



The military battle is over

The economic battle has begun ...

Thirteen years after independence, Angola is finally able to start the economic reconstruction necessary after colonial rule. DAVID NIDDRIE examines this reconstruction, and looks at why it has been so long coming.

Every night you can hear the pop-pop-pop of AK-47 fire from Luanda's docks.

Usually, the shooting is directed not at people but into the air: the guards fire to discourage pilfering, say residents of the nearby Presidente-Meridiane Hotel. It begins after curfew at midnight and continues intermittently until the curfew ends at 5 am.

But the shooting does not stop the thefts. An estimated 40% of goods arriving in Luanda by sea - everything from tinned food to television sets - do not reach their planned destination. They disappear into the narrow streets of Angola's vast, crumbling capital, to reappear at Roque Santiero or one of the other massive unofficial markets. Here, the unit of currency is beer, costs are estimated in crates of 24 and 'change' is made up of individual cans.

In Luanda, home to one in five of Angola's nine million people, mile upon mile of empty shops stare vacantly through broken display windows at the quietly decomposing city. And the kandonga, the 'parallel economy', dwarfs officially-sanctioned commerce: if you don't have the US dollars to buy at the hard currency shops, you shop at Roque Santiero and, usually, you pay with beer.

Up to 400 000 of Luanda's two million people are officially recognised as 'destitute'. When the summer rains come, the waters flood the sewers sending sewage bubbling up into the streets. Last summer this fed a cholera epidemic in the city's sprawling musseques (townships) which killed 123 people.

Even in the relatively dry winter months, the smell hovers over Luanda, contrasting sharply with the majestic beauty of the city that was once the jewel in Portugal's imperial crown.

Wherever you look in Luanda you see soldiers. Some, armed with AK-47 rifles or stubby, evil-looking sub-machine guns, guard key intersections and buildings. But despite their weaponry, they are oddly unthreatening when compared to the guardians of the South African way of life back home.

Many, many more people move on crutches through the city - with part, or all, of a leg missing. Angola has a higher proportion of amputees than

any other country in the world; relief workers put the number of non-military amputees, less than half the total, at 50 000.

Angola also has one of the world's highest infant mortality rates: three Angolan babies out of ten do not survive to their fifth birthdays. More than one in six Angolans would starve this year without foreign food-aid.

However much opponents of Apartheid would like it to be, Angola does not embody all that they are striving for. It is no paradise.

Although it is potentially one of the wealthiest countries in Africa, its 13 years of independence have offered little opportunity to realise that potential.

Even before the last colonial governor of Angola lowered the Portuguese flag on November 10 1975, and set sail for Lisbon, the country was at war.

In the north, British and American mercenaries and President Mobutu Sese Seko's Zairean army were fighting their way southwards under the flag of the Front for the National Liberation of Angola (FNLA), the least effective of the three Angolan nationalist movements, led by Mobutu's brother-in-law, Holden Roberto.

In the south a South African armored column was blasting its way northwards, brushing aside tiny units of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). South African planes were flying in weapons and equipment for the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (Unita) led by Jonas Savimbi, a former member of both the MPLA and FNLA. Planeloads of US weapons and dollars also poured in for Unita - ferried in by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in defiance of official US policy.

The attack in the north collapsed within weeks in the face of determined resistance by MPLA soldiers defending Luanda, leaving the FNLA in ruins. Many of its fighters would later return to Angola to accept the MPLA's clemency offer and join the Angolan army.

In the south, the South African forces fought their way to within spitting distance of Luanda, stopping only after a series of bloody clashes with Cuban units called in to repulse

the invasion.

Savimbi, having gambled on South African assistance winning him the dominant place in an independent government, took his Unita fighters back into the bush once it was clear the gamble was lost - but not before opening supply-lines to South African-ruled Namibia.

The South African decision to go into Angola (enthusiastically but secretly encouraged by US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger) swung world opinion behind the MPLA government. The invasion brought with it official recognition from virtually every member of the United Nations besides the United States (which continues to withhold diplomatic recognition) and South Africa.

But this rush of recognition helped the MPLA liberation movement - now transformed into Angola's socialist ruling party, the MPLA-Workers' Party (MPLA-PT) - little in solving its domestic problems.

This was primarily because 360 000 of Angola's 400 000 Portuguese settlers, who effectively monopolised all skilled jobs both in government administration and in the economy, had packed up and fled in the eight months before independence - the equivalent of about two million key South African administrators, technicians and officials vanishing overnight.

The exodus left devastation in its wake - 2 500 factories closed, most of them because their owners had abandoned them. Only 8 000 of Angola's 150 000 registered vehicles were still available for use.

Even in Luanda the most basic services collapsed. Says Swapo Information Secretary Hidipo Hamutenya, a long-time resident of the capital: 'When the Portuguese left, they even took the plans of the buildings with them. The Angolans couldn't even find things like pipes - they didn't have the plans to locate them - when they broke down'.

The building housing the Swapo office bears vivid testimony to this. From almost every floor black pipes make their way to an open sewer manhole in the street below - the only way the toilets can keep operating.

'The Portuguese not only ran the companies, shops, farms and banks, but they also drove the taxis, laundered clothes and shined shoes', delegates from the Canadian Council

for International Co-operation reported after visiting Luanda last year. 'In 1975...the young country inherited an economy in which almost nothing functioned'.

And although the MPLA was a Marxist-Leninist movement, committed to centralised economic planning with limited capitalist economic activity, the mass Portuguese exodus gave them few options. 'Strictly speaking the government nationalised nothing. It simply inherited abandoned productive capacity', the Canadians said.

From coffee production (at the time Angola had the world's fourth largest coffee industry, earning R1,2-billion annually) to hair-cuts, economic activity ceased.

Every barber-shop in the country closed as, literally, every single barber left. The coffee industry fell victim both to the exodus of settler-farmers - the elite of the settler community - and to the narrow base of the liberation struggle. The coffee plantations had been manned almost exclusively by migrant workers from the central Angolan provinces, many of them effectively forced labourers, and most of them Ovimbundu-speakers. This group makes up between 40% and 50% of the Angolan population, and is the base of Savimbi's support.

Administratively, too, the Portuguese legacy was one of empty government offices and gaping filing cabinets.

The government had to begin rebuilding the country from scratch. Any notion of long-term economic planning vanished in the face of the massive daily challenge of keeping the most basic facilities going.

For the first decade of its existence, the Angolan government could not so much direct the economy as annually attempt - generally unsuccessfully - to balance its own spending against its foreign income from oil. Only by the mid-1980s was it able to look beyond the next 12 months.

At the same time, the MPLA's guerrilla army, the People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (Fapla), rapidly had to transform itself into a standing army, both to prepare for the possibility of renewed South African invasions and to defend against the steadily-increasing

sabotage campaign of Savimbi's Unita.

Railways, bridges, roads, hydro-electric installations, state farms, health centres - the nuts and bolts of economic and political infrastructures - were destroyed.

This activity increased steadily every year - costing Angola R552-million in 1980 and R808-million a year later.

In the face of this mounting military pressure the MPLA-PT government managed to make some gains: its health and inoculation



MPLA information director
Pinto Jaoa

programmes cut child mortality rates year by year from 1976 to 1980, while diamond production - potentially Angola's second biggest foreign currency earner - increased steadily, peaking in 1980 at 1,5-million carats.

But to defend itself, Angola had to spend the bulk of its foreign income - capital vitally needed for investment in the economy - to feed, clothe, train and equip its army. When the oil price plummeted at the beginning of this decade, slashing its foreign earnings, Angola was forced to spend 75% of foreign income on defence.

To win itself the time and space to begin economic reconstruction, the MPLA-PT argued, it must rid itself of the military threat to its survival. Year by year the only objective achieved in the national programme was that at the top of the agenda: 'Absolute priority to defence'.

In the late 1970s, other factors intervened to intensify that threat. After the failure of the United Nations to enforce implementation of UN Security Council resolution 435, granting independence to Namibia on Angola's southern border, Swapo steadily increased its guerilla campaign to end South African rule in Namibia. Granted bases in Angola after independence, Swapo was, by 1980-81, launching an average of three attacks a day and pushing its fighters south of the heavily-populated Ovamboland border regions into the white farmlands around Tsumeb.

The South African response was to launch a series of offensives into southern Angola, driving Swapo increasingly further into Angola and pushing the war out of northern Namibia into southern Angola.

With the arrival of Ronald Reagan in the White House - and Chester Crocker as assistant US secretary of state for Africa - the prospect of Namibian independence receded further into the background. Unita's Savimbi - now transformed, for convenience, from an avowed Maoist into an anti-communist 'freedom fighter' - became the beneficiary of an annual US grant officially pegged at R36-million, now unofficially acknowledged at almost three times that.

With each new incursion, the size and duration of South African operations increased, turning southern Angola into a no-go area not only for in-transit Swapo guerrillas, but also for Fapla troops and government administrators. When Pretoria finally agreed to withdraw all its troops in 1984, says the London-based *Africa Confidential* newsletter, it 'cut a swathe through Cunene province (the southern-most of Angola's 18 provinces, bordering Namibia), committing atrocities and frightening away the local population'. Its intention was to create a deserted buffer-zone north of the Namibian border which would be patrolled by Unita and which would prevent Swapo infiltration of Namibia.

In a carbon-copy of MNR activity in Mozambique on the other side of the continent, Unita launched a major disruption campaign designed not so much to win popular support as to undermine the country's already-limited ability to keep itself alive. By

1985 one in four health facilities had been destroyed and extensive immunisation programmes wrecked, sending child mortality rates rocketing.

Writing in last year's *South African Review*, Joseph Hanlon estimates that between 1980 and 1985, '215 000 children in Mozambique and 320 000 in Angola died unnecessarily. Although not killed by bullets or machetes, they are all still war victims'. In the same period, a further 50 000 Angolans were killed either directly by the war or by famines induced by sustained and escalating guerrilla attacks on agriculture. Landmines planted in fields or paths left up to 50 000 rural Angolans - mainly women and children - maimed.

By 1985 Angola had suffered R42 000-million in war damage. At least 700 000 people had lost their homes - some observers put the figure as high as two-million, or one in four Angolans - while a further 400 000 peasants were unable to plant or harvest their crops. A country theoretically able to produce almost double the food it needs to feed itself will, in the next 18 months, need almost R200-million in food imports and food-aid to keep its people alive.

After visiting Angola early last year, UN emergency operations in Africa director Charles la Muniere told Canadian aid workers the country was 'like Europe in 1944 - starvation, disease and war-wounded everywhere'.

'What is surprising', says a senior Western diplomat in Luanda, 'is not that the Angolans were able to beat the South Africans, but that they were able to fight at all'.

While their country was ripped to pieces around them the Angolan government held to the policy of giving absolute priority to defence. By 1985 Fapla was no longer the guerilla army which had barely survived the double-invasion that marked Angolan independence. With more than 50 000 troops - most of them conscripts - backed by increasingly sophisticated weaponry, Fapla was able to challenge for control of southern Angola. It was also able to strike south-east towards Unita's headquarters at Jamba, 70 km from the Caprivi Strip border.

In spring offensives during 1985 and 1986, Fapla reached the outskirts of Mavinga, just north of Jamba, only to be forced back by South African bombers.

With increasingly-generalised fighting developing throughout southern Angola, a 10 000-strong Fapla force moved out of Cuito Cuanavale towards Mavinga in a third spring offensive last August.

Against the advice of senior Cuban military advisers, they attempted to take the town - this time to be beaten back by long-range artillery fire from



Angolan defence minister
Pedro Maria Tonha

South African G5 and G6 155 mm howitzers.

For the first time South African Defence Minister Magnus Malan acknowledged SADF participation in the defence of Mavinga - telling parliament that without it, Jamba would have fallen.

South African, Unita and SWATF (the South African-led South West African Territory Force) and troops poured into the gap left by the retreating Angolans. The Angolans kept running until they reached the Lomba River, where they stopped and turned. They were forced back again, however, by a reinforced South African force numbering around 9 000. Then, at Cuito Cuanavale, 300 km north of the Namibian border, Fapla turned again.

Despite repeated frontal assaults continuing until May this year, an artillery bombardment averaging

more than 400 shells a day and repeated bomber attacks, the South African advance stopped at Cuito Cuanavale.

Independent Western estimates put Angolan losses at Cuito Cuanavale at 1 500, those of Cuba's 'internationalista' (internationalist) troops - face-to-face with South Africans for the first time since 1975 - at 40, SADF casualties at about the same figure, SWATF losses at 250 and Unita (fighting as the front rank of the attack) at more than 2 000.

Lasting more than six months, the battle for Cuito Cuanavale was the biggest land battle in Africa since the Nazi defeat at El Alamein in World War Two - and probably almost as decisive. While the fighting still raged across the Cuito river east of the town, Cuban President Fidel Castro told diplomats in Havana: 'When the history of southern Africa is written, historians will divide it into two periods: before Cuito Cuanavale and after Cuito Cuanavale'.

For the first time in its history an SADF force in southern Africa - probably the biggest ever to take the field in the region - had been stopped.

'They can come with any weapon they like. Our people will defeat them', Manuel Francisco Tuta, military commander of the Cuando Cubango province, told the first Western journalists to visit Cuito in March.

And while insisting that the battle was not a major defeat for Pretoria, Angolan Defence Minister Pedro Maria Tonha said later in Luanda that Cuito Cuanavale had forced South Africa to re-assess its policy of regional destabilisation. 'South Africa realises it will have to find another way to solve its problems, a non-aggressive way'.

By early this year both sides recognised that the stalemate at Cuito Cuanavale would not be broken at Cuito Cuanavale. Both sides thus launched campaigns to change the balance of power beyond the immediate battle-zone - South Africa and Unita by-passed Cuito Cuanavale to the east and moved north towards the Benguela railway line, attacking Munhango (Savimbi's birthplace, which they held until September) and Cuemba (which they failed to take).

The Angolan thrust began 800 km to the west, at the southern ports of

Lobito and Namibe where 10 000 fresh Cuban troops, most of them members of the elite 50th division, disembarked to link up with Swapo and Fapla units to sweep south. They cleared Huila, Cunene and Cuando Cubango provinces of South African and Unita bases and established a 450 km front just north of the Namibian border. At the same time, engineers rapidly constructed a complex network of radar and air-defence systems and two fighter airstrips just to the rear. These served as bases for the Soviet-built MiG-23s which had proved their superiority over the South African Mirage IIIs at Cuito Cuanavale.

Cuba and Angola now had a combined tank fleet - primarily the top-of-the-range Soviet T-62 - estimated at 105 in southern Angola. Castro boasted that this was bigger than Pretoria's entire tank fleet spread across South Africa, Namibia and the narrow strip of south-eastern Angola still open to them.

In June - in an apparent attempt to collapse peace talks in Cairo - gung-ho South African commanders at Calueque on the Namibian border ordered their G5 gunners to begin shelling the Cuban front rank.

Their outraged Cuban opposite numbers informed their government - which, in turn, informed the US and Soviet governments - and then launched a MiG-23 airstrike. South Africa later admitted having lost 12 men in the resultant carnage - the biggest single loss sustained by the SADF in Angola.

Reluctantly, the South Africans remained in the talks - agreeing to, and in September implementing, a South African withdrawal - with Defence Minister Magnus Malan and Foreign Minister Pik Botha developing a carefully-orchestrated public rivalry over the various advantages of negotiations and renewed war.

By August the reality was clearer: while South African negotiators continued to talk, up to 70 000 SADF troops had moved up into northern Namibia, with more on the way, despite a South African agreement to withdraw all but 1 500 of its troops from Namibia shortly after implementation of Resolution 435, due on November 1.

What happened at Cuito Cuanavale and in the rest of southern Angola

was not a major South African defeat, but an enforced South African recognition that it could no longer range freely, uninvited and unchallenged across someone else's country. This created, in the words of Cuban Communist Party Politbureau Foreign Affairs Secretary Jorge Risquet, 'the objective conditions for a negotiated settlement'.

If the message of Cuito Cuanavale sent a cold ripple of concern through Pretoria, it surged through Luanda like a flood in a desert.

Its impact, however, needs to be seen against the background of Angola's past.

For 400 years of Portuguese colonial rule - a rule harsher than anything experienced in the African colonies of Britain and France - the dominant economic enterprise in Angola was the slave trade.

Vast areas were stripped of people until, in 1880, the Portuguese finally abandoned the practice - having sent eight million Angolans across the oceans.

Portuguese colonialism, only belatedly adopting the 'civilising mission' with which other colonial powers cloaked their conquests, did little to break down the tribalism and regional isolation the slave trade and the resultant de-population created and reinforced.

Holden Roberto's FNLA drew strongly and exclusively on tribal loyalties in the far north, along the Zaire border. Savimbi's Unita developed its tribal support primarily from Ovimbundu-speakers, the majority, in the centre. Only in the cities, where the explicitly anti-tribalist, socialist MPLA attracted its initial support, did these loyalties break down in the face of an emergent Angolan nationalism.

Thrust into power in 1975, the MPLA had little chance to build its anti-colonial struggle into national movement. War became its first and absolute priority. With much of the country either controlled or rendered ungovernable by Unita or South Africa, the MPLA-PT has battled to expand representation beyond the confines of the party's 40 000 members.

Regional, district and provincial people's assemblies through which Angolans theoretically participate in national decision-making were either

destroyed by the war or never established.

Angola became, under the onslaught of war, a number of isolated islands of people in a sea of war. 'Many Angolans are aware only theoretically that they are Angolans', says a sympathetic Western diplomat in Luanda. 'MPLA presence in many areas has often been no more than one official. For many, the past 13 years have brought nothing but terror and strangers with guns'.

Unable to mobilise popular support and facing a massive campaign to destroy it, the MPLA in its first years of rule turned to those tactics which had served it best during its 14 years of clandestine struggle against the Portuguese, turning in on itself, talking only to those it trusted absolutely. To survive it had to throw its best brains, its most skilled cadres and its major resources into war.

In doing so it had to shelve those programmes of nation-building and national reconstruction which would normally form the first priority of any newly-independent country.

Cuito Cuanavale marked a turning-point for southern Africa, symbolising a turn-around in Angola's fortunes. Throughout 1988, says a Scandinavian diplomat, 'the signs of Angolan perestroika and glasnost have been growing - growing slowly, but growing.

'When I got here early this year, I couldn't get over the secrecy - the papers didn't even carry major policy speeches by (President Jose Eduardo) dos Santos. That's changing'.

Says another diplomat: 'As the threat of war diminishes - even if Namibia isn't immediately settled - so will the government's need for rigid control of all elements of Angolan life'.

Adds a young civil servant: 'For the first time the party is acknowledging that it is fallible, that the country's problems cannot all be blamed on the South Africans'.

The changes are most vividly demonstrated in the economy.

In February, with South African shells still raining down on Cuito Cuanavale, Angola's People's Assembly voted through five laws enabling the government to implement a major economic and financial reconstruction and reform programme, known by the Portuguese

acronym SEF. Although reportedly meeting some resistance from within the government bureaucracy, SEF has already achieved an end to price controls on 52 basic foods (among them tomatoes, potatoes, naartjies and apples) as part of an attempt to outflank the massive *kandonga* 'parallel economy'.

Although the *kwanza* remains almost valueless in Luanda - the official exchange rate is Kz29,92 to the US dollar, but in the *kandonga* a dollar changes hands at well over 200 times that rate - SEF is making some inroads. Last month more than 700 people attended a meeting called by government officials to enable Luanda traders to legalise their activities.

Luanda residents say the end of price controls, the legalising of private traders and privatisation of some commercial transport has brought more food into shops in the battered Angolan capital. The flow is likely to increase because of the expected decline in Unita activity in the months ahead - in early October, Dos Santos predicted that 'without massive (South African) intervention, Unita cannot last very long'.

The streets of Luanda themselves bear testimony to the change: rubbish removal was privatised and contracted out two months ago and the streets are clean for the first time in a decade, say residents.

The reforms go way beyond local trade, however.

While the MPLA-PT retains a strong commitment to central planning and keeps monopoly control of areas such as defence, central banking, education, postal and telecommunication services and power supply, the SEF laws have opened up vast areas of the economy to private traders.

In addition it is substantially loosening direct central control over state enterprises - and ending previously-automatic subsidisation of financial losses. Planning Minister Antonio Henriques da Silva told the people's assembly in June that 'the enormous problems and difficulties' of state enterprises, and 'indiscriminate' state subsidies of their losses had contributed to 'a huge budget deficit'. This included more than R8 000 000 in cross-debts (owed by state enterprises to other state enterprises) alone, equivalent to the annual general state budget.

SEF is also looking further afield - it allows for an ambitious wooing of foreign investment.

While attempting to avoid foreign monopoly control by encouraging a wide spread of investors (a practice it is developing even in its highly-centralised oil industry), the government is offering guaranteed rights of dividend repatriation in the event of sale.



Soviet military hardware arrives in Luanda

Most enterprises involving foreign investors have to be undertaken jointly with either state or private Angolan interests - such as the joint government-East German plant which produces the Simson 50cc bikes which zip through Luandan traffic, or the Yamaha plant in the south.

While the South African government and other critics continue to portray the Angolan economy as collapsing under the weight of socialism, foreign investors disagree: Portuguese and Belgian companies have recently begun joint diamond mining projects with Endiama, the

Angolan mining company; French companies are about to begin joint granite and marble projects; and Brazil's Duarte company is involved in major upgrading of Angola's telecommunication network. This project also involves British Telecom and, with plans for a domestic satellite in the pipeline, probably a French company as well.

The reform programme is winning Angola other friends internationally. Brazil - recipient of most of the eight million slaves exported under Portuguese rule - has, appropriately, become Angola's major non-military trading partner. Cultural ties with Brazil are expanding - a fact demonstrated by the name of Luanda's biggest black market: *Roque Santeiro*, named after a Brazilian soap-opera.

And MPLA Information Director Pinto Joao says a mid-year World Bank investigation found that SEF went further than the reforms it would have demanded as a precondition for further aid. Bolstered by a steadily increasing oil output (up to 453 000 barrels a day, compared to the 1986 figure of 282 000) and foreign earnings from diamonds (at \$100 000, triple the 1985 annual income), the SEF programme has helped Angola renegotiate several of its foreign debts. These now total \$4-billion, with the USSR, Brazil and Italy its biggest creditors.

Despite ongoing US opposition, Angolan officials believe repeatedly-delayed negotiations over membership of the International Monetary Fund will be concluded successfully - particularly as US policy towards Angola is increasingly in conflict with its commercial relations: the US is the biggest single purchaser of Angolan oil.

Impressive enough on its own, this economic resurgence has combined with the massive boost in military confidence - and the prospect of peace - to persuade the government to ease its rigid political control.

With much of the country now under Angolan control for the first time since independence, the government is establishing or re-establishing district, regional and provincial people's assemblies.

As one young Angolan put it, peace for Angola will mean more than an end to war: 'It will mean we will learn what normal life is like'.

‘If Unita does not succeed in forcing the MPLA to negotiate by 1990, it has no chance to succeed at all’, Jonas Savimbi told a sympathetic journalist in 1980.

With just 15 months to go and conditions less favourable now than at almost any time since the 54-year-old Unita president made that statement, it will be a close-run thing. And if Angola’s ruling MPLA-Workers’ Party does eventually agree to settle with Unita, Savimbi himself is likely, like Moses, to be denied the privilege of leading his people into the promised land.

While President Jose Eduardo dos Santos and his Angolan government have let it be known over the past six months of negotiations that they might consider talking to Unita, they have flatly rejected the idea of talking to the man who has increasingly come to symbolise South Africa’s 13-year-long military involvement in his country.

Yet the idea of Unita doing anything without Savimbi - indeed of even surviving without him - contradicts its entire history.

Born in Lubango in 1934, Savimbi rapidly developed a sense of his own worth. One of several hundred Africans from the colonies allowed by Portuguese administrators to study in Portugal, Savimbi moved to Switzerland in 1960 to begin a BA in political science. By the 1980s this never-completed course had somehow taken on the status of a doctorate, with his supporters routinely referring to him as ‘Dr Savimbi’.

Even this early in his career Savimbi ‘showed more hostility towards other rebel groups in Angola than he did towards the Portuguese’, according to American historian Gerald Bender. Nevertheless, he managed to swallow his pride sufficiently to link up briefly with Holden Roberto’s UPA (later renamed FNLA).

Savimbi formed Unita on March 13 1966 after quitting the UPA in frustration at its inactivity and failing to persuade the MPLA to grant him a position senior enough to satisfy his ambitions.

He and his first ten Chinese-trained fighters smuggled themselves from Zambia into Angola with the help of Namibia’s Swapo nationalist move-

ment.. Savimbi claimed afterwards that their first weapon was a Tokarev pistol given to him by Swapo president Sam Nujoma. Regardless of how true this is, Unita retained close ties with the Namibian movement for the next decade.

For the first five years of Unita’s existence, Savimbi slowly but steadily developed Unita operational areas along the Benguela railway line - until Zambia’s Kenneth Kaunda, with no other outlet for his copper, won a Unita agreement to suspend these attacks - and below the railway line in south-eastern Angola. In 1974 Unita finally won recognition from the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and its fighting force steadily increased to 4 000 by 1975.

In the same year, however, Savimbi’s image as a freedom fighter was tainted for the first, but by no means the last, time: a French magazine published documents revealing details of an agreement between the Unita leader and the Portuguese forces he was allegedly fighting.

The agreement was signed in 1971, amid increasing competition between the three guerilla armies (Unita, MPLA and FNLA) for infiltration and communication routes into Angola. This was particularly the case in the east, along the Zambian border, where both Unita and the MPLA had established themselves. With merger talks underway between MPLA and FNLA, Savimbi initiated a ‘merger’ of his own, signing a secret cease-fire agreement with the Portuguese military, code-named ‘Operation Timber’.

In exchange for uniforms (Savimbi specifically requested camouflage ‘commando uniforms’ for himself and Unita secretary-general Miguel N’zau), ammunition, medical and school equipment and food from the Portuguese, Savimbi undertook to wage war on MPLA and FNLA. Documents found by later researchers suggest ‘Operation Timber’ lasted until January 1974, and that a second agreement was being negotiated when left-wing army officers overthrew the Portuguese government. This ushered in Angolan independence a year later.

Flatly denied by Savimbi himself, this Portugal-Unita agreement has been confirmed by right-wing Portuguese prime minister Marcello

Caetano (the target of the military coup, who referred to ‘our understanding with Unita’); by General Francisco Costa Gomes, at the time chief of staff of the Portuguese army; and by several Portuguese officers who served in Angola.

Pro-Unita Austrian journalist Franz Sitte recently said the claims were ‘doubted by no side’, and even British journalist Fred Bridgland, highly-sympathetic author of ‘Jonas Savimbi: A key to Africa’, acknowledged that ‘some degree of Portuguese-Unita collaboration against the MPLA cannot be ruled out’.

When talks between the liberation movements began on the nature of post-colonial Angola, Augustino Neto’s MPLA and Savimbi’s Unita thus confronted each other not as anti-colonial allies, but as bitter battle-field foes.

The three-party Alvor agreement on a post-independence government of national unity quickly collapsed under the weight of rapidly growing mutual mistrust, as the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) began pouring funds and weaponry into Angola for Unita and the FNLA, whose president, Holden Roberto, was already on a personal annual CIA retainer of more than R25 000.

Savimbi himself was placed on the CIA payroll as an intelligence source.

Had the independence process proceeded as planned, Savimbi was in with a good chance - ‘if we had elections in 1975, Savimbi would have won’, says a long-time opponent in Luanda. ‘He was charismatic and a powerful speaker, able to sway crowds. He had a major impact on the politically inexperienced rural masses - particularly when he was speaking his home language, Ovimbundu, among Ovimbundu speakers’. He was particularly adept at using the rhetoric and symbols of militant black nationalism which found a strong resonance among his audiences.

The US, disenchanted with Roberto’s obvious inability to establish a serious ‘moderate’ alternative to the MPLA, was pleasantly surprised by its first dealings with Savimbi.

CIA agent Robert Stockwell, fresh from the collapse of America’s operations in Vietnam, was assigned to Angola to prevent an MPLA victory.