

IMUN Research Report 2024

Historical Security Council Issue #3: The question of the Angolan Civil War.

30 March 1981

After the collapse of the Estado Novo dictatorship in Portugal, the new, democratic government relinquished its colonies, one of them being Angola. The liberation movements in the country, which had previously fought to win independence from the Portuguese, now became embroiled with one another in a struggle for political control in the new country's government.

The People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), a leftist, Marxist-Leninist movement, was founded in 1956. The National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA) was founded in 1957, and was supported by the president of Zaire (presently known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo) ("The Angolan Civil War, 1975-1992."). At the outbreak of the Angolan War for Independence in 1961, these two parties led the struggle, and then were soon joined by a third, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), which was founded in 1964 by a former member of the FNLA (Knapp). Angola won the war of independence in 1974 after a military coup in Portugal toppled the colonial dictatorship, and the MPLA, FNLA, and UNITA came together with Portuguese troops to sign a treaty, designating Angola's official day of independence as November 11, 1975. These three parties attempted to form a joint government, but tensions remained high in political divisions, and the MPLA instead took full control of Luanda, Angola's capital. The FNLA, in retaliation, evoked military attacks against MPLA forces, and thus the Angolan Civil War began (Knapp). The FNLA eventually dissipated as it became too weak to fight against the MPLA.

Immediately, foreign nations were quick to financially and militarily back these parties in the Angolan Civil War. The Soviet Union continued to finance the MPLA, as it had done since

1962, and in turn the CIA from the United States began to support the FPLA. Cuba, however, soon joined the fray and also provided military support to the MPLA through the supply of troops. Anxious by the increasing involvement of communist influences in the conflict, the United States began to support small amounts to UNITA, and convince South Africa to provide more assistance to the same party (Knapp). South Africa's involvement with the United States became troublesome; the United States did not wish to boldly associate itself with the apartheid state, but required its assistance in supporting UNITA against the Soviet-backed MPLA ("The Angola Crisis 1974-75"). China briefly supported the MPLA, until China's relations with the USSR worsened. China then began supporting both the FNLA and UNITA. The presence of these proxy powers, most significantly the United States and the Soviet Union, led to the Angolan Civil War to be recognized as a major proxy war of the Cold War.

The South African Border War took place during this same period, and the Angolan Civil War frequently intersected with it. South West Africa (presently known as Namibia) had been under South African mandate control since the end of the first world war. However, when in 1966 the United Nations terminated South Africa's mandate over Namibia, South Africa refused to withdraw. The South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO), which had been founded in 1962 calling for independence from South Africa, transformed into advocating for armed struggle against South Africa's now illegal presence in South West Africa (Clarence-Smith). SWAPO, now supported by the MPLA, based many of its operations in South West Africa from southern Angola. In trying to eliminate these SWAPO bases, South Africa invaded Angola in 1975 in Operation Savannah, continuously attacked Angolan territory, and began supporting the opposing group to the MPLA: UNITA.

Besides being divided by proxy powers and political ideologies, the parties directly involved in the Angolan Civil War strengthened ethnic divisions that had begun to rift in colonial times. UNITA, for example, gained most of its support from the Ovimbundu people, which made up forty percent of the Angolan population.

The UN's role in mediating the war had been quite mild in these first few years. Several resolutions were debated discussing South Africa's actions in South West Africa, as that had been deemed the central source of conflict in the region (Aksu). In 1977, the United States presented a plan that called for free elections in Namibia, and the gradual withdrawal of South African troops (Aksu). In May of 1978, Angola issued a complaint against South Africa in the United Nations ("Complaint by Angola against South Africa."). Little action further than this was taken to specifically address the Angolan Civil War.

Focus of debate:

The focus of the debate should remain on bringing political stability to the conflict and the Angolan government, as well as on the matter of South Africa's military attacks on Angola and its implications. Delegates should be wary that many P5 members are participating in the conflict through proxy, and therefore are likely to veto resolutions that seem to greatly favor either UNITA's or the MPLA's political goals. Continuously consider a state's motivations for entering this proxy war. Despite states' personal stakes in the conflict, however, it is also important to acknowledge the internal political and ethnic identities, and their influence on Angola's political stability. Do not dedicate an extensive amount of debate on solving the South African Border War. Although it is essential as a contribution to the dynamics of the Angolan Civil War, it is not the

principal conflict being addressed in the issue. All attitudes and information available to the delegates must mirror that publicly accessible as of 30 March 1981.

Relevant resolutions and documents:

[Memorandum by the United States - 1975](#)

- Details the United States' interest in gaining UNITA as an ally in Angola

[Intelligence Report: CIA's Secret War in Angola - 1975](#)

- Intelligence report released in 2004 on the CIA's role in the Angolan Civil War

[Resolution 435](#)

- Resolution by the United States calling for free elections in South West Africa, and the withdrawal of South African troops

[Complaint by Angola against South Africa 1978](#)

- Letter by the representative of Angola calling on the Security Council to condemn the invasion of South Africa on Angola

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