Diamonds are a guerrilla's best friend: the impact of illicit wealth on insurgency strategy

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ABSTRACT   *Current internal wars in Africa are increasingly being driven by the desire to control important sources of revenue, not by revolutionary ideals of redressing real or perceived injustices. It is not accidental that some of the nastiest wars in Africa are being fought in countries richly endowed with natural resources. This paper deals with Angola, a potentially rich country ravaged by war since independence. It suggests that control of important diamond producing areas has given the rebel UNITA group a new lease of life after suffering serious setbacks at both the national and international levels. The paper also highlights the political and military miscalculations committed by the rebels and attributes them to the quick infusion of large sums of money into rebel coffers.*

Diamonds have become African guerrillas' best friends, especially since the end of the Cold War. These precious stones are formed within the Earth's crust at a depth of 100–200 kilometers. Within the mantle, as this region is called, immense pressures combined with temperatures of up to 1000 degrees Celsius force carbon atoms to bond together. It is the regularity and strength of these bonds that make diamonds 'the hardest, and one of the least volatile, naturally occurring substances on Earth'.[1]

These stones, brought to the Earth's surface through volcanic activity, have captured human imagination since they were first discovered in an Indian stream in the 12th century BC. India became the major source of the world's diamonds until 1725 when important deposits were discovered in Brazil. In 1866 major discoveries took place in South Africa at a time when Indian and Brazilian deposits were nearing exhaustion. During the twentieth century, important deposits were discovered in Australia, Russia and Angola.

The unique properties of diamonds, including their hardness and resistance to chemical attack, serve important industrial purposes. For example, their grit is used 'as an abrasive for grinding and polishing all the other softer stuff in the world, while diamond-tipped tools make mighty fine cutters and drills'.[2] Alas, diamonds' current value does not arise solely from their abrasiveness. Their rarity and durability, as well as clever manipulation of supply and demand, have made diamonds 'a girl's best friend', a universal token of love and a global

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symbol of luxury. Consequently, diamonds have become one of the most valuable commodities in the world. In 1999 world production of rough diamonds reached 111 058 000 carats, valued at US\$7.2 billion, while the wholesale value of polished diamonds coming out of the cutting centres (notably India and Israel) was \$13 billion. The retail market for diamonds in 1999 was close to \$56 billion.[3]

Unlike those of other commodities, diamond prices are not determined by the market on the basis of supply and demand. The industry is dominated by mining colossus De Beers. In 1999 this company was responsible for 66% of global diamond sales. Historically, the company has held 80% of the global diamond market. The secret of De Beers' success has hinged both on its ability to create and sustain a worldwide demand for diamonds and on its capacity to create an artificial scarcity of this rather plentiful commodity. High demand for diamonds is achieved by clever marketing. De Beers' successful strategy has also involved controlling the global supply of diamonds, mainly by scooping up worldwide production. Invariably, this has meant buying diamonds from shady characters, including guerrilla groups involved in Africa's new internal wars. Unwittingly, therefore, diamonds have also become a guerrilla's best friend, an important source of revenue for insurgent forces in several African countries like Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Sierra Leone. For example, in Angola, the rebel União Nacional para Independencia Total de Angola (UNITA) raised \$3.7 billion through diamond sales between 1992 and 1997.[4] Although the rebels have recently lost some of the most productive mines to government forces, they are still able to mine diamonds from deposits scattered around the country. In 1999 they earned \$300 million from such operations.[5]

Fortunately for the rebels, diamonds 'exist over much of Angola' and industry experts claim that this country's reserves are 'virtually limitless'.[6] Production has taken place mainly in the northeast, where diamonds were first discovered in 1912. Historically Angola has produced mostly high quality diamonds, 97% of which are classified as gem or near gem quality. Angola's diamonds are 'ranked among the top three countries in the world in terms of quality'.[7] By the time it achieved independence from Portugal on 11 November 1975, Angola was the world's fourth-largest producer of diamonds in terms of value. Diamonds from the northeast, together with oil from the Cabinda enclave in the northwest, have been the main sources of foreign exchange for the Angolan government.

It is this important source of foreign exchange that UNITA rebels have been able to control almost uninterruptedly since 1992 and from which they have been able to obtain between \$400 million and \$600 million dollars per year in income. For example, as recently as 1999 'artisanal production' in Angola was estimated at 2 000 000 carats, worth \$400 million. A significant portion of this production still comes from 'deposits under the control of UNITA'.[8] Such substantial revenues enable UNITA to remain a powerful military machine.

Diamonds are also playing a key role in the insurgencies taking place in the neighbouring and mineral-rich DRC. There, former President Laurent Kabila allowed his military allies to help themselves to Congo's vast diamond resources while different rebel groups also relied on the precious stones to finance their insurgencies. The promise of considerable diamond wealth for the eventual winner in this civil war—often referred to as 'Africa's first world war'—has

helped to lure several other countries into the conflict. Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe have ensured the survival of the Kabila dynasty,[9] while Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda have sided with the rebels.

Similarly, in Sierra Leone control of the country's diamonds is an important factor in the continuing strife. Sierra Leone's coloured gems are particularly sought after around the world thanks to their size and beauty. As in Angola and Congo, Sierra Leone's diamonds are mostly alluvial, making them easy to mine with rudimentary tools. Therefore they can be easily captured by various warlords who use the revenues to finance intermittent attempts to topple the government. Sierra Leone rebels are partly inspired by the experience of neighbouring Liberia, where the current president, Charles Taylor, funded his insurgency war between 1989 and 1997 by seizing control of the diamond areas in the northern part of the country.

African insurgent movements' control of revenue-generating diamond areas comes at a time when the acquisition of military means to support guerrilla wars has become considerably less complicated. In the post-cold war era diamond smuggling from rebel controlled areas takes place within a context of unprecedented worldwide proliferation of light weapons. While during the Cold War the USA and the former USSR often supported their respective clients with massive quantities of weapons, such support—whether for governments or liberation movements—took place mostly through 'official' channels. In the post-cold war era many states and manufacturers are eager to empty their warehouses and arsenals of weapons that are no longer needed, either because of the momentous global political changes of the previous decade or simply because they have been made obsolete by technological innovation. Since Africa remains one of the few areas in the world still affected by various low-tech conflicts, it is an irresistible market for arms traders. The widespread availability of the ubiquitous AK-47 rifle in Africa attests to this reality.

The relatively easy availability of both diamonds and weapons has created a particularly nightmarish situation in Angola. This paper analyses how Angola's insurgent movement, UNITA, has used its considerable diamond revenues to evolve from a guerrilla group into a quasi-conventional army, with near catastrophic consequences for the government. But the paper also suggests that the availability of such enormous amounts of money created premature overconfidence within UNITA, leading the rebels to commit major military and political errors. Specifically, control of diamond revenues led to an illusion of military and politico-administrative capacity. This illusion, in turn, caused serious strategic and tactical miscalculations: UNITA used its newly acquired wealth to transform itself too rapidly from a guerrilla group into a quasi-conventional army. Ultimately, UNITA's decision to use the conventional tactics of warfare—including the deployment of large infantry and mechanised units as well as heavy artillery—to face government forces proved nearly fatal for the rebels. They were simply not ready to confront Angolan government forces in successive conventional battles. After all, since coming to power in 1975, the government had moulded its own former guerrilla army into a powerful fighting force with the help of Cuba and the former USSR. Although UNITA had important advantages—a plentiful supply of seasoned and committed troops and, since the late 1980s, access to

important sources of revenue—the rebels underestimated the government's military advantages, ie a monopoly in air and naval power as well as important leads in artillery and logistics.

At the political level, UNITA's control of major diamond mines induced the rebels into committing significant blunders, especially after signing the Bicesse Peace Accord. For example, UNITA failed to build on its guerrilla campaign between 1975 and 1991 to position itself as the natural political alternative to the governing Movimento Popular para Libertacão de Angola (MPLA). Specifically, UNITA did not offer a clear programme that would satisfy national aspirations for change, particularly in terms of good governance and respect for the fundamental rights of all citizens. Instead, its misplaced overconfidence led it to underestimate the MPLA's strong desire to stay in power and the regime's willingness to employ all available means to achieve this objective. Conversely, UNITA's relationship with the population grew increasingly hostile, even vicious. The rebels were no longer dependent on the population for food and other necessities; these could now be purchased abroad and flown into rebel-controlled areas—all paid for with diamonds. In sum, it can be argued that, ultimately, UNITA's own errors contributed to the Angolan government's victories, both in the political arena and on the battlefield. The rebels, on the other hand, were left with only one viable option—a return to guerrilla warfare.

This paper is divided into five parts. First, it presents a general discussion of insurgency dynamics and guerrilla warfare. Second, it focuses on the new internal wars in Africa and argues that, devoid of the ideological differences that characterised African wars during the Cold War, these new wars have become little more than resource wars. Third, the paper focuses on diamonds, a unique resource that has been used by several African guerrilla movements to finance their insurgencies. Fourth, it outlines the complex relationship between war and natural resources in Angola. Finally, the paper highlights the perils involved in a hasty transition from guerrilla to conventional warfare for insurgency movements. UNITA's failed attempt is presented as an illustration. The conclusion suggests that the war in Angola is far from over. UNITA has already begun to use its considerable financial resources once again to restructure, recalibrate and redirect itself—this time back to classical guerrilla warfare.

Insurgency dynamics

Insurgency refers to a protracted political and military activity directed towards completely or partially controlling a state through the use of irregular military forces and illegal political organisations. Typically, insurgencies are responses to chronic governmental ineptitude and corruption, or to other forms of bad governance. More proximate causes include government insensitivity and ineffectiveness in meeting popular demands. Insurgencies can be ignited either through repressive actions by the government or by calculated actions carried out by legal or illegal opposition groups. Insurgent movements use a variety of means to achieve their ultimate political goal of eroding government control and legitimacy. These actions can include guerrilla warfare, terrorism and political mobilisation.[10]

Most insurgencies have a dominant political character. As mentioned above, they are precipitated by real or perceived government breakdown, manifested in unwillingness or inability to meet the demands of important social groups. In other words, where good government does not exist, insurgent movements appear and use warfare as a means to eliminate bad governance. In this sense, insurgencies traditionally have a Clausewitzian character inasmuch as military actions are subjugated to the political purposes for which war is fought.

However, once initiated, the physical conduct of insurgency often requires the adoption of Maoist revolutionary strategy and tactics to overcome important initial military disadvantages. Specifically, the initial stages require considerable patience because governments are typically heavily armed. This significant military disadvantage is often minimised through the adoption of a highly mobile guerrilla warfare strategy.

Guerrilla war refers to military conflicts using unconventional tactics. Historically this has been the preferred tool of small, weaker insurgent forces involved in combat against much larger and stronger conventional armies. Guerrilla fighters are usually irregular forces who possess neither the weapons nor the training to engage in a conventional war to achieve their political objectives. This mismatch, however, is not always disadvantageous to guerrilla forces. First, this type of warfare is much cheaper to conduct. Second, guerrillas have an important edge because they generally control the tempo of fighting: they choose when and where to strike.[11]

Unlike conventional wars, where the principal objective is the control of territory, guerrilla warfare seeks to undermine the exercise of central political authority within a country or region of a country. In this sense, although guerrillas may successfully control or even administer 'liberated zones', control of territory is not their overriding objective. Their main objective is to induce the collapse of the central government by de-linking it from the countryside and its population and, ultimately, de-legitimising it. These de-linking and de-legitimising processes often build on incipient dissatisfaction with prevailing socioeconomic conditions of decay caused by government incompetence, corruption, or both.

The dissatisfaction with poor governance often facilitates revolutionary movements' attempts to win the 'hearts and minds' of the alienated population with promises of radical reforms to eliminate real or perceived injustices. By building on the dissatisfaction of those segments of the population that feel ignored by the government—especially in the countryside—guerrilla movements are able to implant themselves in rural areas. Since guerrilla wars are primarily rural military conflicts, the countryside is vital to most guerrilla strategies because it opens possibilities for relatively secure bases of operations and reliable access to food. This is often a determinant factor for an eventual victory because, after achieving effective military and political dominance of the countryside, guerrillas can then move to encircle major urban areas and wear down government troops, a process that often lasts many years.

Generally, therefore, most guerrilla wars are long-term, protracted conflicts of attrition that seek to wear down a much stronger conventional army. Unlike conventional wars, where direct military contests between two opposing groups

are the norm, guerrilla groups traditionally avoid direct military confrontations altogether. Instead, as mentioned above, the preferred strategy involves weakening the opposing force psychologically and militarily through surprise hit-and-run operations against isolated military installations and poorly defended communication, power, transportation and supply centres. The ultimate aim of the guerrillas is to weaken the central government in at least three ways: politically, militarily and economically. First, at the political level, guerrilla activities can further alienate a rural population from the central authorities, especially when governments respond to such activities by mounting military counter-attacks that affect civilian targets residing within the guerrillas' area of operation.

Second, guerrilla warfare presents governments with important military challenges. For example, guerrillas' ability to quickly submerge themselves among the population makes their detection by government forces highly problematic. Thus, after starting operations in remote areas where government control tends to be at best tenuous, guerrillas are able to expand their areas of operation relatively quickly. Many guerrillas go as far as proclaiming 'liberated zones', areas from which the government has lost politico-administrative and military control. Eventually, through a slow process of attrition, guerrilla warfare forces government troops to concentrate in larger cities while the insurgents are left to dominate increasingly larger portions of the countryside.

Third, guerrilla warfare often succeeds because it is able to bring formal economic activity to a halt, especially in the countryside. The guerrillas' favourite soft targets include bridges, railway tracks, ports, airports, electrical and telephone lines, schools, hospitals, small-scale manufacturing enterprises, farms, etc. By constantly and relentlessly attacking such facilities, insurgents force the government to keep spending limited financial resources to repair such infrastructure. Over long periods of time, this imposes unbearable costs upon a central government that must also spend considerable amounts on the war effort. For many African states already weakened by political instability, economic mismanagement and ethnic tensions, insurgencies pose important security challenges.

New internal wars in Africa

The end of the Cold War had a profound impact on the security of the international system. While this momentous historical event enhanced the stability of the 'zone of peace' in the West, it did not produce dramatic changes in the dynamics of instability in Africa and other peripheral, if not perennial, 'zones of turmoil'. Significantly, in post-cold war Africa, insurgent forces have created nightmarish situations approaching anarchy. African insurgents—in Angola, DRC, Sierra Leone and elsewhere—can now no longer place their conflicts within a larger international ideological context. Theirs have become non-ideological, non-Clausewitzian and non-revolutionary conflicts.

Throughout the Cold War, guerrilla wars were common in the so-called Third World. For example, anti-colonial movements often resorted to insurgency to achieve liberation from colonial regimes. However, given the superpower rivalry that defined this period, insurgencies in Africa and elsewhere in the non-Western

world were often incorporated in the global quest for superpower dominance. Consequently, they often assumed the character of proxy wars, ie indirect confrontations between the former USSR and the USA using local armies.

As discussed above, the end of the Cold War did not herald a new era of peace and stability in Africa. Instead, old conflicts continue unabated by the changes at the systemic level, while new wars break out at the regional level. But now, in the absence of a global ideological divide, both old and new wars are sustained by more regional, national, even local factors of political economy, ethnicity, religion, personal ambition and greed. This change in the rationale for insurgencies has been accompanied by a significant shift in both rebel strategies and tactics. Current insurgent strategies focus on the pillaging of natural resources, not necessarily the toppling of existing governments. Unconventional force is no longer primarily used to erode the government's control of the countryside. Rather, it is used both to gain and secure areas rich in natural resources and to drive the rural population away from those areas and into government-controlled urban centres.

These changes in the character of current insurgencies in Africa point to an abandonment of the intimate and reciprocal relationship between the political and military aspects of insurgency. Significantly, they highlight the fragility, if not absence, of the insurgent's political base. In other words, new internal wars in Africa are no longer fought at the military level to achieve political objectives. With notable exceptions, eg the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in Sudan, African insurgents are no longer primarily interested in the political dimensions of war. War is no longer viewed as part of a broader contest for political loyalty and legitimacy that involves, first and foremost, winning the 'hearts and minds' of the people. In fact, people now are regarded as burdens, if not obstacles, whose removal by military means is justified. By removing people from, say, diamond producing areas, rebels can enrich themselves without the political and administrative costs of governing.

The new internal wars in Africa that are being fought in places like Angola, DRC and Sierra Leone can be best described as criminal insurgencies. The rebels demonstrate neither the ability nor the inclination to bring new, more effective and inclusive forms of governance to their respective countries. More significantly, these rebel groups have not been able to articulate a coherent set of political objectives for their insurgencies. Therefore, even in the event of state collapse leading to the insurgencies' capture of state power, it is unrealistic to expect that these rebel groups will bring about significant change.

The uniquely criminal character of these insurgencies presents serious challenges for Africa and, more generally, the international system. First, their lack of political objectives as well as the extent and level of atrocities against civilians makes the prospects for peaceful conflict resolution, let alone postwar governance, highly problematic. Short and tenuous ceasefires become the rule, stable and enduring peace processes the exception. Second, such conflicts can escalate into genocide because of the rebels' constant and relentless victimisation of civilian populations.

Frighteningly, in the internal wars that have devastated Angola, DRC and Sierra Leone, it is the insurgents' control of important diamond resources and

their significant participation in the global political economy of diamonds that enables them to survive, even thrive. The case of Angola, in particular, illustrates this point.

Angola: diamonds are to kill for

Civil war in post-independence Angola was inevitable. The major problems that conspired against the viability of the Angolan state were glaringly visible at the time of independence. The chaotic decolonisation process took place amidst complex political and military crises arising from the three anti-colonial groups' failure to form a united front during the 14-year struggle against Portuguese colonialism. Consequently, the Frente Nacional de Libertacão de Angola (FNLA), the MPLA and UNITA were unable to agree on a power-sharing formula for post-colonial governance.

Given the highly fractured nature of the nationalist movement, all the unresolved problems that marred the liberation struggle were brought unchecked into the realm of post-colonial politics with calamitous consequences. The three liberation groups by-passed all avenues of co-operation and each attempted to usurp the political power left up for grabs by the precipitous departure of the soldiers and administrators of a collapsing colonial empire. Without exception, and almost simultaneously, each of the nationalist groups quickly turned to foreign armies in a desperate attempt to crush the opposition. Thus, the FNLA, MPLA and UNITA welcomed Zairian, Cuban and South African armies, respectively, into Angola in the months leading up to independence.

At independence, Angola had three competing local administrations: the FNLA, supported by Zairian troops, held the northern provinces; the MPLA, backed by Cuban troops, controlled Luanda, the capital, and little else; finally, UNITA controlled Huambo, the second largest city and several southern provinces with South African help. The long-simmering divisions among the anti-colonial movements boiled over ferociously during the decolonisation process.

In the early stages of this internationalised civil war Cuban troops prevailed over a South African army lacking the political will to fight and a Zairian army lacking professionalism. Demoralised and humiliated for failing to install their respective allies in power, both the South African and the Zairian armies retreated within months of independence. However, independence and the defeat of UNITA/South African and FNLA/Zairian armies in 1976 constituted a short pause in the civil war. It would continue with greater intensity, albeit now in the form of a protracted guerrilla war, proving that it was fundamentally a continuation of the unresolved struggles and contradictions within the anti-colonial movement predating independence. The extreme levels of violence registered after independence were the result of two important new elements: first, there was now greater direct external participation in the conflict—a function of prevailing bipolarity and superpower rivalry. Second, and more significantly, the opposing groups now controlled important domestic resources—oil and diamonds—that could be used to finance the escalating war.

MPLA: *oil and corruption*

The MPLA could not capitalise on its 'victory' over its domestic and international enemies during the crucial battles that took place during the independence process for several reasons. The initial differences were visible soon after the euphoria of independence subsided. As the political and military dust from the struggle for independence settled, the gulf between the new regime and society became apparent. This schism was the result of various domestic conflicts related to class, race, ethnicity and overall inability to cope with the administrative challenges of post-colonial governance.

In the war against colonial domination, and during its first years in power, the governing MPLA proclaimed itself a 'movement of the masses'. Gradually, however, members of the urban elite—constituted predominantly by *mestiços* or people of mixed race—used their superior education, political skills and economic power to take control of the party and other sources of state power. But, instead of maintaining the existing strong ties with workers and peasants, the governing elite grew increasingly detached from the common citizen and used the repressive means of the state to preserve its privileged status, now supported by about $800 million per year in oil revenues.

From the ordinary citizen's point of view, the elite's grip on the state assumed hegemonic proportions and represented a throwback to colonial times when power, prestige, and privilege were closely associated with class and race. Given their control of the country's significant oil revenues, members of the Angolan ruling elite have enormous resources of patronage. Since independence, these resources have been used to create extensive and intricate patron–client networks. It is within these networks that most political deals are made and significant economic transactions take place. Such networks quickly became an indispensable base from which to hold political office or seek public employment.

The networks of patron–client relationships were used by the ruling elite for political control and financial aggrandisement. In the process, however, they engendered high levels of corruption and have eroded public trust and government legitimacy. Within this context, UNITA's insurgency was initially seen as an important counterweight to check governmental excesses and, perhaps, provide alternative forms of governance. In both respects, the promise has not been fulfilled. Alas, as this paper suggests, in the post-independence period, UNITA has abandoned whatever revolutionary ideals it might have developed during the nationalist anti-colonial struggle. The discovery of important diamond deposits in areas under UNITA control had a profound and negative effect upon the insurgency. People now became both dispensable and disposable. Strategically, control of resources, not people, became the rebels' primary concern. Tactically, this necessitated a movement away from guerrilla warfare towards more conventional forms of combat to secure control of diamond-rich territory.

UNITA: *diamonds and violence*

Throughout the years of insurgency, UNITA never demonstrated that it was any

better equipped to establish a new form of governance than the MPLA. As mentioned above, after losing a pre-independence power struggle with the MPLA, UNITA returned to the countryside and waged a devastating guerrilla war with the help of South Africa and the USA. By the time the Bicesse Peace Accords were signed in May 1991 by the warring factions, the rebels controlled most of the southeastern portion of Angola.

However, political participation in the areas controlled by UNITA was even more problematic than in government-held zones. There are several reasons for this situation. Although UNITA portrayed itself as a democratic organisation, its practice suggested that it was a terrorist organisation masquerading as a political movement. UNITA created highly centralised structures both at the political and at the military level. Peculiarly, its military structures dominate the organisation in the sense that few civilians hold leadership positions. For example, all members of UNITA's Politburo and its Political Commission (the decision-making body) have a military rank. The primacy of the military gave UNITA a particularly rigid and non-revolutionary character. This has become even more pronounced since the early 1990s, especially since it lost the first multiparty elections in September 1992 and returned to guerrilla warfare.

The major global and regional changes that took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s—the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the minority regime in South Africa—relegated UNITA to irrelevance at the international and regional levels, even if not domestically. These changes presented UNITA with major challenges. The rebels could no longer count on the generosity of external bene-factors to ensure survival, let alone victory. Thus UNITA reluctantly joined an externally driven peace process aimed at ending the civil war. As expected, however, UNITA did not completely abandon its long-term goal of capturing state power.

Unexpectedly, the peace process opened significant opportunities for the rebels. They deceitfully used the lull in fighting to reorganise for a planned new phase of the war. Rebel leader Jonas Savimbi believed that the MPLA regime was irremediably debilitated by long years of economic mismanagement, internal squabbles and civil war. More importantly, the regime could no longer count on the 50 000 Cuban troops that had been keeping it in power since independence. Moreover, the peace process would enable Savimbi to move his best troops from southeastern Angola into the diamond producing regions of Lunda Norte, Lunda Sul, Malanje and Bie. The loss of US and South African support would be more than offset by the new found diamond wealth.

UNITA guerrillas initiated their northward movement immediately after the signing of the Bicesse Peace Accord. The process of demobilising excess govern-ment and UNITA soldiers as part of the peace process provided the ideal pretext inasmuch as both government and rebel troops were expected to assemble with their weapons in various predetermined sites around the country. But UNITA did not send its best soldiers to the demobilisation centres. In fact, after UNITA's refusal to accept the results of the first multiparty election in October 1992, its guerrillas quickly seized most, if not all, of Angola's richest diamond-producing regions in the northeast. Having failed to precipitate the regime's collapse in the aftermath of the electoral fiasco, UNITA appeared ready to embark on a new, now

conventional, round of war to topple the government. This time around, UNITA could confidently count on its control of Angola's diamonds to win the war.

From 1992 until 1998, when the UN called upon its members to suspend all dealings with the Angolan rebels, especially in diamonds, rebel gems were traded openly in places like Johannesburg, Antwerp and Tel Aviv. There is no evidence to suggest that current UN sanctions on UNITA have been fully and diligently implemented. Understandably, few people in the diamond industry believe that this embargo will halt the illegal flow of diamonds from Angola. The prevailing attitude is that 'wherever diamonds are mined, there are dealers prepared to purchase them'.[12] And, as mentioned earlier, the rebels continue to mine considerable quantities of diamonds.

UNITA has used its substantial diamond revenues to undertake a fundamental military reorganisation—away from its traditional posture as a guerrilla army into a more conventional disposition in preparation for delivering a final victorious blow against government forces and seizing state power. To this end, the rebels engaged in a major military procurement programme. The Fowler Report, prepared in compliance with UN Security Council Resolution 1237 (1999) presents a detailed account of UNITA's activities in acquiring arms and military equipment.[13] It establishes, for example, that UNITA has used several international arms brokers as well as connections in several African states—especially Burkina Faso and Togo—to facilitate delivery of large quantities of weapons imported from Eastern Europe. UNITA imports mainly small arms and light weapons. However, the Fowler Report found evidence that UNITA also imported conventional weapons systems including 'mechanized vehicles such as tanks and armored personnel carriers, mines and explosives, a variety of small arms and light weapons, and anti-aircraft weapons, and a variety of artillery pieces'.[14] This evidence corroborates previous reports that, between 1994 and 1998, UNITA purchased military hardware from Eastern Europe, particularly Ukraine and Bulgaria. The purchases included about 50 T-55 and T-62 tanks; a significant number of 155-mm G-5, B-2, D-2 and D-30 guns; medium- and long-range D-130 guns; BMP-1 and BMP-2 combat vehicles; ZU-23s anti-aircraft weapons; and BM-21 multiple rocket launchers.[15] In the end, however, UNITA's attempts to topple the government through conventional means backfired. The rebels lost their main strongholds of Andulo and Bailundo to government troops in September 1999. What went wrong for the rebels?

The perils of a hasty transition to conventional warfare

After losing and rejecting the results of the first multiparty national elections of September 1992, UNITA used conventional military tactics to overrun most government positions around the country and seriously threatened the capital city, Luanda. It would take the Angolan government about two years to beat back UNITA's pressure. In November 1994, Angolan government forces captured Huambo, UNITA's main stronghold only days before the two sides were due to sign the Lusaka Peace Protocol to end the post-electoral round of fighting. Ominously, Jonas Savimbi did not personally endorse this accord. He retreated to Bailundo and Andulo to set up his group's new headquarters.

Gaining control of these two strongholds was now a top political and military priority for the government for several reasons. First, its claims of legitimacy rested heavily on the ability to fully implement the Lusaka Protocol. This peace accord provided the government with both a mandate and a timetable to re-establish state authority in all areas still under rebel control. Second, UNITA's headquarters were highly symbolic: Bailundo is the cradle of Ovimbundu nationalism whilst Andulo is Savimbi's hometown. But these towns were also significant from a military standpoint: they were the main nerve centres for UNITA's impressive military machine. Andulo, for example, was the main operational centre responsible for supporting UNITA forces fighting on the various fronts around the vast countryside. Equally important, their geographic position at the centre of the country was of particular concern for the government inasmuch as UNITA could continue to spread its political and military activities to every corner of the country. By retaking Bailundo and Andulo, the government would force UNITA soldiers to disperse into various unconnected regions. This would make communication, co-ordination and control, as well as logistical support, extremely difficult. In other words, without its central headquarters, UNITA could not retain a conventional military posture. From the rebels' point of view, this meant that Bailundo and Andulo had to be defended at all costs.

Initially, guided by the provisions of the Lusaka Protocol, the government embarked on an attempt to regain control over these two areas through negotiations. However, after four years of failed efforts, the government changed course. On the eve of its fourth Congress, the governing MPLA blamed UNITA's 'war-mongering wing' for 'obstructing the fulfillment of the Lusaka Protocol by overtly refusing to demilitarize its forces, and to reinstate government administration in all areas of Angola'. Therefore, it decided to discontinue talks with the rebels while condemning their leader as a 'war criminal'.[16] The government promptly directed the armed forces to retake the two UNITA strongholds. UNITA, however, was strong enough to withstand this offensive. In fact, it responded by undertaking military offensives of its own.

After successfully stopping the Angolan Armed Forces (FAA)'s March 1999 offensive, UNITA escalated its military operations and brought them, as in 1992, closer to the capital city. Thus, on 20 July 1999 UNITA rebels mounted a daring and surprise attack on the town of Catete, just 60 km from Luanda.[17] The rebels' movement towards Luanda began in Zenza do Itombe, Maria Teresa and Calomboloca.[18] Catete represented a clear warning to the government that Luanda itself could be the next target.

The rebels appeared intend on threatening Luanda in a variety of ways. There were reports that UNITA was building a major paved runway in the neighbouring Cuanza Sul province to receive large cargo aircraft that could disembark military matériel for a final assault on Luana.[19] At the time there were also unconfirmed reports that UNITA was equipping itself with air resources to confront the government.

UNITA's military and political calculations, however, reflected a continuing inability to carefully assess the realities on the ground. This would, again, lead to major tactical errors on the part of the rebels. For example, UNITA's pressure on Luanda could not be sustained for any prolonged period. First, the FAA had

significant concentrations of military power in the capital. Second, the civilian population in Luanda was heavily armed, a result of the government's distribution of about a million rifles (type AK-47) to its sympathisers in the aftermath of the electoral fiasco of 1992. More importantly, while UNITA was putting pressure on Luanda, the FAA was fortifying its positions in the central highlands, in preparation for its long-delayed *cacimbo* (cold season) offensive against Savimbi's headquarters in Andulo and Bailundo.

Tactically, instead of preparing to attack Luanda, UNITA was in a better position to deny government troops the ability to mount the inevitable *cacimbo* offensive. This would necessarily involve continuing the sieges of Huambo, Kuito, Malanje and Menongue. These were government-controlled cities from which re-armed government troops in the central highlands would strike out to evict Savimbi's troops from their bases in Andulo and Bailundo as well as the diamond mines around Nharea. What led UNITA into such tactical blunder?

UNITA was confronted by conflicting messages from senior FAA officers and members of the Angolan government regarding their perceptions and interpretations of the rebel military threat. Some FAA officers expressed overt pessimism about the government's prospects for defeating UNITA. For example, in June 1999, in a report to the Angolan parliament, the army chief of staff, Lieutenant-General José Ribeiro Neco, admitted that 'UNITA has the upper hand and the Angolan army is largely on the defensive'.[20] Even the Angolan president was seeking support from his regional allies to deal with UNITA.[21] These kind of signals reinforced UNITA's misguided assessment of its own military capacity.

UNITA exhibited this exaggerated sense of confidence when it claimed to control 70% of the country in the semi-circular zone adjoining the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia and Namibia while 'the regime control[led] only 30 per cent of the territory, mainly the coastal band about 100–175 km wide'.[22] From this illusory position of strength, UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi threatened to enter Luanda. In a letter to the ruling MPLA he stated that, 'this time, UNITA may reach Futungo [the presidential palace] before the Angolan armed forces reach Andulo'.[23] But government forces were not as unprepared as Savimbi expected. In fact, they were openly preparing for a decisive offensive against UNITA. For example, the Angolan Deputy Minister of Defence, Armado Cruz Neto, confirmed that the FAA was 'preparing for a decisive offence against UNITA' and repeated his government's intention 'to wipe out' the rebels.[24] Other senior FAA officers maintained that the government was 'very close to canceling UNITA's military advantage, especially in the area of long-range artillery'.[25] This 'military advantage' was primarily responsible for UNITA's ability to block the FAA's previous military offensives aimed at reoccupying Andulo and Bailundo in March 1999.

UNITA chose to believe only those reports that presented it in a favourable and/or stronger position. Thus, the rebels did not appear to fully appreciate the political and military factors driving MPLA's strategy. They seemed surprised by the scale of the FAA's much anticipated offensive that began on 14 September 1999. According to UNITA, government forces, supported by 'massive numbers of tanks, self-propelled artillery pieces, and MiG and Su fighter bombers', attacked on four fronts:

Northern Front, from Uige towards UNITA-administered towns. Malanje Front, a two-pronged offensive from Malanje and Caculama, and from Malanje and Mussende towards Andulo. Bie Front, a two-pronged offensive from Kuito and Chipeta towards Catabola; and from Camacupa an Vouga towards Andulo. Huambo Front, a two-pronged offensive from Mbave, and from Vila Nova and Chiumbo towards Bailundo.[26]

The government formally announced the capture of Bailundo and Andulo on 20 October.[27] On the following day Angolan television showed pictures of FAA Chief of Staff, General João de Matos, in Andulo. Despite UNITA's deployment of some of its most experienced troops back to Andulo from the siege of Malanje for a final stand on the outskirts of the town, the government advance was so powerful that Andulo was evacuated without heavy fighting. In the disorderly evacuation, the rebels abandoned large quantities of war matériel, including heavy artillery guns and vehicles. They also abandoned other valuable possessions, including their leader's Mercedes limousine. As he moved east into Moxico province, to resume guerrilla warfare, Savimbi would not need such luxurious means of transportation.

Conclusion

Current wars being fought in Africa have lost the ideological character of previous conflicts. These wars are now being fought mainly for control of important natural resources like diamonds, not as a means for undertaking fundamental changes in the character of society. In other words, these insurgencies have little in common with the wars of national liberation fought in various parts of the continent from the end of the Second World War to the end of the Cold War. Alas, they are criminal wars being fought with complete disregard for Africa's citizens.

Angola's is a particularly complex war fuelled partly by the rebels' control of major diamond producing areas. The revenues accrued from UNITA's ability to sell diamonds on the global market have enabled this rebel movement to remain militarily active, thus scuttling all efforts for peace, let alone development, in Angola. For the second time in a quarter century of civil war, UNITA has been forced to retreat and revert to guerrilla warfare, an implicit concession of its inability to remove the MPLA from power in the near future. Likewise, the Angolan government is unlikely to improve its ability to curtail rebel activity, especially in the countryside; only a handful of urban centres seem to be firmly controlled by the government.

This enduring stalemate may eventually lead the warring parties back to the negotiating table. This may provide Angola with another opportunity to place itself on the path to sustainable peace and development. However, the inevitable next peace conference must do much more than simply attempt to find agreement on the distribution of political offices between MPLA and UNITA. This formula has doomed previous peace processes. Since, as this paper suggests, the war in Angola is now primarily about control of natural resources, economic factors must occupy a central position in any attempt to find common grounds for peace. Eventually, Angolans must find appropriate institutional arrangements that will

wrest control of their resources away from MPLA and UNITA leaders in an indispensable step to eliminating the real causes of the civil war. Angola's plentiful supply of diamonds have made these stones UNITA's best friend. Angolans hope, however, that, unlike diamonds, their civil war is not forever.

Notes

[1] Norman Miller, 'The hard and soft of it', *Geographical*, 71 (12), 1999, pp 64–65.
[2] *Ibid*, p 64.
[3] *The Mining Journal*, 16 June 2000, p 464; *The Mining Journal*, 30 June 2000, p 499.
[4] Global Witness, *A Rough Trade: The Role of Companies and Governments in the Angolan Conflict*, London: Global Witness, 1998.
[5] Christian Dietrich, 'UNITA's diamond mining and exporting capacity', in Jackie Cilliers & Christian Dietrich (eds), *Angola's War Economy: The Role of Oil and Diamonds*, Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2000, p 275.
[6] Richard Helmore, 'Diamond mining in Angola', *Mining Magazine*, June 1984, p 530.
[7] *Ibid*.
[8] *The Mining Journal*, 16 June 2000.
[9] Laurent Kabila was assassinated on 16 January 2001 and was replaced by his 29-year-old son, General Joseph Kabila.
[10] Donald Snow, *National Security: Defense Policy in a Changed International Order*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1998, p 228.
[11] Dean Minix & Sandra M Hawley, *Global Politics*, Belmont, CA: West/Wadsworth, 1998, p 371.
[12] *The Mining Journal*, 15 October 1999.
[13] United Nations Security Council, *Report of the Panel of Experts on Violations of Security Council Sanctions Against UNITA*, S/2000/203, 10 March 2000.
[14] *Ibid*, para 48.
[15] BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 'Radio notes British study of UNITA's military resources', 17 August 1999. See also Chris Gordon, 'Eastern Europe aid bolsters UNITA', *Africa News Online*, 15 January 1999.
[16] BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 'MPLA Central Committee issues communiqué at the end of meeting', 7 December 1998.
[17] *Africa News*, 30 July 1999.
[18] BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 'Officer says armed forces were caught off guard in Catete', 27 July 1999.
[19] BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 'UNITA reportedly building paved runway in Cuanza Sul', 20 August 1999.
[20] Suzanne Daley, 'Hunger ravages Angolans in renewed civil war', *New York Times*, 26 July 1999, p A1. See also Chris McGreal, 'Profits fuel Angola's war', *Guardian*, 14 July 1999, p 3.
[21] BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 'Angola asks SADC summit for human, material support against UNITA, 18 August 1999.
[22] BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 'Angola: UNITA leader's letter to ruling party calls for dialogue', 31 August 1999.
[23] *Ibid*.
[24] Xinhua News Agency, 'Angolan army to launch massive attack against rebels', 13 July 1999.
[25] BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 'Army source says capture of UNITA bases at Andulo, Bailundo imminent', 21 July 1999.
[26] BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 'Angola: UNITA reports government offensive on four fronts', 19 September 1999.
[27] BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 'Angola announces recapture of Bailundo, Andulo, other regions from UNITA', 25 October 1999.