

Background:

The conflict in Angola can be divided up into four general phases. The first phase began with Portugal's decision to grant independence to its Angolan colony in 1974. As negotiations for independence began it became clear that three main parties were vying for power within the country - none of which were powerful enough to singlehandedly replace the Portuguese administration. These parties included the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), and the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA).

Independence in November 1975 was followed by an ineffective transitional coalition government that suffered from inter-factional rivalry. This rivalry turned into armed hostility, and as the conflict spread throughout the country each faction received external support; UNITA from the South African Government and the US, the MPLA from Cuba and the USSR, and the FNLA from Zaire. It was not until the 1980's that concerted efforts were made at ending the Angolan war, although in a roundabout fashion. The US, through its policy of "constructive engagement" sought to bring democratic change to South Africa. This required Namibian independence which in turn relied on the withdrawal of Cuban forces from Angola. This grand strategy eventually resulted in the Angolan-Namibian Accords of 1988 which fulfilled the latter two goals.

The second phase followed the withdrawal of Cuba and South Africa from the Angolan conflict. The MPLA and UNITA, as the primary antagonists, continued to fight among themselves and the war effectively became internal, having been extricated out from under the influence of the Cold War. From 1988 until 1991 this civil war continued with one African mediated attempt at peace, the Gbadolite Accords, failing outright, as the commitment of both parties towards reconciliation was non-existent. UNITA was led by Jonas Savimbi, while the MPLA was led by Jose Eduardo dos Santos.

The Bicesse Accords of May 1991 presented Angola with its first real hope of peace, and represents the start of the third phase. Brokered by the three power "Contact Group", the US, Portugal and the USSR, the Bicesse Accords resulted in sixteen months of comparative peace in the lead up to national elections. The MPLA received the majority of the votes but, despite the fact that the UN had declared the elections generally free and fair, UNITA rejected the results and redeployed its army. The renewed conflict occurred with unparalleled ferocity, with conservative estimates suggesting that more than one thousand people per day were killed as a direct result of the war. Despite UN efforts at mediation, proposed cease-fires never materialized and the official, public commitment of the two parties to reconciliation seemed no more than political posturing to retain international credibility.

Fighting continued even as the November 1994 Lusaka Protocol was being negotiated and it was not until February 1995 that a stable cease-fire took effect. At this point the Angolan conflict entered its fourth and most recent phase. A complex plan of national reconciliation was put into effect, including the formation of a transitional government, the demobilization and reintegration of combatants, the formation of a national police force, and the creation of a joint national army. However, despite some political progress such as UNITA representatives taking their seats in the national parliament and initial moves by UNITA towards demobilizing its army, progress has now stalled. The UNITA leader, Jonas