Protracted conflicts
A long way to go for peace

PROTRACTED CONFLICTS:
Issues or dynamics at stake?

AFGHANISTAN:
An extended struggle for state power

Western Sahara – status and resources

SUDAN AT THE POINT OF NO RETURN:
Fears and hope for a conflict-ridden country

ANGOLA AND MOZAMBIQUE:
Honeymoon after civil war?

The northern Uganda war – protracted, devastating and spreading

COLOMBIAN PEACE COMMUNITIES:
Active non-cooperation rather than passive acquiescence

Inspiring citizens’ initiative for peace-building in Kenya

The road to Jaffna
Protracted conflicts

Can you get used to living with war? Probably, in the same way that you can somehow get used to living with physical pain, with constant stress, with disturbing noises. You get used to it, you bear with it in silence, because you have no other choice. You don’t know of any alternative.

One thing is for sure: the surrounding world can “get used” to protracted conflict. The international community, the media, the aid organisations – they all can turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to suffering that does not have any news value. Protracted conflicts are often forgotten conflicts. In this issue of New Routes we throw light upon different types of protracted conflicts in different stages and in various parts of the world.

According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, 13 of the 243 conflicts in the world since World War II have been active for at least 32 years. Marcus Nilsson and Joakim Kreutz in their analysis present the theory of “conflict issues” and “conflict dynamics”.

One of the most forgotten conflicts in the world is that of Western Sahara, ongoing for 35 years between the same conflicting parties. The war in Afghanistan is of another character: much observed by the surrounding world and with shifting actors throughout the decades. Hans Corell and Anders Fänge, respectively, share their views and deep knowledge of these seats of war.

The majority of the wars in modern time are complex intrastate wars, fought between two or more conflicting parties, often across the borders to neighbouring countries. In his article, Ronald R. Atkinson describes the consequences of the propagation of the Lord’s Resistance Army’s attacks beyond northern Uganda, which thus is becoming a regional, rather than national, concern.

Eventually also protracted wars come to an end, in a cease-fire or peace agreement. Henning Melber and Florian Krampe picture the post-war situation in Angola and Mozambique, which both suffered from brutal civil wars with a complicated net of conflicting parties and power relations. Anna Åkerlund describes an everyday situation in Sri Lankan Jaffna 18 months after the end of 26 years of war.

As you see, New Routes now takes the step into the four-colour world. On the back cover you can read more about the plans for technical renewal of the journal. Welcome with your comments on both the contents and appearance of New Routes!

Kristina Lundqvist
klundqvist@life-peace.org

Marcus Nilsson works for the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) where he currently investigates non-state conflicts and expands the UCDP database.

Joakim Kreutz is a PhD Candidate at the Uppsala University Department for Peace and Conflict Research.

Anders Fänge has worked with Afghanistan since the beginning of the 1980s, mainly as the Country Director of the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan. Besides Afghanistan, he has worked in Ethiopia, Central Asia, Somalia and Palestine with different NGOs and the United Nations.

Hans Corell was the UN Legal Counsel 1994-2004. He served in the Swedish judiciary 1962-1972. He then joined the Ministry of Justice where he became a Director in 1979 and Chief Legal Officer in 1981. From 1984 he was head of the Legal Department of the Foreign Ministry.

Kristina Lundqvist is Communications Officer at the Life & Peace Institute and editor of New Routes.

Florian Krampe, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University and Uppsala Centre for Sustainable Development.

Henning Melber is Executive Director of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation and a Research Associate with the University of Pretoria.

Ronald R. Atkinson teaches African history and is Director of African Studies at the University of South Carolina. He has lived and worked in Kenya, Uganda, Ghana and South Africa.

Pedro Valenzuela is Director at the Graduate Program in Conflict Resolution, Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá, Colombia. He studied Political Science at Florida International University and the University of Pittsburgh. He has a PhD in Peace and Conflict Studies from Uppsala University.

Paul van Tongeren is the founder of the European Centre for Conflict Prevention. He was the convener of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC). Up until 2010 he was Secretary-General of GPPAC.

Anna Åkerlund has lived in Sri Lanka since October 2008. She works as a Technical Advisor for Diakonia, a Swedish development organisation that works with local partners to achieve a sustainable change for the most vulnerable people in the world.
When and how do protracted conflicts end? Does a ceasefire or peace accord put a halt to outbreaks of violence? For how long are people’s minds affected by their experiences of war? What does it take to change, not only the rhetoric, but also the mindset of political leaders from agitation to dialogue?

Angola and Mozambique have both gone through a long-lasting struggle for colonial independence, followed by years of brutal civil war. Both countries seem to have a long way to go until real peace is established not only in the official documents but also in the daily life of their citizens.

The decades before the independence of Angola and Mozambique, two southern African societies previously under Portuguese colonial rule, were marred by a brutal degree of violence in long-lasting liberation wars. However, peace remained an elusive hope after both countries obtained formal state sovereignty in 1975. The long anti-colonial struggle, fought also by non-violent, but mostly military means, had a lasting effect on the mindset of those ultimately seizing legitimate political power. The internal structures and social beliefs, especially among the elites, remained and, thus, paved the way for continued fighting for control. New internal wars affected the already traumatised societies with new, horrific violence victimising the populations even further.

One of the most destructive factors during this period between the mid-1970s and the late 1980s was the South African apartheid regime, which played a crucial role in the regional destabilisation efforts. Nevertheless, the former liberation movements eventually maintained political power and control as governing parties, despite the concerted onslaught on their governments and rule.

Bearing in mind the decades of civil war and mutual atrocities against the population in both countries, it is of interest why and how they have seemingly achieved a relative socio-political stability 35 years after obtaining self-determination. Moreover, it is based on political contestation with the former rebel organisations that laid down arms and entered parliaments instead. The successful appeasement has seen the political integration of the antagonistic rebel groups since the turn of the century. But despite moving towards becoming a player in a competitive democratic state, the liberation movements have actually managed to consolidate their hegemonic status. As dominant parties, they are not facing any serious political challenges through an increasingly weaker political opposition.

**Angola:**

**MPLA and UNITA**

In 1975, the Movimento Popular de Libertacao de Angola (MPLA) was the anti-colonial liberation movement, which in direct competition with other organisations emerged as the new political agency seizing power over the independent state. Its political rule remained contested and challenged, also through the barrel of the gun, land mines and other forms of warfare through means of terror.

The main opponent, resorting to such destructive rebel tactics mainly at the expense of the civilian population in large parts of southern, eastern and central Angola, was the Uniao Nacional para a Independencia Total de Angola (UNITA). As a sad irony, UNITA was initially supported by both South Africa and the People’s Republic of China in a strange constellation of geo-political interests to undermine the Soviet backed regime in Luanda, which relied on heavy military presence and support by Cuban forces and logistic support from the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic. As a result, UNITA and its rather illustrious, if not flamboyant, leader Jonas Savimbi, whose main base was a state within the state, resonated positively among conservative western policy makers and their agencies despite all the horrific acts of violence committed. At that time Angola was probably the most contested African country during the late Cold War period.

UNITA had its main operational bases in the southern and eastern regions of Angola, where it was also rooted in the local population and had access to the diamond mines. These secured a massive income from trade in blood diamonds, which in turn allowed the purchase of arms and military technology to challenge the armed forces under the command of the state authorities.

For more than a quarter of a century UNITA was able to bring the MPLA government to the verge of collapse and controlled large parts of the country’s territory. The MPLA government’s initial survival was until the late 1980s a result of the massive presence of Cuban troops. However, control over considerable parts of the territory rested with the rebel armies under the unscrupulous, ruthless but intelligent command of Savimbi, whose headquarters was like a royal court.

**International efforts for peace**

The New York Accords at the end of 1998, paving the way for a transition to independence in Namibia, included a withdrawal of Cuban troops (estimated at 50,000) from Angola and the end of South Africa’s military occupation of Namibia and its operations in southern Angola. Several subsequent international efforts with the involvement of the United Nations to bring a peaceful
solution through power-sharing arrangements to the country and its suffering population failed, although these even included a political representation of the civilian wing of UNITA in a so-called unity government.

The civil war dragged on until the beginning of this century. The non-compliance of UNITA with internationally negotiated and mediated agreements throughout the 1990s provided the MPLA a relative legitimacy to begin another military offensive at the turn of the century, thereby seeking to achieve an end to the conflict on the battle field. The killing of the UNITA-leader Jonas Savimbi in February 2002 in an ambush by the Angolan army, and the subsequent death of UNITA vice-president António Dembo – reportedly from diabetes and starvation – ended the chronic violence. The defeat of UNITA was partly also the result of a direct collaboration between the Angolan and Namibian armed forces, which allowed for efficient operations in the border region.

Already in April 2002 a new agreement regulated the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of the UNITA army. Some 85,000 soldiers with 350,000 family members surrendered within a few months. UNITA reconstituted itself as a purely civil political party.

In the meantime, the more isolated and small-scale war by the Frente para a Libertacao da Exclava de Cabinda (FLEC) for the autonomy of the oil-rich enclave Cabinda continues. It drew worldwide attention with the vicious attack on the football team of Togo during the African Nations Cup in 2009. The conflict hardly has any wider impact on most parts of Angola’s territory, where relative stability prevails. But peace is more than the absence of war.

Angola’s war-torn history never allowed any meaningful reconstruction of what used to be one of the breadbaskets of the continent. The immense resource-based wealth through oil and diamonds seemed more of a curse than a blessing, since the income from oil on the one side (MPLA) and diamonds on the other side (UNITA) allowed investing in warfare. Half a million people have sought refuge in neighbouring countries, and some four million people (a third of the population) were internally displaced.

**Unthreatened power**

The last parliamentary elections in early September 2008 documented the further decline of UNITA, also brought about by the (ab)use of state power by the ruling MPLA. Its overwhelming victory (with almost 82 per cent of the votes and 191 out of 220 seats in the National Assembly) was achieved under anything but fair conditions and left the ruling party almost unchallenged. UNITA obtained only 16 seats, while three other smaller parties secured in total another 13 seats.

This result also left President José Eduardo dos Santos (who has been in office longer than Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe) confident in his prospects for the next presidential elections. In October 2008, the government dissolved the wartime government of national unity. It had been established as part of the 1994 Lusaka Protocol and had allocated several cabinet posts to political representatives of UNITA, without bringing the war to an end.

Angola’s “oligarchy” remains a dubious case in point for a predatory elite, which bases its privileges on a self-enrichment strategy through an inner circle in control of the party, the government and the state. Their prevailing public legitimacy, however, is not based on the democratic system or good governance. Like so many former liberation movements also the ruling elite in Angola bases their legitimacy and rule on their historic role as liberators of the people.

The over-reliance of the people in their “liberators” inhibits countries not just mentally, but also socially, to develop. Angola is statistically – due to its enormous revenue income generated mainly by the oil and to a lesser extent the diamonds – a higher middle-income country, but its Human Development Index remains appallingly low. According to the latest Index of African Governance sponsored by the businessman Mo Ibrahim and released in early October 2010, Angola’s score (out of a maximum 100) at least rose steadily from 31 to 39 over the four years since the index was introduced. This puts the country now in the 43rd place out of 53 countries surveyed.

However, the still even worse performance in the health and education sector is not included in this index, which puts its emphasis mainly on political governance related issues. Angola remains one of the worst places in this world for children below the age of five. It is considered to have the highest density of land mines in the world and as a result the largest proportion of people, who, through mines and other forms of mutilation, are physically impaired.

**Mozambique:**

FRELIMO and RENAMO

In contrast, Mozambique ranks with 52 scores markedly above Angola in terms of the Ibrahim Index. For decades the much poorer country has been a primary recipient of external assistance and has in terms of natural resources hardly anything to offer of interest to the external agencies. Maybe also because of this relatively little attraction to foreign powers, Mozambique originally faced a less violent transition to independence. The main cause was, however, the status of the Frente de Libertacao de Mocambique (FRELIMO) as the only liberation movement fighting Portuguese colonial rule and hence entitled to taking political power as government at independence. Similar to the MPLA, it originally held a firm alliance with the Soviet bloc and a socialist political ideology, which-by the late 1980s, however, was replaced by a much more pragmatic and far less ideological orientation.

The differences originally secured a more peaceful transition, since neighbouring South Africa was seeking a kind of ‘peaceful coexistence’. FRELIMO’s support to other liberation movements and the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980, however, changed the regional constellation and provoked South Africa’s ‘securocrats’ in the army to pursue a more aggressive regional destabilisation strategy. It sponsored the externally created but internally operating
rebel movement Resistencia Nacional Mocambicana (RENAMO), which was originally established as a counter-insurgency force by the Rhodesian security apparatus after Mozambique’s independence.

The terror brought to the civilian population lasted for more than a decade. The Nkomati Accord of 1984, mediated by the Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda between South Africa and Mozambique, did not bring an end to the internal war, and RENAMO’s military operations reached even the outskirts of the capital Maputo.4 But RENAMO’s relative success was not the sole result of its military capacity. It was also based on parts of the country’s population, who did not identify with FRELIMO. Even more than UNITA (which also had a local support base in the regions where it was firmly entrenched), RENAMO was at times able to operate efficiently due to local support.

Only when FRELIMO realised the degree of the internal RENAMO support and started to change its own policy, it gradually gained the upper hand politically. It benefited from the fact that in contrast to Angola, where UNITA received wide international support from western countries, the West generally tended to recognise FRELIMO as the legitimate government. While in Angola the changing international constellation with a regional appeasement strategy from the early 1990s onward resulted ultimately in the defeat of UNITA on the battlefield, not least through the physical elimination of its leader Savimbi, the downfall of RENAMO was more a result of the loss of its internal support base among the suffering population.

**Ceasefire at last**

After intensive diplomatic negotiations from the late 1980s and a growing active involvement of western states, the Mozambican president Joaquim Chissano and the RENAMO president Afonso Dhlakama met for the first time eye to eye in Rome, where in October 1992, after almost three years of negotiations, an accord was signed and a ceasefire agreement implemented. At the end of October 1994 both parties contested for the votes in presidential and parliamentary elections. They resulted in a victory for president Chissano, who was re-elected with 53.2 per cent of the votes (with 33.7 per cent of the votes for Dhlakama documenting his relative support among the electorate). The result of the parliamentary elections was even closer, with 44.3 per cent of the votes and 129 out of 250 seats for FRELIMO and 37.8 per cent or 112 seats for RENAMO. Although reluctantly and against the reservations of his party, Dhlakama recognised the results and thereby – in contrast to the permanent sabotage exercised by Savimbi in Angola – contributed decisively to the end of violence and a lasting effect of the Rome accord.

FRELIMO did not co-opt the RENAMO leadership into the governance structures but used its hegemonic status and control over the state apparatus in the years to come to marginalise the political opposition. Notably, the RENAMO leadership never resorted to armed insurrection again. In the meantime the party has been in steady decline and Dhlakama’s influence faded away, as the latest elections in late October 2009 for parliament, the president and new provincial parliaments documented. FRELIMO consolidated as the dominant party at all levels. President Armando Guebuza (who succeeded Chissano in 2005 in a smooth power transfer within the party) was re-elected with 75 per cent of the votes, while his party took 191 parliamentary seats, more than two thirds of the total of 250. It also won majorities in all the provincial assemblies, taking altogether 703 of the 812 seats.5

Since independence, FRELIMO has re-established firm control over the country, not without dubious practices. Evidence of electoral manipulation provoked criticism among international observers. Despite the emergence of a new political alternative with the formation of the Mozambique Democratic Movement, which broke away from the declining RENAMO, like in Angola no short-term alternative is in sight.

**Happily ever after?**

Certainly there are marked differences in the trajectories of both countries, but the parallels of the historical paths are overwhelming. In both cases the long period of internal strife and civil war has been replaced by a relative stability and an absence of warfare. This is, however, far from sustainable peace.6

The psychologist Daniel Bar-Tal argues that at the end of protracted violent conflicts it is the ‘societal beliefs’ – the shared beliefs of the own group, and of ‘the other’, the enemy – that need to change in a process of reconciliation.7 In Angola and Mozambique, as in many post-colonial states, the long anti-colonial struggle has had a lasting effect on the mindsets of the elites. These elites have persisted and strengthened their conflictive beliefs during violent civil wars and still retain their protracted viewpoints, even years after fighting has ended.

In both states a former liberation movement stays in firm control of the domestic politics and the economy. Both ruling movements carry on their beliefs from the conflict period, because it helps
them to justify their own use of violence and atrocities, maintain their identity and constituency, and marginalise the opposition. As political parties these movements consolidated their rule by means of a clientilist, if not predatory, regime. Under pressure, these regimes tend to become even more impaired by their inability to form normal political relationships and to communicate than they were already as a result of the clandestine underground activities during the anti-colonial struggle. This is not a strong foundation for lasting peace and stability, but rather represents the impact of decades of intractable conflict on the political elites.

The rebel groups, whose military operations caused the suffering and death of an uncountable number of people in both countries, have lost their influence and seem to have gradually ended up in irrelevance for the political future. Nevertheless, the culture of impunity enables the persistence of conflictive attitudes also among the opposition’s elite. With all former belligerents remaining in a mindset of confrontation, the situation in both states bears a latent potential for renewed conflict.

The former liberation movements remain in power and show little signs of securing legitimacy based on good governance. Their style of politics suppresses any sort of reconciliation or serious democratic contestation. Moreover, it neglects an economically destitute population traumatised by decades of violence. Perhaps, in the absence of alternatives, the partycraticity of the liberation movements is nonetheless the lesser evil to those rebels, whose onslaught they survived. Yet in both societies, the admirable people’s struggle for freedom and lasting peace remains treated with carelessness. The losers in both cases have – as so often – been the people, who are still waiting for a happy ending.


3 The Humanitarian Action Report published by UNICEF for 2008 concluded that the war has had a profound impact on all aspects of social and economic life in Angola, with the destruction of basic infrastructure and the disruption of educational provision leading to continuing poor service delivery. With 260 deaths per 1,000 live births Angola has the second highest under-five mortality rate after Sierra Leone and before Afghanistan.

4 The horrific brutality of the rebels and the traumatic consequences for the people of Mozambique have been movingly documented in the novel ‘Comedia Infantil’ by the Swedish author Henning Mankell, who spends part of the year in Maputo.


6 A remarkable effort to come to terms with the legacy of violence and destruction in both countries is presented in Christopher Cramer, Civil War is not a Stupid Thing. Accounting for Violence in Developing Countries. London: Hurst 2006.
