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Lt. Col. Luís Manuel Brás Bernardino:

## THE ROLE OF THE ANGOLAN ARMED FORCES IN THE AFRICAN REGIONAL SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

*“...It is equally significant that Angola responded to its post-conflict internal challenges of reconstruction by looking abroad...”*<sup>1</sup>

ABSTRACT: *The participation of the Republic of Angola in the African Peace and Security Architecture represents, in the current sub-Saharan context, the example of a search for strategic affirmation of a rising regional power, through a participatory, influential foreign policy and commitment, a bet on strategic balance duality in which the Angolan Armed Forces are an instrument of military cooperation and conflict resolution in Angola’s conjectural interest space.*

*THIS article demystifies this paradigm and discusses the possible interests of Angola within the framework of participation in the African Peace and Security Architecture, constituting a framework for development and an affirmation of military capabilities. Employing the Armed Forces has a regional and continental assertion mechanism for Angola’s external policy in the context of a non-permanent member of the Security Council in the United Nations.*

KEYWORDS: *Angola, African Peace and Security Architecture, Security and Defense, Angolan Armed Forces*

### INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of conflict in post-independence Angola was one of the most violent in the sub-Saharan region and in Africa as a whole and echoed the main arguments that had been put forward as endogenous factors generating intra-state conflict there. It was only after the signing of the Luena Agreement (4<sup>th</sup> April 2002) that it was possible to start along the road to development in a setting of peace and security. The Angolan armed forces were obliged to play an important role in the country’s reconstruction and assertion of state sovereignty. They participated in such important areas as support for development, domestic security, border control, involvement in regional conflict prevention systems and, as a last resort, acting almost instinctively as a factor in Angola’s foreign policy to defend its interests at regional and continental levels.<sup>2</sup>

More recently in this context, the Angolan armed forces have been endeavouring to improve security in the sub-Saharan region, as reinforcing external security also helps to strengthen domestic security, especially border control and maritime defence. These aspects were reflected in the documents that served as a theoretic and conceptual basis for the Strategic Concept of

<sup>1</sup> Assis Malaquias: *Angola’s Foreign Policy: Pragmatic Recalibrations*. South Africa Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA), 2011, 17.

<sup>2</sup> Miguel Júnior: *A Formação e o Desenvolvimento das Forças Armadas Angolanas*. Luanda, Editorial Nzila, August 2003, ISBN 972-8823-25-8, 67–69.

Security and National Defence, which revised the 1993 Strategic Concept, and Law 2/93 of 26 March, the National Defence and Armed Forces Law,<sup>3</sup> which were considered the cornerstones of the development of the capability of the ‘new’ armed forces and security forces in Angola.<sup>4</sup> Their political and strategic orientations point to greater participation in regional security. We believe that this will help assert Angola at regional level and show its armed forces as an active part of foreign policy and a structural mechanism for external action by the state, serving not only security, but also Angola’s development and assertion in the sub-Saharan region.<sup>5</sup>

This article analyses Angola’s involvement in the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and answers the question of how important Angola’s involvement in the African Regional Security Architecture is. We address Angola’s foreign policy in the African regional organisations in which it is represented, identify its main contributions to regional and continental security and defence and pinpoint participation scenarios and possible strategies for bolstering the Republic of Angola in the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

## STRATEGIC ASPECTS OF ANGOLA’S INVOLVEMENT IN THE AFRICAN PEACE AND SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

Recent developments in global conflicts, especially in the sub-Saharan region, are the subject of constant academic reflection and many specialised geopolitical analyses and studies. In this setting, regional African organisations, acting as a complement to states’ sovereignty missions, have been the main agents of development, security and regional defence in Africa. We believe that the creation of the APSA is a very different approach to those in Africa in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in terms of proactive mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of regional conflicts. Insecurity and underdevelopment in Africa due to globalisation began to affect world stability and this was reflected in different geostrategic areas as a factor of permanent disruption for the international community.

The creation of the APSA represents a “pan-Africanisation” of the security sector. At strategic and operational levels it covers the entire continent, involving and committing states and organisations in politico-strategic cooperation for better standards of living for the people.<sup>6</sup>

In their regional area of intervention, these players are responsible for member states’ security and conflict prevention (also represented by the early warning system), thereby placing them in the regional and African security context. They are therefore the focal points and main interlocutors for strategic cooperation policies on security in Africa. In this framework, the AU takes a more interventionist attitude, in contrast to the ineffectiveness of its predecessor. It has set up structures and mechanisms to ensure an acceptable level of success in management of regional conflicts and is now the central feature of cooperation strategies for security and defence in Africa.

<sup>3</sup> Lei de Defesa Nacional e das Forças Armadas de Angola (LDNFA) – Lei Nº 271993 de 26 de Março de 1993. [http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/angola/hosting/1\\_def.pdf](http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/angola/hosting/1_def.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Ana Leão – Martin Rupiya: A Military History of the Angolan Armed Forces from the 1960s Onwards – As Told by Former Combatants. South Africa: International Security Studies (ISS). <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?ots591=0c54e3b3-1e9c-be1e-2c24-a6a8c7060233&lng=en&id=108507>

<sup>5</sup> Christine Messiant: L’Angola postcolonial – 1. Guerre et paix sans démocratisation. Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2008, ISBN 978-2-8111-0029-2, 367–370.

<sup>6</sup> Jakkie Cillier: Toward a Continental Early-warning System for Africa. South Africa: Institute for Security Studies, Occasional Paper No. 102. <http://www.iss.co.za/Pub/papers/102/Paper102.html>

The Peace and Security Council has set up a Continental Early Warning System<sup>7</sup> that connects units in the field monitoring tense situations to other complementary sub-regional mechanisms that are linked to supranational politico-strategic decision centres.

This network is an opportunity for Angola to make a name for itself in the context of peace cooperation in the sub-Saharan region, especially by helping to implement a situation centre and exchanging strategic information in an inter-regional operations network. Although this continental early warning network is not yet complete, it is intended to be the most reliable indicator for assessing threat levels and regional conflicts. As we have seen, it can monitor developments in an emerging crisis, where Angola's involvement is a necessity rather than a priority for the security of the country and the region, with effects on the level of conflict in Africa.

At a time when peace and a security are a strategic priority for Africa, as development is closely linked to security, the implementation of conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms and especially the continental forces based on the African Standby Brigades is a strategic priority, in which Angola can play an important role. Angola has participated actively in the SADC and ECCAS, creating an ambiguity and apparent vagueness in its strategic line of foreign policy action, which has served it well, especially in defining regional priorities for asserting its military potential.<sup>8</sup>

For Angola, it is not a problem but rather an articulated solution to its internal security and defence dilemmas (such as border control, especially in the north and east but also in the south), a chance to develop as a multi-faceted regional power. The fact that it plays simultaneously on these boards provides Angola with a number of opportunities that the Angolan armed forces are preparing to include in their capability development strategies, boosting its vocation as a rising regional power.<sup>9</sup>

As a member of two different sub-regional organisations, Angola is fuelling a structured, strategically appropriate dichotomy that, in terms of regional security, is designed to contribute to a better, fuller definition of its regional foreign policy. Where the SADC is concerned, Angola has seemed to be focusing on greater political and diplomatic visibility and commitment in its relations with Jacob Zuma and South Africa since 2013. It has contributed resources to the regular operational manoeuvres of the Southern African Development Community Standby Brigade (SADC-Standby Brigade).

Military exercise "Dolphin" is still the largest and has involved the deployment of troops from the Angolan armed forces and National Police and some civilian elements with a view to training for humanitarian intervention in emergency areas. Military exercise "Blue Zambezi" trains capability for airborne insertion of human and material resources in the region. It essentially involves the SADC countries' air forces, and Angola has played an

<sup>7</sup> The Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) is one of the five pillars of the African Peace and Security architecture (APSA) and is responsible for data collection and analysis and is mandated to collaborate with the UN, its agencies, other relevant international organizations, research centres, academic institutions and NGOs with its information to be used by the Chairperson of the Commission to advise the Peace and Security Council (PSC), on potential conflicts and threats to peace and security in Africa and recommend the best course of action. <http://www.peaceau.org/en/page/28-continental-early-warning-system-cews>

<sup>8</sup> Luís Manuel Brás Bernardino: *A posição de Angola na Arquitectura de Paz e Segurança Africana. Análise da Função Estratégica das Forças Armadas Angolanas*. Coimbra, Editora Almedina, ISBN 978-972-40-5000-3, 251.

<sup>9</sup> Messiant: *L'Angola postcolonial*, 367–370

active part, including organising a military exercise in Cabo Ledo (2012), which was praised by the international community.<sup>10</sup>

Angola also helped prepare and implement a memorandum of understanding on the formation of the SADC-Standby Brigade in late 2007. It was a significant step in the introduction of this regional prevention and security mechanism and support in setting up the SADC Regional Peacekeeping Training Centre in Harare, Zimbabwe<sup>11</sup>. This centre has administered a substantial number of training courses in peacekeeping operations for members of the region's armed forces, including those from Angola.

According to 2014 data in an annual publication, the Angolan armed forces (under politically oriented restructuring since 2007) currently have around 107,000 personnel. Of these, around 100,000 are in the Army (95% of the Angolan armed forces personnel), around 6,000 in the Air Force (4%) and 1,000 in the Navy (1%), an additional 10,000 paramilitary personnel were not included in this tally. Regarding weaponry, the Angolan armed forces are equipped with materiel from different sources, though most of it is of Russian, Cuban or Chinese origin left over from the MPLA-UNITA war before 2002. The Army has around 300 armoured vehicles (200 Soviet T-55s and 50 T-60s and also 50 T-52s), around 1,100 reconnaissance and combat vehicles and light infantry personnel carriers (600 BRDM-2) (250 BMP-1/BMP-2 and BMD-3) (250 BTR-152/BTR-60/BMD-3) and 1,408 artillery pieces (over 100 mm calibre) of different origins, calibres and operability.<sup>12</sup>

The Angolan Navy (although it is in the process of acquiring more naval assets) has nine ocean patrol vessels, amphibious vehicles, a small naval air contingent and an equally small but growing force of marines.<sup>13</sup> This shortfall is one of Angola's main weaknesses in terms of maritime security capability, considering the vast maritime area and coastal area over which it has (or is supposed to have) sovereignty.

The Angolan Air Force is relatively substantial in the sub-Saharan region. It has 83 fighter aircraft (of different types and in various states of repair), around 70 utility and transport helicopters, and 44 attack helicopters (22 Mi-24 Hind and 22 Mi-35 Hind) most of them of Soviet origin.<sup>14</sup> This provides the forces with a good strategic capability for intra-theatre transport and support for ground manoeuvres and maritime operations. This is a strategically relevant element in the current context of the armed forces of the region's countries and an important contribution to the APSA. This is clearly visible in their operational use in recent regional military exercises, such as the SADC's "Dolphin" and "Blue Zambezi" and the ECCAS exercise "Kwanza", not to mention military exercise "FELINO" conducted in Angola by the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP) in 2011.

The Angolan armed forces are still being consolidated and restructured and their naval capability is rather small. This is an aspect that needs development and investment in new equipment and specialised crew training as a way of finding a balance between operability and representation among the other armed forces instruments. This will be a bet on the future, as security and defence are three-dimensional and are vital in Angola's vast maritime area.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.safpi.org/news/article/2013/blue-zambezi-exercises-bring-sadc-troops-catumbela>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.sadc.int/sadc-secretariat/services-centres/rptc/>

<sup>12</sup> Military Balance, International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), 2014. ISBN: 978-1-85743-722-5, 420–421.

<sup>13</sup> Military Balance, 420–421.

<sup>14</sup> Military Balance, 420–421.

<sup>15</sup> António Manuel Luvualu de Carvalho: Angola. Economia e Petróleo (2002–2010). Lisbon: Universidade Lusíada Editora, ISBN 978-989-640-099-6, 67–68.

The land component, the Army, seems to have surplus personnel and a number of problems in terms of equipment and training. It would be advisable to reduce and optimise resources in order to guarantee less but better equipment, thereby improving operability. The Angolan Air Force has a degree of capability in regional terms. Pilots and support personnel have been trained in a number of countries. Their proficiency has been maintained at an appropriate level, which enables Angola to deploy air assets in the African theatre of operations for African regional organisations where its geostrategic interests are well-known. This is an important asset in a regional context and Angola needs to make the most of it in the near future.

The Angolan armed forces have been undergoing restructuring and resizing since 2007 and are preparing to take on new challenges, not only in reinforcing Angola's internal security and defence responsibilities but also as an active feature of its foreign policy in the sub-Saharan region and Africa as a whole.

## ANGOLA'S STRATEGY IN THE SADC

The Southern African Development Community is a sub-regional economic organisation and was officially founded at the Southern African Development Coordination Conference held in 1980 by the so-called front-line countries (Angola, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia, later joined by South Africa and Zimbabwe in 1994). In 1992 it changed its name to SADC, merging the region's countries into a regional common market confined to Southern Africa. In terms of cooperation in the area of defence, in mid-2001 the SADC established a Protocol on Politics, Defence and Security, which would serve as a tool for dealing with political, defence and security challenges in the region. The Inter-State Defence and Security Committee, consisting of the member states' ministers of defence, was set up for the purpose.

The formation of the Mutual Defence Pact (2003) and the strategic decision to set up the SADC Standby Force Brigade (SADCBRIG) are particularly significant in terms of regional security activities, in which Angola has played an active role since its creation. In 2004, the SADC adopted its Strategic Indicative Plan for the SADC Organs (SIPO), which identified the organisation's main security and defence weaknesses and proposed some corrective measures. It set up two bodies for the purpose, which associated the member countries' interstate political and diplomacy committees, the Interstate Politics and Diplomacy Committee of foreign ministers and the Interstate Defence and Security Committee, comprising the member states' ministers of defence.

Today, the SADC is a sub-regional organisation that has a vast number of development support and security and defence programmes. The integration of security and sustainable development strategies in the region has facilitated consistent economic growth and an improvement in regional security (thanks to the economic and financial success of South Africa and Angola), making it a highly successful organisation in Africa. As we have seen, the series of military exercises "Dolphin" has made it possible to use military, police and civil resources and forces in operational training activities in order to increase the operational level of the member states' SADCBRIG contingents. Angola has devoted particular attention to this aspect, as demonstrated by its growing commitment in recent years to regional dynamics in the SADCBRIG and involvement in these joint and combined military exercises.

If we compare the main capabilities of the SADC countries' armed forces, we find that Angola is not in a superior position, as the region's military power is South Africa. The figures may be misleading, however, as we must not forget SA's economic capacity in terms of GDP, which reflects on its financial and industrial capability, population, education

and growing armaments and defence industry. This alone gives it a clear advantage over the other countries in the organisation. When compared to the region's other countries, the Angolan armed forces have higher combat potential in all components (land, air and sea), but especially in terms of its army.

The Angolan Air Force's fighter and transport planes and helicopters give it a clear quantitative and qualitative advantage, surpassed only by the South African Air Force and equalled by that of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The SADC countries' naval component is very small, although the Angolan Navy is in the median of most countries that have a navy or coastguard in the region.<sup>16</sup>

Some theoretical reflections advocate the need for Angola to maintain organised and prepared armed forces capable of facing up to the main current and future threats to the country. It is also important to assess whether this principle should be followed in spite of the financial and personnel restrictions associated with restructuring and resizing the Angolan armed forces. These adjustments are in fact essential to the sustainable development of the armed forces. But it is necessary to balance the country's investments in health, education and manufacturing sector in detriment to the priority that has been given to defence and domestic security.

While a reduction in the defence and security budget seems to be a reality, it is necessary to know how and where to disinvest (or rather not invest), without affecting the essentials and maintaining the operational standards that the Angolan armed forces need for their mission in African regional organisations and their sovereignty duties enshrined in the Constitution.

At international level professionalization is one of the most used forms to solve this problem, but it seems that the end of compulsory military service would pose a huge risk in a country like Angola, as it is the country's main school for citizenship training and it also seems to be one of the principal factors of national unity and cohesion. It has been a crucial factor in instilling a sense of identity in the rebuilding of the Angolan armed forces since 2002.

The Angolan armed forces, currently undergoing restructuring, are facing the challenge of doing more with less and of being another of the state's regional foreign policy instruments, thereby helping to make a name for Angola in Africa.

## CONCLUSIONS

Angola has an active, comprehensive regional foreign policy in which some of its strategies are linked to its armed forces' activities in the SADC. The answer to the central question: "*How important is Angola's involvement in the African Regional Security Architecture?*" has to do with the Angolan government's political priorities pursuant to its aspirations to be a rising regional power in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In order to answer this question, we need to reflect on Angola's recent history and the Angolan armed forces' role in the defence of its sovereignty. The main issue since Angola gained its independence has been its land and maritime borders, which comprise a constant concern for the Angolan executive power. The Army, or its derivative border control force and National Police, has had the task of waging war to win the peace but is currently more involved in supporting the country's development.

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<sup>16</sup> Eugénio da Costa Almeida: *Angola. Potência Regional em Emergência*. Lisbon: Edições Colibri, October 2011, ISBN 978-989-689-131-2, 123.

The air force is a significant asset for the prevention and resolution of conflicts in the APSA in general and SADC in particular. There is also a need to enlarge and lend operational consistency to the navy, which is still dangerously small. Maritime security and integration of a naval component in the APSA is one of the main challenges both for Angola and the regional organisations.

In the future, the Angolan armed forces are preparing to be more professional, interventional and operational in the sub-Saharan region, thereby becoming a tool of Angola's foreign policy and asserting Angola's position in the SADC. This will help create and strengthen the right working conditions for the African Peace and Security Architecture.

Luís Manuel Brás Bernardino is a Lieutenant Colonel in the Infantry of the Portuguese Army and has General Staff Course qualifications. He has a post-graduate diploma in Peace and War Studies in New International Relations from Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa, a MA in Strategy from Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas at Universidade de Lisboa and a PhD in International Relations from the same university. He is currently conducting research at the Centre for International Studies at the University of Lisbon (CEI-IUL) in a post-doctoral project on African Security and Defence Architectures. He is a member of the editorial board of *Revista Militar* and *Editor of the Revista PROELIUM* at the Military Academy. Lt Col Luís Bernardino participates habitually in national and international seminars and regularly publishes articles in journals on the subject of security and defence in Africa. He is currently Professor in the Department of Post-graduate Studies at the Military Academy in Lisbon and member of the Centre for Investigation, Development and Research of the Army (CINAMIL).

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