed state of war the process of democratisation has not a ground to a halt as some analysts suggest. Democratisation in Angola has made some progress. Despite significant frailties, democratic institutions now hold the reigns of power for the first time since the country's independence. The crux of the matter is no longer how to bring representative government to Angola, but how to strengthen it. In November 1992 a new parliament based on the election results took office; out of a total of 220 seats,

129 belonged to the MPLA, 70 to UNITA, and 21 to other smaller political parties. Only twelve UNITA deputies unhappy with Savimbi's return to war took up their parliamentary duties. The parliament began functioning in full in February 1993. In December 1992, a government of national unity was sworn in made up of 27 posts. UNITA was offered four minister of Culture, vice-minister, Agriculture, Public Works and Social Assistance. Although at best UNITA's posts were minor, the organisation accepted these and nominated incumbents. Six other minor positions were offered to parties represented in parliament.

UNITA's war has naturally hampered the development and the subsequent strengthening of these institutions. UNITA deputies are psychologically constrained by the fact that they represent a party at war with the system. Their position bears little resemblance to that of the main opposition groups in more advanced parliamentary democracies. None of the UNITA officials nominated to the government of national unity have as yet taken up their duties. UNITA's non-participation in the new executive seriously undermines its claim to represent "national unity". The end of the war will make a significant contribution to strengthening both institutions. Yet, strengthening the new and still weak system of representative government will take somewhat longer and is a far more complex process. Civil society will have to learn to organise itself and to take the opportunities presented by representative government to increase its influence in the political decision-making process. The appearance of a strong civil society with the mushrooming of new professional and social associations will depend to a great extent on overcoming the low levels of education and the general state of underdevelopment in Angola - something in turn which requires peace, stability and, of course, time.

Media freedom, which has come to play a fundamental role in modern democracies, is still significantly curbed by the state. Only recently president J. E. dos Santos criticised the independent projects of a number of journalists by stating the need, to avoid the sensationalism which peacekeeping characterises the press in other countries. The comment was not in itself incomprehensible, but his notion that the state should judge what is and what is not sensational, demonstrates the fledgling nature of press freedom and democracy in Angola. The judiciary, another important cornerstone of representative government, is still cumbersome and largely inoperative. Although peace is essential to strengthen representative democracy in Angola, its ultimate success will also depend on perceived legitimacy - and legitimacy will inevitably depend on adapting representative government to emphasis of local conditions. Both peace and representative government in Angola are thus strongly tied to the striking of a new balance in political power

relationships between central and local government, city and countryside, voter and politician.