

# The war for independence

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## Early and colonial history

Of the history of Angola prior to the arrival of the Portuguese little can be said with any certainty, except that the ancestors of most of today's inhabitants had long been in occupation of their traditional lands. At the end of the 15th century there were few large political units to be found in this sparsely populated part of west-central Africa. One exception, however, was the relatively sophisticated kingdom of Kongo, which exercised control over a wide area from its centre at the mouth of the Zaïre River and with which the Portuguese established contact in 1492.

Portugal's initial interest in the Kongo kingdom was largely of a missionary nature, but slave trading soon came to dominate relations with the local peoples, particularly after the opening up of the colony of Brazil in the 1530s. The effects of the slave trade were essentially destructive and a series of internal wars allowed the Portuguese to erode the autonomy of the kingdom. The traffic in human beings came to dominate the economy of Angola and in the course of 350 years or so it is estimated that some three million Africans were exported through Angolan ports – many of them to Brazil and Cuba.<sup>1</sup>

Portuguese attention then shifted southwards to where Luanda now stands and to the Mbundu kingdom of Ndongo, ruled by chiefs who took their titles from a religious symbol, the *ngola*. It was this title that was to give Angola its present name. Luanda was to serve as the base for the initial Portuguese attempt to conquer a larger area of what was to become Angola.<sup>2</sup> Portugal's claim to have been the earliest European colonial power in Africa tends to mislead, for it obscures the reality of Portugal's relationship with the peoples of Angola. For almost four hundred years after the initial contact, Portugal's control over the inhabitants and territory of Angola remained episodic and extremely limited. Until the end of the 19th century the Portuguese colonial enterprise in Angola consisted of little more than the establishment of a handful of ports and the erection of fortified posts along some of the more important trade routes. There were also protracted attempts to establish Portuguese penal colonies in the interior.<sup>3</sup>

The trade in human beings helped to establish a pattern of exploitation and relative advantage that goes a considerable way towards explaining the historical memories and cultural attitudes that underpin much of Angola's modern political configuration. The Mbundu-speakers of Luanda and its hinterland, in essence, came to be regarded as the collaborators of the Portuguese, exploiting the human capital of the interior.<sup>4</sup>

This pattern of perceived advantage and exploitation survived the end of the slave trade. It persisted into the 20th century, by which time there had emerged a class of *assimilados*, and *mestiços*, in the Angolan ports and their hinterlands, who enjoyed an existence more privileged than that of their fellow Angolans, many of whom remained entrapped in a form of rural slavery. The cultural divisions resulting from this history continue to inform popular notions and stereotypes in Angola today.

The end of the slave trade naturally generated a profound change in Portugal's economic and administrative policy in the colony. Alternative sources of revenue had to be secured, and this meant that control over the territory had to be asserted. In the event, however, the transition was far from rapid, and the borders of Angola as demarcated by European treaties in the 1880s and 1890s were not effectively secured until the late 1920s, despite the use of large numbers of Portuguese and African troops.<sup>5</sup>

Until the end of the Second World War Angola recorded little economic progress, except in the coffee plantations in the north of the country. These plantations were dependent upon forced labour, a system in many respects akin to slavery and so harsh that many Angolan communities sought to escape into neighbouring colonies.

Suddenly, after 1945, the rapid rise of world coffee prices brought an economic bonanza and Angola became Africa's largest producer and ranked third or fourth in the world coffee market. This windfall also had important social and political implications, for it intensified the latent conflict between whites and blacks, creating a new demand for forced labour and encouraging white immigration and the expropriation of African lands.

The growth of Angola's white population continued apace during the 1960s. Most of these settlers were of peasant stock, poorly educated and possessing few skills or resources. Rather than brave the isolation and dangers of rural settlement many of these immigrants sought the comparative comfort and security of the towns, where they competed for jobs with the urbanised black and *mestiço* populations.<sup>6</sup> This development aggravated a growing racial antagonism in Angola, and emphasised the primacy of white Portuguese interests. The economic and social tensions and opportunities of the period 1945–61 saw the rebirth of local political activity.

## The three streams of nationalism

To impose some order upon the chaotic events that comprise the history of the Angolan struggle for independence, it is necessary to discuss in some detail the emergence of modern Angolan nationalism in its three broad streams, each with its own peculiarities in terms of region and political culture.

All these streams to an extent were influenced and informed by the urban and intellectual protest that developed first in Luanda before spreading into the

capital's Kimbundu-speaking hinterland. As has been seen, this area of Angola, inhabited by the Mbundu peoples, was the first to be subjected to Portuguese rule at the end of the 16th century. Within a hundred years the Portuguese had destroyed the local kingdom, leaving no vestiges around which later nationalists could organise resistance. Other Mbundu groups sought refuge in the interior, around Kasanje, and here a pre-nationalist Mbundu resistance did emerge, separate from that of the Luandans. As Portuguese influence extended into the interior along the railway line from Luanda, to Catete, Dondo, and Malange in the first decade of the 20th century, the Mbundu people of the Dembos hills continued a steady opposition to colonial domination that had lasted through most of the 19th century.<sup>7</sup>

The mainstream of Mbundu nationalism, however, was to be subsumed in the broader river of Luanda politics, with its strong Portuguese cultural influence, affecting intellectuals of white, *mulatto* and black origins. The Salazar government, which came to power in Portugal in 1932, was authoritarian and right wing. In Portugal itself, no liberal democratic opposition was tolerated or allowed to grow. Instead, the metropolitan opponents of Salazar tended to develop in the form of a radical and disciplined underground movement with Marxist leanings. These intellectual traditions found themselves easily transposed into the 'creolised' educated communities of Luanda and Benguela, and the centrality of class analysis was readily seized upon by nationalists reluctant to emphasise racial difference as the key polarising factor in their struggle.<sup>8</sup>

The victory of the Allied powers in 1945 triggered a wave of political enthusiasm among Luanda's nascent nationalists. The defeat of European fascism left Salazar's Portugal isolated and ideologically obsolete. In Luanda's growing slums a discontented black proletariat awaited organisation, which was to be forthcoming from the white and *mestiço* elite, many of whom had been educated in Portugal, and a growing class of black *assimilados*, many of whom had received their schooling from Protestant missionaries, and who identified with the aspirations of the uneducated majority. The local authorities' suppression of opposition simply led to a continuing radicalisation of dissent. The Portuguese Communist Party assisted the small Angolan political intelligentsia, and in 1955 the Angolan Communist Party (*Partido Comunista de Angola* – PCA) was established, though essentially as a clandestine cell of the metropolitan movement. Within a few months the PCA had joined with others to form a nationalist front the *Partido da Luta dos Africanos de Angola* (PLUA), which by the end of 1956 had become part of the *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA).<sup>9</sup>

The original MPLA manifesto called for the overthrow of Portuguese rule and the establishment of an independent Angola under a democratic coalition of all the forces fighting Portuguese colonialism.<sup>10</sup> Initial efforts to establish a broad united front were frustrated largely because of the effective and ruthless counter-measures adopted by the secret police, the *Polícia Internacional de Defesa de Estado* (PIDE), both in Portugal itself and in the overseas territories. Concerned by the possible influence of nationalist riots that had begun in January 1959 in

Léopoldville (Kinshasa), the capital of the Belgian Congo (Zaire/Democratic Republic of Congo), two months later PIDE began to round up suspected subversives in Luanda. The following year many of these people were tried in secret and sentenced to long prison terms. Among those jailed were the first president of the MPLA, Ilidio Tomé Alves Machado and Dr Agostinho Neto, then leader of the MPLA steering committee. Unable to operate effectively within Luanda in the face of the PIDE's decapitation of its domestic leadership, the MPLA established itself as an external exile organisation under the acting leadership of Mário de Andrade, an intellectual and poet.<sup>11</sup>

In these early years much of the MPLA leadership hailed from the European-trained student elite. Many were the sons of civil servants or came from relatively privileged backgrounds, which set them apart from the inhabitants of the Luanda *muceques* (sand slums).<sup>12</sup>

The second major stream of Angolan nationalism had a quite different source. It was centred on the Angolan part of the old kingdom of Kongo, which had been in steady political decline since the defeats of the 17th century. A rump kingdom continued to exist under Portuguese tutelage, and direct colonial rule came late to the Kikongo-speaking people of northern Angola. This also implied that Portuguese cultural influences were far slighter here than in Luanda and the Mbundu territories. The Bakongo of Angola constitute merely part of the broader Kikongo-speaking community of the two Congos, and the interaction of nationalist agitation in the three colonies was conducted easily between peoples differentiated principally by their formal status as subjects of various colonial powers, and subsequently of independent states. This is not to say that Bakongo nationalist sentiment had but one outlet: some sought to resist the demands of their colonial rulers by resuscitating the autonomy and even independence of the Kongo kingdom, a tendency that continues to surface sporadically to this day, principally in the Democratic Republic of Congo. But the chief origin for Bakongo nationalism was the deep and growing resentment of the colonial practice of recruiting forced labour for the plantations, not merely for those of Angola, but of the enclave of Cabinda, and the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe.<sup>13</sup> To escape the harsh, indeed inhuman, demands of their colonial overlords, in the course of the first half of the 20th Century many Angolan Bakongo fled across the border into Belgian Congo, an exodus that had significant consequences for this stream of the Angolan nationalist project. In 1914 a general rising began in the area of São Salvador (Mbanza Congo), against the local chief's complicity in labour recruitment. One of its leaders was Miguel Necaca, whose grandson, Holden Roberto, was to emerge as one of the major figures of Angolan nationalism.<sup>14</sup>

Roberto was born in 1923 in Angola but spent almost all of his life in Belgian Congo, where the Bakongo opposition made its headquarters in Léopoldville. Here the support of the large Angolan refugee population allowed the Bakongo politicians in the Congolese capital with their broader objectives to displace those in São Salvador who still sought to promote Bakongo autonomy within Angola. In July 1957 the *União das Populações do Norte de Angola* (UPNA) was

established in a merger between the nationalists of Léopoldville and Matadi, under the presidency of Miguel's son Barros Necaca. As Portugal had been admitted to the United Nations in 1955, the UPNA leadership decided to lobby the world body and the American government. It also received an invitation to attend the All-African Peoples' Conference to be held in Accra, the capital of newly-independent Ghana in 1958. This important assignment went to Necaca's nephew, Holden Roberto, who thus began a career characterised by frenetic travelling and networking, which, for a while at least, was to give UPNA and its successor organisations an advantage over their Angolan nationalist rivals.<sup>15</sup>

By the time he reached Accra in December 1958, Roberto was circulating literature in the name of a new organisation, the *União das Populações de Angola* (UPA), which, at least on paper, depicted the Bakongo-led movement as a nationwide one, a role that was calculated to have a greater appeal to the leaders of other African states and liberation movements. In Accra, Roberto established relationships with several other young luminaries of the nationalist firmament, including Patrice Lumumba, Kenneth Kaunda, Tom Mboya and Frantz Fanon. Already by now he was beginning to consider the use of revolutionary violence, should Portugal remain obdurate.<sup>16</sup>

The following year he visited the United Nations as a member of the delegation from Guinea-Conakry, when he addressed the United Nations in its first debate on the Angolan issue. He also made use of the opportunity to broaden his US contacts, building upon those he had made in his youth among Protestant missionaries. In 1960 Roberto returned to Africa to attend the Second All-Africa Peoples' Conference in Tunis, where he began what was to be a long friendship with Habib Bourguiba. Here he also met a delegation from the MPLA, led by Viriato da Cruz and Lucio Lara who, encouraged by their success in forming a loose common front with Amílcar Cabral's Guinean nationalists, tried to persuade Roberto to bring in UPA as well. In this they were motivated by an awareness that Roberto's organisation had an important following among the forced labourers of northern Angola and the émigrés in the Congo. Roberto rejected the approach, but was to be pressured sporadically thereafter by African politicians to review his decision.<sup>17</sup> In the meantime Roberto began a campaign to lure experienced soldiers from the colonial forces in Angola, and a number of deserters formed the core of the UPA's nascent guerrilla army, to be trained initially by Tunisian officers.<sup>18</sup> He now turned to the task of building a broader political and diplomatic base prior to launching militant action.<sup>19</sup> Among those he contacted shortly afterwards was Jonas Savimbi, then enrolled in the University of Fribourg in Switzerland, and an important leader of Angolan student opinion in Europe. Savimbi had already been approached by the MPLA, but made it clear that for the moment he was not interested in joining either movement, given their relative disarray.<sup>20</sup>

The third stream of Angolan nationalism traces its source to the Ovimbundu peoples of Central Angola, who comprise some 40% of the national population, comparable to the size of the Mbundu and Bakongo communities combined. It was also influenced to a lesser degree by smaller ethnic groups, such as the

Chokwe, Lwena and Cuanhama of the east and south, which perforce brought it into contact with political groups among people of similar ethnic background in neighbouring states.<sup>21</sup> For a long while this third stream attracted little attention, for it was far removed from the major urban centres of Luanda and Léopoldville, and little influenced by their cultural activities. Few of its leaders had access to overseas education, and the result was that in the early years this stream lacked a significant body of political activists, students and exiles.<sup>22</sup>

The Ovimbundu kingdoms of Bailundo and Bié were subdued by the Portuguese only around the turn of the 20th century. The construction of the Benguela railway line between 1903 and 1929 allowed the spread of Ovimbundu settlements into the interior province of Moxico, and brought them into contact with the developing copper economies of Katanga and Northern Rhodesia (Zambia).

The political interest of the Ovimbundu was stimulated by Portugal's horrified reaction to the sudden independence of the Congo. By the end of 1960 local groups of young nationalists were emerging from the schools of the Umbundu-speaking region. In 1958 the Protestant missions of the region had despatched a first group of Ovimbundu students, mainly of peasant stock, to study in Portugal. Here they were joined by a growing number of dissidents forced into exile by PIDE repression. One of this initial group of students was Jonas Savimbi, who had previously been a scholar in the isolated and culturally Portuguese environment of Sá da Bandeira (Lubango).<sup>23</sup>

## 1961: The anticolonial revolt begins

By the beginning of 1961 the Angolan economy was in a recession triggered by the collapse of coffee prices and exacerbated by problems in the fishing and cotton sectors. Rising unemployment and wage-cuts led to a rising tide of frustration among the increasing number of black students leaving the educational system.

It was in the cotton sector that the first three violent outbursts began. In January 1961, falling cotton prices and the failure to pay the peasant growers led to strikes and retaliation in the form of beatings and arrests. This triggered a wholesale revolt against the Portuguese authorities and their system of enforced cotton growing in the Kasanje area. The rising was led by António Mariano and became known as 'Maria's war'. The insurrectionists burned the seed they were supposed to plant, destroyed barges, erected barricades, looted stores and missions, slaughtered livestock and chased away Europeans. From the remote border areas the revolt spread into the centre of the Malange district. This alarmed the authorities into reaction, and troops and aircraft were sent to firebomb and strafe apparently disaffected villages. Though the rebels managed to destroy a number of bridges and launched a few ambushes, they were no match for the Portuguese. There are no accurate figures of the numbers who died in this short and brutal campaign, but its leader was arrested, tortured and shortly afterwards murdered by the authorities.<sup>24</sup>

Many of the insurrectionists fled to the Congo, where they would form a support base for subsequent UPA operations into Kasanje.

The second outbreak of 1961 occurred in Luanda itself where in the early morning of 4 February, several hundred Africans armed with knives and clubs attacked the principal political prison in an abortive assault. Some seven Portuguese police were killed and about 40 of the attackers. Following the funerals of the policemen, whites shot dead a number of African bystanders. Renewed rioting and another attempt to storm the prison were followed on 10 February by an attack on another jail, with further fatalities. The authorities' reaction was to organise vigilante attacks on the *muceques*. Summary executions by the army, police, militia and vigilantes left about 3 000 dead.<sup>25</sup>

It is still unclear who organised and launched the attack of 4 February, though the MPLA is generally thought to have been responsible. Certainly in the wake of the rioting several MPLA militants left Luanda for the Dembos region, hoping to start a resistance movement among the rural Mbundu. Though a failure in terms of its outcome, the violence of February 1961 certainly put Angola firmly on the agenda at the United Nations, and drew attention to the explosive situation building in the country.

The torch of militant nationalist, however, now passed to Holden Roberto's UPA. On 15 March an insurrection broke out across a wide swathe of northern Angola. Though the UPA had been preparing for the launching of a militant campaign to coincide with the opening of a United Nations' debate on Angola, its claims to have organised the entire rising seem to be exaggerated, but for all that they were believed, with important consequences for the status of the UPA in revolutionary and nationalist circles.<sup>26</sup> It was some days before the extent of the northern insurrection became apparent. The numbers of Portuguese settlers killed amounted to some 250 in the first few days, and perhaps 750 by the end of another three months, despite the attempts of the UPA leadership to target property rather than persons. Also targeted were *mestiços* and farm labourers, mainly Ovimbundu, who resisted the insurgents.

Though momentarily successful in seizing control of a broad swathe of northern Angola, the rebellion was far too poorly equipped or organised to sustain its territorial gains. Nor was the Portuguese regime susceptible to such pressures as could be brought to bear by international public opinion. In desperation the UPA set about trying to remould the uprising into a sustained guerrilla war, and in June 1961 formally established an armed wing, the *Exército de Libertação de Angola* (ELNA).<sup>27</sup>

As the area affected was scantily garrisoned, the rising had spread quickly, and reinforcements began to arrive from Portugal only at the beginning of May. Thereafter, Portuguese retaliation was fierce and indiscriminate. Aircraft bombed and strafed villages in and outside the affected area, while troops and settler militias conducted a terror campaign on the ground. At the end of six months, some 40 000 Africans had been killed, and the Portuguese had succeeded in their over-reaction in spreading the insurrection over a much wider area than

originally, and had forced more than 200 000 Angolans to seek refuge across the border in Congo-Léopoldville, where they would eventually serve as a recruiting base for the UPA.<sup>28</sup>

The Portuguese reaction was not simply one of repression, however, and a number of important reforms were introduced, including the abolition of forced labour, the compulsory cultivation of cotton and the alienation of land. Efforts were set in motion to broaden access to health and education services. But significant political reform was not forthcoming, and the suddenness and brutality of the rising and its aftermath had made it all but impossible to rebuild a feeling of communality to underpin any 'hearts and minds' strategy. By October the Portuguese armed forces and their auxiliaries had regained control of almost all of northern Angola, but this would prove only the first of many campaigns, as the Angolan crisis shifted up a gear.<sup>29</sup>

## Competition or cooperation?

Despite the setbacks and military humiliations of 1961, the UPA had established itself in the public consciousness as a threat to Portuguese domination. Its knowledge and experience of the situation in Léopoldville gave it additional advantages over rival Angolan movements at this time.<sup>30</sup>

The MPLA, realising that it was being upstaged, moved to garner more international support, and approached the UPA to form a common-action front that would give the MPLA access to Congolese bases from which to operate into Angola. The MPLA gained some ground on the diplomatic front, winning material support from Morocco, and making its appeal heard through progressive circles in Europe. Roberto's careful courtship of American liberal opinion left the UPA unchallenged in the USA, which was in any case distrusted in MPLA circles because of its generally accommodating stance on the policies of its NATO ally, Portugal, but the division of foreign activity on the part of the rival movements added another complicating dimension to their competition for support.<sup>31</sup> At this stage in Africa the MPLA could count on the 'radical' states of the Casablanca group – Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Morocco and the United Arab Republic and on links forged with nascent nationalist movements in Mozambique, Portuguese Guinea, Cape Verde and São Tomé-Príncipe.<sup>32</sup>

In an attempt to improve its profile inside Angola, the MPLA moved its headquarters from Conakry to Léopoldville where it renewed its efforts to create a common front. Roberto remained aloof, however, issuing a counter proposal that other groups should join the UPA, the only movement actually waging a military campaign in Angola. Roberto's response was indicative of two emerging trends: first, his unwillingness to surrender any measure of control over the UPA; and, second, his rejection of an alliance with the MPLA, whose well-educated and sophisticated leadership would present too formidable a challenge to the relatively less privileged figures who comprised the UPA's directorate.<sup>33</sup>



As the MPLA attempted to insert small guerrilla bands of its own into Angola to reinforce the groups of partisans who had escaped Luanda into the Dembos forests it met resistance not only from the Portuguese but from the UPA, which ambushed and killed MPLA patrols entering the operational area. Roberto himself had given instructions to the effect that MPLA infiltrators were to be annihilated, setting a pattern for the murderous internecine conflict that was to characterise the relationship between the rival nationalist groupings. This was a weakness the Portuguese authorities would exploit to the full.<sup>34</sup>

In November 1961 Roberto was one of several Angolan nationalists present for another debate on the question in the United Nations General Assembly. He was accompanied by Jonas Savimbi, who had succumbed to Roberto's persuasion and had recently been appointed the UPA's secretary-general. The appointment was a shrewd one, for it brought a leading element of the Ovimbundu stream into the organisation.<sup>35</sup>

By early 1962 the chaotic nationalist uprising of the previous year was beginning to take the form of an organised guerrilla insurgency. The rebels could claim to control an area in northern Angola some 240 km wide and 320 km deep. Here they established a crude form of self-government. Rebel military activity consisted largely of ambushing Portuguese patrols and attacking plantations. The Portuguese riposte was the use of airpower, including napalm.<sup>36</sup>

For UPA the next stage was to forge an alliance with another Bakongo movement, the *Partido Democrático de Angola* (PDA) in March 1962 as the *Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola* (FNLA) and then, in the following month, to create a provisional government. This eventually happened not in Angola itself but in Léopoldville as the Revolutionary Government of Angola in Exile (GRAE).<sup>37</sup> As much as anything this move was a calculated response to recent efforts on the part of the MPLA to establish itself among the emigre and refugee community of Léopoldville and Bas Congo that constituted the UPA's support base. The formation of the GRAE also provided a vehicle with which to solicit the recognition of African governments for the FNLA's exclusive legitimacy.<sup>38</sup> By mid-1963 Roberto's strategy had paid off. The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) recognised the GRAE as the sole recipient of sanctioned assistance from its Liberation Committee. To many observers it seemed as if the MPLA had been terminally marginalised, a situation exacerbated by its own internal feuds, of which an early episode saw the removal of Viriato da Cruz as secretary-general.<sup>39</sup>

In July 1962 Dr Agostinho Neto, the MPLA's 'honorary president' had escaped from house arrest in Portugal to Morocco. His imprisonment and exile had bestowed upon him a heroic status, and it was hoped that his arrival on the Léopoldville scene would pave the way for nationalist unification. In the event Neto handled negotiations with Roberto with a distinct lack of skill and tact, and ended by publicly dismissing the FNLA as working to safeguard the interests of the imperialists.<sup>40</sup>

Neto's position as party president was confirmed at the MPLA's first national congress, held in Léopoldville in December 1962. Also at the congress, Mário de

Andrade, now responsible for external affairs within the party, accurately summed up one of the MPLA's principal weaknesses. He urged the party to broaden its appeal to the peasantry, and to discard its image as an organisation for intellectuals. He also urged that more attention be given to the situation inside Angola, where political education, military activities and strikes all had a role to play. Already small groups of trainees were returning from Ghana and Morocco to form the basis for the party's new military wing. But despite efforts to redirect the party to an internal militancy associated with the oppressed peasantry, the dominance of the party's steering committee by a group hailing from Luanda-Mbundu elite group continued to impede a convincing association with the Ovimbundu and Bakongo peasantry.<sup>41</sup>

Roberto's own shortcomings prevented him from driving home the GRAE's advantages over its troubled rivals. His centralised system of control was creating tensions within the leadership, many of whom, particularly those of the PDA, felt increasingly marginalised.<sup>42</sup> Another consequence of Roberto's leadership style was that in terms of political and administrative organisation little or no progress was made, with most time spent on garnering external support and expanding military operations. The myth of having formed a government in exile merely aggravated the situation, allowing the FNLA and many of its supporters to confuse form with substance.<sup>43</sup>

Other developments in the region offered the chance to broaden the GRAE's operational area into other Angolan border regions, from Northern Rhodesia, then entering its pre-independence phase of self-government. Savimbi, assisted by student leader Jorge Valentim was especially eager to operate into the Lundas and Moxico districts. Yet this threatened the paramouncy of FNLA/Leopoldville, which proved obstructive and eventually compelled the closure of the movement's Katanga office. By now, Savimbi and Valentim were on the verge of campaigning against Roberto's continued leadership, as he spurned opportunity after opportunity to broaden the revolutionary front, ethnically or geographically.<sup>44</sup>

Tshombe's accession to power in Léopoldville in 1964 was disastrous for the GRAE, which, sealed off from any external aid by the new regime, had to fall back upon its own resources. These proved distressingly meagre. Within the FNLA/GRAE factional suspicion had been growing throughout 1964 and Savimbi had begun organising his own following to challenge Roberto's leadership. In the course of mounting this campaign Savimbi travelled secretly to Moscow, Prague, Budapest and East Berlin, but came away disappointed. He also courted the favour of Iraq and the UAR, carefully distancing himself from Roberto's acceptance of Israeli aid. By this stage, Roberto himself had taken over GRAE's foreign affairs, leaving Savimbi's organisational title hollow. Savimbi was now considering the next step in his planned defection, which for a while, at least, included establishing a new party and then negotiating a common front with Neto, to whom he had already begun approaches. Roberto was accused of tribalism, racism, corruption and of obstructing the opening of a new front from Katanga. By mid-1964, GRAE was torn in two.<sup>45</sup>

The OAU's summit in Cairo July 1964 provided the setting for a public falling out. Savimbi turned up in Cairo and called a press conference at which he announced his resignation from GRAE. He denounced the FNLA as an empty sham. Roberto and Savimbi now traded open insults, each denouncing the other as tribalist, divisive and pro-American. Savimbi's attacks allowed those African leaders suspicious of Roberto to reopen the debate about GRAE's recognition. The OAU decided to try to persuade Roberto to consider uniting in the common struggle with the MPLA, now thrown a lifeline by the unlikely agency of Savimbi.<sup>46</sup> After the summit Savimbi proceeded to Algiers, where Ben Bella helped him arrange a visit to the Far East. Here he met Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai. They reminded him that only a few months earlier he had been denouncing Da Cruz as pro-Chinese, but agreed to provide modest training and support for a genuine guerrilla war inside Angola. Savimbi also visited North Korea and North Vietnam, where he held discussions with General Giap.<sup>47</sup>

Once back in Africa Savimbi returned to Algiers, where he consulted with Che Guevara. Having followed up on arrangements to send a group of his followers to China, he returned to complete his studies in Switzerland, interrupting his work later in 1964 to visit Brazzaville, where Neto, Daniel Chipenda and other MPLA leaders made an unsuccessful attempt to persuade him to join their movement. After completing his degree in July 1965, he returned to Zambia to begin the organisation of his own movement, which immediately led to a sharp deterioration in his relations with the MPLA, who also coveted this bridgehead. In this enterprise he was able to draw on a number of constituencies: the disillusioned ranks of the GRAE, including several experienced military and political leaders; a group of overseas students, being organised by Jorge Valentim; and ex-UPA members in Lusaka. Rationalising his decision to begin a new organisation, Savimbi argued that since the MPLA was pro-Moscow and the GRAE received assistance from Western sources, a new movement was needed that would represent the interests of the Angolan majority within the country. He also argued that it was essential to avoid the embroilment of the Angolan struggle in Cold War confrontations, and to this end, in October 1965, he persuaded President Kaunda to invite Roberto and Neto to Lusaka for discussions on a common front. They declined.<sup>48</sup>

In March 1966 Savimbi crossed the border into Angola to gather with 67 others at Muangai in Moxico district. This was the culmination of months of preparations, culminating between 5 and 25 March in the establishment of the *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (UNITA). Further approaches to the GRAE and MPLA met with rejection and in September 1966 a UNITA congress in Lusaka elected the party leadership, with Savimbi at its head.<sup>49</sup>

UNITA was preparing for a protracted struggle and, unlike Roberto and even Neto, understood the necessity of careful organisation on the base of a politically educated peasantry. It was difficult and painstaking work which involved showing an illiterate rural population the links between the abstract aims of the anti-imperial struggle and their own local grievances. This would lay the ground for civil disobedience campaigns. Meanwhile UNITA also sought to mount a

limited number of small-scale military actions. It began recruiting and training peasant militias in its quest to operate independently of external assistance. The opening of the eastern front met with a violent Portuguese response. The MPLA, too, was now ready to enter the eastern part of Angola, leading to bloody rivalry once again within the nationalist movement.<sup>50</sup>

By mid-1964 GRAE's insurgency in Angola had come to a virtual halt, crippled by Tshombe's hostility and by rising tensions within the military wing based at Kinkuzu. The lack of momentum and of internal cohesion fed upon each other through Tshombe's rule, and defections and schisms multiplied, many of them encouraged by the PIDE.<sup>51</sup>

Once again, unforeseen events combined to assure Roberto's political survival. Tshombe's ambitions to seize power were foiled by his dismissal in October 1965. A few weeks later the army toppled Kasavubu, and installed General Joseph Désiré Mobutu in his place, a coup ratified unanimously by parliament.<sup>52</sup> Mobutu was a close personal friend and ally of Roberto, and allowed him to silence his political opponents and marginalise those FNLA elements outside of the UPA.<sup>53</sup>

While UPA/GRAE withered in 1964–66, the MPLA staged an astonishing recovery. In the OAU the MPLA succeeded in reopening the issue of GRAE's recognition and by March 1965 had secured a promise of training and material assistance from the Liberation Committee. The Soviets had also resumed exclusive support to the MPLA in 1964, accusing Roberto of collaboration with Tshombe and the USA. Between 1964 and 1966 the MPLA also opened links to China, which granted limited support. On a visit to Brazzaville in 1965 Che Guevara met Neto, and when some 1 000 Cubans arrived to train the Congo-Brazzaville militia, some also devoted time to Angolan guerrillas. This was the beginning of a relationship that was to prove of cardinal importance to the MPLA's fortunes, though few would have anticipated that at the time. The situation *vis-à-vis* GRAE had now been reversed, and the MPLA found itself virtually recognised as the sole movement worthy of support from the Afro-Asian bloc.<sup>54</sup> There were problems, of course, Tshombe's government was even less likely than its predecessor to grant the MPLA passage en route to Angola, a situation that failed to improve with the advent of Mobutu. Thus for much of the period 1964–66 the Cabinda enclave was the only area in which the MPLA could undertake military operations, though these were limited in scope and failed to elicit much support from the Cabindans themselves.<sup>55</sup>

UNITA, operating out of Zambia, faced its major challenge in the shape of the militarily more robust MPLA, which did everything possible to wipe out this political rather than military interloper. Savimbi's attempts to achieve a united front with the MPLA were firmly rebuffed, while Kaunda's attempts to secure the reconciliation of Savimbi and Roberto were frustrated by the latter's insistence that UNITA should disband and join the FNLA as individuals. In December 1966 UNITA launched its first major operation against the Benguela Railway. Militarily it was a disaster, with almost 300 guerrillas being killed. Politically it placed UNITA on the map, but this and subsequent attacks on the railway led to threats

from Portugal that it would close a route vital to the exports of the Zambian and Zairian Copperbelt. In June 1967 Savimbi was arrested in Lusaka and subsequently deported to Egypt, the temporary leadership of UNITA passing to Smart Chata, the organisation's vice-president. It was another year before Savimbi was able to return to Angola via Zambia, his return expedited by the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO).<sup>56</sup>

For Savimbi the internal front in the struggle against the Portuguese remained paramount. In its propaganda UNITA continued to disparage the *mestiço* as collaborators and emphasised its own links with the longest resistance to Portuguese penetration among the people's of the south-east. Self-reliance was also a recurring theme. UNITA represented itself as nationalist and anti-imperialist, which included a rejection of socialist imperialism. Invoking the thinking of Mao Zedong, it advocated the formation of a socialist state accommodating the African cultural heritage. The achievement of this end would require a protracted struggle led by a revolutionary party, but one quite different from that led by intellectuals raised in a European ideological tradition.<sup>57</sup>

By 1970 UNITA was attempting to extend its influence westwards along the line of rail into the centre of the Ovimbundu communities. It met with opposition, not only from the Portuguese security services but also from MPLA forces in the rear.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless the framework of a system of rudimentary administrative structures was established at village level. Outside Africa, UNITA maintained offices only in London, which meant its external profile remained low relative to those of the MPLA and FNLA.<sup>59</sup>

Within the MPLA the opening of its eastern front from Zambia after 1966 was the source of fresh tensions. This strategy implied that the party had to develop a new local leadership among ethnic groups hardly represented in Luandan society. Most of the peoples of sparsely populated eastern Angola were illiterate and politically naive. This meant that Mbundu figures continued to dominate positions of authority even in the new theatre, even though the overall organisation was directed by an Ovimbundu, Daniel Chipenda, a situation that was virtually bound to lead to resentment.<sup>60</sup>

The MPLA's effectiveness was also attenuated by the geographical dispersion of its operational headquarters. Attempts to co-ordinate and concentrate precipitated new internal conflict, not over ideology, for the MPLA remained an eclectic front at this stage of its development, but over inadequate communications, military difficulties and personalities. By 1968 the Portuguese had developed more effective counter-insurgency tactics involving the extensive use of helicopters, ground-attack aircraft and commando raids. FNLA pressure on MPLA units contributed to the latter's discomfort in the battle zone.<sup>61</sup> The MPLA was badly affected in terms of casualties and morale. Up until 1973 the Portuguese forces were able to inflict serious losses on the MPLA, which exacerbated tensions between the political and military leadership of the movement.<sup>62</sup> This internal feuding, which became associated most starkly in the growing differences between Neto and Chipenda, evidently led Moscow to shift its support from the former to the latter for a period in 1972 and

1973. But by early 1973, Moscow shifted once more in Neto's favour, and provided him with evidence of an assassination plot on Chipenda's part. Neto immediately denounced his rival as an ambitious Ovimbundu tribalist in the Savimbi mould.<sup>63</sup> Chipenda dismissed the accusations and criticised Neto for again trying to shift the weight of MPLA operations to the north following the signing of a common front accord with Roberto in December 1972.<sup>64</sup> The attempts to carry through this plan eventually failed, but had the additional effect of paralysing MPLA activities in eastern Angola. By early 1974 Neto's leadership was under renewed criticism from a group of intellectuals led by Mário de Andrade.<sup>65</sup> The MPLA was already dividing into three distinct factions, one centering on Neto and his lieutenants, one centering upon De Andrade – the *Revolta Activa* – and one around Chipenda – the *Revolta do Leste*.

As we have seen, the assistance provided by most of the governments of independent Congo-Brazzaville had given Holden Roberto's FNLA a distinct edge over its nationalist rivals in terms of its proximity to the area of operations most favourable to an insurgency. Roberto's leadership style, however, with its centralisation upon his own person and the marginalisation of able lieutenants continued to hobble the organisation. From time to time this led to debilitating internal dissension, and in June 1971, tiring of the GRAE's inability to advance organisationally, the OAU withdrew the recognition it had extended in 1963 to this putative government in exile.<sup>66</sup> The GRAE idea having lost its *raison d'être*, was tacitly allowed to wither, and from 1972 Roberto's efforts were dedicated to constructing a strong military force.<sup>67</sup> In 1972 the situation at the key Kinkuzu training base had deteriorated to such an extent that a virtual mutiny ensued. This was eventually suppressed by Congolese troops, and thirteen officers who had opposed Roberto's continued leadership were executed and others imprisoned. In effect Roberto's links to Mobutu had saved him. Further purges followed and in 1973 the PDA and UPA were formerly dissolved and fully merged into FNLA. From now on, as Mobutu sought to position himself as a figure on the Pan-African stage, his army played an increasingly significant role in organising, training and equipping Roberto's forces, even to the point of allowing the FNLA to conscript youths among the refugee-émigré population in Zaïre.<sup>68</sup>

Despite pressure from Mobutu to revitalise the movement, Roberto remained largely reclusive in Kinshasa, guarded by Zairian troops. The FNLA's philosophy, such as it was, remained nationalist, non-Marxist and peasant-oriented, which also fitted comfortably with Mobutu's new-found passion for African authenticity.<sup>69</sup>

## The Lisbon coup

Ultimately, independence was to come to Portugal's African possessions only indirectly as a result of the struggle being waged by the various liberation movements. Although waged in a relatively ineffective and desultory fashion, particu-

larly in the case of Angola, taken as a whole these conflicts were consuming some 40% of the national budget of the poorest country in Western Europe. The conscript army was thoroughly demoralised by unwinnable campaigns that had cost them some 12 000 dead and more than 40 000 wounded, mostly in Guinea and Mozambique. On 25 April 1974 Caetano's government was ousted in an almost bloodless coup by the Armed Forces Movement, a group of some 300 junior officers, some of whom wanted simply to restore the armed forces' self-respect, others pursuing a more radical agenda. In place of the old authoritarian regime, they installed their senior officers as a Junta of National Salvation, under the leadership of General António de Spínola, whose outspoken criticism of ruinous colonial wars had led to his dismissal from the army the previous month.<sup>70</sup>

By July 1974 Spínola had been pressured by an increasingly radical regime into conceding independence to the African colonies rather than pursue his preferred federationist agenda. The Portuguese junta initially planned on a referendum to decide the political future in each of its African territories, but this was unacceptable to the liberation movements, who were not about to be denied the prize at this late stage. Each now strove to position itself to succeed in what looked increasingly like a triangular struggle.<sup>71</sup>

At this time the FNLA was by far the most formidable of the parties in terms of the size and equipment of its armed wing. Roberto now set about building upon this advantage by expanding his force of some 10 000 guerrillas, of whom 2 000 were operating inside Angola. Already in January Roberto had received promises of assistance from Romania, and this started to arrive, despite the MPLA's best attempts to dissuade Bucharest. Libya, too, would soon begin sending arms and equipment. At this stage, however, the FNLA's principal external supplier was China, and in addition to arms and equipment, in June 1974 the first of what would become a team of 120 Chinese military instructors began to arrive at Kinkuzu base, where they would join 100 Zairian paratroopers to train an army planned to number 15 000. By early August, the Chinese deployment was complete and a massive shipment of arms and other military equipment had been received.<sup>72</sup>

Throughout July and August, the FNLA began to move additional forces into northern Angola, and stepped up its military activities against the Portuguese. By the end of September it boasted a substantial occupied zone in Uige. These activities and attempts at recruitment persuaded some 60 000 Ovimbundu contract workers to flee the coffee plantations and seek the relative safety of refugee camps near Huambo. On 12 October 1974, the FNLA signed a cease-fire with the Portuguese authorities, having completed the initial part of its military positioning. Roberto now sent a strong delegation into Luanda to open an office in a city where only five to ten per cent of the population were Bakongo.<sup>73</sup>

UNITA's reaction to developments was to try to consolidate its political position in the centre of the country. It promptly discarded its Maoist rhetoric in an attempt to secure white political and financial support. On 14 June 1974 UNITA

concluded a cease-fire with the Portuguese. Savimbi's skills as a orator were now employed to good effect, and he was able to adjust his party's message to suit the tastes of whatever audience he was addressing. In this way he managed to reassure many whites fearful of the militaristic image of the FNLA and MPLA. He was simultaneously able to appeal to the sentiments of Afro-Americans, by rejecting the MPLA's multiracialism. To supplement its propaganda campaign, UNITA also began to gather recruits for military training, so as to have the necessary physical strength to underpin its political aspirations.<sup>74</sup>

The Lisbon coup caught the MPLA completely off-guard. As we have seen, the movement was riven by factionalism and on 11 May 1974 the *Revolta Activa* issued a manifesto from Brazzaville blaming Neto's presidentialist style for the political and military weaknesses of the MPLA. De Andrade and his following of largely *mestiço* intellectuals wanted the issue of the party leadership decided at a full congress. Later that month Mobutu, in collaboration with Roberto and Savimbi tried to have Daniel Chipenda, of the *Revolta do Leste*, recognised as the authentic MPLA, an attempt frustrated by Tanzania's President Nyerere.<sup>75</sup>

On 8 June the three MPLA factions met in Lusaka to agree on a compromise tripartite leadership pending the outcome of the party congress. The following month a summit under OAU auspices at Bukavu urged the MPLA and FNLA to agree to a common front after the congress, which was held in Lusaka from 12–23 August. The congress was attended by 165 members of Neto's faction, 165 of the *Revolta do Leste*, and 70 of the *Revolta Activa*. After eleven days of dispute Neto's faction walked out, claiming it had been underrepresented, and would hold its own congress in Angola. Most of the *Revolta Activa* delegates also departed, leaving Chipenda in charge of the rump, which obligingly elected him party president. Even Chipenda realised this position was untenable and at the end of the month he bowed to OAU pressure and relinquished the presidency. On 3 September in Brazzaville all three factions signed a pact officially reunifying the MPLA.<sup>76</sup>

The Brazzaville compromise, as so many before and since, fell apart almost immediately. Daniel Chipenda went straight to Kinshasa and then with Mobutu to Sal, in the Cape Verde islands. There they met with General Spínola, Holden Roberto and Jonas Savimbi. In common with many observers, Spínola calculated that the Chinese-backed FNLA constituted the most formidable of the movements militarily, and Mobutu evidently convinced him that Neto and his branch of the MPLA could be removed from future consideration. Unhappy with the free hand given FRELIMO in Mozambique, the conservative general planned to install in Angola a provisional government of 12 ministers, two each from UNITA, FNLA and MPLA (*Revolta Activa* and *Revolta do Leste*) and six from other ethnic and white movements. He envisaged independence by October 1976.<sup>77</sup>

The effort to exclude Neto from the political equation ended later that month when Spínola resigned, unable to co-operate further with the radically inclined movement that had thrust him into power. He was replaced by General Francisco da Costa Gomes, an appointment that signified an ideological shift to the left.



Already the previous month the MPLA had benefited implicitly from the appointment of Admiral Rosa Coutinho as Angola's high commissioner, for he openly sympathised with Neto.<sup>78</sup> Between 12 and 21 September Neto held his congress in Moxico. Here a new political strategy was articulated and a 35-member central committee headed by a 10-person politburo elected.<sup>79</sup>

Chipenda now publicly repudiated the Brazzaville agreement, and called on the support of the 2 000 to 3 000 guerrillas under his command in eastern Angola and Zambia. When Neto signed a cease-fire with the Portuguese on 21 October 1974, Chipenda vowed to continue fighting. Nevertheless by December Chipenda, too, was in Luanda to open an office, whereupon he was formally expelled from the MPLA.<sup>80</sup>

In November the MPLA consolidated its position in the oil-rich enclave of Cabinda, ousting the separatist guerrillas there with the tacit assistance of the Portuguese.<sup>81</sup>

## The Alvor Accord

By the beginning of 1975 there was plenty of cause for the OAU to be alarmed at the prospect of a three-cornered struggle for power in Angola, despite pacts between Savimbi and Roberto in November and Savimbi and Neto in December which called for a common front and a cessation of all mutually hostile propaganda.<sup>82</sup> Accordingly it summoned Roberto, Neto and Savimbi to Mombasa on 3 January to sign an accord in which they undertook to co-operate in peace, to preserve Angola's territorial integrity and to facilitate national reconciliation. They also declared themselves ready to negotiate with Portugal on the independence process. These latter talks began on 10 January in Alvor, Portugal. Five days later, on 15 January 1975, the Portuguese government signed an agreement with the MPLA, FNLA and UNITA providing for Angola to receive its independence on 11 November that year. In the meantime the country would be governed by a coalition transitional government comprising members of the three movements under the leadership of a prime ministerial triumvirate. The high commissioner, Brigadier-General Silva Cardoso, would arbitrate any differences in the coalition. There were also provisions to integrate the armed forces of the three movements into a single army. Initially this mixed force was to consist of 8 000 men each from the MPLA, FNLA and UNITA and 24 000 Portuguese troops – who would be withdrawn between 1 October 1975 and 29 February 1976. In terms of the Alvor Accord, the transitional government was to draft a provisional constitution and an electoral law, and register voters and candidates for general elections to a constituent assembly, to be held before the end of October 1975.<sup>83</sup>

It was perhaps too much to expect that an agreement signed in the uncertainty of the situation then unfolding both in Angola and Portugal would suddenly mark the end of the bitter internecine rivalries within the liberation movement. Though the members of the transitional government agreed on virtually all poli-

cy issues, including the state taking a 51% stake in all major extractive industries, and the rejection of Cabindan separatism, an atmosphere of deep mutual distrust persisted and was made worse by factions and individuals now competing for actual state power.<sup>84</sup>

By now, despite their public pledges, each movement was approaching possible foreign sponsors for arms and military assistance. Late in January, the US National Security Council approved a secret grant of US \$300 000 to the FNLA, considering that it enjoyed the military advantage. It rejected a proposal to assist UNITA at this stage. Instead of putting its weight behind the Alvor Accord, and despite a reputation for having tacitly assisted the Portuguese regime as a member of NATO, Washington now determined to wager on the exclusion from power in Angola of pro-Communist forces, though, oddly enough, these were also receiving assistance from Beijing.<sup>85</sup>

This decision seems to have been made with no reference to the MPLA's long-standing links with Castro's Cuba, a relationship that was resumed in December 1974 with the visit to Angola of two senior Cuban officials. This mission concluded that while the FNLA was certainly militarily the strongest movement, the MPLA had greater staying power. At this stage, however, Neto seems to have been more interested in what the Soviets could supply in terms of arms and money, though in subsequent months he did ask the Cubans for US \$100 000 to allow him to tranship his arsenal from Dar es Salaam, a request that went unanswered for now.<sup>86</sup> Moscow had resumed its support for Neto, and would increase this as it became apparent that the USA and China were backing the FNLA, in an unholy alliance that caused great alarm in the Kremlin.

## Overture to civil war

The first major clash after the inauguration of the interim government on 31 January occurred just two weeks later when MPLA troops loyal to Agostinho Neto attacked the Luanda offices of Daniel Chipenda's MPLA *Revolta do Leste* faction, killing several people. This attack drove the Chipenda group out of Luanda and was justified on the flimsy grounds that since the Eastern Revolt group had not been recognised in the Alvor Accord, it was illegal. A more likely explanation is that Neto was eager to prevent a rival MPLA group from establishing a position in the capital, a location that was obviously to prove vital in determining which of the liberation movements would lodge the strongest claim to the succession. Chipenda shortly announced that his forces would join the FNLA, of which he became assistant secretary-general on 15 April. This move effectively reduced the size of the non-Mbundu component of the MPLA.<sup>87</sup>

Fighting also occurred in a number of places between the MPLA and FNLA, the latter being acutely aware of a need to establish a presence in the capital. Using the financial clout afforded by US and Zairian backing Roberto bought Angola's leading daily and a TV station and launched a propaganda campaign against the

MPLA. He also began to deploy well-armed contingents of his forces into Angola, including Luanda, conscious of his movement's superiority in terms of overall numbers and equipment.<sup>88</sup> At this stage it appears that some of Roberto's lieutenants were pressing him to stage a military bid for power, a temptation he apparently resisted, though FNLA operations suggest a two-track approach. On 23 March FNLA troops attacked MPLA installations in Luanda and a week later a motorised column of 500 FNLA troops arrived in the city. Fighting continued in the *muceques* for most of April as the FNLA attacked MPLA headquarters throughout Luanda. By 3 May the death toll stood at some 700, with another 1 000 wounded. Other incidents occurred in the north – in São Salvador (Mbanza Kongo), Ambrizete (Nzeto) and Tomboco. In the central highlands there were clashes between FNLA and MPLA forces in Nova Lisboa (Huambo), which spread further east to include Luso, Silva Porto (Bié) and Teixeira de Sousa (Bailundo).<sup>89</sup>

UNITA, which had least to gain from a military confrontation at this stage, managed to remain aloof from the conflict until 20–21 May, when its offices in Lobito came under MPLA attack.<sup>90</sup>

Fighting in Luanda was halted for little more than a fortnight by a cease-fire signed on 12 May and then resumed with greater ferocity over a wider area. MPLA units attacked FNLA positions in Cuanza Norte, Malanje and Uige. Between 3 and 5 June the FNLA was driven from the Cabinda enclave. Fighting then recommenced in Luanda and persisted despite another cease-fire agreement. The June fighting was the first to affect UNITA, as its headquarters in Luanda came under MPLA attack, but until August the party continued to try to win popular and international support as a party of peace, an effort that secured a significant amount of sympathy from other African governments.<sup>91</sup>

By this time, however the Alvor Accords were effectively dead, and the transitional government barely functioning. No provisional constitution had been published nor an electoral law approved. There were violent disagreements about how many Angolan refugees were eligible to vote, the FNLA's estimates being more than twice those of the MPLA and UNITA. Internal displacements caused by the internal conflict added to the chaotic situation.<sup>92</sup>

In the meantime the joint army had not even begun to be formed, each movement was recruiting as fast as possible, and growing quantities of weaponry were flowing into the country.

Since mid-May the Portuguese government had sought a reconfirmation of the parties' commitment to Alvor, and from 16–21 June 1975 Neto, Savimbi and Roberto met in Nakuru, Kenya to attempt a settlement that would rescue the peace process. Portugal was excluded on the insistence of Roberto, who accused the Armed Forces Movement of bias towards the MPLA. Two days after agreement had been reached, mortar and small-arms fire was again being exchanged in Luanda. High Commissioner Cardoso blamed both the FNLA and MPLA, and the ministry of economic affairs warned that the country stood on the verge of collapse.

This realisation seemed to have an effect, however brief. In the first week of July the provisional constitution was published and a modest beginning was

made with force integration, but by the 9th the fighting had resumed in greater intensity and the three movements began effectively to divide Angola into spheres of military influence. By the middle of the month the MPLA had almost evicted the FNLA from the capital. Roberto's forces were also under increasing pressure in the Luanda-Malanje corridor and by August had been pinned back into the north-east corner of Angola. The MPLA had now secured control of all central Angola. The MPLA was proving far more formidable than the FNLA and its backers had anticipated. The governments of Zambia and Zaïre were becoming alarmed and approached Washington for action.<sup>93</sup>

In mid-July the US Central Intelligence Agency decided upon a massive increase in its support for the FNLA, and the initiation of assistance to UNITA. The FNLA attempted a counter-offensive from the Zaïre and Uíge provinces, where it had now amassed a force of 17 000. Roberto announced that he would lead his troops on Luanda, the first time he had entered Angola in 14 years. By 24 July the FNLA had seized Caxito, scarcely 50 km from the capital, but here the advance stalled.<sup>94</sup>

As July ended with Angola engaged in a full-scale civil war, Cuba again took the initiative in its dealings with the MPLA. In early August a seven-man delegation arrived in Angola to establish Neto's exact requirements. It also brought him the US \$100 000 he had earlier requested. Neto asked for military instructors, weapons, clothing and food, and the Cuban mission forwarded to Havana a proposal for a military mission of 94 men. The Cuban government promptly increased the size of the training mission to 480, sufficient to staff four centres, where it was planned to train 5 300 Angolans. Weapons and supplies would also be provided so that the operation could begin in mid-October. At no stage does Havana appear to have consulted with Moscow about this matter, giving the lie to the, then and later common, assumption that Cuba was acting as the USSR's proxy or surrogate.<sup>95</sup>

By this stage the South Africans, too, had become alarmed. They had been involved on the periphery of the Angolan conflict for some time, at least partly out of a desire to counter SWAPO's activities in the border area with South West Africa (Namibia). This had also drawn them into combined operations with Portuguese forces against all guerrillas within south-eastern Angola.<sup>96</sup> As the situation deteriorated in Angola in early 1975, the South African government was adamant that it would not be drawn into the conflict. Nevertheless, there had been contacts as early as July 1974 between Savimbi and the South Africans at which the former requested weapons. A small number of small-arms was delivered that October, but over the next few months Pretoria edged increasingly into the provision of clandestine assistance. In exchange Savimbi promised to cooperate in the fight against SWAPO.<sup>97</sup> In February 1975 the FNLA made contact with the South Africans, followed by Daniel Chipenda in May.<sup>98</sup> Savimbi, Roberto and Chipenda all played the anti-communist card and undertook to undermine SWAPO's strength. Pretoria's intelligence calculations were that the MPLA enjoyed little popular support, and that the Portuguese government would

probably postpone elections indefinitely. By June 1975 South Africa was drawing up plans to provide substantial assistance to the three anti-MPLA leaders, with equipment, arms, ammunition and training. By July deliveries were under way, and by September a substantial training programme was in operation.<sup>99</sup>

A small force of South Africans had already moved into southern Angola in June 1975, whence they moved two months later to secure the Cunene River hydroelectric scheme against possible attack.

Meanwhile in the north of the country the FNLA had received a massive amount of weaponry from the USA in August, and in mid-September Mobutu deployed two of his elite battalions in support of Roberto. By 26 September, however, the MPLA forces had again stalled the northern advance, albeit within 30 km of the capital. By this time US intelligence was becoming alarmed that despite the superiority of the FNLA in terms of numbers and equipment, the movement was poorly trained and led. The Chinese, coming to the same conclusion, withdrew their training teams. In the centre of the country, Nova Lisboa (Huambo) was coming under threat from the MPLA by early October, as the Portuguese withdrew towards Luanda preparatory to their planned return home. The South African instructors with Savimbi were sending alarming reports to their superiors in Pretoria and had even assisted in UNITA's defence of the city on 5 October. Nine days later, on 14 October 1975, a South African Defence Force column crossed into southern Angola in support of a force under Daniel Chipenda.<sup>100</sup>

The South African-led force quickly moved north-eastwards, forcing the MPLA out of Pereira de Eça (Ngiva), before moving through Sá da Bandeira (Lubango) on 24 October and taking the port of Moçâmedes on the 28th. On 2 and 3 November Cuban instructors came into contact with the South Africans as the latter pushed on to Benguela, which fell on the 6th. By the 7th the South African column was in Lobito, and by the 14th in Novo Redondo (Ngunza).<sup>101</sup>

By this time the MPLA was thoroughly alarmed at the sudden threat from the south. The MPLA now approached Cuba for combat troops. Havana agreed on 4 November, and the first contingent of 158 special forces arrived in Angola on the 9th. Through November and December Cuban reinforcements continued to arrive and succeeded in holding a defence line less than 300 km south of Luanda. By late December the Cubans had achieved numerical parity with the South Africans and were ready to begin a counter-offensive.<sup>102</sup>

By then the FNLA's northern front had collapsed. Roberto was impatient to reach the capital by the date set for independence, 11 November. Ignoring the advice of his foreign allies, he set off from Caxito with a single column to cover the 30 km to Luanda. Roberto's force disintegrated under heavy artillery and rocket bombardment, and by early January the FNLA had ceased to pose a military threat of any significance.<sup>103</sup>

High Commissioner Cardoso departed for Portugal the day before independence and the MPLA installed itself as the government of the People's Republic of Angola. Initially most African governments withheld recognition, preferring an inclusive settlement with elections to follow, but as the scale of the South African

intervention became apparent, more and more states announced their support for Neto's new government. By now Pretoria was isolated, at least in public, and whatever undertakings the US National Security Advisor Dr Henry Kissinger had given in private, a hobbled presidency was unable to deliver upon them in the face of a recalcitrant Congress determined to bring under control the White House's ability to conduct foreign policy and wage war without the approval of the elected representatives of the people.

On 22 January 1976, the South African Defence Force withdrew its forces across the Angolan border. The war for independence had finished, the war against the Angolan people was about to begin.

## Endnotes

- 1 D Birmingham, *Portugal and Africa*, Macmillan Press, Basingstoke, 1999, pp 44–62; GJ Bender, *Angola under the Portuguese: The myth and the reality*, University of Los California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1978, pp 12–18; I Kaplan (ed), *Angola: A country study*, The American University, Washington DC, 1979, pp 10–29.
- 2 Birmingham, op cit, pp 55–62.
- 3 Bender, op cit, pp 59–94.
- 4 Birmingham, op cit, pp 82–109. As with so many historically derived stereotypes, this was not an accurate reflection of the facts, in that many people of the interior had also been profiting from this trade.
- 5 J Marcum, *The Angolan revolution*, volume I: The anatomy of an explosion, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1969, pp 3–5.
- 6 Bender, op cit, pp 95–131.
- 7 Marcum, op cit, volume I, pp 13–16.
- 8 Ibid, pp 16–22; WM James, *A political history of the civil war in Angola, 1974–1990*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, NJ, 1991, pp 28–30.
- 9 Marcum, op cit, volume I, pp 23–30.
- 10 Ibid, p 30
- 11 Ibid, pp 37–41.
- 12 One of the prominent intellectual forces in the MPLA was Lúcio Lara, the son of a wealthy sugar plantation owner. See Marcum, op cit, volume I, pp 42–43.
- 13 Ibid, pp 49–53.
- 14 Ibid, pp 49–56; James, op cit, pp 27–28.
- 15 Marcum, op cit, volume I, pp 60–68; James, op cit, pp 27–28.
- 16 See Marcum, op cit, volume I, p 135 for Fanon's influence on Roberto's thinking.
- 17 Ibid, pp 43, 70, on the Accra meeting.
- 18 Ibid, pp 135–136.
- 19 Ibid, pp 136–137.
- 20 Ibid, pp 137–138.
- 21 After 1960, the Cuanhama branch of this stream, as a subgroup of the Ovambo, most of whom lived in South West Africa (Namibia), brought about connections between SWAPO's Sam Nujoma and the UPA of Holden Roberto and subsequently with Savimbi's UNITA. See Marcum, op cit, volume I, pp 114–115.
- 22 James, op cit, pp 31–35.

- 23 Marcum, op cit, volume I, pp 111–112; 118–120
- 24 Ibid, pp 124–126; James, op cit, pp 52–53.
- 25 Marcum, op cit, volume I, pp 126–130; WS van der Waals, *Portugal's war in Africa 1961–1974*, Ashanti Publishing, Rivonia, 1993, pp 52–53.
- 26 Marcum, op cit, volume I, pp 130–147; van der Waals, op cit, pp 56–58.
- 27 Marcum, op cit, volume I, p 157; van der Waals, op cit, pp 61–67.
- 28 Marcum, op cit, volume I, pp 135–154; van der Waals, op cit, pp 58–78.
- 29 Marcum, op cit, volume I, pp 190–193; van der Waals, op cit, pp 75–78.
- 30 Marcum, op cit, volume I, pp 159, 175–180; James, op cit, pp 42–44.
- 31 Marcum, op cit, volume I, pp 159–164; 200–204. With the advent of the Kennedy administration in 1961, Portugal was no longer able to count on the unequivocal support of the USA in the UN, a point not lost on Roberto, but the limits to US altruism were revealed starkly when the Berlin crisis broke and reminded Washington of the importance of the Azores facility. Ibid, pp 181–189. See also G Wright, *The destruction of a nation: United states' policy towards Angola since 1945*, Pluto Press, London, 1997, pp 16–36.
- 32 Marcum, op cit, volume I, p 203; James, op cit, pp 46–48. The United Arab Republic (UAR) was created on 1 February 1958 through the union of Egypt and Syria. In September 1961 Syria withdrew from the union, but Egypt retained the title UAR until 1971.
- 33 Marcum, op cit, volume I, pp 203–205. This fear of being outclassed by the sophisticates of Luanda is a recurring theme in the failure to achieve unity between parties of different traditions and backgrounds.
- 34 Ibid, pp 210–221. In the propaganda war between the UPA and the MPLA there were increasing allegations that the former was driven by Bakongo tribalism and was anti-*mestiço* and anti-*assimilado*. There were also charges that Roberto was not really Angolan, having spent so much of his life in the Congo. UPA countered that the MPLA was Mbundu-dominated.
- 35 Ibid, pp 220–221.
- 36 Ibid, pp 228–233.
- 37 *Governo Revolucionário de Angola no Exílio*.
- 38 Marcum, op cit, volume I, pp 243–248
- 39 Ibid, pp 251–255; van der Waals, op cit, pp 100–101. Viriato da Cruz, the secretary-general was eventually dismissed the party altogether in July 1963 when he persisted in advocating a working relationship with the FNLA to gain access to the main Angolan war front. In April 1964 Da Cruz and his followers were admitted to the FNLA, but not to GRAE. See J Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution, volume II: Exile politics and guerrilla warfare (1962–1976)*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1978, pp 86–92.
- 40 Marcum, op cit, volume I, pp 263–267.
- 41 Marcum, op cit, volume I, pp 299–302; volume II, pp 27–32; van der Waals, op cit, pp 101–104.
- 42 Marcum, op cit, volume I, pp 302–304; volume II pp 34–37.
- 43 Marcum, op cit, volume II, pp 38–39.
- 44 Ibid, pp 100–113.
- 45 Ibid, pp 133–134.
- 46 Ibid, pp 136–141.
- 47 Ibid, pp 160–161.
- 48 Ibid, pp 160–166; James, op cit, pp 50–52.

- 49 Marcum, op cit, volume II, pp 164–167. van der Waals, op cit, pp 106–109. One of Savimbi's three vice-presidents was Smart Chata, who had been so important in establishing the party's Chokwe and Zambian links.
- 50 Marcum, op cit, volume II, pp 167–169; van der Waals, op cit, p 106.
- 51 Marcum, op cit, volume II, pp 141–149.
- 52 Ibid, p 149.
- 53 Ibid, pp 149–160.
- 54 Ibid, pp 169–172
- 55 Ibid, pp 172–176. A small MPLA group continued to operate in the Dembos area of northern Angola, but was virtually cut off by UPA forces.
- 56 Ibid, pp 191–193. UNITA's co-operation with SWAPO was important in allowing the former to infiltrate the remote south-eastern parts of Angola. See Marcum, op cit, volume II, p 217.
- 57 Ibid, pp 193–195.
- 58 Ibid, pp 211–212. It appears that many of the MPLA's actions in the eastern front were undertaken not against the Portuguese, but UNITA.
- 59 Ibid, pp 194–197.
- 60 Ibid, pp 197–199.
- 61 Ibid, pp 210–214. According to Portuguese sources, MPLA informers reciprocated by disclosing the whereabouts of FNLA forces. van der Waals, op cit, pp 110–121.
- 62 Marcum, op cit, volume II, pp 199–201.
- 63 Ibid, pp 200–203. He added the accusation that Chipenda had been providing arms to UNITA and that the latter organisation was collaborating with the Portuguese.
- 64 Ibid, pp 209–210. Ever since withdrawing recognition from the GRAE, the OAU had been at pains to reconcile the FNLA and MPLA. UNITA, which enjoyed no recognition from the OAU at this stage, was simply omitted from the ensuing negotiations. The agreement of 13 December 1972 provided for the establishment of a unified command council, but mutual suspicions once again prevailed and the MPLA still failed to gain access to Angola via Zaire, to Neto's great embarrassment.
- 65 Ibid, pp 203–205.
- 66 Ibid, pp 185–187.
- 67 Ibid, pp 189–191.
- 68 Ibid, pp 187–189; 218–221.
- 69 Ibid, p 189.
- 70 van der Waals, op cit, pp 237–257. van der Waals was with the South African consulate in Luanda from 1970 to 1973, and is particularly good on developments within the armed forces, and the influence of Spínola's published writings. See also D Reynolds, *One world divisible: A global history since 1945*, Allen Lane, Penguin Press, London, 2000, pp 343–345; James, op cit, pp 41–42; Marcum, op cit, volume II, pp 241–243.
- 71 Marcum, op cit, volume II, pp 243–244.
- 72 Ibid, pp 243–246, 428 fn 43; James, op cit, pp 52–53.
- 73 Marcum, op cit, p 246.
- 74 Ibid, pp 243, 247–248, 429 fn 59. UNITA also found it expedient in November 1974 to disavow its long-standing alliance with SWAPO.
- 75 Ibid, pp 248–249.
- 76 Ibid, pp 249–250.
- 77 Ibid, pp 250–251, 431 fn 84–85; M Wolfers & J Bergerol, *Angola in the frontline*, Zed



- Press, London, 1983, p 6, which also provides a view of developments from the main-line MPLA perspective.
- 78 Marcum, op cit, volume II, pp 250–251; van der Waals, op cit, p 255.
- 79 Marcum, op cit, volume II, p 252. The top five in the politburo were Agostinho Neto, president; Lopo do Nascimento; Lúcio Lara; Carlos Rocha; and José Eduardo dos Santos.
- 80 Ibid, p 251.
- 81 Ibid, pp 253–254.
- 82 C Legum (ed), *Africa Contemporary Record*, volume 7, 1974–1975, Rex Collings, London, 1975, p B538.
- 83 Marcum, op cit, volume II, pp 255–256; C Legum (ed), *Africa Contemporary Record*, volume 8, 1975–76, Rex Collings, London, p B421.
- 84 Legum, *Africa Contemporary Record*, 1975–76, op cit, pp B422–425.
- 85 Marcum, volume II, op cit, pp 256–257; Legum, *Africa Contemporary Record*, 1975–1976, op cit, p B 423. The insistence of many Western journalists and politicians upon labelling the MPLA a Marxist organisation was incorrect. Though many of its leaders had been informed by Marxist-Leninist writings, there were other who represented a far broader spectrum of Leftist thinking. At this stage it remained a heterogeneous movement; developments and alliances would push it more firmly into the Marxist camp.
- 86 P Gleijeses, *Havana's policy in Africa, 1959–76: New evidence from Cuban archives*, Cold War International History Project Bulletin, Issues 8/9 Winter 1996/1997, pp 8–9.
- 87 Legum, *Africa Contemporary Record*, 1975–1976, op cit, p B423.
- 88 Ibid, p B423–4.
- 89 Ibid, p B424
- 90 Ibid.
- 91 Ibid, p B425.
- 92 Ibid.
- 93 Marcum, op cit, volume II, pp 261–262.
- 94 Legum, *Africa Contemporary Record*, 1975–1976, op cit, pp B426–427.
- 95 Gleijeses, op cit, p 9.
- 96 van der Waals, op cit, pp 208–211
- 97 FJ du T Spies & SJ du Preez, *Operasie Savannah: Angola 1975–1976*, South African Defence Force, Pretoria, 1989, pp 60–62.
- 98 Ibid, pp 62–63.
- 99 Ibid, pp 62–71; J Marcum, op cit, volume II, pp 268–269.
- 100 Spies & du Preez, op cit, pp 76–87; Marcum, op cit, volume II, pp 286–269; Gleijeses, op cit, pp 10–11.
- 101 Spies & du Preez, op cit, pp 89–110; Marcum, op cit, volume II, p 269; Gleijeses, op cit, p 11.
- 102 Gleijeses, op cit, pp 11–15.
- 103 Marcum, op cit, volume II, p 274.