

Angola Peace Monitor

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Angolan support for DRC sign of growing power

Angola has denied that it has sent troops to the Democratic Republic of Congo to support the government of Laurent Kabila, despite media reports indicating that Portuguese speaking soldiers have been spotted in the east of the country, where the city of Goma is under threat from a rebel warlord.

According to Angolan diplomats there are no Angolan troops in the DRC at present, although there are preparations under way in case the Southern African Development Community (SADC) or the African Union makes a direct request for assistance.

In the Kivu region of eastern DRC there is a growing humanitarian crisis as a result of fighting between rebels loyal to Laurent Nkunda, the DRC army and militias. Half a million people are reported to have fled the fighting, and there have been widespread reports of human rights abuses by the rebels and the Congolese army.

The rebels claim to be acting in self-defence against Rwandan Hutu's who are living in the area after fleeing their country following the genocide against Rwandan Tutsi's and Hutu moderates in 1994. The rebels argue that the DRC army and UN peacekeeping forces have allowed Hutu extremists to regroup, re-arm and threaten Tutsi's in the area.

However, there are allegations that Rwanda is directly involved in the rebellion - which is strongly denied by the Rwandan government - and that control of valuable minerals such as coltan also plays a role in the conflict.

The threat to the Congo is such that on 9 November SADC leaders agreed to provide "immediate military assistance", warning that "SADC will not stand by and witness any destructive acts of violence by any armed groups ... and if necessary will send peacekeeping forces". Meeting in South Africa the region's leaders called for an immediate ceasefire and for dialogue between the DRC and Rwanda - which denies backing the rebellion.

The United Nations has a large peacekeeping operation in the DRC, composed of a military force of 17,000 "blue helmets", and the UN wants to send a further 3,000 troops. The UN force has come under criticism by many, including the French government, for its

deployment and weak terms of engagement. According to the latest issue of the Southscan newsletter "on November 4 and 5 the blue helmets chose not to leave their positions in Kiwanja, a small town to the north of Rutshuru, while civilians were being butchered by both CNDP [National Congress for the Defence of the People led by Nkunda] and Mai-Mai militias". Southscan comments "there is little hope that the UN troops will soon be reinforced, either in numbers or in trained troops, at least by European soldiers. Indeed, efforts by France and Belgium to send a European Force to assist MONUC have met with reluctance from other EU member states, including the UK and Germany".

However, on 20 November the United Nations voted to send reinforcements and it is possible that Angola may provide some of these troops. On 21 November Congo's president, Joseph Kabila, was expected to visit Angola to meet with President Jose Eduardo dos Santos to discuss the crisis.

SADC has sent a small military team to the DRC to assess what is needed, and Angola is on stand-by to send in troops. This came after the African Union meeting in Nairobi on 7 November appointed former Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa and former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo as mediators.

Since then, Obasanjo has visited Angola, Rwanda and the Congo as part of the mediation effort. On 16 November he met with Laurent Nkunda in Congo and received a commitment from him to take part in the peace process and to abide by a ceasefire.

After the meeting Obasanjo said, "Nkunda told me he wants to negotiate with the government on political, economic and security issues. The first item on his request is dealing with FDLR (Rwandan Hutu forces inside Congo) and then the protection of minority groups throughout the DRC including minority groups in north eastern Kivu".

According to Obasanjo, the next step is to arrange direct negotiations between the government of the DRC and Nkunda.

The optimism of Obasanjo is not shared by the publication Africa Confidential, which warns, "Nkunda has announced the formation of a provisional government in eastern Congo and threatens to march on the Kabila government. Without substantial back up for the UN peacekeepers and a turnaround by the

government forces, Nkunda's wild ambitions will face few obstacles. The strategic blunders of both the Kinshasa government and the Kivu rebels leave Congo's government facing military defeat, the rebels facing political isolation and the people of Kivu facing disaster. Moreover, proposals for international intervention seem likely to stiffen the resolve of the rebels and of the embattled Rwandan government, which is their natural ally".

Growing influence

If Angola is drawn into the conflict, it will be another sign of the country's growing regional power that has followed the establishment of peace in Angola April 2002.

The research paper "Drivers of Change, Angola", written in January 2008 for the UK Department for International Development by Nicholas Shaxson, João Neves, and Fernando Pacheco dramatically stated that "Angola is tremendously powerful in regional politics and military and security affairs, and it has one of the most well-resourced and battle-trained armed forces on the continent. Even if Angola does not always engage in ways that regional or international partners are comfortable with, it is still essential for outsiders to engage Angola on regional issues as a matter of routine. Failure to do so, whether deliberate or by omission, will be noticed, with unpredictable and potentially harmful effects".

The country's widespread influence is partly due to its key geo-political position – it is a prominent player within southern Africa, the Gulf of Guinea and the Great Lakes region. The strength of its army, battle hardened by decades of war and with expertise in logistics and troop movement, makes it a key player within the region. It is also Angola's growing economic power that has given it leverage in the African continent at a time that the United States and Europe have lost the power to determine events within Angola. These factors, along with its historic and linguistic ties within its sphere of influence, gives it a position of influence and power perhaps only matched by South Africa and Nigeria.

Since 2004 Angola's annual growth in GDP has been running at over 15 per cent (according to Angolan statistics growth of GDP was 11.2 per cent in 2004; 20.6 per cent in 2005; 19.5 per cent in 2006; and an estimated 31.2 per cent this year). This has been driven by increases in oil production that now stands at about 2 million barrels per day - although due to technical problems and OPEC production cuts, this is currently running at about 1.7 million barrels per day. Growth has also been particularly strong in the construction industry, driven by huge infrastructure projects.

Because Angola's economy is built on oil production it has not only seen its Gross Domestic Product grow along with output and oil prices, it has also seen its political position outstrip growth due to oils position as a key

strategic mineral sought by the United States, Europe and China, along with many other states.

Following the end of the war the International Monetary Fund and Angola attempted to build a relationship which could have led to reconstruction aid from the major western nations once it has adopted an IMF approved structural adjustment programme.

Some argue that the Angolan government found it increasingly hard to reconcile the need to rebuild the country after so many years at war with the IMF demands to cut back public spending and to reduce subsidies. However, others argue that the reason for the breakdown in relations was the Angolan government's refusal to increase transparency, especially in the oil sector where there have been accusations of looting of state resources.

According to "Drivers of Change, Angola" "there seems to be a significant mismatch between external perceptions of Angola and reality on the ground. Transparency, stability and institutional coherence have all improved very significantly (from a very low base) since the war, notably at the Finance Ministry. Negative external perceptions today are significantly rooted in old, outdated analyses from the war era, which presented Angola to the world as a poster child for corruption".

In the end, the Angolan government was able to walk away from negotiations with the IMF because it was able to enter into a \$2 billion concessional oil-backed loan from China to fund reconstruction projects.

The Chinese loan did not contain any of the conditionality required by the IMF. Once the Angolan government identified a project a Chinese company was allocated the work to be carried out with a large component of Chinese labour and management.

SADC

As the western powers lost leverage in Angola, its regional weight has grown.

In the SADC region Angola has become a competitor with South Africa. Not only is Angola a resource-rich country that South African companies are keen to mine, but also its role in the DRC has at times put it in conflict with South Africa, which has tried to be a negotiator.

According to Alex Vines, writing for the European Union Institute for Security Studies (www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Angola_lookin_g_beyond_elections.pdf) "in southern Africa, Angola's main competitor is South Africa and this relationship at presidential level has been frosty because of former South African president Thabo Mbeki's efforts to mediate during the Angolan conflict. With Mbeki's departure Angola- South African relations are likely to improve significantly".

In Zimbabwe, where former president Thabo Mbeki has been the mediator between President Robert Mugabe and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, Angola has been seen as an ally of the discredited Mugabe. This stems from support given by Zimbabwe to Angola

during the war against Jonas Savimbi's UNITA. At one point the Angolan army was struggling against a well-armed rebel movement and the Angolan leadership has not forgotten the support given by Zimbabwe at that time.

In August Southscan put forward the analysis that "the balance of power in the region is shifting as a result of the long drawn out Zimbabwe negotiations. Angola is now taking a leading role alongside South Africa in the mediation effort. This coincides with the burgeoning fortunes of Angolan President Jose Eduardo dos Santos, and the weakening influence of SA's President Thabo Mbeki".

However, there are signs that Angolan support is not unconditional. Observers at the SADC heads of state meeting in Lusaka back in April 2008 noted that President Jose Eduardo dos Santos did not come out in support of Mugabe's intransigence.

Indeed, Angola's then Minister of Youth and Sport, Jose Marcos Barrica, refused to endorse the Zimbabwean presidential run-off – which was boycotted by the Zimbabwean opposition. Heading the SADC observer mission Barrica presented its preliminary statement, which concluded, "the elections did not represent the will of the people of Zimbabwe".

The run-off followed the election in April that failed to select an outright winner after the Zimbabwe Election Commission announced that Morgan Tsvangirai had gained 47.9 per cent of the vote compared with Robert Mugabe's 43.2 per cent.

Gulf of Guinea

Angola is also considered to be part of the geo-political formation, the Gulf of Guinea. This region incorporates Angola, Benin, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Nigeria, Republic of Congo, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

According to research carried out by the IMF, the Gulf of Guinea's "tremendous potential is creating investment opportunities for the region. Some of its resources, such as oil, minerals, and forests, continue to attract significant investments whereas others, like natural gas, could be exploited to their full potential if necessary investments were undertaken".

The Gulf of Guinea produces about five million barrels of oil a day and could have a tenth of the world's oil reserves. The United States imports fifteen per cent of its oil from the region.

In a sign that Angola is prepared to play a leading role in regional bodies, it is hosting the headquarters of the Gulf of Guinea Commission, which aims to coordinate regional economic and political policies. The Commission also requires member states to adopt a policy of non-interference in other member's affairs. For Nigeria it follows a policy of joint security for the

Niger Delta region (which partly explains the extradition in February from Angola to Nigeria of Henry Okah, a founding member of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta).

With the MPLA winning a huge majority in Angola's parliament following legislative elections in September, gaining 81.64 per cent of the vote, the Angolan government has increased its legitimacy. Next year President Jose Eduardo dos Santos, who has led the country since 1979, is expected to win presidential elections. He is one of the continent's longest serving leaders.

Angola diversifying oil industry

The Angolan government has taken two major steps towards adding extra value to its oil production with the development of a liquefied national gas plant in Zaire Province and an oil refinery in Benguela Province.

On 14 November a ceremony took place in Soyo, Zaire Province, at which the site of the future LNG plant was handed over. The process of liquefying the gas enables it to be transported by ship to Europe or the United States where the gas is used in the home or by industry. The cost of the plant will be \$4 billion, paid for by the investors BP, Chevron-Exxon, Sonangol and Total.

The plant will absorb much of the natural gas that is currently flared (burnt as an unwanted by-product in the petroleum industry) as the Angolan government has introduced legislation to phase out flaring by 2010.

Meanwhile the Angolan government has awarded the contract to design and project-lead the Sonaref refinery at Lobito to the US giant Kellogg Brown and Root. The project will cost \$6.4 billion paid for by the state oil company Sonangol.

A previous agreement with the Chinese company Sinopec to build the Sonaref plant fell through in February 2007 because, according to Sonangol, there was no agreement with the Chinese company on the products that would be produced. There have been suggestions that Sinopec wanted to focus on products for the Chinese market whilst Sonangol wants to concentrate on the home market.

More weapons handed over

The Angolan police have announced that the public as part of the disarming process has handed over 1,589 firearms to them.

Last month Prime Minister, Paulo Kassoma revealed that 45,000 arms had been handed over nationally to the police. In 2007 only 8,479 weapons were collected, but at the beginning of 2008 the government launched a nationwide campaign to step up the process to be carried out in three phases: sensitising the population to the need to disarm; the voluntary handing over of illicit weapons; and the final phase which will be the coercive removal of illegal weapons by the police.

UNCTAD call for greater focus on science and technology

A report published by the UN Conference on Trade and Development has called on Angola to have a greater focus on science, technology and innovation to assist in the diversifying of the economy. It believes that this would give the country the opportunity to become an engine of growth for the continent.

The report is one of a series looking at the role of science, technology and innovation policy, STIP, in developing countries.

The report urges the Government to put in place measures to maximize the benefits from technologies and knowledge brought in by non-mineral foreign direct investment. It also recommends that a national framework be set up to develop and coordinate efforts related to science, technology and innovation.

Dr. Supachai Panitchpakdi, Secretary-General of UNCTAD commented, "we in UNCTAD believe that technology is a crucial element for enhancing the growth prospects of developing countries and is a necessary precondition for overcoming poverty and marginalisation. In spite of increasing global commitment to address this issue, the technology gap among and within nations continues to widen"

UNCTAD states that "inasmuch as Government is the principal actor in both economic and social scenes at this time, the review focuses on the technology needs of the main ministries and proposes innovative measures for creating additional value-added in their service delivery and organizational dynamics. While national research and development capacity was critical not only in agriculture and health but also in the nascent private sector, the review stresses that it should be development-oriented rather than research-centred".

The report had praise for the government's efforts since the end of the war in 2002, stating "on the social development front, significant gains have been made in education even while improvements have yet to be seen in other key areas. Furthermore, the Government has taken steps to improve and strengthen the delivery of basic social services and utilities".

However, it warned, "economic growth and social development are not likely to be sustained in the absence of technological learning and innovation capacity-building. Indeed science and technology has of late featured prominently in the agenda of regional bodies such as NEPAD, SADC and AU".

The review found that the key area that should be addressed is strengthening human capital. It concedes "Angola has responded to the immediate post-conflict challenge with heavy investment to address structural and human capital bottlenecks in food sufficiency, health, education and infrastructure, notably in transportation and power supply. The agricultural sector for instance would be revitalized to ensure food security, to combat entrenched poverty, and to stabilize displaced persons who have been resettled in the rural areas. For the longer term, it has initiated steps to strengthen its economic base and diversify its export structure. With a correct mix of policies and measures, Angola can and must move up the chain of commodity exports and into the global network of manufacturing".

For Dr. Panitchpakdi "Angola has the resources and potential to become an economic engine in the sub-region. Its success will not only serve as an example for countries emerging from conflict but also as a stabilizing factor in the geopolitical dynamics in the region".

Minor parties to be closed down

Angola's Attorney General on 19 November announced that he has asked the Constitutional Court to take action against 22 political parties that failed to get half a per cent of votes cast in September's parliamentary elections.

Under the Electoral Law parties can only register if they can get 7,500 signatures, which must include at least 150 residents from each of the country's 18 provinces.

The rewards for registering can be huge. For taking part in the elections each party was given more than \$375,000. At one point there were more than 130 political parties, although only ten parties and four political coalitions were able to meet the requirement that 15,000 citizens should support parties wishing to stand in elections. The Constitutional Court found that a further 63 parties had not meet those conditions.

Now the Constitutional Court is to decide on the future of those parties that did not get the threshold of 0.5 per cent of the vote in the elections.

This could leave the country with five registered parties: MPLA, UNITA, PRS, FNLA and PDP-ANA. The Constitutional Court will at some point have to rule on the coalition Nova Democracia, which is composed of six parties - MPDA, PSIA, UND, PSL, UAPDD and CIA. In the elections it gained 0.51 per cent of the vote.

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