

A military history of the Angolan Armed Forces from the 1960s onwards—as told by former combatants

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INTRODUCTION

The history of the Angolan Armed Forces (FAA) remains largely unwritten—yet, understanding the FAA’s development is undoubtedly important both for future Angolan generations as well as for other sub-Saharan African countries. The FAA must first and foremost be understood as a result of several processes of integration—processes that began in the very early days of the struggle against Portuguese colonialism and ended with the April 2002 Memorandum of Understanding.

Today’s FAA is a result of the integration of the armed forces of the three liberation movements that fought against the Portuguese—the MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola), the FNLA (National Front for the Liberation of Angola) and UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola). This was a process that developed over more than 30 years.

The various phases that characterise the formation and development of the FAA are closely related to Angola’s recent political history, particularly the advent of independence in 1975 and the civil war that ensued.

This chapter introduces that history with a view to contributing to a clearer understanding of the development of the FAA and its current role in a peaceful Angola. As will be discussed, while the FAA was formerly established in 1992 following the provisions of the Bicesse Peace Accords, its origins go back to:

- the Popular Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FAPLA) and the integration over more than three decades of elements of the Portuguese Colonial Army;
- the FNLA's Army for the National Liberation of Angola (ELNA); and
- UNITA's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FALA).

These give the FAA a history and development that are *sui generis* in the region, if not in the world. Today, the FAA can be considered a factor and a reflection of national unity comprising soldiers and officers from all ethno-linguistic groups, from all regions and parts of the country and from all political and social groups. For the vast majority of Angolans, the FAA represents the entire nation and is one of the few institutions in the country that truly embody a sense of nationhood. The FAA has now to continue its transformation into a peace-time armed force, changing the objective of its missions as well as the structure of its organisation, training, readiness, ways of thinking and acting. Beginning with a discussion of Angola's recent political and military history, this chapter aims to provide an initial reflection on these issues, highlighting Angola's National Defence Policy, the FAA's legal and institutional framework, the FAA's current structure and composition and, finally, the FAA's current strategic positioning.

BACKGROUND: HISTORICAL CONTEXT AS A DETERMINING FACTOR

STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE: THE LIBERATION MOVEMENTS AND THEIR MILITARY FORCES

Modern Angolan nationalism has its origins in the 1940s and 1950s with the birth and development of several organised liberation movements. The influence of pan-Africanism and the independence wave that swept across the African continent in the late 1950s and early 1960s, coupled with the excesses of the late colonial period, particularly in the form of forced labour, contributed to the emergence of a new political conscience in Angola.

The nationalist movement gained added momentum with the independence of the former Belgian Congo, which allowed nationalist Angolans to find refuge and operate from within the borders of that country. On 7 July 1954, the UPNA (Union of the Peoples of the North

of Angola) was born with the specific aim of fighting for the independence of the old kingdom of Congo. Following the integration in 1958 of Angolans with different political views and from different parts of the country, the UPNA changed its name to the UPA (Union of the Peoples of Angola).

During the 1960s, the UPA developed its political structure and created a military wing, launching the armed struggle against the colonisers. In 1962, the UPA unified with the PDA, another emerging political force, to form the FNLA. The FNLA's organisation capacity as well as the creation of its military wing, ELNA, gave it international and continental recognition, as well as increased external support. Moreover, the FNLA would soon be recognised by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) as Angola's government in exile and the true representative of Angolan nationalism. In addition, international recognition of the Revolutionary Government of Angola in Exile (GRAE) enabled the FNLA to train officers at the Kinkuso base from liberation movements from neighbouring countries, such as Zimbabwe (ZANU), South Africa (ANC), Mozambique (Frelimo) and Namibia (SWAPO).

Also during the 1950s, more precisely in 1956, another liberation movement was formed, the MPLA; and also a result of the integration of groups representing varying strands of the Angolan political landscape. The MPLA would become consistently involved in the liberation struggle from 1961. In 1962, when Dr Agostinho Neto became its president, the MPLA created a military wing, EPLA (People's Army for the Liberation of Angola). It is important to note that although the FNLA and the MPLA initially operated from independent Congo-Leopoldville, disagreements and competition between them led the MPLA to move to Congo-Brazzaville.

How and why did UNITA emerge as Angola's third liberation movement? As a student, Jonas Savimbi (later to become UNITA's president) became an active member of the UPA. He participated in the formation of the FNLA, rising to the important position of minister of foreign affairs of the GRAE. In 1963, during a trip to China by some of the leading members of the FNLA, including Savimbi, President Mao suggested that the leadership of the liberation struggle should be established inside the country in order to supervise the combat. This principle was enthusiastically accepted by Jonas Savimbi but met with strong opposition by Holden Roberto. This disagreement between the two was made worse when Savimbi went to Cairo as the representative of Roberto at an OAU Heads of State and Government meeting, but

publicly denounced both the MPLA and the FNLA as not deserving credibility or recognition due to the fact that neither of them was conducting the struggle from inside Angola.

This accusation led to the expulsion of Savimbi from the FNLA. The MPLA, who for some time had tried to bring Savimbi into its ranks, now refused to accept him. In Kinshasa, Savimbi started mobilising some of the ELNA officers and other FNLA political cadres and moved with them to Lusaka in Zambia. There, they reorganised themselves and on 13 March 1966 established UNITA inside Angola. With a hard-core nucleus of 12 leaders who had received military training in China, UNITA created its armed wing, FALA.

In this regard, it is important to note that while both the MPLA and FNLA's political activity and organisation as liberation movements led to the development of their armed wings, it was the creation of FALA that gave substance to the UNITA movement and its all-party activities. As will be discussed below, this largely explains why, several decades later, UNITA became weakened once FALA was disbanded.

In the struggle for independence, the three movements faced a powerful and intransigent coloniser. The deployment of Portugal's armed forces to the colonies—according to some accounts a force of more than 300,000 Portuguese was in Angola at this time—coupled with the forced conscription of many thousands of Angolans into the colonial army, posed a considerable challenge to the liberation movements. There was little that Angolans could do to avoid being drafted, for, at the age of conscription, Angolans were considered as citizens with rights only if they had served in the Portuguese armed forces.

The colonial authorities also fostered organisations of civil defence, such as the Special Groups (GE) and the Provincial Organisation of Volunteers for the Civil Defence of Angola (OPVDCA), which consisted of armed civilians living among the population. OPVDCA is said to have had an arsenal of 40,000 small arms and light weapons, which was later plundered by the three liberation movements.²

In addition, the settlers organised themselves into vigilante groups and took justice into their own hands with little, if any, oversight by the colonial authorities. According to some estimates, these first uprisings in the 1960s led to the death of 40,000 Angolans due to disease and famine, 400 settlers and innumerable Angolans considered as *assimilados*³ as well as anyone sympathetic to the colonial regime.⁴

From the mid-1960s onwards, Angola's three liberation movements fought separately (and at times antagonistically) for the common ideal of

national independence. Attempts to unify the FNLA and the MPLA (the two larger and better organised movements) into a united front against the colonial power were not successful. Political, ideological, regional and ethno-linguistic differences—to say nothing of each movement's different international support and alliance base—proved difficult to overcome. Indeed, there were several reports of fighting between ELNA and FAPLA forces during the anti-colonial war.

In order to understand the options of the three liberation movements and the way they evolved, it is important to consider both the timing and the nature of their formation. The suppression of all political activity before the April 1974 coup in Portugal meant that any opposition to the regime, either in Portugal or in the colonies, had to go underground. The clandestine nature of opposition made it easy for the communist party in Portugal to co-opt political dissent—the Soviet Union provided steady funding, international networks of support, and operational plans. Democratic European countries could not openly support the movements opposing Portuguese colonialism because of Portugal's membership to NATO and to other Western institutions. The geo-strategic importance during the Cold War of the Azores and Cape Verde was another reason why the Western allies could not openly support the opposition movements. It was for this reason that the political opposition in Portugal during the dictatorship came to be channelled through the communist party.

The FNLA, however, had the financial, logistical and military support of Mobutu's Zaire as well as the financial backing of the United States (US). By establishing itself in Leopoldville (Kinshasa) and opting for a centre-right ideology, the FNLA had opened the doors for the West to see it as a valuable tool in the fight against communist penetration of the African continent. Mobutu had close relations with the West and the US, which were used to channel mostly covert support to the FNLA, as open support was impossible because of the geo-strategic considerations previously referred to. The FNLA started as an ethnic movement seeking the restoration of the old kingdom of the Bazacongo.⁵ The FNLA's leader, Holden Roberto, had family ties to President Mobutu in Zaire, who thus became a natural ally with sympathy from the West. Moreover, Mobutu never hid his interest in Angolan natural resources; they would later influence some of his decisions towards relations with the government of Angola.

The MPLA was formed by Angolans with connections to the Portuguese communist party. Students from the colonies were

accommodated in Portugal's 'Casa do Império' (House of the Empire). The communist party was quick to form relationships with these students, who included Amílcar Cabral, Mondlane, Agostinho Neto and Marcelino dos Santos, who also developed close ties with one another. They had not much choice for allies and these future leaders soon realised that support would only come from the Eastern bloc. The MPLA had the support of Congo-Brazzaville and other socialist countries. This movement's origins as an offshoot of Angola's Communist Party and its close relations with the Portuguese Communist Party—the most organised party in Portugal at the time of the revolution of 25 April 1974—provided it with the necessary networks and contacts in the former communist bloc.

UNITA opted for socialism, despite the fact that most of its cadres had come from the FNLA, but aligned itself ideologically with Maoist China. Closer to home, it benefited from the support of Zambia and a few other African countries. When Savimbi decided to found UNITA he accepted that China would probably be the party's only supporter. While the West via Zaire was supporting the FNLA⁶ and the MPLA could count on the support of the former Soviet Union and Cuba, Savimbi had few allies to choose from, particularly at the time of UNITA's inception.

Although ideological differences should not be taken as paramount in the relations between the movements before independence, the connections and alliances each one maintained undoubtedly influenced their future development. This was also a reflection of the bipolar structure of the international system at the time. In fact, the cleavages between the movements were most evident in the disagreements of the mid-1960s on how to conduct the liberation struggle and the way support was obtained for carrying it out. In the 1974–75 period, the emergence of the civil war exacerbated these contradictions and exposed deep-seated ideological cleavages.

Of the three liberation movements active on the eve of Angola's independence, the FNLA was the strongest militarily, enjoyed diplomatic recognition and had a better organised and structured operation. The MPLA, although second in strength, was at this time paralysed by internal divisions caused by the activities of various factions: the 'Active Rebellion', consisting mostly of intellectuals; the 'Rebellion of the East', led by Daniel Chipenda and integrating the larger part of the EPLA guerrillas in the east of the country; and Neto's faction all competed for control of the leadership. In fact, these divisions would persist until the first negotiations on a cessation of hostilities were held with the

Portuguese. The attempts made in Lusaka during 1973 to attain unification of the three movements did not produce any results. Even though Agostinho Neto insisted on the need for reconciliation with the other movements, creating FAPLA as an attempt to unify the armed forces on 1 August 1974, when negotiations started with the Portuguese, there were de facto three distinct armies in the country: ELNA, FAPLA and FALA—the armed forces of the FNLA, the MPLA and UNITA respectively. And although the movements concluded an agreement with the colonial power in Alvor, Portugal, which *inter alia* provided for a transitional government comprising all three movements as well as the colonial power, this was not sufficient to overcome the cleavages which had resulted from the different objectives during the liberation struggle. The civil war could therefore not be avoided. However, when analysing international intervention and Cold War strategic interests one has to wonder whether the civil war would have taken place if the liberation movements had not been heavily armed in support of interests other than Angolan national ones.

The 1974 coup in Portugal followed an accumulation of pressures from colonial wars, international criticism and the Portuguese resistance. Being the most organised party, the communists attracted opponents to the regime regardless of their ideologies, sharing in the common goal of defeating fascism. The co-option of Portuguese dissent by the communist party and the lack of an explicit political agenda by the coup leaders led to a period of political turmoil in mainland Portugal, where emerging political parties were competing for space in domestic politics.

The influence of the communists in Portugal surfaced during the power struggle that started with the coup of 25 April 1974 and ended in November 1976 when the socialist party came to power. This period spanned the decolonisation process and had a serious impact on the way this was conducted.

INDEPENDENCE AND CIVIL WAR

Being essentially military in nature, the coup of 25 April had the objective of bringing the colonial war to an end. However, it failed to articulate specific policies or even a coherent political and military plan to end the colonial war.

The process of decolonisation coincided with a period of political turmoil in Portugal. Between April 1974 and December 1975 Portugal had six provisional governments and two presidents, and had elected

members of a constitutional assembly. This instability was the result of the power struggle between the Portuguese communist party and other democratic forces, which came to a head in November 1975 (a mere two weeks after Angola's independence) with a rejection of the communists. During this period, the Portuguese government implemented, among other things, a number of nationalisations, foreign exchange control and land reform based on property expropriation. For the whole period of decolonisation (1974–75) Portuguese leaders were, rightly or wrongly, considered leftist sympathisers.

The political instability in mainland Portugal and the breakdown of colonial authority had dire consequences for the decolonisation process of Angola.

A former Portuguese minister in the transitional government commented on the situation on the ground in Angola at that time:

... but we had a situation that virtually led to a general demobilisation of the Portuguese troops ... there was an unwavering principle and that was independence; without agreeing to this principle it was not possible to even start talking to any of the liberation movements ... the Portuguese troops were not willing to fight for a country soon to be independent ... And there was another obvious thing, the huge political unrest here in Portugal, which [made it impossible to form any coherent policy]... .⁷

During the colonial war, the three Angolan liberation movements failed to reach an agreement on what to do when the war came to an end. They failed also to discuss eventual power-sharing models should Angola become independent.⁸ Of the three Angolan movements, only the MPLA had strong links to Portugal and to the Portuguese communist party. The perception that a left-wing military government in Portugal, with a strong communist composition, would favour the MPLA seems to have compounded distrust among the Angolan parties and it ultimately created space for foreign intervention in Angola. It certainly did not help to build confidence in the Alvor Accords in January 1975—a process in which Portugal acted as mediator.

The civil war was the consequence of the climate of mutual suspicion carried over from the liberation struggle. The inability of the movements to create a political platform for consensus, coupled with the ideological turmoil and intolerance that characterised the anti-colonial period, all contributed to this state of affairs.

According to the Alvor Accords, signed on 15 January 1975, Angola would become independent on 11 November 1975. Until then, there would be a transitional government of 12 ministers (three Portuguese and three from each Angolan movement) and a Portuguese high commissioner appointed by the Portuguese president. The transitional government would be under the command of a presidential council that included one representative from each movement. The transitional government was empowered to organise elections to take place within nine months and to set up common security forces consisting of 48,000 troops (24,000 Portuguese and 8,000 from each Angolan movement). By February 1976 all Portuguese troops were to leave Angola. The Alvor Accords also protected the interests of the Portuguese settlers in Angola and their rights to Angolan citizenship.⁹

The terms of the treaty seemed correct but the assumptions were perhaps misguided. There was no trust among the parties signing the Accords and the impartiality of Portugal as a mediator was questioned.¹⁰ Members of the Angolan delegations would often tell the press that: “During Alvor we debated independence and nothing but independence.”¹¹ And the MPLA delegation added: “... there is no unity among the movements. There is only a common programme.”¹²

The ability of Portugal to implement a political solution was questionable, and the continuing deployment of Portuguese troops raised dissent in Portugal. A Portuguese soldier who arrived in Angola in December 1974 told a reporter about the demonstrations against the shipping of Portuguese troops to Angola: “There was a strong opposition to the shipping of troops ... when our battalion was ready to embark there were incidents with a demonstration.”¹³

The immediate result of the coup on Angola was the exodus of Angolan nationalists from the Portuguese armed forces to the movement of their choice—MPLA, FNLA or UNITA, carrying with them as much weaponry as possible. While the Angolan nationalists were diverting weapons to the liberation movements, the Portuguese armed forces were engaged in similar activities, with a bias towards the MPLA, which only served to increase the perception of the questionable impartiality of Portugal as the mediator of the Alvor Accords and as a neutral implementer of the transition period leading to independence. According to a Portuguese soldier, who only left Angola on the eve of independence:

As you know, some people just wanted us [Portuguese soldiers] to do what many other [Portuguese soldiers] were doing and that was hand

over the weapons to the MPLA. In Quibaxe, many people did just that. In our battalion, practically everything [meaning weapons and stockpiles] was handed over to the MPLA.¹⁴

Between the signing of the Alvor Accords in January until independence in 11 November 1975, the three movements spent more effort in positioning their military wings to take over Luanda than in implementing any of the provisions of the Alvor Accords. The perception was that the party controlling Luanda on 11 November would control the rest of Angola.

The civil war started in Luanda between the two factions of the MPLA, which found itself divided between Agostinho Neto's faction and Daniel Chipenda's 'Active Revolt' faction. In order to contain Neto's faction, the Active Revolt asked for the support of the FNLA. The participation of ELNA on the side of Chipenda led to further animosity between the MPLA and FNLA, and fighting between both movements intensified. The fighting carried on and escalated with the participation of hundreds of civilians. The FNLA and UNITA were forced to leave Luanda and their leadership sought refuge in the north of the country (FNLA) and in the centre south of the country (UNITA).

Each movement took control of the area in which it found its natural or historic support base. In addition, and of critical importance for a comprehensive understanding of this period, the end of the anti-colonial war and the withdrawal of the Portuguese from Angola generated a movement of former soldiers of the colonial army into the armed forces of the different liberation movements. This was a spontaneous and voluntary process in that each person could freely decide which liberation movement or force to choose. As elsewhere, these choices were based on a variety of factors, such as the regional distribution of the forces, family or ethnic ties, personal knowledge and the existence of friends in the different movements. It should also be noted that this process also involved students and other young people.

Given the political instability in Portugal at the time of decolonisation, the climate of mistrust among the Angolan movements, the ideological differences, the perception of Portuguese bias towards one of the contenders and the enormous natural wealth of Angola, foreign interests were quick to form and consolidate alliances; their purpose to ensure a friendly regime in independent Angola rather than to support a liberation movement. This escalated the war and ensured that advanced weaponry would play a major part in its course.

As independence day approached, conflict among the liberation movements increased; and so did foreign support for each movement, which took the form of military assistance and the supply of weapons. The dawn of Angolan independence saw the MPLA (with massive support from Cuban troops) controlling Luanda in the face of severe attacks from the FNLA in the north (supported by Zairian forces) and from UNITA in the south (supported by South African troops). On the final day of the Portuguese administration, power was handed over to the Angolan peoples rather than to any specific movement or coalition. In practical terms, the MPLA, as the party controlling Luanda at the time, named a government and proclaimed the People's Republic of Angola, which was quickly acknowledged by several countries. For the MPLA, the conflict turned from a struggle for power into an invasion by foreign forces and into the requirement of a legitimate government to defend the country.

In late January [1975], a high-level United States government policy-making body authorised a grant of US\$300,000 to the pro-Western FNLA, which at the time seemed to be the strongest of the three movements. In March the Soviet Union countered by increasing arms deliveries to the MPLA, and by mid-July that group had become appreciably stronger militarily. Alarmed, the United States increased funding to the FNLA and, for the first time, funded UNITA. Cuba, which had been aiding the MPLA since the mid-1960s, sent military instructors in the late spring of 1975. By early October, more Cuban military personnel had arrived, this time primarily combat troops; their total then probably reached between 1,100 and 1,500.

In April the presidents of Zambia, Tanzania, and Botswana decided to support Savimbi as leader of an Angolan government of national unity, believing that UNITA attracted the widest popular support in Angola. Savimbi also had the support of some francophone states and of Nigeria and Ghana.¹⁵

General civil war was now irreversible and conditions were ripe for foreign intervention in support of the belligerents. In an attempt to consolidate their tenuous but established lines of control, the two main movements (MPLA and FNLA) actively sought increased support from their backers. The FNLA obtained increased support from Mobutu when he gave his tacit approval to the use of Zaire as the rear-guard base

of ELNA—also important because it permitted the transit of mercenaries from this country in support of ELNA (with the support of several European countries and with the US at the fore). The MPLA also sought increased support from its allies, including the Soviet Union, Cuban internationalist forces, Marian Nguabi's Congo Brazzaville and the Portuguese Communist Party operating via the Movement of the Armed Forces, which was at this time in control of the post-revolution government in Lisbon.

UNITA, however, as the smallest and least powerful of the three liberation movements, did not at this stage benefit from the direct support of third parties. Nevertheless, it established a number of agreements with the FNLA for the creation of common fronts in the country. Although UNITA had the manpower, it did not have the equipment for war, except for a limited arsenal recovered when the Portuguese abandoned some of the areas now controlled by UNITA.

Shortly before independence both the FNLA and the MPLA were experiencing leadership problems and were militarily weakened. Militarily, the war had reached a stalemate. UNITA was still in the initial stages of its struggle and did not yet have a steady supporter as the other movements had. UNITA's lack of military leverage turned it into a particularly interested stakeholder to the Alvor Accords—UNITA had everything to gain from a political solution but had no leverage to back it. The foreign support provided to the other two players, the FNLA and the MPLA, attracted them to a military solution of the conflict rather than a political one.

The supply of large numbers of weapons from the Soviet Union combined with technical assistance from Cuba to the MPLA after the April 1974 coup must have made a political compromise less and less attractive for the movement. While negotiating the Alvor Accords, the MPLA received large amounts of weapons from the Soviet Union and had their troops trained by Cuban officers. Reports estimate that between April and October 1975 Angola was supplied with 27 shiploads of weapons—enough, it was claimed, to arm 20,000 troops. Armed with Soviet weapons, the MPLA set out to secure Cabinda and the major urban centres. Violence escalated with increasing confrontation between MPLA and FNLA militants. By June there were already 5,000 dead.¹⁶ The total amount of Soviet military support has been valued at US\$400 million, so that the US support of around US\$60 million paled by comparison.¹⁷

Foreign intervention dramatically altered the theatre of operations—the war was no longer scattered guerrilla warfare but instead became a

conventional war, with front lines and a rearguard. In addition, the levels of training and the types of equipment were fundamentally different from what the movements had been accustomed to. The chaotic decolonisation had opened doors for open military intervention in Angola. And it was this intervention that turned war into an option, by arming and training parties reluctant to pursue a political solution.

FAPLA AND CUBAN TROOPS

In 1975 the MPLA integrated between 3,500 and 7,000 anti-Mobutu Katangese in exile in Angola into the FAPLA force. These Katangese troops joined the MPLA in opposition to the FNLA, which was supported by Mobutu.¹⁸ The arrival date of Cuban troops in Angola has been subject to much debate but accounts of the presence of Cuban troops already in mid-1975 are too many from varied sources to be dismissed as propaganda. In mid to late 1975 some 230 Cuban military advisers arrived in Luanda to train FAPLA in the use of the Soviet equipment.¹⁹ After declaring independence, the MPLA decided to strike against what was considered a foreign invasion and soon the Cuban troops reached 10,000 with long-range guns and armoured personnel carriers.²⁰

THE FNLA AND UNITA

The FNLA had been the movement considered the strongest in military terms. However, at the time of independence several internal disputes had considerably weakened its capability. Right after the coup in Portugal, the FNLA had received support from China in the form of military assistance and 450 tons of weapons. In January 1975, the month the Alvor Accords were signed, the US had increased its covert support to the FNLA with an award of US\$300,000 “for organisational purposes”. The support may have been covert and cautious but it was also quick and generous; it is equally possible that it may have diminished the attraction of a peaceful solution through a power-sharing model. Later in July 1975 the US would increase its support with a grant of US\$60 million.²¹

The supply of weapons from the US to the FNLA was done via Zaire, where they would replace weapons already delivered by Mobutu or smuggled them into Angola to give the FNLA military leverage vis-à-vis the Russian-backed MPLA.²²

But Zaire also contributed with troops, and some sources mention that by mid-May 1975 there were 1,200 Zairian soldiers operating in Angola.²³ Mobutu had many reasons for intervening in the conflict in Angola. He wished to secure access to the Cabinda oil, thus favouring a friendly regime in independent Angola. Relations with the MPLA were not an option because of the alliances with opposing blocs and there were family ties between Mobutu and Holden Roberto, leader of the FNLA. In addition, the MPLA was supporting the Katangese opposition.

In January 1975 the FNLA claimed a force of 21,000 troops: 9,000 in Angola and 12,000 on stand-by in Zaire.

UNITA had been said to have a force not stronger than a thousand troops but in April reports were claiming a force of 40,000.²⁴ Estimates at the numbers of troops in FNLA and UNITA are as disparate as those ascribed to the MPLA; movements seemed to boost or understate their force according to the political considerations of the moment.

Initially, the US envisaged support for UNITA with much caution. Roberto and the FNLA had a long history of alliance and connection with Mobutu; while UNITA was a relatively new player with weak military capacity.²⁵ Of all the parties to the Alvor Accords, UNITA was the only one likely to benefit from a political solution, but as violence escalated between the other two parties UNITA was sucked into the turmoil and in August 1975 declared war on the MPLA.²⁶ It is interesting to note that by August UNITA had already approached South Africa; the party that until shortly before had a vested interest in a political solution was now able to compete militarily on a par with the other two contenders.

Covert military support from the US to UNITA started in September 1975 via Zambia; it is estimated that US support to the FNLA and UNITA amounted to US\$64 million and not US\$32 million as stated officially. Around September 1975 UNITA secured the support of South Africa in an attempt to reach and control Luanda before the date set for independence. UNITA's approach to South Africa had started in mid-1975 in the search for a substantial foreign supplier of military equipment.²⁷ In political terms, such an alliance was to prove a disaster but in military and immediate terms South African support tipped the balance of power towards UNITA, even if only temporarily.

The first big operations took place when the South Africans entered the country with 6,000 troops in support of the FNLA, coming from Namibia and advancing towards the centre of Angola in the direction of Luanda. From the northern borders with Zaire simultaneously came the

FNLA forces, stopping at only 12 km of the capital. It was in this environment that the independence of Angola was proclaimed on 11 November 1975. Neto proclaimed independence in Luanda, creating the People's Republic of Angola and, in Huambo, the FNLA and UNITA proclaimed the Democratic Republic of Angola.

In April 1976 news of US covert support to UNITA leaked to the American press and South African troops were made to retreat to northern Namibia, from where they provided discreet but steady support to UNITA. The South African intervention rallied political support by African countries in favour of the MPLA, and on 10 February 1976 the OAU recognised the People's Republic of Angola. The alliance between FNLA and UNITA was finished and their proclamation of independence failed.²⁸ The South African invasion had consumed US\$130 million²⁹ and South Africa was not prepared to back up UNITA on its own. Nevertheless, the South African Defence Force (SADF) undertook occasional small incursions into southern Angola under the pretext of pursuing SWAPO guerrillas.

With the arrival of the Cubans, the support of the Katangese for the MPLA against the FNLA rear bases in Zaire, the restructuring of FAPLA in 1976 and, finally, the departure of the South Africans, UNITA and the FNLA were forced to abandon the towns they controlled and opted for guerrilla activity. It should be noted that the exit of the South Africans was largely a result of the inconsistency of US policy towards Angola: 1975 was an election year in the US in the context of widespread opposition to the war in Vietnam. The Democrats, who won the election, reversed previous Republican encouragement of South African intervention in Angola. Without the diplomatic support from the US, the South Africans could not continue their direct military intervention in support of the FNLA. The South Africans ended this intervention leaving some of the ELNA/FNLA forces along the border with Namibia without protection. The rapid southern advance of FAPLA and the Cubans prompted the FNLA to sign an agreement with South Africa for the integration of its forces in the now famous 32 Battalion (Buffalo Battalion), as a means of allowing them to pass, together with their families, to the South African side.

THE BIPOLARISATION OF THE CONFLICT AND THE GROWTH OF UNITA

South African support for UNITA had the immediate result of consolidating the MPLA government as the legitimate government of independent Angola. However, in spite of the defeat inflicted on its two

opponents, peace was not forthcoming. Furthermore, the MPLA was experiencing internal challenges to its leadership, which was consolidated by violence in 1977. Regime reprisals against those perceived as having been involved in the unrest of 1977 were ruthlessly prosecuted and the MPLA government set up security institutions similar to those of the colonial regime.

UNITA was still reluctantly being supported by South Africa, with training and air cover,³⁰ and kept its ties to Mobutu's Zaire. The MPLA, however, had welcomed and supported the Katangese opponents to Mobutu. After two aborted invasions of Zaire by the Katangese opposition and several border skirmishes, the MPLA and Mobutu signed a peace agreement in 1978, which excluded Zairian support to the Angolan movements in the opposition. This would be the *coup de grace* for the FNLA and would keep UNITA with a lowered profile for some time. Through the 1980s until 1991 with the Bicesse accord, the Angolan conflict continued in the cyclic pattern it had taken early on.

The survival of UNITA from 1979 until the Bicesse accord was based on its alliance with the US. The Clark Amendment of 1976 precluded open American support to UNITA but the Carter administration could allow Angola to become the easy victim of Soviet influence. Besides, American business was thriving and even though Reagan was unable to lift the Clark Amendment until his second term, the US supported UNITA politically and diplomatically. Furthermore, the US illegally supplied UNITA with weapons via a third party; weapons were coming not from the US but rather from client states such as Belgium, Switzerland and Israel, with funding issuing from Saudi Arabia and other Western partners:

To facilitate delivery of UNITA weapons, a covertly managed Central Intelligence Agency charter firm won the air supply contract for Angola's government diamond mines. Legitimate supplies of mining equipment were thus carried in conjunction with illegitimate supplies of weapons delivered to opposition units camped out beyond the diamond mines.³¹

But in August 1981 South Africa was no longer hiding behind the SWAPO pretext:

... South Africa no longer pretended to restrict its incursions to the pursuit of Swapo units but openly intensified its assaults on Angolan

economic targets and began to occupy Angolan territory ... furthermore, SADF support for UNITA in 1982 and 1983 increased to the extent that the South African Air Force (SAAF) participated in UNITA operations against Fapla.³²

In 1984 Reagan won his second mandate, lifted the Clark Amendment and increased support to UNITA, and the conflict escalated once more as war spread again to the highlands.

During this cycle both parties targeted populations for supplies and manpower but the contenders also engaged in conventional war battles, such as the battle for Cuito Canavale in 1987. By now the Cuban troops amounted to 50,000 and the debt to Moscow a billion dollars.³³ The South Africans realised that they did not have the capacity to invade Angola successfully.

The testimonies collected for this chapter provide an interesting insight into this period. According to them, in the immediate post-independence context it is important to consider the truce between the MPLA and the FNLA in 1978, which gave the civil war in Angola the bipolar structure (MPLA versus UNITA) that would characterise it for decades to come. During the anti-colonial war, several hundred Katangese had found refuge in Angola, where the Portuguese settlers made use of them in the fight against the liberation movements. While the Katangese aimed for Katanga's secession from Mobutu's Zaire and for that could use the support of the MPLA, the MPLA needed them to fight the FNLA and in particular to destroy its bases in Zaire. As it was in the interests of Angola (MPLA) to end the FNLA's operations from Zaire, President Neto took very clear political decisions, believing that in order to defeat the FNLA, a pact should first be sought with Mobutu. Only subsequently could the FNLA be purged.

In 1978, the MPLA and Mobutu agreed on such a pact. In return for the end of Mobutu's support for the FNLA, the MPLA would guarantee the control of the Katangese within its territory, in particular to stop the infiltration of Katanga and lower Zaire. This agreement led to the expulsion of the FNLA from Zaire. Deprived of its rear bases, the FNLA started to disintegrate. Of importance to the topic of this chapter is the fact that some of the FNLA's cadres were integrated into the MPLA and ELNA forces and became part of FAPLA. Other cadres and leaders looked for exile in Europe and the US. Those who tried to resist formed Comira (Military Committee for the Resistance in Angola), which did not last, although the support of South Africa might have been possible at this time.

The demise of the FNLA and its armed wing had an immediate effect in the military correlation of forces—from this moment onwards, FAPLA and its allies directed their efforts towards fighting a single enemy, UNITA.

Unable to fight the MPLA/Cuban forces in the cities due to the imbalance in troop numbers, equipment and technical capacity, UNITA opted for guerrilla warfare, spreading its forces in small units throughout the centre-south provinces.

UNITA's leadership found refuge in the 'chanas' of the east, from where it co-ordinated the movement of small guerrilla units towards the interior of the country. FAPLA's military operations in the area during 1977, which for the first time included air support, forced UNITA's leadership to move from the east towards the south-east of the country, installing itself in the uninhabited region of Kuando Kubango. Although at this time UNITA had no significant international support, it had strengthened its arsenal of light and support weapons during the South African intervention.

In the course of this intervention, all arms captured by the South Africans had been given to the FNLA or UNITA. As was previously mentioned, UNITA fought on the side of ELNA and the South Africans during their simultaneous advance to Luanda before 11 November 1975.

In Kuando Kubango, UNITA found suitable conditions for the installation of a support base—UNITA needed a vast area inside Angola, difficult to reach and capable of lodging the party leadership structures and the headquarters of its armed forces. Once this support base and the links with its guerrilla units scattered around the centre and south of the country had been firmly established, UNITA's leadership initiated the approach to the South Africans. Begun in September 1978, UNITA's overtures to the South Africans had been given the blessing of two critical Western powers, France and the US. A number of factors explain the unlikely alliance between apartheid South Africa and UNITA, namely:

- The encouragement and support of the West, which continued to regard Angola as strategically important in the fight against communist expansion.
- UNITA's need of a strong international backer in order to sustain its war effort.

- The realisation by the South Africans that the fight against SWAPO and the ANC (both supported by the MPLA) could not be done inside their lines of defence.
- The disintegration of ELNA, which South Africa regarded as its ally.

In 1978 UNITA received the first tranches of logistical support from South Africa and in 1979 various training centres were installed, some within Namibian territory and others along the borders with Namibia, within Angola. These developments enabled UNITA to restructure its forces and equip them with new weaponry. In restructuring its forces, UNITA divided these into scattered guerrillas (small groups carrying out sabotage operations), compact guerrillas with stronger offensive capability (in groups estimated at up to 150 men), semi-regular units and, finally, special forces units.

From 1985, after the establishment of the so-called free territory of Angola (*Terras Livres de Angola*), which comprised the whole of Kuando Kubango province, the bigger part of Cunene province as well as part of Moxico province, UNITA's first regular units were launched, with a new organisational system, heavy armament, motorised artillery and logistical support. At this time, UNITA's semi-regular units were transferred further into the interior of the country in order to defend the free territory from the enemy inner defence lines. While, during the struggle against colonialism, UNITA's support bases were in the east of the country, the south-east of the country became the main bastion during the civil war.

INTERNATIONALISED CIVIL WAR

From 1977 to 1989 the civil war in Angola was truly internationalised, with foreign forces fighting alongside Angolans—on one side FAPLA and Cuban troops and on the other side FALA and South African troops. Tactically, this period is characterised by a gradual movement towards a more conventional type of war, with infantry and mechanised artillery gaining importance for UNITA, and the MPLA seeking to acquire an air combat capability.

The launch of UNITA's semi-regular units and special forces allowed the movement to widen its territorial gains by dislodging various FAPLA units from a number of positions. This largely explains UNITA's control of a vast territory without significant opposition. In this way, it was able

to develop political, cultural and diplomatic activities almost unhindered. These included negotiations for additional support. In fact, in order to reach UNITA's headquarters in Jamba (and therefore its leadership), FAPLA and the Cubans had to cover such a long distance that they were rendered vulnerable.

The alliance between the South Africans and UNITA was a determining factor that changed the course of events. The first two years of co-operation proved to the South Africans that UNITA was a secure ally to which all available support could be channelled. On a political level, this was confirmed by the several visits that Savimbi made to Pretoria and that Pik Botha made to Jamba. Although in the beginning the South Africans intended to provide no more than logistical support and training to FALA for the defence of the Cunene line, the MPLA's increased support for SWAPO and the ANC (which now fought from inside Angola) prompted the South Africans to redeploy in the field of operations.

FAPLA's repeated attempts to break the FALA lines in order to destroy UNITA's headquarters and reach the border gave the war a more conventional nature. UNITA proceeded to study the best way to defend its bastion. It chose to take the offensive and procure additional means. At the same time, the government was waiting for the necessary conditions to enable it effectively and simultaneously to hit FALA's defence lines and its rearguard. Thus, FAPLA acquired fighter and transport planes in order to support its infantry in the destruction of FALA's rearguard. FALA replied by using field-guns and anti-aircraft artillery as well as land mines and explosives.

From 1985, FAPLA started using large numbers of armoured units and launching periodic offensives, which UNITA found increasingly difficult to stop. The South Africans stepped up their support with heavy long-range artillery and the introduction of light vehicles armed with anti-tank weapons.

It was during these years that the US resumed its support to UNITA. Following Ronald Reagan's election, UNITA could now count on two sources of support. The resumption of American support with the lifting of the existing embargo against UNITA further entrenched the internationalisation of the conflict. Angola's civil war was increasingly regarded by the US and the Soviet Union as strategically critical. The two superpowers had deployed their own military and diplomatic advisers to both sides, and increasingly the war was managed from the Pentagon and the Kremlin.

EARLY DÉTENTE AND THE BEGINNINGS OF A NEGOTIATED SOLUTION

The result of the escalation of the conflict during the 1980s led once more to an impasse. In the 1980s, international support enabled UNITA to sustain the MPLA counter-attacks, to set up a form of public administration to manage the territory under its influence, and to establish headquarters in Jamba, considered as the capital of UNITA's territory. The presence of foreign troops fighting on Angolan soil, coupled with the risk of indefinitely prolonging the conflict led the parties to consider (hesitantly at first, and without UNITA) a negotiated solution that would deal with the international aspects of the conflict.

After 1985, UNITA was (with US support) able to extend its operations to the whole country. With little expectation of a military victory, UNITA was trying to increase its leverage in case negotiations should start.

UNITA's armed forces were now a conventional military organisation with command and specialised staff organs, a formal hierarchy of ranks, an impressive array of weapons and equipment, and considerable international support.³⁴

Western economic interest in Namibia started to decline in the mid-1980s, as the oil crisis of the 1970s was resolved and public opinion against nuclear energy increased. Namibian uranium lost some of its appeal, Angolan oil gained in importance, support to Angola was a burden on the Soviet economy, and social unrest in South Africa was stretching the capacity of the apartheid regime. In this context, and with the added imminence of independence for Namibia, Angola, Cuba and South Africa signed the Tripartite Agreement in New York in December 1988. The implementation of this agreement was to be overseen by the United Nations (UN), through its UN Angola Verification Mission 1 (UNAVEM 1). This mission was to stay until May 1991, when all foreign troops had left Angola.

The New York Accords regulated Cuban withdrawal from Angola and the simultaneous withdrawal of South Africans from Angola and Namibia, which would become independent. The agreement also foresaw the formation of a demilitarised zone along the Angola–Namibia border—and, although UNITA had been ignored in these negotiations, it had forces deployed along the border.

Although the New York Accords (signed in 1988 and mediated by US Assistant Secretary of State Chester Crocker) took close to a decade to

be achieved, they provided the framework for the disengagement of foreign troops (Cubans and South Africans) from Angola and the independence of Namibia. Many observers felt that once the international aspects of the conflict were dealt with, internal negotiations with UNITA could begin.

The relatively swift implementation of the New York Accords and the independence of Namibia, in a context of international détente and the end of the Cold War, created ripe conditions for initial contact between UNITA and the Angolan government.

The 1980s were the decade of Reagan in the US and Gorbachev in the Soviet Union; of the fall of the Berlin Wall; and of the Namibian peace process. Foreign support—or the lack of such support—to Angola would determine the cycles of the conflict and at the end of the decade foreign troops were made to withdraw from Angola. It was thought now that the lack of international intervention would make possible a political decision to the conflict, but this was not to be. Diplomatic pressure was able to bring the warring parties together to negotiate and sign the Bicesse Agreement in May 1991, but the process was almost as flawed as the Alvor Accords and had a similar outcome, even though its implementation was to be undertaken by the UN Angola Verification Mission 2 (UNAVEM 2).

1991 BICESSE ACCORDS, FORMATION OF FAA AND RESUMPTION OF WAR

The Bicesse Accords represented the culmination of a series of contacts, at first informal and then official, between the MPLA government and UNITA to reach a negotiated settlement to the civil war. For the purposes of this chapter, and beyond the political framework defined by the agreements (based on the holding of Angola's first democratic elections), Bicesse defined the general basis for the formation of a single unified Angolan Armed Force (FAA). For this purpose, the agreements foresaw the creation of the CCFA (joint committee for the forming of the FAA), operating under nine main directives defining the legal framework and the steps needed for the formation of the FAA.

The Bicesse peace agreement was supposed to rule the transition from conflict to political co-existence. Bicesse was also mediated by Portugal—this time through the foreign affairs minister, whose political path ranged from left radical Maoist in the 1970s to right-wing minister in the 1990s. Russia and the US were observers to the process and the three countries constituted what became known as the troika.

The peace agreement established a cease-fire for both warring parties and UNITA forces were to be integrated into a single national army—the FAA. The national army should have 50,000 troops. It also included a clause that prevented either party from procuring new weapons and re-arming; this clause is known as the triple zero clause. UNITA acknowledged the authority of the government of Angola that was to stay in place and set the date for the first general elections in Angola, while UNAVEM 2 would co-ordinate and oversee the transition. The troika had an observer and diplomatic role to ensure that the parties complied with the agreed clauses.

The political climate in Portugal had changed since 1975. After the turmoil of the 1970s and the economic crisis of the 1980s, Portugal had been a full member of the European Union since 1986. Links with Europe took precedence to links to the former colonies. The elected president, Mário Soares, was the former leader of the Socialist Party, one of the negotiators in the Alvor Accords. Soares was also in a political coalition with a centre-right government. In terms of Angolan politics, the situation was almost the reverse of 1975. The Portuguese leaders seemed now to favour UNITA: the Portuguese government because of political and ideological affinities, and the Soares family because of the close ties they had at the time with Savimbi. If in 1974 Portugal could have been blamed for partiality towards the MPLA, less than 20 years later the wheel had turned and UNITA seemed to be now the preferred choice. One way or the other it seems Portugal insisted on the pattern of questionable neutrality. Most analysts, stressing the historical ties with Angola, will argue that the reverse was true: that Portugal's position was favourable to the government. However, Portugal was now more concerned with its role in Europe than in Africa. Also, in spite of the socialist ideology there were apparently business ties between the Soares family and Jonas Savimbi. The then Portuguese centre-right prime minister provided only half-hearted support for the MPLA.³⁵

For the warring parties the situation was different too: in military terms and just as in 1975, the conflict had reached an impasse but, different from 1975, the two armies were now two efficient war machines. Politically, however, the world was now different. In 1975 UNITA had had everything to gain from a political solution, which would have given legitimacy to a relatively young movement still struggling for international support. Now, in 1991, after years of support by powerful international allies, UNITA had enough political clout to stall and to adhere, or not, to the agreement. Although UNITA

now could not count on US military support (due to the triple zero clause), the US started diplomatic relations with the government of Angola only in 1993, after the war had resumed.

Furthermore, the Bicesse peace agreement seems to have underestimated the difficulties the transition entailed. There was great mistrust between the contenders; some joint commissions that should have been led by the UN were entrusted alternatively to the MPLA and UNITA; UNAVEM 2 was understaffed and underfunded. And, while the international community turned a blind eye, one of the parties was obviously neither demobilising nor disarming. The new Angolan army—the FAA—was empowered two days before election day.

According to one testimony, the formation of the FAA began following the implementation of the cease-fire negotiated in Bicesse. Once implemented, the accords foresaw that the UNITA forces would take up their quarters in their previously established areas while FAPLA would remain in its own barracks after withdrawing from the line of battle. The basic formation of the FAA would be completed before the elections, and recruitment, on a voluntary basis, would be done from both FAPLA and FALA units. The surpluses from FAPLA and FALA would remain in their barracks under the control of UNAVEM 2, awaiting demobilisation and reintegration into society at a later stage. The FAA would have no political affiliation, its neutrality being secured by the parties acting in the political and military joint commission (CCPM) and the committee for the formation of the FAA.

Following the sequence of the wars in Angola, one may conclude that, although Bicesse created a platform for an initial understanding between UNITA and the MPLA, the causes of the war had not been taken into consideration sufficiently to achieve a final peace. The Bicesse process required the full commitment and trust of both parties, especially since the responsibility for its implementation was largely given to them (even though the UN and the Troika of Portugal, the US and Russia had been given a monitoring function). Mistrust, however, continued to characterise the relations between the belligerents. Suspicious of a surprise government attack, UNITA kept its reserve forces instead of transferring them to barracks and demobilising. For its part, the MPLA government did not want to demobilise FAPLA—in fact, expecting the end of the war, many FAPLA soldiers had deserted and reportedly committed acts of vandalism.

The elections should have been the crucial element for the consolidation of peace. Instead, they exacerbated the climate of tension

as the instruments foreseen in the Bicesse accords as fundamental elements of stability had not been implemented. These instruments, particularly the formation of unified armed forces and an integrated police, were only in their embryonic stages. Moreover, when the elections took place and the results were published, the two armies that had fought for so many years were still almost intact.

Both parties were convinced that they would win the election. When published, the results were a total disillusionment for UNITA, which rejected them, placed its units in a state of readiness and transferred part of its leadership to Huambo. The conflict re-started during attempts at finding a framework to prevent the collapse of the process. In a very short time, war had spread to the provinces, and because UNITA was in a better position at the start of the conflict, it managed to take control of two-thirds of the country, with only a few provincial capitals remaining outside of its control.

Because at the time of demobilisation the government could not hide troops, many were transferred to the police in order to give the government a reserve force. It was then that the ninjas³⁶ were formed and they were practically partisan troops. Some demobilised soldiers from FAPLA had accepted to join the police under the promise they would undergo special training, but the war resumed and there was massive desertion from the police. There were others, however, who asked to be reintegrated into the new FAA. When the war started, many of the demobilised UNITA soldiers rejoined UNITA. At the time, the FAA had only integrated 4,000 UNITA men—mainly at the administrative level. There were hardly any men from the operative level of UNITA; the operatives never joined the FAA and they went back to war.³⁷

The inability of the recently formed FAA to oppose UNITA's advance and the intensity of the war during this period led the government to abandon the triple zero clause of the Bicesse accords, which prevented the parties as well as the Troika of mediators from procuring or supplying weapons for either side. The government resorted to article 50, which required it to defend the territorial integrity of the country. UNITA, for its part, had already abandoned the clause and had found sources of logistical support.

It is interesting to note that the mediators to the Bicesse accord waived the triple zero clause almost at the time the UN issued its first sanctions against UNITA.

THE 1994 LUSAKA PROTOCOL

In an attempt to put the derailed process back on track, various meetings took place initially with the support of the Troika and then with the mediation of the UN. These contacts resulted in what is known as the Lusaka Protocol, signed in the Zambian capital in 1994. However, the parties kept tight control of their respective areas.

The period between the signing and implementation of the protocol could be characterised as one of 'no peace, no war'. The UN had authorised the deployment of UNAVEM 3, now a more robust peacekeeping, monitoring and verification mission. Yet, Savimbi's strong suspicions that the elections had been rigged by the government and the fact (later confirmed) that he did not entirely agree with the final terms of the protocol, led UNITA to reorganise and rearm its reserve forces (outside the control of UNAVEM 3), while at the same time implementing some of the provisions of the protocol. For example, some of Savimbi's actions towards the implementation of the protocol included ordering UNITA soldiers to their quarters, sending generals to Luanda to take positions in the FAA, and appointing both ministers to serve in the Government of Unity and National Reconciliation (GURN) and deputies to serve in the National Assembly.

The government realised that in order to defend itself adequately it would have to reorganise the FAA. As previously noted, however, the FAA already included UNITA cadres in its ranks. These remained loyal to the FAA in spite of the renewed hostilities, and played a fundamental role during the post-Lusaka period and in particular during the last phase of the war, from 1998 to 2002. In the immediate post-election period, the FAA remained largely an embryonic structure. The restart of the war in 1992 forced the government to transfer the remaining FAPLA soldiers and officers to the FAA and to form FAA operational units. In fact, it was the rearming and reorganisation of the FAA during the Lusaka period that helped to explain the total defeat of UNITA after the war had resumed across the entire country in 1998 and 1999.

During the post-Lusaka period, UNITA gradually strengthened its conventional capability, largely without support from third parties. The movement found itself without allies and lived under the pressure of UN sanctions. Angola's natural resources now became critical for the sustainability of the movement. UNITA's control of vast areas of the country, rich in mineral resources and especially diamonds, allowed it to finance the war effort. In addition, by controlling territory, it controlled local populations, airports and other infrastructure that helped it

maintain the effort for several years. The embargo notwithstanding, its ability to procure weapons and ammunition in the international arms market, and particularly from former Eastern bloc countries, was also an important factor at this time.

THE LAST PHASE OF THE WAR, 1998–2002

When the war resumed in 1998, a strengthened and reorganised FAA gradually and systematically took control of the centre of the country, capturing or destroying UNITA's conventional arms and reoccupying areas under UNITA control. Within the context of the international sanctions regime, it became more and more difficult for UNITA to replace lost weaponry. In addition, as the FAA advanced throughout the country, many UNITA troops were brought into the FAA fold.

This last phase of the war was a logical consequence of the events following the 1991 elections and the culmination of several years of non-compliance with the Lusaka Protocol. The government had lost its patience. Although various contingents of troops had been confined to their barracks, the protocol was not implemented in its entirety, and the demobilisation, disarmament and re-integration requirements had largely failed.

When Savimbi died in February 2002 UNITA's capacity to resist was already doubtful. UNITA had already lost much of its material and human resources. Moreover, the strategic elements that had given the advantage to UNITA had been lost to the FAA, including territory, material resources, troops and officers who had surrendered and who were now serving in the FAA, a scattered leadership and, finally, faulty communications. Savimbi was by then faced with three options: to accept the unconditional implementation of the remainder of the Lusaka Protocol; to go into exile; or to face death on the battle field.

With the death of Savimbi and facing total collapse, UNITA had no choice but to negotiate. The Luena Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), negotiated by the military leaderships of both sides, was signed shortly after Savimbi's death. In this MoU, UNITA was presented with an olive branch: although it was finished militarily, the party still existed and it should assume the responsibilities entrusted to it in terms of the unfinished implementation of the Lusaka Protocol.

Angola is now facing the problem of reintegrating both the ex-combatants and the demobilised forces (FAPLA and FALA) in accordance with the Alvor, Bicesse and Lusaka processes. While

demobilisation has been completed, even if imperfectly, reintegration will remain an on-going process for some time, and will depend on the political will of the Angolan authorities and, partly, on the support of the international community.

THE ANGOLAN ARMED FORCES TODAY

Two-and-a-half years of peace are not sufficient for a clear appreciation of the FAA's peacetime organisation, doctrine and size. Although subject to some minor alterations, the FAA largely retains the structure it had during the conflict, although a more defensive approach is being advocated and practised. Moreover, following a directive from the commander-in-chief, a profound restructuring of the FAA is now being studied and planned. The present institutional and legal framework is therefore based in the Bicesse and Lusaka accords, which contain the general principles for its formation. The Constitutional Law and the Law of National Defence are additional legal documents in this regard.

Today, the FAA can be considered a factor of national unity. This is because it includes soldiers of different political and social origins and from all Angola's ethno-linguistic groups and all parts of the country. As will be discussed below, the FAA's strategic positioning will depend on the country's positioning within sub-regional, African and international organisations.

CONSTITUTIONAL, LEGAL AND POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

At present and within the legal framework of the country, the FAA is entrenched in the constitution as a permanent, regular and non-partisan state institution, under the authority of the political power and obeying the organs of sovereignty. It is required to:

- defend Angola militarily in terms of national defence policy; and
- guarantee the independence of Angola's people against any aggression or external threat in terms of the constitution and international law.

Compulsory conscription is required by the constitution. Consequently, and from a legal point of view, the FAA is regarded by the constitution as an institution of the state. It is a permanent and regular force subject to political control and obeying the organs of sovereignty.

The political subordination of the FAA is naturally one of the more important principles of the constitution and the Law of National Defence. Although the FAA is subject to political control, there are essential elements that independently characterise it. These include its functioning, cohesion, discipline and mission. A wide internal autonomy is accorded to the FAA, including the management of its leadership. The head of state, the National Assembly, the government, the prime minister and the minister of defence share political responsibility for the FAA, while the commander-in-chief and the chiefs of staff hold the technical and military responsibility.

NATIONAL DEFENCE POLICY AND COMPOSITION

The army, navy and air force are the main branches of the FAA. The numerical composition of the FAA is difficult to assess. This is largely a consequence of the turbulent way it developed. While the size and composition of the FAA are still being quantified, it is estimated that its final total establishment will be a maximum of 140,000 men, including active and reserve forces. The size of the FAA is at present inflated, with the result that it constitutes a considerable burden on the state budget, with many arguing that other sectors are underfunded as a result. One argument runs that “if there are no guarantees that a reduced defence budget will automatically result in an increase of welfare expenses for the people, an excessive military capacity may create instability and promote uncertainty and fear and even military conflict”.

When contrasted with the requirement that Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries should allocate some 1.5% of gross domestic product (GDP) for defence and should consider programmes for freezing military expenses for several years, the cost of the FAA to the Angolan state is well out of line. According to SADC data, Angola spent between 19% and 23% of its GDP on defence between 1994 and 1999, except in 1998, when the figure was 11.4%. While it is undeniable that armed forces should be given enough means to guarantee their sustainability and organisation and the fulfilment of their mission, this should not in peacetime come at the expense of other critical sectors of the economy and society.

In terms of national defence policy, the priorities defined by the various legal instruments are to:

- maintain the FAA as the country’s only defence force;

- maintain and retain a conventional capacity to face external attacks;
- maintain the capacity for non-conventional or anti-subversive war;
- face internal threats and others that may arise;
- maintain the capacity to safeguard the inviolability and the security of Angola's borders;
- maintain an intelligence capability in order to uncover latent threats and, if possible, to neutralise them;
- to acquire the capacity to safeguard the country's territorial waters and exclusive economic zone (EEZ); and
- have the capacity to intervene in peace missions at the request of international organisations such as the UN, the African Union (AU), SADC and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS).

The above forms the strategic vision of the FAA. In today's troubled world, a country without armed forces is not respected. In addition, a country with substantial natural resources is envied and may become a looting ground if it does not have armed forces capable of protecting it.

STRATEGIC POSITIONING

The strategic importance and positioning of the FAA should be seen from a variety of perspectives, and an in-depth evaluation of its capacity for its roles, in different theatres of operations and with different partners, needs to be undertaken. Such an evaluation should be guided by the following questions.

- What is the FAA's capacity as a conventional force? Should it adopt a defensive or offensive role in the defence and protection of the national territory including the EEZ?
- What is the FAA's capacity as a non-conventional force in counter-subversion activities? What is its capacity in special operations either outside or inside the country?

- What is the FAA's capacity to act in combined operations of the three branches—the army, the air force and the navy?
- What is the FAA's capacity to operate in a theatre of operations close to its borders? Or in a battlefield situated far away?
- What is the FAA's capacity and means to transport personnel and equipment for near and distant theatres of operations?
- What is the FAA's capacity to be involved in missions or conflicts over short-, medium- and long-term periods?
- What is the FAA's capacity to act in combined operations with foreign forces?
- What is the FAA's capacity as a peacekeeping or peace-enforcement force?

The answers to these questions will serve to determine the real strategic importance of the FAA in the Southern and Central African sub-regions. A brief discussion of each of the topics follows.

From a military point of view, no country in the SADC and ECCAS sub-regions, with the exception of South Africa, has, or in the short- and medium-term will have, the capacity to match the FAA. It should be noted that apart from its size, aspects such as the FAA's organisation, discipline and combat experience make the Angolan force far superior to most other armed forces in the region. Although having a certain financial and military capacity and the support of one or more powers (namely the US, France and possibly South Africa), countries such as Uganda and Rwanda do not represent a real threat—both because of their distance from Angola's borders and because of their experience of FAA capabilities, making it unlikely that they would want to experience a new military confrontation or a repeat of the Kitona and Inga episodes.

The FAA's capacity as a conventional offensive force was largely demonstrated in Angola throughout the civil war as well as abroad with interventions in Congo-Brazzaville and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The FAA's defensive capacity was well demonstrated during the years of war against apartheid South Africa in the south of the country, and more specifically in the Cunene, as well as in the defence

of cities and positions subject to the attacks of UNITA forces, as was the defence of Huambo city and Kuito city. The assumption must therefore be that the FAA is capable of defending Angola's territorial integrity.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said regarding the protection of the EEZ, as the Angolan navy lacks sufficient resources. Without adequate vessels—ocean patrol boats, corvettes or frigates—and maritime reconnaissance and patrol planes, it is impossible to fulfil this essential task. An important part of the country's wealth lies in the maritime zone—fisheries, oil and other minerals, substantial portions of which have not yet been surveyed. The spreading of patrolling responsibilities by different entities—oil companies, the Ministry of Fisheries, the maritime police, the navy and possibly others—lacks consistency and efficiency, makes a rapid and adequate response to threats more difficult, and represents costly duplication and overlap.

Combatting subversion is undoubtedly the FAA's strong point, and where it has the most experience and feels most at ease, especially after the integration of thousands of UNITA elements in the final years of the civil war. The hard apprenticeship of more than 20 years of war against a courageous and disciplined enemy, well equipped, with important international support, knowledge of the terrain and with a strong leadership, an efficient chain of command and served by an efficient communications network, gave FAPLA and later on the FAA the endurance and experience that allowed the Angolan government to successfully prevent Savimbi's quest for power through undemocratic means. This apprenticeship was enriched with the experience gathered from the Portuguese—the cross-line concept and the training and utilisation of commandos—which was very useful although not entirely applied.

We should emphasise that although there are no written guidelines for the FAA, its practical experience is a guarantee of its effectiveness. The experience of special operations, although important, was never taken very seriously despite the enormous experience of the UNITA soldiers. Why not retrain them for possible use in this type of operation?

Combined operations involving the army and the air force have for some time been undertaken by the FAA. However, the same cannot be said regarding combined operations involving the navy and either the army or the air force. During the civil war, due to the strength of the land component, the navy was neglected to the point where it was never equipped with appropriate ships and landing craft. Besides sporadic transport and logistical support for the forces, either by sea or river, the

few experiences in the field of naval operations combined with land forces involved the marines. In addition, there was the experience of 1978 and 1979 with small landing barges in the Kuando Kubango—for the crossing of the Kuito and Kubango rivers.

Angola has a 1600 km coastline, not taking into account the navigable part of the Zaire river for large ships and the other rivers in the interior for small vessels. Besides this, the EEZ is vast, comprising approximately 320,000 km², hence the need for the navy to be equipped with sufficient naval means capable of combined naval, air force and army operations.

The capacity to participate in joint operations with foreign armed forces requires wide co-operation in the fields of information sharing, military equipment standardisation (especially ammunition and communications equipment) and procedures. In addition, a great effort must be devoted for the training of the command structure, including the chiefs of staff. Angola's experience of multinational exercises with forces from the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP), namely the Felino exercises, has been a good start, but it is important not to forget that these exercises involved a language common to all the participants.

Regarding co-operation with other armed forces in the two sub-regions, efforts will have to be strengthened and training made more intense. This applies to all missions in which Angolan units participate as part of multinational forces or simply co-operate in the same theatre of operations.

We cannot at present conceive of situations where the FAA will have to act outside Angola without the request or direct or indirect approval of organisations of which Angola is a member—the UN, the AU, SADC or ECCAS. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the experience of the FAA as regards peacekeeping and peace-support operations is very limited since it has never really been engaged in such missions—the São Tomé e Príncipe episode and the second intervention in the DRC should not really be considered as peacekeeping missions.

CONCLUSION

Although the history of the FAA remains largely unexamined, many of the protagonists of that history are still either on active duty or have recently retired from the military. It is critical therefore that an exhaustive research programme be developed so that a comprehensive understanding of that history can be set down. It is not only that several

generations of Angolans admire the FAA's strength, determination and deeds. Understanding the recent past is fundamental for a rational, adequate and sustainable transformation of the army, air force and navy branches of the FAA.

As we wrote at the beginning of this chapter, the FAA has now to transform itself into a peacetime structure, changing the character of its mission, organisation, training, preparation and ways of thinking and operating. This is currently the biggest challenge facing the FAA. The success of this transformation will undoubtedly be of critical importance for the country as well as for its troubled neighbourhood.

NOTES

- 1 This chapter is based on personal experiences and perspectives of former Angolan soldiers and officers during the different phases of the Angolan war, as told personally to the authors. It reflects testimonies rather than scholarly research; it focuses on events as experienced and interpreted by those living them on the ground and as described by them, even if at times they may seem to eschew accepted orthodoxy. The verbal and written descriptions of events represent a unique contribution to the history of the Angolan Armed Forces, an issue worthy of further research. The text voices the perceptions of former combatants, complemented with desktop research by the authors.
- 2 FA Guimarães, *The origins of the Angolan civil war—foreign intervention and domestic political conflict*, Macmillan, London, 1998.
- 3 *Assimilados* were mixed race Angolans and the local elite.
- 4 <http://workmall.com/wfb2001/angola/angola_history_index.html>
- 5 Guimarães (op cit) mentions in his book that it was an American senator who explained to Holden Roberto the advantages of turning an ethnic movement into one with national dimensions.
- 6 Guimarães (op cit) states that the FNLA's links to China were no more than a move by Mobutu to put pressure on the West.
- 7 JN Editorial, Angola 20 anos depois, <<http://jn2.sapo.pt/secdiv/especial/angola4.htm>>.
- 8 In 1972 the FNLA and MPLA signed an agreement to establish the Supreme Council for the Liberation of Angola aimed at the unifying the struggle of both movements. This agreement, however, never came to anything.
- 9 JN Editorial, op cit.
- 10 The FNLA and UNITA also had Portuguese supporters: the FNLA was supported by the Spínola faction in Portugal and UNITA was able to harness support from Europeans in colonial society. But none of the movements was strong enough to exclude the other two, and the Portuguese faction supporting the MPLA was in power at the time.
- 11 JN Editorial, op cit.
- 12 Ibid.

- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 <http://workmall.com/wfb2001/angola/angola_history_index.html>
- 16 Guimarães, op cit.
- 17 D Birmingham, Angola, in *A history of postcolonial Lusophone Africa*, C Hurst & Co Ltd, United Kingdom, 2002. The total amount provided by Birmingham is US\$30 million; however, other sources place this total at around US\$60 million. See Guimarães, op cit.
- 18 Guimarães, op cit.
- 19 See works from Guimarães, Newitt, Chabal, Birmingham, Kapuscinski among others.
- 20 Birmingham, op cit.
- 21 Guimarães, op cit
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Birmingham, op cit.
- 30 <http://workmall.com/wfb2001/angola/angola_history_index.html>. South Africa also supplied arms, fuel and food to UNITA.
- 31 Birmingham, op cit.
- 32 <http://www.photius.com/wfb2001/angola/angola_military.html>
- 33 Birmingham, op cit.
- 34 <www.photius.com/countries/angola/national_security/angola_national_security_military_organizatio~13_9.html>
- 35 In 1989 the son of the Portuguese president was on board of a plane that crashed when taking off from Jamba, UNITA's headquarters. Recently, Angolan authorities have accused the Soares family of "being the main beneficiaries of the traffic in diamonds and ivory carried out by Angolan rebel leader Jonas Savimbi" <www.africaintelligence.fr/AMF/archives/default_archives.asp?num=20&yea>.
- 36 Paramilitary police force, today rapid intervention police.
- 37 Series of interviews from 20 April to 4 May 2004.



Source: www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/index.html