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Chapter 22

Angola

Pedro Seabra and Vasco Martins

After more than three decades of internal strife and extensive involvement from key international actors, Angola's oversized military apparatus found itself without a core mission following the end of hostilities in 2002. Since then, the Angolan Armed Forces (FAA) have been used interchangeably as means of national reconciliation, internal repression, and external power projection. However, these roles have been adopted with varying degrees of priority and effectiveness. This chapter explores the ensuing adaptation of the FAA as dictated by a lingering wartime legacy, the aftermath of multiple disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) processes, and the atomisation of authority for the protection of the state. The combined effect of these three elements helps to explain the set of capabilities made available, the functional overlapping of internal structures of the state and the fleeting interest in meeting broader African security demands.

Keywords: Angola; armed forces; Southern Africa; DDR; civil war; reconciliation; Cabinda; SADC; MPLA; UNITA

Introduction

The state of Angola's defence sector remains intrinsically linked to the country's extensive civil war record (1975 to 1991, 1992 to 1994 and from 1998 to 2002). More than three decades of internal strife and sizeable outside involvement directly helped to foster an oversized military apparatus that found itself without a core active mission following the end of hostilities in 2002. Since then, the Angolan Armed Forces (FAA – *Forças Armadas Angolanas*) have been used as interchangeable means of state building, national reconciliation, and external power projection, tasks that have been met with varying degrees of effectiveness.

However, research on these topics has not expanded significantly over the years. The bulk of the literature continues to privilege the historisation of the FAA as framed by the country´s

decolonisation and civil war period.[1] Recent works have taken tentative steps to unpack official reform agendas, increasing calls for greater regional involvement in tackling nearby crises, or the securitised use of the military in the internal political order.[2] Yet, the current iteration of the FAA continues to stand out as a product of multiple competing variables that simultaneously influence official decision-making and help to prevent significant change from taking place. A more comprehensive overview that accounts for push-and-pull forces from the past as it does for structural contingencies from the present is therefore required.

This chapter takes on such an encompassing approach, based on a four-part analysis that focuses on a historical contextualisation; the efforts undertook to improve military reform, strategic planning, and professionalisation; the main operational deployments throughout the continent under the guise of multilateral/bilateral cooperation; and key choices of international partners. We explore the evolution of Angola's military as grounded by the intersections of a lingering wartime legacy, the aftermath of multiple disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) processes, and the atomisation of authority for the protection of the state. The combined effect of these elements helps to explain the set of capabilities made available, the overlapping dynamics with other internal structures, and the fleeting interest in meeting broader African security demands. It also helps to inform how despite recurrent calls for greater reform, the Angolan armed forces will most likely remain in a state of perennial indecision over a new purpose and direction in a changing national and regional context.

From Independence to Civil War and Peace

At their genesis, the FAA derive from a confluence of military practices and political ideological traditions with an idiosyncratic historical background. Firmly embedded in the Angolan liberation struggle, what became the current FAA is, by and large, the product of the different military extensions of two political parties, namely, the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA – *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola*) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA – *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola*), who fought for independence and afterwards amongst themselves during a twenty-seven-year civil war at a cost of more than 500,000 Angolan lives. Both parties experimented with different modes of

[1] See, for example, Miguel Júnior and Manuel Maria Difuila, *História Militar de Angola* (Luanda: Editorial Kilombelombe, 2015); Stephen L. Weigert, *Angola: A Modern Military History, 1961–2002* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

[2] See, for example, Miguel Júnior, *The Formation and Development of the Angolan Armed Forces* (Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2019); Luís Bernardino, *A Posição de Angola na Arquitectura de Paz e Segurança Africana: Análise da Função Estratégica das Forças Armadas Angolanas* (Coimbra: Almedina, 2013); Paula Roque, *Governing in the Shadows: Angola's Securitised State* (London: Hurst & Co., 2021).

military organisation, doctrine, and tactics.[3] The MPLA created the Popular Army for the Liberation of Angola (EPLA – *Exército Popular de Libertação de Angola*) to fight against Portuguese colonial troops before transforming from lightly armed guerrilla units into a national army capable of sustained field operations, assuming the form of the Popular Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FAPLA – *Forças Armadas Populares de Libertação de Angola*).[4] UNITA, on the other hand, created its own Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FALA – *Forças Armadas de Libertação de Angola*) in 1966, rooted in guerrilla warfare training that party cadres received in China.[5] Less decisive but equally relevant was the National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA – *Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola*), by means of its National Army for the Liberation of Angola (ELNA – *Exército Nacional de Libertação de Angola*), heavily associated and dependent upon Mobuto Sese Seko's regime in former-Zaire.[6]

The three movements were an integral part of the decolonisation process as signatories of the Alvor Agreements with Portugal in 1975, which foresaw the dissolution of each movement's military wing and the creation of national armed forces upon independence. However, decade-old unresolved tensions between each party led to outright conflict in Luanda before the transition of power even took place. Various reasons help to explain why the landscape became so intensely and quickly polarised, from political issues pertaining to elite competition and power politics,[7] to historical suspicion and conflict[8], and identity divisions that spilled over onto party organisation.[9] The civil war that ensued forcibly postponed the goal of creating a single Angolan military body.

After the ELNA became a minor actor following the Battle of Quifangondo in 1975,[10] between 1975 and 1991 the conflict was essentially fought between the FAPLA, with Soviet and

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[3] Júnior and Difuila, *História Militar de Angola*.

[4] Mbeto Traça, *Do EPLA às FAPLA: Apontamentos para a história das Forças Armadas de Angola* (Luanda: Mayamba Editora, 2013); Miguel Júnior, *Popular Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola: First National Army and the War (1975-1992)* (Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2015); Thomas Collelo, ed., *Angola: A Country Study*, 3rd Edition (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1991).

[5] Weigert, *Angola*.

[6] Ana Leão and Martin Rupiya, 'A Military History of the Angolan Armed Forces from the 1960s Onwards – as Told by Former Combatants', in *Evolutions and Revolutions: A Contemporary History of Militaries in Southern Africa*, edited by Martin Rupiya (Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2005), pp. 7-42.

[7] See, for example, Justin Pearce, *Political Identity and Conflict in Central Angola, 1975–2002* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Assis Malaquias, *Rebels and Robbers: Violence in Post-Colonial Angola* (Uppsala, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2007); Christine Messiant, *1961. L'Angola colonial, histoire et société. Les prémisses du movement nationaliste* (Baselö Schlettwein Publishing, 2006).

[8] Linda Heywood, *Contested Power in Angola, 1840s to the Present* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2000).

[9] Vasco Martins, *Colonialism, Ethnicity and War in Angola* (London: Routledge, 2021).

[10] Edward George, *The Cuban Intervention in Angola, 1965-1991: From Che Guevara to Cuito Cuanavale* (Abingdon: Frank Cass, 2005), pp. 89-90.

Cuban support, and the FALA, with the backing of the United States and South Africa. The length of the war was structurally entangled in Cold War dynamics, from Namibia's struggle to independence to the very survival of the Apartheid regime in South Africa. The path to a general ceasefire only became possible after the stalemate of the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale, which paved the way to the Tripartite Accord of 1988, linking the departure of Cuban troops from Angolan soil with the independence of Namibia, and with the departure of South African troops from Angola's southern border.[11] This succession of events allowed for a ceasefire that led to the signing of the Bicesse Accords in 1991 and to Angola's very first democratic elections in 1992.

Implicit in this new phase was the need to initiate a sustainable process of national reconciliation and nation-building. To that end, the creation of the FAA was meant to mend fences and create bridges between former enemies. A Joint Political-Military Commission (CCPM – *Comissão Conjunta Político-Militar*) was therefore created, supported by a Joint Commission for the Formation of the Angolan Armed Forces (CCFA – *Comissão de Criação das Forças Armadas*). The new organisation of Angola's military was defined and approved on 9 October 1991, with the goal of reaching 50,000 strong joint armed forces, by first quartering troops from both sides and then demobilising surplus reserves. From an estimated total of 200,000 troops who were on active duty, the FAA was to be composed by 40,000 army soldiers, together with an Air Force and a Navy of 6,000 and 4,000, respectively.[12] However, the return to war in 1992 brought these plans to a halt. Even though UNITA retained the bulk of its army, many of its officers had already begun to integrate in the new command structures, under the MPLA government's control. This meant the new FAA took its first steps in less-than-ideal conditions, based upon half accomplished measures and without fulfilling initial operational targets. Regardless of its readiness status, it was immediately used to fight the remnants of UNITA's FALA.

Lasting peace was finally reached after the signing of the Luena Memorandum on 4 April 2002, following the death of UNITA's leader Jonas Savimbi. Yet, for a war that lasted twenty-seven years, its memorialisation remains essentially generic, more focused on its various international layers than upon the internal divisions and the elements that contributed to its temporal extension. Only a handful of large-scale military operations endure in public memory due to their dimension and human cost, like the battle of Quifangondo (1975) and Operation Savannah (1975-76), the battle of Cuito Cuanavale (1987-88), the battle of Huambo (1993) or the siege of Cuíto (1993-94). This limited selection is owed to a cross-cutting consensus towards

[11] Piero Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom: Havana, Washington, Pretoria and the Struggle for Southern Africa, 1976-1991* (Chapel Hill, NC: North Carolina University Press, 2013).

[12] Bernardino, *A Posição de Angola*; Júnior, *The Formation and Development*.

nurturing national reconciliation, which has both framed and limited the conversation on any past wounds.[13]

Much of this consensus is also due to the considerable focus assigned to DDR immediately after the conflict. This priority was understandable given the 3 to 4 million small arms and light weapons (SALW) in circulation as well as the nearly 80,000 former-UNITA combatants accompanied by an estimated 360,000 family members.[14] Previous attempts in 1991-1992 and specially in 1994-1998 – in the form of the Lusaka Protocol, not completely enforced due to yet another return to hostilities – had failed to jumpstart any serious disarmament drive. This feature had also been consecutively overlooked by the mandates of the various United Nations (UN) missions deployed to the country.[15] Hence, post-2002, DDR quickly warranted political prioritisation and began in the earnest with the quartering of former-UNITA soldiers and their families as well as a general amnesty to all UNITA fighters.[16] The government-led, World Bank-funded Angola Demobilization and Reintegration Program (ADRP) was subsequently implemented from 2004 until 2008 and carried out without additional violence or retaliation, thus contributing to an effectively non-partisan process. In fact, the new FAA soon stood out as the most visible symbol of national unity for its inclusion of soldiers of different political and social origins from all of Angola's ethno-linguistic groups and parts of the country.[17] The success of these reintegration efforts has taken roots in society and has even led the military to be considered one of the most trustworthy institutions,[18] in line with similar findings in other parts of the continent.

Notwithstanding this perception, the FAA has not been innocuous to Angola's broader post-war dynamics. Overall partidarisation and controversial cases of corruption have taken a toll,

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[13] Vasco Martins, 'Hegemony, Resistance and Gradations of Memory: The Politics of Remembering Angola's Liberation Struggle', *History & Memory* 33, no. 2 (2021): pp. 80-106.

[14] João Gomes Porto and Imogen Parsons, *Sustaining the Peace in Angola: An Overview of Current Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration* (Bonn: Bonn International Center for Conversion, 2003).

[15] Dame Margaret J. Anstee, 'The Role of International Mediators in Conflicts: Lessons Learned from Angola', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 14, no. 2 (2001): pp. 70-79; Vladimír Krška, 'Peacekeeping in Angola (UNAVEM I and II)', *International Peacekeeping* 4, no. 1 (1997): pp. 75-97; Gwinyayi Albert Dzinesa, 'A Comparative Perspective of UN Peacekeeping in Angola and Namibia', *International Peacekeeping* 11, no. 4 (2004): pp. 644-663.

[16] João Gomes Porto, Chris Alden, and Imogen Parsons, *From Soldiers to Citizens: Demilitarization of Conflict and Society* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007); Jaremey R. McMullin, 'Exclusion or Reintegration: Child Soldiers in Angola', in *Child Soldiers: From Recruitment to Reintegration*, edited by Alpaslan Özerdem and Sukanya Podder (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 246-266.

[17] Roque, *Governing in the Shadows*; Leão and Rupiya, 'A Military History'.

[18] Afrobarometer, 'Angolans trust religious and traditional leaders more than elected leaders, Afrobarometer survey shows', Afrobarometer press release, 30 November 2022, https://www.afrobarometer.org/articles/angolans-trust-religious-and-traditional-leaders-more-than-elected-leaders-afrobarometer-survey-shows/.

particularly among the high echelons of the military, dividing the top brass from lower rank-and-file personnel.[19] In 2017, as João Lourenço took over the presidency from José Eduardo dos Santos, a litany of judicial cases shed light on previously undisclosed malpractices involving military procurement. In addition, old ethnic divisions have resurfaced, as expressed by reports that former UNITA officials of Ovimbundu ethnicity have been sidestepped and disenfranchised in the FAA, in contradiction to previous DDR efforts.[20] Yet, while Angolan society remains politically polarised and regional, ethno-linguistic and religious divisions continue to stand out, none has led to fragmentation, disintegration, factionalism, or loss of control within the armed forces.

Military Reform, Strategic Planning, and Obstacles to Professionalisation

In a national context marked by a deep sense of reconciliation, it is understandable that the legacy of the civil war continues to inform the way Angola's defence sector is governed. That much is evident from the complex framework that combines dispositions generated in Bicesse with more updated legislation. This framework has been met with occasional, if fleeting, attempts at reform over the years. After 2002, the first meaningful effort came in the form of a presidential directive aimed at restructuring and modernising the FAA for the 2007-2025 period. The official aim was to maintain the system of forces based on the three branches (Army, Air Force, and Navy), while providing them with greater firepower, manoeuvrability, and projection capacity.[21] The role of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was also to be reinforced, with a greater focus placed on improving military administration, logistics, and technical maintenance. In reality, the goal was far more pragmatic, consisting of gradually adjusting the numbers of military personnel to more sustainable levels of expenditure in a post-war environment.

The next step in adapting to this scenario came by means of a new constitution, approved in 2010, which formally defined the FAA as a "permanent, regular and non-partisan national military institution, entrusted with the military defence of the country".[22] More importantly, it reaffirmed the chain of command by consolidating the President of the Republic as both Head of State and Commander-in-Chief, with powers to conduct overall defence policy and military missions. The National Assembly, on the other hand, became responsible for legislating in this domain and exercising control and supervision of the Executive's performance. Finally, the

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[19] Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, *Magnificent and Beggar Land: Angola since the Civil War* (London: Hurst & Co., 2015).

[20] Roque, *Governing in the Shadows*.

[21] Angola, 'Directiva do Presidente da República e Comandante em Chefe, sobre a Reedificação das Forças Armadas Angolanas', 30 July 2007, cited in Bernardino, *A Posição de Angola*, pp. 949-963; Júnior, *The Formation and Development*.

[22] Angola, 'Constituição da República de Angola', 2010, article 207.

National Security Council was formalised as the main advisory body for matters relating to national security policy and strategy, as well as the organisation, operation, and discipline of the Armed Forces – even though the President's far-reaching Security House, renamed Military House in late 2021, already under João Lourenço, retained a core ascendancy over every single decision in this domain.

On paper, the drive to instil further changes was evident, as attested by the approval in 2018 of two key documents, namely a new National Defence Strategic Concept – which replaced the previous 1993 version – and an original Defence White Book. The latter was presented as a trust-building instrument aimed at portraying the FAA as increasingly professional and modern armed forces in international and regional contexts.[23] The former concentrated on formalising Angola's strategic interests, in terms of consolidating its participation in regional, international and continental organisations; reinforcing the external credibility of the Angolan state, including through its diaspora abroad; contributing to the promotion of peace and security as well as regional, international and continental stability; and promoting cooperation and foreign investment, with a view to leveraging the development of the country.[24] The combination of these interests was translated into the pursuit of a loose set of priorities, namely: to maintain and retain a conventional military capacity to face external attacks; to maintain the necessary means for non-conventional or anti-subversive war; to face potential internal threats; to protect the inviolability and the security of Angola's borders; to maintain a credible intelligence capability; to safeguard the country's territorial waters and exclusive economic zone (EEZ); and to contribute to peace missions at the request of the UN, the African Union (AU), the South African Development Community (SADC) or the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS).

However, tensions over how to best use the extensive military resources at the disposal of the state remained unresolved amidst such an overarching listing of objectives and areas of intervention. On the one hand, much of the official aim at restructuring has been challenged by the need to retain capacity and operational readiness, while at the same time ensuring that battle-ready forces do not remain idle or underused. The memory of the civil war also continues to fuel mixed signals on a national strategy guiding decision-making. In fact, any semblance of strategic thinking remains closely associated to an informal acknowledgement that the state remains in

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[23] Angola, 'Decreto Presidencial n.º 108/18', *Diário da República*, 25 April 2018, https://faa.ao/themes/admin/assets/img/normas/livro_defesa%20_nacional.pdf, accessed 14 July 2023.
[24] Angola, 'Decreto Presidencial n.º 107/18′, *Diário da República*, 23 April 2018, https://faa.ao/themes/admin/assets/img/normas/conceito_nacional.pdf, accessed 14 July 2023.

constant confrontation, be it external or domestic to the Angolan borders – a reflection of the difficulties in overcoming the limits of a prevailing all-out war mentality.[25]

On the other hand, these difficulties are also best reflected by the ongoing domestic engagements of the FAA. Indeed, national peace remains relative when considering lingering tensions over oil-rich Cabinda, a region with extensive independence claims by the Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (FLEC – *Frente para a Libertação do Enclave de Cabinda*). Following a protracted struggle, the activities of FLEC continue to warrant occasional deployments of the Angolan military, keen on quashing the insurgency, even after a 2006 peace agreement with a local faction.[26] The provinces of Lunda Norte and Lunda Sul have also witnessed considerable military activity to protect the diamond mining industry.[27] As in Cabinda, these operations have stood out due to reports of human rights violations in the use of the military as an internal security actor, prone to co-optation.

Additional obstacles have also been evident through the lack of structural changes in the regular functioning of the FAA. Strikingly, the 1993 National Defence and Armed Forces Law that established the general principles of military organisation, has yet to be revised in full.[28] This has led to a slower pace of reform than initially anticipated. For instance, the FAA remain organised in four military regions (north, centre, east and south) and two special military regions: Cabinda and Luanda. The latter is where the top FAA structures are based, including the General Staff, the Military Technical Institute, or the Grafanil military base, as well as regiment-type units such as commandos and marines, stationed out of Cabo Ledo and Ambriz, respectively. The very composition of the FAA has also not varied drastically since the end of the war, and continues to abide by predictable trends, as evidenced by Figure 1. Currently, it includes nearly 100,000 active-duty troops in the Army, 6,000 in the Air Force and 1,000 in the Navy – numbers only possible in large part due to the maintenance of national conscription. First foreseen in 1986 by Law 2/7, conscription continues to be mandatory and extendable to every male citizen aged between 25 and 45 years old, while women over 20 years old can join voluntarily. The duration of military service is two years, including basic instruction, plus an additional year for sergeants and specialists in the Navy and Air Force.

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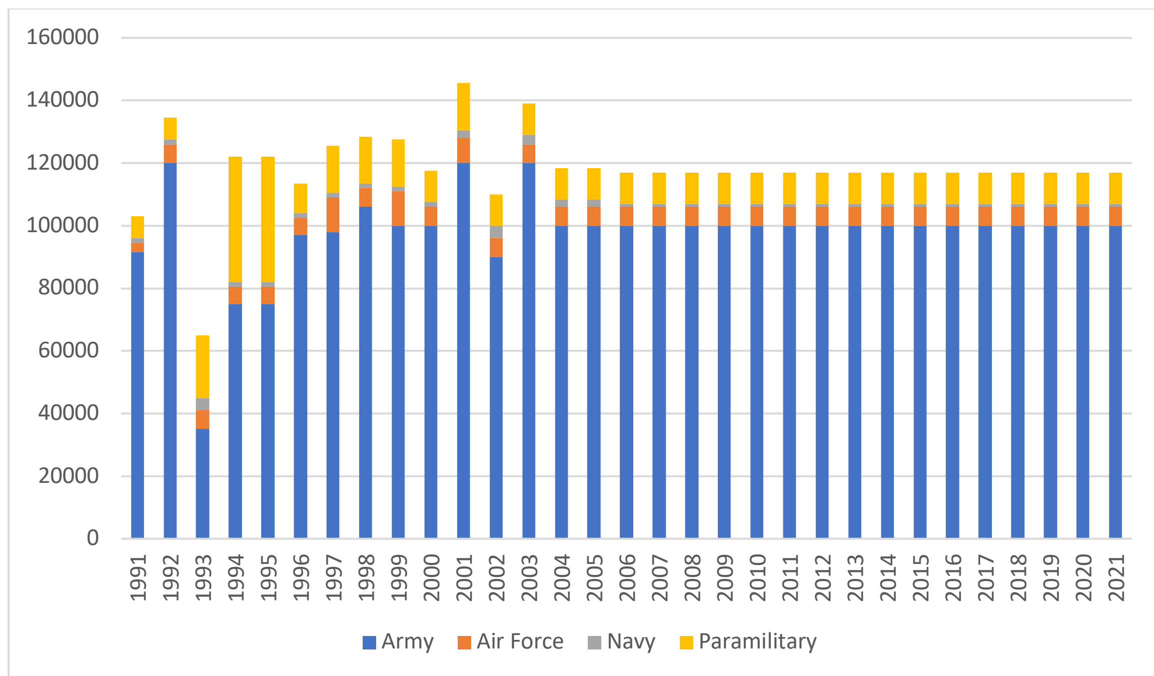
[25] Miguel Júnior, *Génese do Pensamento Estratégico Angolano* (Cascais: Tribuna da História, 2020).

[26] Patrício Munengo Mangovo, 'Os Desafios da Paz em Angola e as Dinâmicas do Conflito em Cabinda', *Nação e Defesa*, no. 131 (2012): pp. 91-123; Joseph Figueira Martin, 'The Front(s) for the Liberation of Cabinda in Angola: A Phantom Insurgency', in *Secessionism in African Politics: Aspiration, Grievance, Performance, Disenchantment*, edited by Lotje de Vries, Pierre Englebert, and Mareike Schomerus (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 207-227.

[27] Soares de Oliveira, *Magnificent and Beggar Land*; Roque, *Governing in the Shadows*.

[28] Júnior, *The Formation and Development*.

Figure 1 – Angolan Armed Forces personnel, total (1991-2021)



Source: The Military Balance Database, International Institute of Strategic Studies

A lack of meaningful reform has, in turn, raised questions from different angles over effectiveness. First and foremost, the FAA has had to contend with the increasing atomisation of power within different national structures – a feature not uncommon in the Angolan context. During the civil war, the FAPLA shared responsibilities with the Popular Defence Organisation (ODP – *Organização de Defesa Popular*), in charge of ensuring the security of populations and production units, and neutralising infiltrations and sabotage acts.[29] Since the war ended, however, the contrasts between the FAA and other militarised forces have further accentuated and the lines became increasingly blurrier. These competing forces include the Rapid Intervention Police (PIR – *Polícia de Intervenção Rápida*), the Presidential Guard Unit (UGP – *Unidade de Guarda Presidencial*) – renamed Presidential Defence Unit (UDP – *Unidade de Defesa Presidencial*) in 2021 – and the Presidential Security Unit (USP – *Unidade de Segurança Presidencial*), all considered to be better funded than the three military branches, and to have assumed a key centrality for the sustainability of the regime.[30]

Second, distinctions within the composition of the FAA remain painstakingly visible. While the Air Force has amassed considerable credibility in the nearby region due to airlifting capabilities by means of its Il-76 aircraft, inherited from the war, the Navy continues to

[29] Collelo, *Angola*, p. 219.

[30] Roque, *Governing in the Shadows*.

diametrically stand out. With a shoreline of nearly 1,600 kilometres, Angola finds itself with poor naval capabilities and few legal assurances over the full extent of its maritime sovereignty. Despite the launch of a much-publicised Angolan Naval Build-up Program (PRONAVAL – *Programa de Desenvolvimento do Poder Naval de Angola*) in 2014, the navy accounts for little over 1 percent of the total budget for the FAA.[31] This scenario is further accentuated by the different maritime security issues to which Angola is exposed, including the need to protect oil platforms, natural gas wells and shipping lanes, as well as to combat illegal fishing. The January 2014 piracy attack on the Greek tanker Kerala in Angolan waters made the Navy's equipment faults more apparent and reinforced a perception of lingering vulnerability to security threats coming through the sea.[32]

Third, the reintegration process between different warring sides proceeded, which meant reforming the different military structures and investing in new training institutions, such as the Higher Education War School (ESG – *Escola Superior de Guerra*) in Luanda. The goal was to provide new venues so that national reconciliation could be achieved from within the military institution itself. However, even though the incorporation of UNITA's top echelons into the FAA is often considered a success story, the reintegration of rank-and-file troops has not proceeded as smoothly. In 2021, the Institute for Socio-Professional Reintegration of Ex-Soldiers (IRSEM – *Instituto de Reintegração Socioprofissional dos Ex-Militares*) announced it had managed to only reintegrate 10,000 former-soldiers, as part of an original target of 80,000 for the 2018-2022 period, due to budgetary restrictions.[33] Conflicting reports over the exact number of beneficiaries to whom state support is still owed has also brought to the forefront previous decisions when the Angolan government opted to treat underage fighters as dependents of fighters, thus excluding them from formal reintegration benefits.[34] Public protests and walkouts of former combatants, particularly regarding delays in the payment of pensions,[35] have taken place on occasion, as a reminder of unfulfilled pledges in this area with significant social impact.

Fourth, following the end of the civil war, Angolan defence spending was met with a period of considerable stability after 2002, owing to the need to incorporate the armed forces as a national

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[31] Enock Ndawana, 'Non-South African SADC Navies and Maritime Security in the Post-Cold War Era: Angola and Mozambique', in *African Navies*, edited by Timothy Stapleton (London: Routledge, 2022), pp. 168-172.

[32] Pedro Seabra and Adriana Erthal Abdenur, 'Age of Choice or Diversification? Brazil, Portugal, and Capacity-Building in the Angolan Armed Forces', *African Security* 11, no. 3 (2018): pp. 252-273.

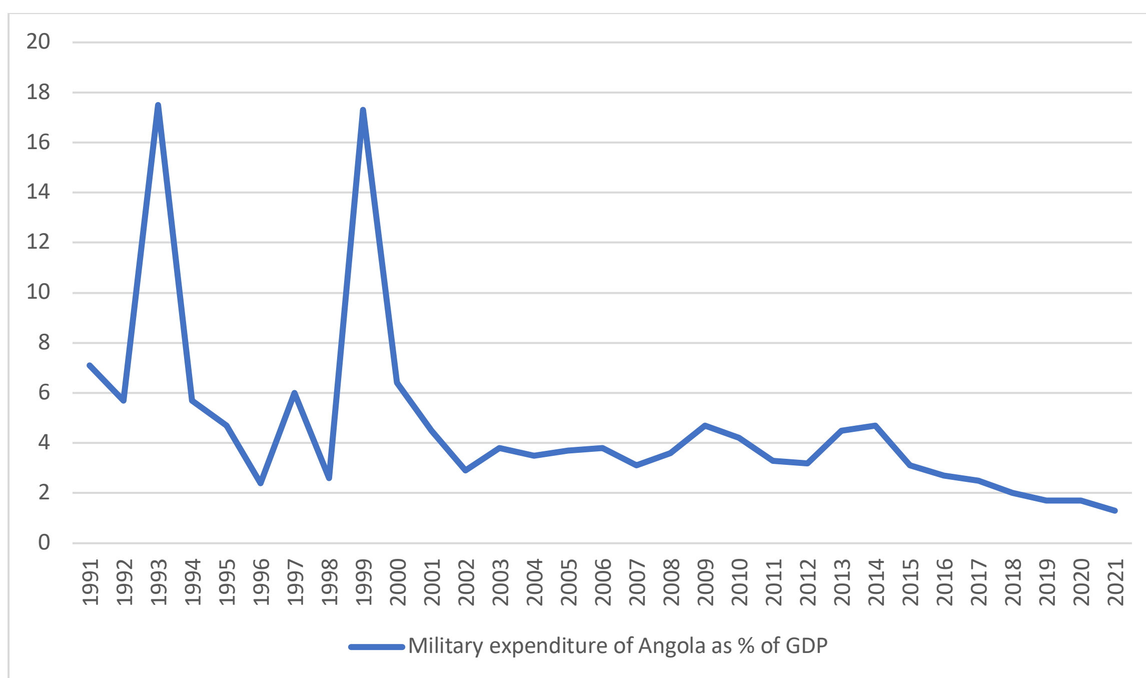
[33] Jornal de Angola, 'Angola reintegrou 10.736 ex-militares em três anos', *Jornal de Angola*, 15 April 2021, https://www.jornaldeangola.ao/ao/noticias/angola-reintegrou-10-736-ex-militares-em-tres-anos/.

[34] McMullin, 'Exclusion or Reintegration'.

[35] Manuel José, ´Em vésperas da manifestação de antigos militares, Governo envia proposta de pensões ao Parlamento', *VOA Portugues*, 16 July 2021, https://www.voaportugues.com/a/%C3%A9m-v%C3%A9speras-da-manifesta%C3%A7%C3%A3o-de-antigos-militares-governo-envia-proposta-de-pens%C3%B5es-ao-parlamento/5967961.html.

reconciliation vehicle.[36] However, even though official numbers are often met with doubt over whether they reflect exact spending totals, Figure 2 showcases a more constrained trend in recent years.

Figure 2 – Angolan military expenditure as percent of GDP (1989-2021)



Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database[37]

This orientation has been best expressed in documents such as the Defence White Book, when noting that the "current economic, financial and currency exchange climate imposes significant restrictions on all areas of life in the country" and that the goal should be to "rationalise, a decision made by the Executive which aims not only to save money, but also to better channel state revenues towards various sectors and needs".[38] Depreciations in the kwanza and soaring inflation have thus led to cuts in defence spending that averaged 17 per cent between 2015 and 2021.[39] This

[36] Carlos Pestana Barros, 'Country survey: Angola', *Defence and Peace Economics* 27, no. 3 (2016): pp. 423-432.

[37] SIPRI military expenditure data as a share of GDP are estimates and includes military and civil personnel, including retirement pensions and social services for military personnel; operation and maintenance; procurement; military research and development; and military aid. Excluded are civil defence and current expenditures for previous military activities, such as for veterans' benefits, demobilization, and weapons conversion and destruction. The ratio of military expenditure to GDP is calculated in domestic currency at current prices and for calendar years.

[38] Angola, 'Decreto Presidencial n.º 108/18', p. 2070.

[39] International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2023* (London: Routledge, 2023), p. 429.

retraction is nonetheless consistently put on hold whenever new increases in international oil prices take place, further emphasising the dependency on expansive cycles of commodities prices.

Deploying Abroad

These obstacles notwithstanding, Angola has not shied away from using its military forces in the service of its external agenda.[40] Following independence, two key goals guided the decisions over where to employ troops abroad: on the one hand, "solidarity deployments" in support of fellow African partners with close ideological affinity, as part of a general trend in the continent;[41] on the other hand, and perhaps more consequently, to cut off external bases of support to UNITA, FNLA and FLEC which had proliferated alongside Angolan borders, particularly in former-Zaire.[42]

The first goal became evident in 1978 when Angola sent between 1,000 to 1,500 troops to São Tomé and Príncipe to back the government of Manuel Pinto da Costa amidst internal contestation; they remained in the country until 1991.[43] Yet, external deployments became larger in scope when considering former-Zaire. In 1997, Angola airlifted 2,000 troops to secure Kinshasa and provided vital military, financial and logistical support to Laurent-Désiré Kabila's Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL). Within weeks, Angola became its second biggest foreign contributor, after Rwanda, as part of an international coalition that aided in the toppling of Mobutu – a consistent backer of UNITA and instrumental in its supply lines and diamond sales – during the First Congo War.[44] The following year, as the political-military crisis in the DRC escalated, Angola found itself once more heavily involved, alongside Zimbabwe and Namibia – in the framework of SADC – but this time against Rwanda, Uganda and the insurgent movements who sought to depose Kabila. After his assassination in January 2001, Angola further increased the number of troops deployed in Kinshasa to reinforce the position of the late president's son and successor, Joseph Kabila. A similar level of engagement was displayed in Congo-Brazzaville, where Angola intervened in September 1997 on behalf of former-president

[40] Assis Malaquias, 'Angola's Foreign Policy since Independence: The Search for Domestic Security', *African Security Review* 9, no. 3 (2000): pp. 33-46.

[41] Paul D. Williams, 'Peacekeeping in Africa after the Cold War: Trends and Challenges´, in *Routledge Handbook of African Security*, edited by James J. Hentz (Routledge: London, 2014), p. 68.

[42] Roque, *Governing in the Shadows*.

[43] Gerard Seibert, *Comrades, Clients and Cousins: Colonialism, Socialism and Democratization in São Tomé and Príncipe,* 2nd edition (Leiden: Brill, 2006), p. 145.

[44] Philip Roessler and Harry Verhoeven, *Why Comrades go to War: Liberation Politics and the Outbreak of Africa's Deadliest Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Weigert, *Angola*, 2011.

Denis Sassou-Nguesso, with forces estimated between 3,000 to 5,000 troops.[45] The combined effect of these operations ultimately succeeded in shutting down critical havens for UNITA and FLEC, while confirming the MPLA's willingness to take the fight beyond Angola´s borders and the FAA's potential relevance as a regional player.

However, in a post-2002 context, the rationale for the use of military forces abroad underwent a significant adjustment as civil war dynamics could no longer justify external forays of this kind and magnitude. Instead, in line with a newfound high-profile international role befitting the ensuing oil boom of the late 2000s, Angola sought to recast itself as a key supporter of overall African stabilisation and mediation efforts. But the role of crisis managers did not come easy to Angolan officials.[46] In 2012, as Guinea-Bissau underwent a new cycle of political turmoil, the Angolan Military Mission in Guinea-Bissau (MISSANG – *Missão Militar de Angola na Guiné-Bissau*), composed by 200 troops, was deployed with the aim of incentivising local Security Sector Reform (SSR) efforts.[47] But close ties with the Bissau-Guinean government led to a new crisis, followed by the quick shutdown of the mission. A similar engagement was briefly entertained, but soon discarded, when the regime of Laurent Gbagbo – a close partner of dos Santos – crumbled in Côte d'Ivoire in April 2011.[48] Angola also toyed with the idea of sending peacekeepers to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA – *Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations unies pour la stabilisation en Centrafrique*) after violence broke out in 2013. However, after an initial public display of interest, the offer was retracted in the face of insurmountable logistical and financial difficulties.[49]

The growing pains of Angola's regional role somewhat abated in recent years as it began to participate more actively in multilateral efforts led by SADC. Those contributions have constituted small tokens of involvement but nonetheless represent a new approach to existing frameworks in the region. Whereas in the past Angola would look upon initiatives led by regional power competitors such as South Africa with suspicion, it has since reverted its stance on the utility of such bodies as the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security. In 2017, the country contributed 162 troops to the SADC Preventive Mission (SAPMIL) sent to Lesotho. Likewise, as

[45] John F. Clark, 'Foreign Intervention in the Civil War of the Congo Republic', *African Issues* 26, no. 1 (1998): pp. 31–36.

[46] Soares de Oliveira, *Magnificent and Beggar Land*; Jonathan Fisher and Nina Wilén, *African Peacekeeping* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), p. 14.

[47] Zeferino Pintinho, 'A Política Externa de Angola no Processo de Reforma das Forças de Defesa e Segurança da Guiné-Bissau (2007-2020)' (PhD thesis, ISCTE-University Institute of Lisbon, 2021).

[48] Paula Roque, 'Angola´s Africa Policy', Egmont Royal Institute for International Relations Policy Paper 98, October 2017, https://www.egmontinstitute.be/app/uploads/2017/10/egmont.papers.98.pdf?type=pdf.

[49] Roque, *Governing in the Shadows*.

an insurgency movement grew in Cabo Delgado, Angola sent 20 military personnel to take part in the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM), launched in 2021. Finally, after investing considerable diplomatic capital in the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), Angolan officials announced in March 2023 that they would send a military contingent of 450 to 500 troops to support DDR activities in eastern Congo, following a pause in the hostilities between forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the rebel M23 group. All these deployments were publicly underpinned by a new role envisioned for the FAA as ready and capable of being deployed to participate in peace support and humanitarian missions in adverse contexts.

These attempts to play a larger role in African crises have been pursued in tandem with key bilateral relations, by means of long-established venues of cooperation. This has happened at the same time as the FAA began losing its centrality in Angola's foreign policy, evident when the PIR also began assuming a newfound prominence abroad.[50] The support provided to its counterpart in Equatorial Guinea ahead of the CAN 2015 football cup stood out in this regard. Regardless, the principle remained identical: to provide capabilities and expertise when so required, while retaining sizeable ascendancy over regional developments. The case of the DRC is paramount, as exemplified by the over 20,000 military personnel trained over the years by FAA officers stationed in-country.[51] Inversely, this close symbiotic relation between both countries has yet to foster a permanent solution to unchecked unresolved maritime boundaries disputes with potential impact on oil revenues for each party.[52] Moreover, recurrent activities in Cabinda have also led to additional crackdowns and incursions into Congo-Brazzaville and the DRC,[53] under the pretext of curtailing flows of illegal migration into the country through porous and extensive borders.

Diversifying Partnerships

Yet, if the FAA have become an important regional player, its current gamut of external partners continues to reflect, for all intended purposes, the political choices of the past. Indeed, between 1977 to 1989, the civil war became heavily internationalised, with foreign forces fighting alongside Angolans soldiers, including various non-state actors. Private military companies, in particular,

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[50] Cristina Udelsmann Rodrigues, 'Renovações da Polícia em Angola: cooperação e formação internacional', *Politeia* 10, no. 2 (2016): pp. 87-109.
[51] Roque, 'Angola´s Africa Policy'.
[52] Patrick Edmond, Kristof Titeca, and Erik Kennes, 'The DRC–Angola Offshore Oil Dispute: How Regime (In)Security Outweighs Sovereign Claims', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 45, no. 5 (2019): pp. 841-857.
[53] Roque, 'Angola's Africa Policy'.

became heavily involved, mostly composed by Portuguese and South African mercenaries, who assumed important responsibilities during key moments of the conflict.[54] But the two Cold War blocs proved far more consequential, by readily transferring doctrines, practices, and processes onto willing local military organisations, and thus generating an impact that outlasted the war itself.

On the one hand, South African and US assistance had a considerable effect on UNITA by increasing its operational capabilities and allowing for a sustained campaign against better equipped forces.[55] On the other hand, Cuban and Soviet support proved instrumental for the MPLA. The former, by invoking international solidarity, became a key partner in deploying over 50,000 civilians and 370,000 troops, and helping to create centres for revolutionary training (CIR – *Centros de Instrução Revolucionária*) dedicated to counterinsurgency and guerrilla warfare,[56] along with other duties in the health and education sectors. The Soviet Union disbursed extensive equipment and training assistance, with the purpose of shoring up regular FAPLA forces to sustain a key ally in Africa, amidst the broader struggle against the West.[57] Reports estimate that nearly 11,000 military advisors were sent to Angola, while over 6,000 Angolans were trained in Soviet military institutions at the height of the war.[58] Unsurprisingly, even after the disintegration of the USSR, "Russia's influence spread through the strategic thinking of the leadership of the [Angolan] security apparatus" and remained a regular fixture of the ensuing FAA.[59]

However, external influences were not just felt as a by-product of the civil war. They also resulted from different attempts to create and structure the new FAA. The leadership of the CCFA, subordinated to the CCPM under the Bicesse framework of 1991, and designed to guide the formation of the FAA, was assigned to Portugal, the United Kingdom and France.[60] The three countries were entrusted with presenting a novel concept of national armed forces that could overcome suspicions and divisions from the civil war. Portuguese advisors, in particular, took a key role by drafting regulations and legislation that were then submitted as part of the ceasefire package. Despite the legacy of colonial rule, the historical background shared between the two

[54] Sean Cleary, 'Angola – A Case Study of Private Military Involvement', in *Peace, Profit or Plunder? The Privatisation of Security in War-Torn African Societie*s, edited by Jakkie Cilliers and Peggy Mason (Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 1999): pp. 141–74.
[55] Quint Hoekstra, 'The Effect of Foreign State Support to UNITA during the Angolan War (1975–1991)', *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 29, no. 5-6 (2018): pp. 981-1005.
[56] George, *The Cuban Intervention*; Harry Villegas, *Cuba and Angola: The War for Freedom* (London: Pathfinder Press, 2017).
[57] Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*.
[58] Vladimir Shubin and Andrei Tokarev, 'War in Angola: A Soviet Dimension', *Review of African Political Economy* 28, no. 90 (2001): pp. 607-618, at 614.
[59] Roque, *Governing in the Shadows*, p. 133.
[60] Bernardino, *A Posição de Angola*.

countries effectively acted as a trust-building venue between their respective defence sectors. Consequently, ties remained strong over the years: despite occasional political flare-ups,[61] between 1991 and 2019, more than 3,000 officials received training in Portuguese military institutions, while consecutive teams of Portuguese trainers were sent to Angola under the framework of multi-annual cooperation programs.[62]

The combined evolvement of these partners led to the absorption of different intakes from an institutional, doctrinal, and organisational point of view. It also led to acknowledging an "excess of foreign influences in the construction of the National Security and National Defence dimensions".[63] Any attempt to effectively proceed with the desired post-war restructuring of the FAA therefore run afoul of previous choices, which only discouraged radical attempts at change. Accordingly, the abovementioned 2007 presidential directive identified, but it did not restrict, the set of countries that should be engaged in this domain, namely Russia, Israel, China, the DRC, Brazil, and Portugal.[64]

This pragmatic selection was, in part, related to the issues of defence procurement that assumed new visibility as the war came to an end, especially given how most of those countries were also suppliers of military equipment already in use by the FAA. The key vehicle to assist in this process was found in SIMPORTEX, an Angolan public company entrusted with the acquisition of new equipment and materials for the armed forces. However, official ambitions were soon restricted by consecutive low levels of investment, as major announcements of new programs were followed by a flurry of substitute plans that were not seen to fruition. The country's Navy provides, yet again, a stark example. In 2011, negotiations began with Germany for the acquisition of six to eight patrol vessels, ranging between €10 to €25 million each. In September 2014, Angola and Brazil signed a US$170 million deal to construct seven 500t Macaé-class patrol vessels. This was followed by a new contract, totalling €122 million, with Italy, in December 2015, for maritime surveillance equipment and two speedboats. Finally, in September 2016, the process of reequipping the Angolan Navy took yet another turn when a new contract for seventeen military patrol and transport vessels was announced, this time with a Middle Eastern shipbuilding group, under a €495 million package.[65] None of these deals was ever concretised. Purchases for the Air

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[61] Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, 'Portugal and Africa', in *Oxford Handbook of Portuguese Politics*, edited by Jorge Fernandes, Pedro Magalhães, and António Costa Pinto (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022): pp. 728-742.

[62] Pedro Seabra, 'Cooperação no Domínio da Defesa', in *Políticas de Defesa de Portugal*, edited by Nuno Severiano Teixeira and Helena Carreiras (Lisbon: Instituto da Defesa Nacional, 2022): pp. 397-422.

[63] Bernardino, *A Posição de Angola*, p. 259.

[64] Angola, 'Directiva do Presidente', p. 29.

[65] Seabra and Abdenur, 'Age of Choice or Diversification?', pp. 264-268.

Force, in comparison, fared considerably better. The acquisition in recent years of six A-29 Super Tucano light-attack aircraft and three Airbus C-295 strategic transports have demonstrated that it is easier to reinforce certain branches, even if the goal of developing a national industry cluster remains elusive all around.

In the process of keeping the FAA operational, Angola has also come to rely on multilateral exercises to instil further training exchanges with key partners and relevant organisations. The FELINO exercises with fellow members of the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP – *Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa*) have become a regular fixture in the country's external participation.[66] Exercises with SADC, on the other hand, have been aimed at operationalising the SADC Standby Brigade personnel for peacekeeping actions, as well as at improving regional cooperation in support of humanitarian assistance. There has been a similar level of involvement with exercises associated with the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC), seeking to prepare for AU-mandated rapid deployments in crisis situations, until the African Standby Forces (ASF) become operational. Other examples include growing engagement with US-led initiatives. Those include medical emergency exercises, such as MEDFLAG and MEDREX, focused on medical techniques and procedures, and in preparing medical forces; or the OBANGAME EXPRESS exercises in the Gulf of Guinea, focused on maritime security and anti-piracy activities. In these cases, the main goal has been set on information sharing, military equipment standardisation and procedures, in addition to training and command structure, thus allowing the FAA to take tentative steps in these fronts.[67]

Conclusion

After thirty-two years since their official creation in Bicesse and twenty-one years since Angola found peace, the FAA remain locked in a struggle to overcome the past. As in other post-conflict scenarios, the legacy of the civil war in Angola runs deep at a political and societal level, while simultaneously fuelling decisions over how and when to use and/or reform the armed forces in the present day. Even after the end of hostilities between the MPLA and UNITA, the push-and-pull forces associated to the memory of the past is evident at multiple levels. From a nation-building perspective, the military took upon a key role in supporting the reintegration of different warring factions, including in abating ethnic grievances that had been instrumentalised by all parties. However, successful DDR processes require consistent follow-up to avoid compromising consolidated gains. The potential of a fragmentation effect in the cohesion of the armed forces,

[66] Bernardino, *A Posição de Angola*.
[67] Angola, 'Decreto Presidencial n.º 108/18', p. 2368.

even after decades passed, remains therefore present. A similar dynamic is found when unpacking the country's exposure to external influences in the overall composition of its defence sector. The extensive involvement of the international community, both during the war and at key moments of inflection, has generated a dual effect, not only in providing much-needed support at critical stages for the formation and development of the FAA, but also in constraining the number and diversity of partners to those that still match previous choices of doctrine, organisation, and equipment.

Yet, the current iteration of the FAA is not boxed-in by the past alone. Other important challenges have taken hold when considering a sizeable apparatus that has become under-prioritised during peace time, particularly in the face of other institutions that have assumed more internal relevance. The expansion of the operational profile of the FAA in the nearby region through occasional deployments has proven an alternative route to recover political utility. However, every step taken thus far has been characterised more by tentative caution than by an all-out adoption of multilaterisation of operations in the face of humanitarian crises. And even though the region and the continent have growingly called for the contribution of these battle-tested forces, their use within the country itself, as in the case of Cabinda, calls into question the narrative of a national state of peace. In this context, the FAA are bound to remain caught between an inescapable legacy that is part of its core fabric, and a set of structural contingencies that impede radical change, as it continues to search for a new purpose in a markedly different country than the one in which it came to be.

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Notes on contributors

Pedro Seabra is an Assistant Professor at Iscte-University Institute of Lisbon and a Researcher at the Centre for for International Studies (CEI-Iscte). He holds a PhD in Political Science with a specialization in International Relations from the Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lisbon (ICS-ULisboa), and his research has been published in such journals as the South African Journal of International Affairs, African Security and Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding.

Vasco Martins is an Assistant Professor at Iscte-University Institute of Lisbon researcher at Centre for Social Studies, U. Coimbra, from which he holds a PhD in African Studies, and a researcher at Centre for Social Studies, U. Coimbra. Author of several articles on issues of memory, war, ethnicity and nationalism, Martins has recently published the book Colonialism, Ethnicity and War in Angola (Routledge, 2021). His research interests are related to issues of memory, war and nationalism in circumstances of state and nation formation, particularly in countries that experienced colonial/liberation wars and civil conflict.