



# Winding down the Angolan war

*A ceasefire, elections and a 'mixed economy' are the Angolan government's objectives in the current round of peace talks. But David Coetzee asks: Will that satisfy Savimbi?*

**A**s a regional conflict the Angolan war is proving one of the most intractable to solve.

In October, the latest and most creative attempt was made in Lisbon to get progress, but it was postponed to early November.

Already there have been a series of meetings (see chronology), but the big difference this time has been that the Soviet Union and the US have sent 'technical advisers' as observers.

South Africa has also sent a preparatory team from the foreign ministry and from what was described in Portugal as the 'interior' ministry, to Lisbon.

It has been kept quiet - but South Africa has been having continuing talks with Angola, the Soviets and Cuba in the commissions set up after the December 1988 New York accords to monitor the withdrawal of Cuban forces from Angola. (The next meeting takes place in January). These commissions have provided the diplomatic base for South Africa's forays into the Eastern bloc.

This time in Lisbon all the preparations for Angolan peace talks have once again been made with Portuguese mediation through foreign minister Durao Barroso.

As *WIP* went to press, promises had been received that the major Angolan parties would attend the postponed talks beginning on November 6. This followed a meeting of the central committee of Angola's ruling MPLA party which formally agreed to replace one-party rule with a multi-party system.

This has been one of Unita's key demands: the Angolan government should recognise it as a legitimate party before there could be movement towards a ceasefire.

The two sides have been dancing endless diplomatic steps round this issue: on its side Unita has agreed to recognise the MPLA - until elections. It had earlier recognised president Jose Eduardo dos Santos as the head of state.

There are also problems over the logistics of creating a single military force out of the still-warring sides.

But Unita was this time also asking for a list of six African countries to be added to the observer team.

This, they say, should constitute the core of a monitoring group for the ceasefire being negotiated and for the elections to come.

Included is Zaire, which Luanda has said should no longer be involved as a

'mediator' because of its active role in support of Unita.

There is plenty of meat here for diplomatic delay - unless there is the will to break through.

Everywhere there are signs that patience is wearing thin: the US repeatedly stresses that the Soviet Union is cooperating nicely. US secretary of state James Baker said on October 19: 'In Africa our joint efforts with Moscow led to full Namibian independence. Now, we are working together to achieve a ceasefire and multi-party elections in Angola'.

The US congress, which has looked the other way in the past when the CIA put forward its budget requests for the supposedly covert war in Angola, this month had a long debate, and a radical motion to overturn Unita aid was narrowly defeated.

Instead, the US congress voted to make the aid conditional on both sides keeping to the talks, and the Soviets stopping their military aid.

This they have already said they are prepared to do, if the US cooperates.

So in theory the way is open for an end to Unita military supplies through Zaire.

Whether the congress' vote will have an immediate effect remains to be seen - the CIA has been notoriously disdainful of congressional votes in the past, and this vote was in many ways targeted more against them than against Unita, seeking to stop up some of the loopholes revealed in the Iran-Contra affair.

Indeed, the right wing in the US probably sees Angola as a chance for a re-run of the Nicaraguan elections, with a war-weary populace burying its pride and voting for the US candidate and peace.

For all except this still influential group, the continuation of the war seems an anomaly. The 'Cold War' is dead and overt South African destabilisation ended. In the US the right wing has, however, been allowed to have its head on this issue till now because Angola has simply not rated on the domestic political charts.

For years Angola has in vain sought to reassure policymakers in Washington that it is friendly to US business. Finally Luanda launched an all-out diplomatic offensive just before Jonas Savimbi made his trip to Washington a month ago to seek to ensure Unita's access to continued military aid.

This no doubt had its effect - and for the Congressional Black Caucus, Angola is now the major Afro-American issue. But an added impetus for a changed US policy change could now come from

1988

December: Angola, Cuba and South Africa sign tripartite accord in New York in the presence of US and Soviet observers; it foresees Namibian independence and Cuban withdrawal from Angola, and is the culmination of a series of contacts started in 1976. The meetings subsequently took place on Sal island, Cape Verde; in Egypt; and in Congo, before ending up in New York.

1989

April: The UN sets up shop in Namibia on 1 April to bring Resolution 435 to fruition. The entry into the country of armed elements of Swapo is perceived by Pretoria as a violation of the accords. A week of violent combat follows but the peace process is still on track.

June: Zaire's president Mobutu hosts two dozen African heads of state in moves to mediate in the Angolan conflict. Unita leader Jonas Savimbi and Angolan president Jose Eduardo dos Santos are there and on the 24th shake hands on a ceasefire - but it is never observed. Luanda wants Savimbi to go into exile; Unita accuses Mobutu of taking sides.

September: Unita meets in an extraordinary congress and approves proposals to 'reactivate Gbadolite'.

November: Swapo wins Namibian elections.

December: Dos Santos promises various reforms and measures to achieve peace. The government prepares a nine-point plan as a basis for negotiation, in

which exile for Savimbi is included.

1990

January: Savimbi visits Portugal.  
February: Angolan armed forces announce on the 2nd that they have entered Mavinga, a key position on the route to Unita's headquarters at Jamba. Unita says it will not negotiate 'with a knife at its throat'.

March: Namibian independence is proclaimed on March 21. Dos Santos meets Portuguese foreign minister Durao Barroso.

April: Dos Santos meets his Congo, Gabon and Sao Tome counterparts and says he is rejecting Zaire mediation. This appears to end the first chapter of negotiation process, which started a year previously in Gbadolite. On the 7th Unita recognises the Angolan state and says its ready to sign an immediate ceasefire without conditions. It demands direct contact with Luanda. That recognition is one of the conditions Luanda regards as essential. It is announced that Paulo Alicerces Mango is chosen by Savimbi to coordinate meetings. Previously in Bonn, he is transferred to Lisbon, replacing Alcides Sakala. On the 18th Angola's foreign minister, Pedro de Castro van Dunem ('Loy'), holds talks with Barroso in Lisbon. Just before the meeting, Loy has extolled Portugal's role in unblocking the impasse preventing di-

# The long road to



**Dos Santos ... promised to achieve peace**

rect talks. On the 23rd and 24th in Portugal, the first meeting between Unita and Luanda government takes place, with Barroso as Portuguese facilitator. The Angolan government delegation is led by jurist Antonio Pitra ('Petroff'), with Cirilo de Saita, while the Unita delegation is led by Gen Alicerces Mango, with a representative from Jamba, Paulo Lukamba ('Gato'). Two days later, the first Congress of Angolan Cadres abroad takes place in Lisbon, bringing together those sympathising with both sides in the

outside, from the Gulf crisis: the US is Angola's best customer for its fine grade oil, taking between 80% and 90% of production. But Washington is now growing aware that the US had become too dependent on the Middle East for its oil, and it needs to diversify suppliers.

Any further rationale for the US to back this war has been removed by Luanda delivering most concessions Washington has sought through the years of its proxy war - except immediate recognition of Unita.

The government has not only - as part of the Namibia deal - agreed to the Cuban forces leaving but it has submitted to direct US involvement in its own constitutional affairs, agreeing to multi-party elections.

US demands were not made in a vacuum - there was already pressure for

constitutional change inside Angola, and inside the ruling party.

Dos Santos has said, however, that he does not anticipate elections on this constitution before three years after the end of the war. Unita has given a cautious welcome to the move away from multi-party rule but questioned the proposed three-year delay.

Multi-partyism is the trend elsewhere in Africa, where single party rule has been tried and found wanting. But Angola's experience of the single party has been different: nowhere else in Africa has a single ruling party had to lead a high level technical war for so long on this level.

Angola's survival as a unified state has probably been due to the centralisation and discipline of the MPLA. But the rigid, centralised model, allied to an

absolute lack of the necessary levels of cadres, has led to an inertia and bureaucratism, while urgent development tasks have needed to be carried out.

With elections, Savimbi may emerge as the leader of a new Unita party, taking his place in the people's assembly (or there may be a third force, to which Unita supporters will accrue). The US has, however, always played for higher stakes, with Savimbi entering government.

All this will be hard for Luanda residents to stomach.

Their image of Savimbi is of a man who has kept a civil war going because of personal ambition and nothing else. He has permitted terror bomb attacks on cities and towns, hitting civilians, and has operated a policy of cutting peasant production by blowing their limbs off with anti-personnel mines.

Yet Luanda, and in particular Dos Santos, have taken the long view and agreed to the post-ceasefire legitimisation of a disarmed Unita. First, they want Unita to drop its weapons - not go into the elections as an armed force, as happened with the Contras backing the US-backed Uno party in Nicaragua.

What is not yet clear is how Luanda will deal with some of the underlying reasons for the existence of Unita. Until now the government has been denying that this is a civil war, but there are enough tensions in the society to underpin such a conflict - especially with outside aid. They will reveal themselves in a multi-party dispensation, too.

The most cited divisions concern rivalry between the Ovimbundu (who constitute the backbone of Unita) and the Kimbundu of the north. But there is also the tension between town and countryside. And if the new economic reform takes root, there will be more class-based tensions also, to find political expression in parties.

However, there is no other course. The government's own structural adjustment plan depends on constitutional change, too.

At the end of last year Lopo de Nascimento, provincial commissioner for the south, said that it was necessary to free up the politics of the state before the economic restructuring programme could work.

A ceasefire, elections and an economy using both market and planning is the government's preferred path now. But will Savimbi see enough in this scenario to guarantee him the future he feels he deserves? •

# peace

Angolan conflict.

May: A communique signed by Unita's political bureau members and the high command of its armed forces recognises Dos Santos as head of the Angolan state. Alicerces Mango announces in Lisbon that Savimbi is sending a personal message to Dos Santos proposing a ceasefire for June. Tony da Costa Fernandes, Unita's secretary for foreign relations, brings the Portuguese government a message on the negotiations. Barroso then goes to Luanda where he meets Loy.

June: A second round of talks begins in Oeiras. The meeting is interrupted on the 18th when the Unita delegation says it has been called back to Jamba 'for consultations'. At the end, Barros says the two sides 'have never been so close to a deal'. It is announced that the contacts will resume in the first half of July.

July: An editorial in the Jornal de Angola says the government is not interested in pointless meetings, and will only agree to participate in a third round of talks when Unita's leaders give clear signs that their words and their actions will correspond. Barroso meets for five hours with Savimbi, to whom he brings a verbal message from Cavaco Silva. On the 31st, Venancio de Moura takes Cavaco a message from Dos Santos.

August: Barroso announces the postponement of the third round until the end

of the month. The move to delay it came from Luanda, and Unita reacted. Loy says there were problems of a legal, constitutional and political nature with the recognition of Unita as a political party. Cavaco Silva meets Dos Santos on the 9th in Sao Tome and says the two sides will get together in Portugal on the 15-20th. But on the 15th Luanda publishes a declaration accusing Unita of delaying a new round of talks set for the 21st. The talks eventually get under way on the 27th, and last four days. They end without agreement on the recognition issue, but the parties agree to meet again. Portugal proposes that US and Soviet observers should be present at the next talks. Luanda is negative. Ninth meeting of the joint commission on south western Africa, in Windhoek on 13 September, with Angola, Cuba, Namibia and South Africa, and the US and Soviet Union present as observers. An opportunity for indirect talks in advance of the next round of peace talks in Portugal.

October: Another round in the peace talks is set for Lisbon, this time with the Soviet Union and the US as 'technical observers'. Talks postponed to November 6. At the same time the US Congress votes to make further aid for Unita, set at \$60-m, conditional on both sides holding to the talks, and to the Soviets stopping their military aid for Angola. The vote is welcomed by Luanda. MPLA formally decides to adopt multi-partyism, but sees elections three years after a ceasefire. •