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Vasco Martins



Angola in 2011: West Africa, Asia, and Security Exports

VASCO MARTINS

Researcher, Portuguese Institute of International Relations and Security (IPRIS)

2011 has been a year of change in the African continent. When pundits and observers pondered African politics in 2010, most pointed to the upcoming elections in Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) or Zimbabwe as a source of political conflict. However, apart from the Côte d'Ivoire, change and political conflict erupted not in sub-Saharan Africa but mainly in northern Africa. Instead, a revolt in Tunisia in December 2010 triggered a wave of regime change that is having a profound impact on how countries like Angola and Zimbabwe arrange their foreign policy and organize their political inclination in the international arena in 2011. Before the Arab Spring, Africa had a number of authoritarian leaders who had been in power for decades. Yet, in less than half a year only Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, Uganda and Zimbabwe in sub-Saharan Africa were under the rule of long standing leaders. Such an intense decrease in number had deep consequences inside each country. The revolts' quick pace, images of popular mobilization and a sense of inevitability that change would indeed come, provoked a counter-current of containment by many African governments, both domestically and externally.

Angola is a somewhat politically closed country. Besides exhibiting features of profound social trauma its government is accused by many of having authoritarian tendencies that underpin the reasons for the social agitation of late. Angola and Zimbabwe have presidential elections scheduled for 2012, which under the present circumstances will have to provide some degree of change inside each country. Even though it is hard to speak of an Arab precedent as an inevitable foreign paradigm hitting sub-Saharan African countries, perhaps even following any type of domino-theory, these events must not be disregarded by the slightest, as the possibility of achieving political change in Angola is already at work in the minds of a discontent, though traumatized, population.

Following the Arab revolts, youth protests began to be organized and started taking the streets of Angola, often meeting violent police crackdown. The demonstrations which began on 7 March 2011 carried among others,

the slogans "*32 é muito*" (32 is too much), in reference to the number of years Angolan President José Eduardo dos Santos has held power.¹ Even when the acquisition, manifestation and usage of power in Africa begs for a different analytical approach than the western model of power or state power, African leaders are nevertheless not ambiguous to manifestations of popular discontent, which ultimately provide feedback on the acceptability and legitimacy of each leader. The possible succession of President José Eduardo dos Santos – although unclear as to who would replace the decade long leader – might open pockets of conflict, as a disgruntled population is faced with the opportunity of overturning the regime. Inserted in a climate of possible political instability with elections, successions and several demonstrations, the Angolan government was forced to invest more of its political resources and time in dealing with potential internal situations than in raw foreign policy, even though certain vectors of it, namely security exports – related to military missions and the passing of security know-how to other countries –, financial investment and a focus on new and old regions was maintained.

Angola and West Africa

The foreign policy of Angola toward West Africa in 2011 revolved around the electoral conflict of the Côte d'Ivoire, opposing Alassane Ouattara to Laurent Gbagbo, and in the establishment of a security sector reform mission in Guinea-Bissau. British ambassador to Angola Richard Wildash stated that "the international community until now does not understand the importance of Angola in the region and the world",² while pointing to the country's capacity to settle and negotiate conflicts, as currently witnessed in the Côte d'Ivoire.³ Indeed, ambassador Richard

1 "Centenas de mensagens SMS contestam José Eduardo dos Santos" (*Voice of America*, 26 August 2011).

2 "International community should understand importance of Angola" (*Angola-Press*, 17 January 2011).

3 See Paulo Gorjão, "Côte d'Ivoire: A test tube for Angola's regional policy?" (*IPRIS Viewpoints*, No. 29, December 2010); and, Vasco Martins, "An unshaken alliance: Angola's stance in the Côte d'Ivoire" (*IPRIS Viewpoints*, No. 41, March 2011).



Wildash is very close to the truth. Angola had a very important role in the unraveling of the Côte d'Ivoire crisis, mainly due to old connections between the party in power in Angola, the MPLA, and Laurent Gbagbo. Many leaders and international organizations flew to Luanda to seek President José Eduardo dos Santos and gauge his position regarding the crisis in the Côte d'Ivoire. The results of these meetings would show the more attentive observer of Angolan politics the magnitude of the country's influence in African affairs. As mentioned above, although having an elusive position on the subject, Angola did support Laurent Gbagbo for the most part, even attempting to convince other African leaders to change their position against Ouattara, an endeavor which had its degree of success. Many are the reports of African leaders visiting Luanda and suddenly announcing their country's position towards the Côte d'Ivoire electoral crisis had changed, recognizing a degree of legitimacy in Laurent Gbagbo's actions, a claim which matched Angola's stance. Benin and Equatorial Guinea changed their position and stood beside Angola in solving the crisis in a pro-Gbagbo fashion. Guinea Conakry's Alpha Condé praised Angola's stance on the crisis as pushing towards a peaceful solution. These countries, along with Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe, had several meetings with high-level Angolan politicians, mostly with President José Eduardo dos Santos, Foreign Minister George Chicoti and National Assembly President António Paulo Kassoma. Nonetheless, the international political game does not come free of charge, as Angola would have to compensate its partners for their political support in the Côte d'Ivoire file. Hence, after Alpha Condé praised Angola's efforts in the Côte d'Ivoire on 28 January 2011, on 17-18 March both countries held a bilateral commission meeting, discussing topics related to defense and security framework cooperation.⁴ Equatorial Guinea applied the same *modus operandi*, revealing its support to Angola on the Côte d'Ivoire question on 10 February 2011⁵ and was rewarded

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with the first joint commission between the two countries on 9 April 2011,⁶ a meeting mostly based on energy cooperation. With regard to Guinea-Bissau, the country represents a stronghold of Angolan presence and influence in West Africa. With the signing of the technical-military assistance protocol which created a joint military mission to Bissau (MISSANG), to support Bissau's security sector

reform, both countries have enhanced their bilateral relations significantly. On 26 December MISSANG had its first challenge, with troop movements absent of clear leadership provoking what seemed to be an attempt at *coup d'état* in Bissau.⁷ Reportedly, Angolan troops fired shots at the insurgents who were attempting to kidnap the Prime Minister, Carlos Gomes Júnior, who sought shelter at the Angolan embassy in Bissau. The involvement of the Angolan military forces in the crisis was greatly criticized by the political opposition in Bissau, arguing it was unacceptable for a Prime Minister to rely on foreign 'occupation' forces rather than the country's military as a security detail.⁸ Even though the situation remained peaceful, Angola's role in the crisis was seen as crucial in maintaining the very fragile political stability of Guinea-Bissau. Indeed, only countries with excellent relations with their partners would

not only allow and cherish a foreign military presence on their soil but also sponsor its capacity to intervene if needed. Such is the case between Angola and Guinea-Bissau.

Angola is increasingly seen as a rich country, with respectable economic growth estimates and a very strong presence in the oil business scene in Africa. Many African countries understand that dealing directly with Angola – thus bypassing the textbook international organization approach – can provide new and profitable frameworks for cooperation in the short term, taking into consideration the quick pace at which Angola is able to project political and financial power in order to celebrate new

4 "Angola: nation, Guinea Conakry finalise defence, security talks" (*AngolaPress*, 18 March 2011).

5 "Angola: Equatorial Guinea supports peaceful solution in Côte d'Ivoire" (*AngolaPress*, 10 February 2011).

6 "Angola: Govt. and Equatorial Guinea join commission deemed as positive" (*AngolaPress*, 9 April 2011).

7 "Troops fire weapons in Guinea Bissau capital" (*Voice of America*, 26 December 2011).

8 "Guiné-Bissau: Angolanos são "força de ocupação estrangeira" (*Voice of America*, 28 December 2011).



deals. Recently, Angola has been opening new political and economic opportunities in Africa – especially in West Africa – by exporting stability through enhancing security abroad. After 27 years of civil war, Angola was left with a broken country and a traumatized population but a very large military apparatus. Finding in the military new sources of political and economic revenue, Angola began ‘exporting security’ to politically unstable regions while at the same time opening paths to create joint commissions and cooperation frameworks, which enhance bilateral relations and thus spur new business opportunities for Angolan investors, an endeavor which would not have been so successful without the ‘security exports’ element. This business orientation filled with components of political stabilization in other countries not only allows the expansion of Angolan investment but also keeps its large military occupied with new projects, a crucial element at a time of internal turmoil and upcoming elections in the country. However, this *modus operandi* is attracting the attention and the keen interest of many African leaders. In 2011, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry and Equatorial Guinea made what seem to be profitable, win-win deals with Angola. While the MISSANG was established in Guinea-Bissau, Conakry Defense Minister Abdoul Kabèlè Camara upon arriving in Luanda in representation of the Conakry government analyzed areas of common interest for bilateral cooperation with the Angolan government, especially in the security and defense sectors, while postponing economic and financial consultations to a later date. In what concerns Equatorial Guinea, after the visit of its Minister of Interior and National Security Nicolas Obama on 25 April, a protocol on security and public order was signed,⁹ thus providing further empirical ground for the proposed paradigm of advancing ‘security export’ before crafting business deals. West Africa is one of the most unstable regions of the entire African continent. Nigeria, its natural regional power has so far been absent in the face of Angolan growing political influence, much due to its internal instability and problems. Nevertheless, Nigeria still appears to function

as a ‘check and balance’ to Angolan diplomatic activity in the region, which explains why Angola as so far been interacting only with smaller, less influential countries. While Angolan ‘security exports’ may be welcomed and cherished in the region, it may not take long for Nigeria to produce a political balance of forces in order to contain Angolan influence. The resolution of the Côte d’Ivoire crisis and the unexpected ‘U-turn’ of Angola’s position, which retreated from open support to Laurent Gbagbo to aligning itself with the African Union – which supported Alassane Ouattara – could be seen as a first check to Angolan presence in the region, as although some countries aligned with Angola, most West African states and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) remained firm behind Alassane Ouattara, hence discrediting the force and progressiveness of Angolan conflict resolution vocation. If the country continues to craft new deals with other countries in the region in fragile areas such as security and off-shore police or military deployment, Angola may yet find other political checks on its influence and agenda.

Asian interest in Angola

In Asia Angola is crafting its image as a country rich in resources, eager for economic growth and fruitful cooperation. In 2011, China, a longtime partner, as well as Japan, have shown interest in Angola. China’s interest in Angola’s oil resources has long made headlines. In that regard, 2011 was no different. The bilateral relationship between Angola and China is characterized by a profound sense of economic interest, which is assured by the deepening of political ties at the forefront. On 8 February Angolan ambassador to China João Manuel Bernardo expressed Angola’s wish to further deepen relations with China, hoping to acquire additional investments in several fields.¹⁰ Such a statement reassures the Chinese government of Angola’s openness to its investment, as well as granting it a ‘reserved’ place within Angolan business, at a time when financial investors seek business opportunities in Angola and competition for Angola’s ‘resource cake’ rises. Perhaps in response to ambassador João Manuel Bernardo’s eager-

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9 “Equatorial Guinean security minister ends visit in Luanda” [AngolaPress, 28 April 2011].

10 “Angola envisages strengthening of cooperation with China” [AngolaPress, 8 February 2011].



ness to capture more Chinese investment, on 7 March the Chinese ambassador to Angola Zhang Bolun announced US\$14.5 billion in Chinese lending to Angola.¹¹ Then, on 22-23 March, Vice Premier Wang Qishan visited Angolan aiming at strengthening bilateral ties between the two countries. During the visit, several cooperation accords were signed in economic and technical areas, with the ultimate goal of establishing a formal China-Angola bilateral commission.¹²

Even though China's investment in Africa is often considered unhelpful and regressive – as it does not nurture local economies and provokes other serious issues such as land grabbing, besides the well-known international critique regarding China's blocking of international efforts to develop African economics and attempts to stabilize impoverished, conflict ridden countries – it has changed the political, economic and social map of Angola. Indeed, although Angola is a worthy investment opportunity, ten years ago when the civil war ended only China was willing to offer credit lines to Angola, thus disregarding international claims that the Angolan government lacked transparency and was riddled with corruption. Today, Angola is an important partner for Chinese economic development and progression, consequently assuring it a position of power and above all of much needed mutual aid, trade and credit lending.

Touted as a highly developed though isolated power, Japan made its move to step into Angolan business in 2011.¹³ On 21 February Angolan Foreign Minister George Chicoti visited Japan where he met his counterpart Seiji Maehara. Both representatives proceeded to open negotiations on a bilateral investment treaty. Upon completion Angola will be the first sub-Saharan state to host Japa-

nese investment.¹⁴ Already on 28 February the Japanese ambassador to Angola delivered poliomyelitis vaccines worth US\$4.7 million, a move which credits Japan's keen interest in Angola.¹⁵ However, with Japanese investment in sight Angola will have to balance the connection between the former and Chinese investment. Being the two major powers in East Asia, China and Japan's tradition of

competing for influence abroad is sure to replicate into the political economy and business environment of Angola.

Redefining foreign policy

2011 was also the year of redefining the 'ins and outs' of Angolan foreign policy. High levels of economic growth, solidly established foreign policy priorities and political strategies, much praised in Africa and in other parts of the world, uncovered the need of reforming and expanding the country's foreign policy machinery to better suit its growing duties, responsibilities and power perceptions in the continent, and in the world.

The Angolan government prioritized the formation of its human resources, by refocusing its Minister of Exterior Relations. The reorganization of Angolan foreign policy took its first step at the *IV Conselho Consultivo Alargado* on 7 February, where diplomats and international organizations from all over the world met

to discuss and share ideas to better shape the country's diplomatic service and foreign policy. Accordingly, on 2 June President José Eduardo dos Santos appointed 32 new ambassadors,¹⁶ a list which included new representatives to countries such as the US, China, Brazil – with whom Angola has a strategic partnership – and South Africa, a move inserted in the broader reform of the ministry which pinpoints the desire to enhance the country's position and communication not only with its existing partners, but also with new countries such as the United Arab Emirates, where Angola will open a new embassy.

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11 "China provides almost US\$15 billion in loans to Angola since 2002" (*Macauhub*, 7 March 2011).

12 "Chinese vice-prime minister ends visit to Angola" (*AngolaPress*, 23 March 2011).

13 See Pedro Seabra, "Japan and Lusophone Africa: tepid outcomes, greater opportunities?" (*Portuguese Journal of International Affairs*, No. 5, Spring/Summer 2011), pp. 9-23.

14 "Agreement in principle on the Investment Agreement between Japan and the Republic of Angola" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 21 February 2011).

15 "Japan partners with UNICEF to help eradicate polio in Angola" (*UNICEF Newsline*, 28 February 2011).

16 "Presidente da República procede a exonerações e nomeações de embaixadores" (*AngolaPress*, 6 January 2011).

One of the main reasons to undertake such a massive investment in reshaping the ministry resides on the country's growing importance in international affairs, reflected by the amount of state leaders, especially African leaders, travelling annually to Luanda to become acquainted with Angola's experience in foreign affairs, especially in conflict resolution, peace building and national and economic reconstruction. Hence, from Brazil to Germany, Timor Leste, Liberia, Namibia, Benin, Equatorial Guinea and the African Union – to name a few –, leaders from around the world visited Luanda in 2011, carrying not only economic prospects and interests, but also eager to know and understand Angola's take on the African scene, especially drawing from its experience in dealing with conflict.

On the multilateral front, 2011 was the year Angola assumed the presidency of both the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP). While leading the SADC Angola organized the regional organization's 31st Summit in Luanda. Marked by Zimbabwean Prime Minister's Morgan Tsvangirai's absence from the summit and the blockage of several NGO's from participating, the meeting went as scheduled, peaking with the chairperson of the Organ on Politics, Defense and Security Cooperation Rupiah Banda presenting the summit with a report reviewing progress on specific areas, namely Madagascar, Malawi, DRC and Zimbabwe. These were the priorities inherited and assumed by Angola as the president of SADC, having sidelined more abstract and problematic issues related to regional political and economic integration or the creation of a regional parliament. As stated by Foreign Minister George Chicoti in late 2011, Angola through the SADC has an important role not only in the DRC but also in the political transition of Madagascar.¹⁷ Indeed, the late presidential elections in the DRC may still resurrect conflict, an issue upon which

Angola refrained from interfering, contrary to occasions past. In Madagascar, after the toppling of the former government, the SADC continues balancing a political transition involving eleven contending groups, a situation which might benefit from Angola's experience. Overall,

due to its many challenges and blockades, Angola remains at the helm of the SADC, maneuvering with a clear perspective but not much political advancement.

Turning to Europe, with the ongoing financial crisis hitting Portugal, consequently triggering the privatization of major national companies, Angola hinted several times at the possibility of buying shares of such companies, many of them with significant investment and infrastructure not only in Portugal but also abroad. The international media has been in an uproar over such news, as it seems the tables have turned and now the former colony invests and gains economic power upon its former colonial patron.¹⁸ Nevertheless, two issues must be raised when considering this turn of events. Firstly, even though Portugal is in the midst of a financial crisis, its national companies remain prosperous and solid business opportunities for investors. Many of these companies not only possess significant presence in other countries, especially in the Lusophone world, but also represent an opportunity to export specific

technological advancements to the acquiring country, especially in the multimedia and telecommunications sector, where Angola is investing the most. Second, both Portugal and Angola have been carving out a pattern of privileging investment in the Lusophone world. Even with Brazil on the fringes of such a movement, the Lusophone space has had a considerable increase in capital and human mobility, especially between Angola and Portugal, a trend which is sure to be strengthened after the late acquisition of shares in Portuguese companies by Angola. To be sure, the redefinition of Angolan foreign policy was mostly centered at revamping its working structure.

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17 "Ministro das Relações Exteriores destaca firmeza angolana em ambiente difícil internacional de 2011" (*Lusa*, 19 December 2011).

18 See Pedro Seabra and Paulo Gorjão, "Intertwined paths: Portugal and rising Angola" (*South African Institute of International Affairs*, Occasional Paper No. 89, August 2011).



Its core objectives, centered at the maintenance of a multi-vector foreign policy based not only on financial investment but now also on 'security exports', still represent the main priority of Angolan foreign policy. Nevertheless, this redefining of its structural foreign policy apparatus is a process in constant change and evolution, as further changes are certain to occur in 2012.

Conclusions

2011 was above all a year of reorganization and consolidation of foreign policy activity for Angola, not a year of major new projects and ventures, with the exception of the creation of the MISSANG mission in Guinea-Bissau. Indeed, it was in West Africa where Angolan foreign policy took its most distinct shape, when the country defied the internationally led resolution of the Côte d'Ivoire electoral crisis, by supporting Laurent Gbagbo and successfully convincing certain countries to join its position of support for the latter. It was also in western Africa where Angola confirmed its strategy based on 'exporting security' to politically unstable countries in order to open pathways for political and economic cooperation, mostly seen as profitable for both sides. With a strategy pertaining the observer to the politics of the late 20th century – when force was often used to advance political and ideological goals –, Angola keeps an active military sector while substituting the political and ideological realism of the past with 21st century economic cooperation. Such a keen instrumentalization of globalization is creating a perception that Angola is becoming an important regional power in Africa. Nevertheless, although much imbued with African spirit, Angola's foreign policy remained attached to its multi-vector strategy, dealing with both eastern and western states, while acquiring economic leverage upon its former colonial patron. Such a massive endeavor reflected the necessity of reforming and expanding its diplomatic structure, which considering the many projects the country is involved in, might be said to more effective than many western states' own diplomatic apparatus. To be sure, even though issues related with the Angolan regime stood out, 2011 was the year the country made its way into the political and economic map of global affairs, transforming its image of a devastated country only exporting conflict and humanitarian disaster, into a power to be reckoned with, not only in the continent but in world politics. However, uncertainty concerning the 2012 elections may further stir up opposition movements and create pockets of instability which may require government intervention, an action sure to be condemned by most western countries. Yet, if 2012 continues the foreign policy trajectory of 2011, it will surely be another successful year for Angola.



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Portuguese Institute of International Relations and Security (IPRIS)
Rua Vitorino Nemésio, 5 - 1750-306 Lisboa
PORTUGAL

<http://www.ipris.org>
email: ipris@ipris.org

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