

Angola: Still waiting for peace

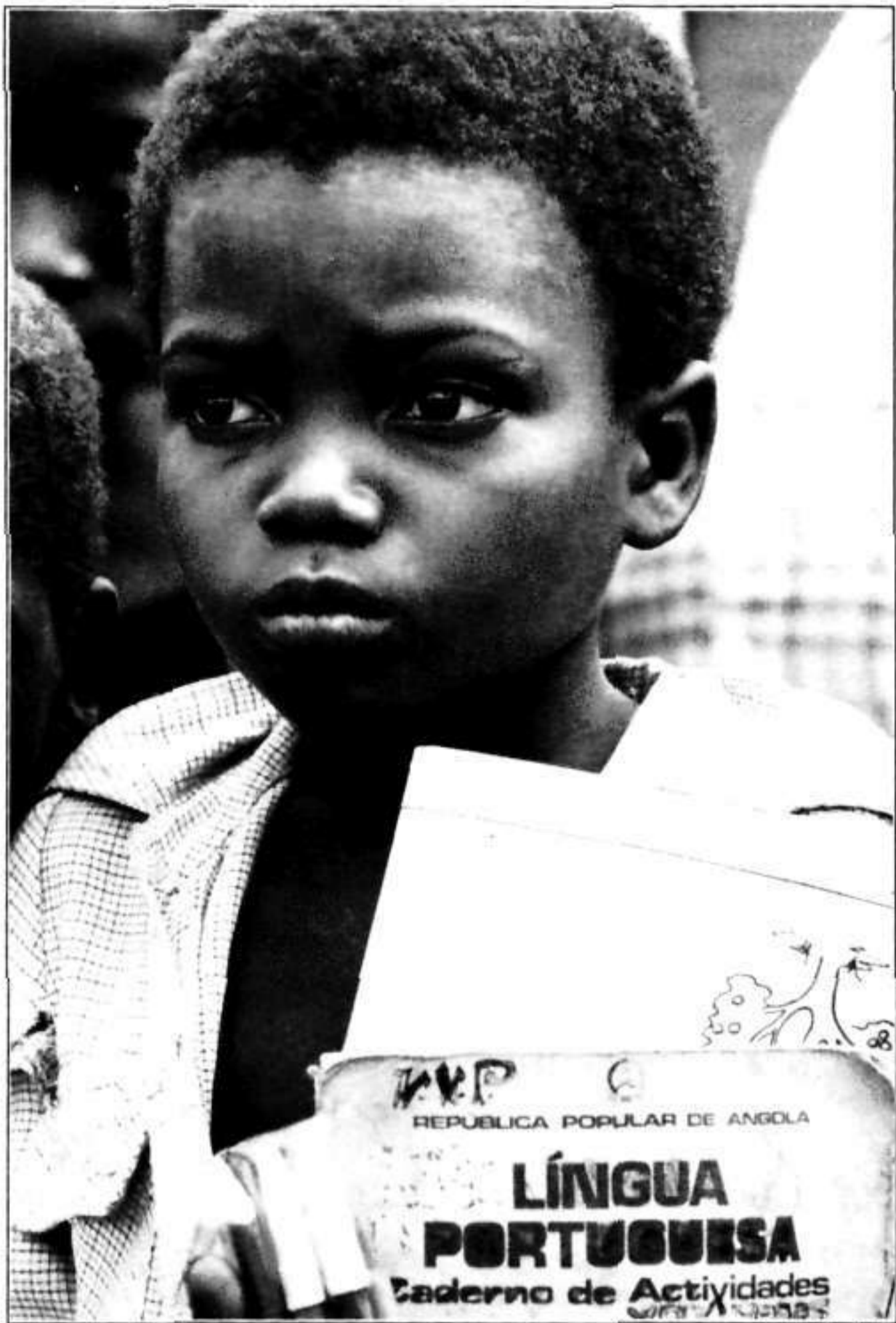
Four months ago Zaire's President Mobutu Sese Seko announced an agreement which he said would bring peace to war-torn Angola. Today, the fighting continues. **DAVID COETZEE** of SouthScan Features examines why.

It was too much to hope that the Gbadolite agreement between the frontline states and the Angolan rebel group Unita - mediated by Zaire - would hold.

Its terms might have spelt the end of United States ambitions for Unita. And for Washington to give up its game plan so easily - here or in any other region of the world - is too much to ask.

But since that 'historic handshake' in June between Angola's President Jose Eduardo dos Santos and Unita leader Jonas Savimbi, a lot of diplomatic traffic has passed through African and world capitals, and a new regional array of forces is beginning to take shape, all of which are making the continuation of the Angolan war problematic.

All the parties to the Gbadolite deal of June 22 - except it seems Savimbi - believed it included the temporary retirement of Savimbi from the scene.



The Star

Unita, in particular its armed forces, would be integrated into the structures of Angola's ruling MPLA.

There were even unsubstantiated reports from the Angolan capital, Luanda, that key provinces such as Huambo, for a short time Unita's seat of power during the mid-70s, would be handed to Unita ministers for control.

In response, the Angolan defence force, Fapla, dropped its guard.

And, when the ceasefire failed to happen, with more outbreaks of fighting in different parts of the country, Luanda and its supporters were at first gracious.

Unita, they suggested, had not yet

succeeded in getting the peace message to its units which were spread widely throughout the country. Then there was speculation that there were differences in the fighting forces, with some willing to come over to the leadership's position, but others fighting on.

Finally, it dawned that Savimbi had no intention of going along with the deal. In a letter in mid-September to his key Lisbon supporters, he said that President Sese Seko 'was deceptive in that he promised things to the MPLA that he didn't say to us'.

The official Angolan line now is that Savimbi backed off under US and

South African pressure - both had looked with dismay at what their favoured notion of an 'African solution' had actually produced.

Fighting continues in Angola today as Fapla makes up the headway it lost after the deal was struck. More summits of the eight regional heads of state are in preparation - the next in Libreville, Gabon - to try to revive the peace process.

A sub-theme is also being played out: Savimbi is seeking to use the influence of Ivory Coast's rightwing President Felix Houphouet-Boigny to counter that of Mobutu, the mediator who - for his own reasons - failed him.

It is believed in the Ivory Coast capital, Abidjan, that Houphouet had earlier advised Savimbi to break off the Gbadolite agreement. Houphouet apparently felt particularly strongly that Savimbi should not accept try exile.

Houphouet is playing by his own rules; he is keen to displace Mobutu because he wants to be remembered as the statesman who delivered Angola. Late in October, he hosted a mini-summit of the presidents of Zambia, Gabon and Sao Tome. But President Bongo of Gabon made it clear that they had not gathered to prepare a Gbadolite II but to discuss differences between Houphouet and Mobutu.

Houphouet also took the opportunity to announce the visit of another key player, South Africa's President FW de Klerk, to Ivory Coast in December. Houphouet has long sought to have his generally cold-shouldered policy of dialogue with Pretoria accepted in Africa, and the Angolan issue seems an excellent means to do it.

In September, Savimbi again enunciated his set of goals, unchanged by Gbadolite. In a private letter to key supporters in Portugal he said: 'Everything must start with the formation of a transitional government of national unity which will end with elections'. He ruled out any possibility of going into exile or of his forces being integrated with Fapla.

But he indicated that the new battles for power in Angola were likely to be more diplomatic than military and that



Talking peace : Savimbi (top),
Mobutu and Dos Santos

his own forces had not yet fully understood this. Washington's support has stayed constant, but he noted a favourable change in Lisbon's attitude to his organisation - as evidenced by the visit to a Unita congress later in September of a delegation from the Portuguese ruling party together with the son of President Mario Soares.

President Soares met him face to face in France a month later - ostensibly to receive news of his son who was injured in a plane crash at Jamba.

More significant than the Ivorian regional diversion is the battle in Washington to keep Savimbi in the show.

In September, both Savimbi and Mobutu were brought to Washington to iron out their differences under US State Department aegis. They did so publicly, but this has not recouped what was lost. Already Savimbi had foregone much valued credibility in the US as the pro-West, democratic African fighting against an inauthentic Marxist regime.

Reneging on Gbadolite dealt a blow to his 'African authenticity' in the US. After all, here was a group of African leaders, some notably pro-US, with not a Cuban or Soviet in sight, who agreed with him on the peace process (though none would have voted in their own countries for the multi-party election Washington seems to favour for Angola).

Already there have been some signs that US media perception is changing. Articles have appeared in the American press detailing massacres carried out by Savimbi's troops.

A major network television news programme in the US last month ran material sharply critical of continuing US support, now that, from the Washington angle, all previous conditions had been fulfilled. They noted that the Cubans were on the way out, independently verified by the US; the Soviets had indicated that they wanted nothing to do with regional bush fires anymore; the Namibian independence process had moved towards a solution; and most important, the Luanda government had started economic restructuring and turned away from its former centralised policies.

But Washington has now had time to think through its next moves. It is likely the administration will simply allow the two sides to battle it out, with Unita continuing to receive US arms, perhaps at an increased pace, and the Fapla forces lacking Cuban support - half of Cuba's 50 000 troops have already moved out, ahead of schedule.

Then, when the positions of the players on the board have been shaken up, a new round of negotiations can begin.

Despite any offence it may give in the region, the US has been markedly hardline about its support for Unita. Africa envoy Herman Cohen, visiting Dakar last month, told a press conference that there were now 'two governments' in Angola. Unita would not be abandoned, he said, because you don't abandon your friends 'just when they are about to get down to real negotiations'. If the issue is mainly military, arms supplies are crucial. And here South Africa still has a role. Reports from northern Namibia have for some time indicated that despite the pres-

ence of Untag monitors - or because of their scarcity on the ground - convoys of trucks and other military vehicles are still moving across the border.

Journalists visiting Jamba reveal that it is still amply provisioned from the south. However, a new border monitoring group was set up last month - announced during the Johannesburg meeting of the tripartite verification commission by South Africa's foreign ministry director general Neil van Heerden - to monitor and solve problems on the spot.

It consists of representatives of Angola, Cuba and South Africa, and Untag, US and Soviet observers. If it is allowed to operate fully, it will at least limit the convoys of supplies heading for Jamba.

Some US senators were suggesting last month that Zaire had cut off the flow of US aid to the Unita forces. There has been no evidence that this is so, and whatever the real situation in the air and on the road from Kamina in Zaire (through which US arms to Unita have been routed in the past), Luanda is choosing to turn a blind

eye. On the surface its relations with Zaire have never been better.

Nowadays there are fewer fixed points to guide diplomats in the region and many more variables. All eyes are on Namibia: the way it emerges first into the post-election period and then into independence will clarify South Africa's intentions. The US may not want to upset a balance of a kind by pushing too hard in Angola at this time.

In the slow motion shuttle diplomacy throughout the region, South African foreign minister Pik Botha has been talking with his Angolan counterpart Pedro de Castro Van Dunem 'Loy'. Nothing has been revealed of the substance of their talks. The scheduled visit by De Klerk to Houphouet may also indicate their next play.

But in regional policy, as in domestic South African policy, strategies seem to be giving way to tactical moves.

The only constants are the interests the players represent and are seeking to foster.

1990 Community Calendar



January 1990

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

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