Armed Conflicts Report

Angola (1975 - first combat deaths)
Update: September 2003

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Summary:

2003 The Angolan civil war ended in mid-2002 and throughout 2003 the country began the process of rebuilding. Since the end of the conflict, more than a million Angolans who had fled the country have returned. The main rebel group, Unita, laid down its weapons and re-established itself as a political party. However, in spite of the absence of violence, many problems must be overcome to stabilize the country.

"What we have now in Angola is negative peace. It is the absence of violence, yes. But it is peace without justice, peace without opportunity, peace without democracy. This is not a peace that promises much to the Angolan people." [The New York Times, July 30, 2003]

"The ceasefire has held, elections are on the horizon, and there have been no reprisals, but otherwise little has gone right for the former rebels... Aid agencies warn that starvation, disease and retribution threaten an estimated 400,000 Unita rebels and their families. Diplomats warn that democracy and stability will elude Angola unless the rebels are integrated." [The Guardian Weekly, February 27-March 5, 2003]

2002 The war in Angola ended mid-year following the death of Jonas Savimbi in an ambush by the Angolan military in February. The government and the political wing of UNITA signed a ceasefire and agreed to adhere to the terms of the 1994 Lusaka Protocol.

2001 The government offensive led to a shift in tactics by the rebel group UNITA, away from direct military confrontations with the government, to more hit and run guerilla style attacks. These attacks were primarily focused on civilian targets, and especially on towns and transportation vehicles where the highest casualties were reported. A UNITA peace plan was rejected by the government which maintained that the Lusaka protocol of 1994 was the only instrument for peace.

2000 The Angolan government gained control of 92 percent of Angola after a series of back-to-back victories. Though seriously weakened, UNITA rebels managed to continue hit and run attacks in much of the countryside. There were reports of the Namibian army fighting alongside the Angolan army as well as of heightened tensions in neighbouring Zambia. In March, the UN released a report identifying political leaders and countries accused of violations of UN sanctions against UNITA. Approximately 1,000 people died in the conflict this year.

1999 The armed conflict between government forces and UNITA rebels intensified, resulting in major rebel losses. UNITA was cleared out of its strongholds in the highland towns of Andulo and Bailundo and lost a vast territory to government forces. Thousands were killed in the fighting, a major increase from the estimated conflict deaths during 1998.

1998 Conflict erupted again between the government and rebel forces as the Lusaka Protocol of 1994...
broke down, with each side accusing the other of not following the peace accord’s provisions. The rebels’ new offensive resulted in their retaking more than half the Angolan countryside.

**Type of Conflict:**

State control

**Parties to the Conflict:**

1. Government, led by President Jose Eduardo dos Santos:
   - Ruling Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA);

2. Rebels, led by Jonas Savimbi:
   - National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA).

**Status of Fighting:**

2002 Fighting declined significantly and eventually ended almost completely this year following the February death of Jonas Savimbi and the signing of a ceasefire in March.

2001 After losing territory, resources and weapons in the government offensive of 2000, UNITA shifted its tactics from direct battlefield engagements to guerilla style attacks. The focus of the guerilla attacks also shifted from military targets to civilians ones, including towns and public transportation, where the most damage and loss of life occurred.

"UNITA was all but routed in 1999, but has managed to regroup since then, operating no longer as a conventional army but as an increasingly effective guerilla force. The rebels’ main aim at the moment seems to be to strike hard in the Angolan Government’s own heartland." [BBC News, July 3, 2001]

"UNITA continued its campaign of attacking lightly defended towns and civilian convoys, whilst mainly trying to avoid contact with the Angolan army." [Angola Peace Monitor, Issue No. 11, Vol. VII, August 1, 2001]

"Nearly one hundred people are dead in Angola after the train on which they were travelling apparently hit an anti-tank mine on the track. Eyewitnesses say that armed men attacked the passengers after the explosion. The assault appears to be the work of the UNITA rebels, who have carried out a number of attacks in northern Angola in the past few months." [BBC News, August 12, 2001]

"Gunmen fired a missile at a passenger bus and then sprayed the vehicle with gunfire, killing some 50 people, including several children. Many of the bodies were charred or blown to pieces in the attack making an accurate victim count difficult. No one has claimed responsibility but UNITA rebels are thought to have carried it out." [Associated Press, August 27, 2001]

2000 The Angolan government gained control of 92 percent of Angola (11 out of 13 districts by September) after a series of back-to-back victories and the capture of the UNITA leader’s headquarters at Jamba. Though seriously weakened and no longer posing a threat to the entire country, UNITA increased its use of landmines and continued hit and run attacks in much of the countryside, including within areas considered to be government strongholds. There were reports that the Namibian army has joined the Angolan conflict, its army fighting alongside the Angolan army which also was reportedly engaged in forced recruitment of Namibian men and women to fight against the rebels. Namibia’s involvement has in turn heightened tensions in Zambia, where UNITA bandits searching for food have attacked villages.

"The Angolan army has seized the UNITA rebel base at Jamba, for years the headquarters of the guerrillas’ leader, Jonas Savimbi...the fall of Jamba gives government forces almost complete control of Angola’s southern border, further restricting UNITA’s avenues for retreat in the face of its worst defeats in more than a decade." [Guardian Weekly, 12 January 2000]

"With the complicity and collaboration of Namibian authorities, the Angolan army is using deceit and force to conscript Rundu’s young men and women into a foreign army, according to peasants, political organizers and clergy here. They say the forced recruitment began last December, when the Namibian government allowed the Angolan military to use Namibian soil for its stepped-up attacks on retreating insurgents as part of an armed offensive that began last September." [Mar 2-8 Guardian Weekly 2000]

"The Angolan Armed Forces (FAA) have continued to make gains against Jonas Savimbi’s military remnants. Fighting has continued along the eastern border with Zambia, and there have been reports that this has spilled over into Zambian territory." [Angola Peace Monitor, 10 June 2000]

"The Angolan army, FAA have made further territorial gains against Jonas Savimbi’s rebel movement - UNITA. The government now claims to control 92 percent of Angola’s 157 districts, including eleven of the 13 districts in the two main diamond producing provinces of Lunda Sul and Lunda Norte." [The Angola Peace Monitor, 26 July 2000]

"However, the rebels have also continued to attack people and property in the government-controlled areas. UNITA are no longer in a position to threaten to take over the country, but by making much of the country unsafe they are succeeding in their campaign to deny hundreds of thousands of people the right to live in their homes and work their land." [Angola Peace Monitor, 1 September, 2000]

1999 Fighting between government forces and UNITA rebels intensified in 1999, resulting in major rebel losses. In October, UNITA was dislodged from its strongholds in the highland towns of Andulo and Bailundo. By year end there were questions whether UNITA could continue as a potent military force.

"UNITA has lost all its former bases, including its more recent headquarters in the central highland towns of Andulo and Bailundo two months ago." [Guardian Weekly, Jan. 6-12, 2000]

"The conventional military capacity built up UNITA since it pledged to disarm in 1994 has been severely damaged, leaving questions about whether it can operate as a single military force. However, senior Angolan military officers recognize that the capacity for UNITA to continue as a dangerous guerrilla force remains.

"The Chief of Staff of the Angolan Army, General Joao De Matos, speaking in Catumbela on 18 December, said that UNITA no longer has the capacity to take control of the country by force. He claimed that UNITA had lost more than 80% of its fighting capacity, with the army seizing from the rebels 15,000 tonnes of weapons, munitions and other equipment, 27 tanks, 7 artillery emplacements, 30 missiles, and hundreds of vehicles... " [Angola Peace Monitor, December 21, 1999]

1998 Fighting was renewed in July 1998, following four years of attempts to broker a fragile peace. The fighting was limited though consistent throughout the period of July to November, with full scale war recurring in December. As the new year approached, it appeared that an escalation of the fighting would likely result for 1999.

"The peace treaty that gave Angola, a country rich in diamond and oil deposits, its longest cease-fire in 30 years is in shambles. Since June the UNITA rebel forces have retaken more than half of the countryside, engaging the Angolan Army in hundreds of places and flushing more than 200,000 Angolans from their villages. The fiercest fighting came this month, when the government decided to attack two rebel strongholds, bombing the central towns of Andulo and Bailundo for three days. The attacks, however, underestimated UNITA’s strength and the army was pushed back, United Nations officials say." [New York Times, December 23, 1998]

Number of Deaths:

Total: At least 500,000 since 1975, including over 300,000 since 1992. Tens of thousands have been mutilated by anti-personnel mines.

[World Military and Social Expenditures 1996 by Ruth Leger Sivard estimates a total of 750,000.]

"The civil war has killed at least half a million people, displaced 4.1 million or roughly one third of the population and devastated the economy of the diamond- and oil-rich southern African nation." [The Times of India Online, May 4, 2002]

2002 Estimates of the number of people killed by the violence this year were not available. However, media reports claimed that hundreds died of war-related diseases and starvation between April and December.

"The government army captured or killed dozens of UNITA’s senior officers before tracking down Mr. Savimbi in remote eastern Angola." [Associated Press, May 4, 2002]

"Wednesday’s truce talks were set to take place in an atmosphere of mistrust, deepened by an attack on Tuesday by armed men suspected of being UNITA members in a village in the central province of Huambo, killing two people. It was the first armed attack reported since the government announced it was ending hostilities against the rebels." [globalandmail.com, March 20, 2002]

"The fog of war is lifting in Angola to reveal a country close to the Dark Ages, with more than a million people starving and homeless after years of living wild in the bush." [Electronic Telegraph, July 22, 2002]

2001 According to media reports, more than 800 people died as a result of the fighting between January and August of 2001.

"Earlier this month some 200 internally displaced persons could have been killed following what is believed to be a UNITA attack on Caxito town, some 50 km north of the capital Luanda. A Danish organization, Development Aid People to People ADPP was among NGO’s that were severely affected. During the attack two of its teachers were killed, and another teacher and 61 pupils were abducted and 120 children are unaccounted for." [All Africa News Agency, May 28, 2001]

"In their bloodiest attack in months, UNITA rebels overran a town 60 kilometers from the capital, Luanda. A statement by the army did not provide casualty figures, but a Luanda-based officer of an aid organization who was in contact with colleagues in Caxito said that 79 people, including soldiers, police officers and civilians, had been slain. UNITA, asserted that it had killed 37 soldiers and police officers in the raid." [Associated Press, May 8, 2001]

2000 At least 1,000 people died in the conflict so far this year.
"The great majority of deliberate and indiscriminate killings which have occurred along the border, particularly in northern Kavango region and along Caprivi Strip, have been carried out by UNITA. In one incident on 6 February, 28 people were killed and 42 injured, including women and children, when a large UNITA group attacked the town of Santa Clara on the Angolan side of the border." [Amnesty International, 22 March 2000]

UNITA claimed last week that its forces killed 261 government troops in seven of the country’s 18 provinces, including the diamond-rich northern provinces of Malange and Uige." [Yahoo Asia News, 11 August 2000]

"The army has reported that it killed 34 UNITA soldiers in military operations around Cuemba at the beginning of August." [Angola Peace Monitor, 1 September, 2000]

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1999 Thousands – with one report estimating over 10,000 people – died in the conflict in 1999. According to the UN, the number of internally displaced people reached over a million by the end of the year.

"Incidents of extrajudicial killings occurred during the year as the war continued and, although figures and details were unavailable, observers believe that the number of such killings increased during the year. Security forces were responsible for numerous extrajudicial killings. Police frequently participate in shakedowns, muggings, carjackings, and killings. Major human rights abuses occurred as government forces carried out counterinsurgency operations. In February government forces reportedly killed several civilians after retaking the town of Mbanza Congo from UNITA. In December there was an unconfirmed report that the FAA killed 47 civilians during operations in the Luanda Sul province. Government aircraft bombed military targets in UNITA-held towns, which reportedly resulted in civilian casualties....

The shelling of cities by UNITA forces often killed civilians, particularly in Malange, Huambo, and Kuito. According to the Bishop of Malange, more than 1,000 persons were killed, and 700 injured, as a result of shelling; however, this report could not be confirmed." [US State Department Human Rights Report, February 2000]

"The UN Humanitarian Coordination Unit (UCAH) in Angola reported that the number of people internally displaced by fighting between the government forces and UNITA had now reached over million." [IRIN, December 21, 1999]

"The civil war between UNITA rebels and the government forces has killed 10,000 people in the last four months, a newspaper reported Monday." [Associated Press, April 5, 1999]

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1998 Approximately 600 people died in the renewed conflict, with most of the casualties occurring during the major escalation in fighting in December.

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**Political Developments:**

2002 Following the death of Jonas Savimbi in February, the Angolan armed forces and UNITA signed a ceasefire and agreed to resume the political process set out by the 1994 Lusaka Protocol which calls for the integration of former UNITA rebels into the armed forces and the national government. In August UNITA disbanded its armed wing, marking an official end to the war. Close to 70,000 former combatants were demobilized between April and December and 5,000 former UNITA rebels were integrated into the Angolan Armed Forces. Despite significant progress by December millions of Angolans were still displaced, hundreds of thousands faced starvation, serious health problems or widespread unemployment, and the country remained littered with landmines and unexploded ordnance.

"Angola began the year 2002 at war. Today, there is peace in 17 of the country’s 18 provinces. The turning point was the death in February of the veteran Unita rebel leader, Jonas Savimbi." [BBC News, December 31, 2002]

"The modern UNITA has little ideologically to unify it. Angola’s civil war began as a cold-war conflict between the Marxist MPLA and the US-backed UNITA. But the MPLA has long since abandoned its socialist policies, and the thing that held UNITA together was Savimbi." [The Christian Science Monitor, April 29, 2002]

"Angolan army officers have been selecting 5,000 members of the Unita rebel movement to be incorporated into the Angolan Armed Forces, in accordance with the peace agreement signed in April." [BBC News, July 15, 2002]

"Despite significant progress towards lasting peace in Angola, the country still faced major security and humanitarian challenges..." [IRIN, December 18, 2002]

2001 A peace overture by UNITA to end the fighting and restart peace talks was rejected by the government in favour of the 1994 Lusaka Protocol. Angolan President Jose Eduardo dos Santos announced elections – not held since 1992 – would proceed both for the presidency and parliament sometime in 2002 or 2003 depending on the status of fighting. Dos Santos was quoted as saying he would not run again for the Presidency, noting that if the constitution had not been suspended due to fighting, he would have served his maximum two terms in office.

"In its new overture UNITA proposed, among other things, the formation of a transitional government comprising of the ruling MPLA, UNITA, and the oppositon National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA). It also mooted the creation of a ‘supreme peace council’. So far the government has rejected the proposal, sticking to its position that the only mechanism for peace remains the Lusaka protocol signed in 1994." [Integrated Regional Information Networks, August 27, 2001]
2000 A UN report under the direction of Canadian UN ambassador Robert Fowler detailing the violations of Security Council sanctions against UNITA was presented to the UN Security Council in March. It identified the political leaders and countries that have continued trade in diamonds and weapons with UNITA. The Security Council gave them until November 2000 to adhere to the sanctions or face reprisals.

1999 There were no negotiations between the Angolan government and UNITA. The South African Development Community (SADC) extended political support to the government, saying Savimbi "ceased to be a viable interlocutor to the solution of the Angolan conflict." Angolan civil society groups have produced a Manifesto for Peace and others have urged the government to negotiate.

1998 The peace talks in early 1998 were considered insincere by many who saw them as a UNITA ploy to refresh troops and revise strategy after losing much of its source of diamond income in December 1997. The renewed UNITA insurgency in July 1998 followed the MPLA expulsion in June of UNITA members from the government of national unity, said to be based on UNITA's failure to disarm as part of the peace provisions. With the eruption of the heavy fighting in December, there was no sign of re-entering the peace process, with continued escalation of the war a likely occurrence for 1999.

Background:

The prolonged civil war is a power struggle between the two rival movements in the pre-1975 war of independence against Portugal. At independence, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), led by Jonas Savimbi, refused to accept the new Soviet-backed government of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), and launched an extended bush war with the help of South Africa and the United States. UN-supervised elections in 1992, won by the MPLA, yielded only a temporary halt to the fighting as the defeated UNITA launched the bloodiest phase of the war during 1993. The following year the rival parties signed a formal peace agreement, the Lusaka Protocol, calling for the formation of a coalition government, the integration of UNITA forces into the Angolan army, and demobilization of remaining combatants. Implementation of the Protocol advanced...
haltlingly until 1997 when, under the auspices of a UN observer mission, UNITA representatives joined a government of unity and 10,000 former UNITA troops were integrated into the new Angolan Armed Forces. Savimbi and several thousand troops remained in UNITA-controlled areas, however, and 20,000 of 70,000 demobilized UNITA troops disappeared from the UN-supervised quartering camps established as part of the Protocol. In response, the UN imposed additional sanctions against UNITA. Peace talks in 1998 gave way to renewed UNITA insurgency following MPLA expulsion of UNITA members from the government of national unity said to be based in turn on the rebels' failure to disarm under the peace provisions.

By 2000 there were indications that the crisis was spreading to the neighbouring countries of Namibia and Zambia, as the Angolan government sought to drive UNITA out of traditional strongholds in the central highlands and further south and west. According to figures presented to the UN Security Council by Kofi Annan, approximately 3.7 million people were considered war-affected, including two million internally displaced. Hundreds of thousands of others have fled fighting to become refugees in neighbouring countries.

The war ended in 2002, following the death of Jonas Savimbi at the hands of the Angolan Armed Forces in February. By March, the government and UNITA rebels had signed a ceasefire and had resumed the political process set out in the Lusaka Protocol of 1994. In August, the war was officially declared over when UNITA disbanded its military wing.

[Sources: IRIN, 20 January 2000; Guardian Weekly, 4-10 May, 2000; BBC News, December 31, 2002].

**Arms Sources:**

Since the Angolan government offensive, former East bloc countries Bulgaria, Ukraine and Romania have become UNITA's main supplier of arms. Earlier, the government reportedly received recent weapons shipments from Russia, France, the United States, Belarus, Brazil, Bulgaria, China, Poland, and South Africa.

In spite of a UN arms embargo against UNITA in place since 1993, Zaire was both a supplier and main conduit of weapons to the UNITA rebels until the ousting of President Mobutu in 1997. Ukraine, and private sources in Albania and in Bulgaria, have been cited as recent major arms suppliers to UNITA which also has secured arms with the help of Congo-Brazzaville, Burkina Faso, Togo, and nationals from Rwanda and South Africa, according to a March 2000 UN report.

**Economic Factors:**

Angola is endowed with an abundance of natural resources such as oil and diamonds. There has been fierce competition for the control of these resources, international sales of which are used by both sides to pay for the war. UNITA is thought to have derived close to $3.7 (US) billion from diamond sales from 1992 through to 1998. The United Nations sanctions imposed against UNITA, along with the Angolan government's offensive, have had an impact on UNITA's ability to acquire and sell diamonds. The United Nations Monitoring Mechanism on Angolan Sanctions – dealing with sanctions against UNITA rebels – estimated that UNITA's diamond output for 2000 would not surpass the 1999 estimated minimum of $150 million. The Angolan government relies on oil to buy arms, and enrich the coffers of corrupt politicians.

*The UN says that arms deliveries to UNITA have been 'drastically decreased' but that cross-border supplies still reach Unita from the DR Congo which remains a major transit country for Unita diamonds.* [Update Angola Supplement, January 19, 2002]

*In its final report submitted in December 2000, the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism on Angolan Sanctions-dealing with sanctions against UNITA...
rebels said the level of UNITA's diamond output for 1999 and 2000 could not be estimated, but would certainly be larger than $150 million. The report also said that UNITA's capacity to produce major quantities of diamonds were seriously hampered by the military situation and that its production in 2000 'is certainly likely to be lower than in 1999' because it had lost access to some mines.’ [Integrated Regional Information Networks, April 4, 2001]

"Oil money has bought arms and kept the war going, particularly in 1993 and 1994, after UNITA captured most of the diamond fields and threatened to vanquish the government army." [Michael Renner, "The Anatomy of Resource Wars", 2002]