

## CASE STUDY: Angola

**Key question: How were independence and peace realised in Angola?**

The Angolan War of Independence (1961–1974) began as an uprising against forced cotton cultivation, and became a multi-faction struggle for the control of Portugal's Overseas Province of Angola, mainly among three nationalist movements:

- The MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola), founded in 1956, led by Agostinho Neto.
- The FNLA (National Front for the Liberation of Angola), founded by Holden Roberto in 1961.
- UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola), founded by Jonas Savimbi in 1966.

The war ended when a leftist military coup in Lisbon in April 1974 overthrew Portugal's Estado Novo regime, and the new regime immediately stopped all military action in the African colonies, declaring its intention to grant them independence without delay.

In Angola, the war came formally to an end in January 1975 when the Portuguese government, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), and the National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA) signed the Alvor Agreement.

The Angolan Civil War was a major civil conflict in the African state of Angola, beginning in 1975 and continuing, with some interludes, until 2002. The war began immediately after Angola became independent from Portugal in November 1975. The Civil War was primarily a struggle for power between two former liberation movements, the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). At the same time, it served as a proxy battleground for the Cold War, due to heavy intervention by major opposing powers such as the Soviet Union and the United States.

### Colonialism and independence in Angola

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Portuguese colonial rule was established in Angola in 16th century. Trading posts were established along the coast.

- In 1885 colonial boundaries were recognised by the Treaty of Berlin.
  - Portugal began to invest in mining, agriculture and infrastructure development in Angola.

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## Case study 2

- In 1951 Angola became an overseas province on Portugal.
- The Africans were called assimilados and they adopted the Portuguese language and culture.
- A hybrid society arose: mesticos in coastal towns, Creole families, Portuguese-speaking blacks on the coast and inland and peasants who spoke indigenous languages.
- → These divisions as well as tribalism influenced the faction group formation later on.

### Independence in Angola

When calls for independence were rejected in 1960, a struggle against Portuguese colonial occupation began.

#### STAGE 1:

In 1961 Angolan peasants rebelled and boycotted cotton production demanding better working conditions and higher wages. They also attacked Portuguese traders.

- Holden Roberto's UPA launched an incursion from his base in the Congo which led to attacks on trading centres and government installations and many deaths.
- The Portuguese Armed Forces retaliated and as a result the rebels formed a guerrilla force and continued their struggle with different strategies.

### How was Africa drawn into the Cold War?

USA was concerned that decolonisation in Africa:

- provided an opportunity for the extension of communism to Africa → worried that:
  - this could lead to a shift in the balance of power in the world
  - result in the loss of access to raw materials, minerals, trade routes and markets.

→ USA used aid packages, technical assistance and even military intervention to encourage newly formed states to become aligned to capitalism and democracy and not to socialism or communism.

- USSR used similar tactics to encourage these states to align themselves with the Eastern bloc:
  - promoted communism as an alternative to imperialist capitalism
  - provided aid packages, technical assistance and military assistance.

Thus, superpowers asserted their influence in Africa to establish and protect their spheres of influence as they did in other parts of the world:

= became involved in proxy wars (usually civil wars) and assisted opponents in gaining the upper hand.

+ provided aid → increased the dependency of African states on superpowers.

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**STAGE 2:**

The main factions became embroiled in a bitter civil war based largely on ethnic loyalties and ideological differences.

- The MFA coup in Portugal and the ensuing Carnation Revolution of 25 April 1974 ended the colonial conflict and brought independence to Mozambique and Angola.

**STAGE 3:**

The new Portuguese leftist government announced that it intended to grant Angola (and other colonies) its independence.

- Negotiations with the factions were complex due to ethnic and ideological differences.
- BUT, on 15 January 1975 leaders of the three main liberation movements and the Portuguese government signed the Alvor Accord.
  - It recommended a transitional government headed by the Portuguese High Commissioner, the integration of liberation forces, national elections would be held and the date for independence was set for 11 November 1975.
- The coalition government collapsed and fighting resumed between the MPLA and FNLA to control Luanda.
  - The MPLA, backed by the USSR
    - forced the FNLA and UNITA out of Luanda.
  - SA launched an incursion into southern Angola
    - captured most of the region and handed it back to UNITA.
  - The FNLA, backed by troops from SA and Zaire:
    - launched an attack on Luanda to recapture it from the MPLA and prevent the latter from setting up a government there.
  - The MPLA, backed by Cuba
    - repulsed the FNLA and dealt it a heavy blow.

### Competing spheres of influence in Angola: trade, conflict and aid

Angola became an ideological battleground in Cold War politics:

- Both superpowers tried to gain the upper hand to ensure control of trade and to establish spheres of influence. This was because of Angola's:
  - strategic position on west coast of Africa
  - well-established infrastructure and agricultural sector (timber, ivory, cotton, coffee and cocoa)
  - minerals (iron, diamonds) and oil.
- Led to conflict around ideological differences as the main political groupings in Angola aligned themselves with the USSR and USA respectively.

**STAGE 4:**

Admiral Cardoso, last High Commissioner of Angola, abandoned the country without officially handing over authority to any faction leader.

- Agostinho Neto, MPLA leader, declared the People's Republic of Angola on 11 November 1975 in accordance with the Alvor Accords.
- UNITA and the FNLA set up a rival government inland and enlisted the support of the SA government to oust Neto.
- The civil war intensified and continued for the next 27 years.

## Why did the civil war break out in Angola in 1974?

The key reasons were:

- Ideological differences among the warring factions prevented a common purpose.
- Deep ethnic and regional differences prevented unification.
- Each leader was ambitious for power and control.
  - Worsened by foreign intervention during the Cold War era:
    - these interventions exploited the mistrust and division even further thus delaying a settlement.

The USSR and Cuba provided support for the MPLA.

The US sent funds to Savimbi and encouraged SA to back UNITA.

## What was the role of the MPLA and UNITA in the civil war?

### MPLA

Formed as a multi-ethnic political party on 10 December 1956. Its support was largely whites, mesticos and the Ambundu ethnic community in the area around Luanda.

- Initially adopted peaceful methods to achieve change but resorted to an armed struggle in 1961.
- With the aid of the USSR and Cuba it maintained control of the central regions of Angola including the rich oil fields off the coast.
- In 1977 it adopted Marxist-Leninism as party ideology and promoted a one-party state.
  - It became extremist and many ideological opponents were killed, e.g. 70 000 killed in 1977 when an attempted coup nearly ousted Neto.
- In 1990 when the Cold War ended, the MPLA adopted social democracy. BUT
  - After the 1992 elections, facilitated by the Bicesse Accord of 1991, thousands of UNITA and FNLA sympathisers were killed in reprisal attacks.
  - With the aid of Cuba and the USSR, the MPLA kept democracy out of Angola by destroying all opposition.

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### Why and how was China involved?

- China gave arms and sent instructors to Zaire in June 1974 to assist the FNLA.
  - = strange move as the FNLA was anti-communist
    - BUT
- China wanted to counter both US and USSR imperialism.
  - The FNLA moved their base to northern Angola (also received aid from the Romanian dictator Nikolai Ceausescu (pro-Peking).

### How was SA involved?

- SA, with US backing, wanted to stop the spread of communism to SWA and to destroy SWAPO bases in southern Angola.
- Also wanted to protect its investment in the Cunene River project, which provided hydro-electricity to the northern regions of SWA.
  - South Africa supported a black, nationalist movement (UNITA) against communism.

In 1988 SA started her withdrawal after the signing of the New York Accords.

- = These were instrumental in granting independence to SWA (Namibia) and insisting on the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola.

### Impact of the Angolan war on regional stability

This war generated severe regional instability that had repercussions in other parts of the world.

Impact on Zaire (Congo)	Impact on Namibia
<p>Zaire was a partner of the USA during the Cold War and allowed the pro-capitalist FNLA to operate from bases on its territory:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● made it vulnerable to counterattacks from the Portuguese armed forces and later, MPLA troops.</li> <li>● the First Congo War broke out because Mobutu supported UNITA.</li> </ul>	<p>Namibia experienced destabilisation as SA troops launched attacks against SWAPO guerrilla forces to prevent the establishment of a Marxist state in Namibia:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● SA supported UNITA and launched attacks from its bases in northern Namibia.</li> <li>● UNITA carried out cross-border raids and incursions for supplies leading to further instability.</li> <li>● Many Angolan refugees fled to Namibia during the civil war.</li> </ul>



## UNITA

Formed by Jonas Savimbi on 13 March 1966. Supported by the Ovimbundu group.

- It gained stature as a black-nationalist movement but also gained support from the SA government as it was fighting an ideological enemy
- = MPLA and indirectly Cuba and the USSR.
  - The US supported UNITA to withstand Marxist expansion and to maintain access to Angola's mineral wealth.
- After the 1992 elections, Savimbi refused to accept the result and returned to the bush to resume war.
  - UNITA aimed to keep rival ideologies out of Angola and undermined the MPLA consistently.
    - Savimbi was killed on 22 February 2002.

## Outside involvement in the Angolan civil war

### Why and how was the USSR involved?

- To counter capitalism and democracy in the region.
  - It was a natural result of Cold War politics, i.e. brinkmanship, posturing and extending spheres of influence.
  - It attempted to entrench communism in the region.
  - It provided material and military aid, e.g. in 1990 it amounted to US\$430 million.

### Why and how was the USA involved?

- To prevent Angola from adopting Communism and to avoid the ideology spreading in central and southern Africa.
  - had economic interests in the region, e.g. Angola supplies 7% of US oil imports.
- Initially the USA assisted the FNLA and UNITA.
  - CIA funding assisted the FNLA and later weapons were sent to them.
  - In 1976 involvement was limited by the Clark Amendment, as the USA did not want another Vietnam War situation to develop.
  - This amendment was repealed in 1985: covert funding to UNITA was resumed.

### Why and how was Cuba involved?

- Cuban involvement was directed against the involvement of capitalist support of movements in Angola. It shared the same ideology as the MPLA and wanted to assist it in its revolutionary struggle for independence.
  - It provided military training and assistance to the MPLA in 1966.
    - It deployed thousands of troops to assist the MPLA which gave the movement the edge in the conflict.
    - → They began winning back the south from UNITA forces backed by SA troops.
    - The final battle was won at Cuito Cuanavale in 1987 and 1988.

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## What was the significance of Cuito Cuanavale?

Both contesting parties claim victory but SA's view was that a crushing defeat was inflicted on FAPLA.

- Cuba and the USSR realised that FAPLA could not stand against SA's conventional troops on their own and there was a chance that the MPLA government would fall.
  - They narrowed down their options to reinforcement (escalation) or to allow negotiations to bring about a settlement.
    - Castro did not want to employ more troops.
    - Gorbachev, faced with turmoil and financial problems in the USSR, supported a negotiated settlement in Angola.
  - The military emphasis now shifted to a diplomatic one = negotiated peace:
    - paved the way for elections in Namibia and opened talks for a solution in Angola.

Without Cuban and Soviet support, the MPLA had to negotiate with UNITA.

- In May 1991 the Bicesse Accords called for a ceasefire and elections in 1992.
  - Savimbi rejected the outcome of the elections and resumed the war.
  - In 1994 the Lusaka Protocol tried to broker a peace deal.
- Peace was eventually achieved by the Luena Memorandum of Understanding signed on 4 April 2002.

## Changing nature of international relationships after 1989

Economic collapse and the end of communism in the USSR led to the MPLA adapting its economic policies. It began to seek assistance from the West.

- Cuban troops began to withdraw in 1989 under the supervision of UNAVEM 1.
- 1989 Mobutu Sese Seko brokered a peace deal between the MPLA and UNITA which is called the Gbadolite Accords (signed on 22 June).
- The peace did not last but the collapse of the USSR strengthened the MPLA's pledge to work for peace.
- In mid-1990 the MPLA decided to abandon Marxism-Leninism and a system of a one-party state. This was formalised in Dec 1990.
- Civil society organisations and private media institutions re-emerged in Angola.
- The civil war came to an end also due to the withdrawal of foreign troops.
- Peace was achieved after the signing of the Luena Memorandum in April 2002.

