

Cabinda: Africa's Forgotten War

by Jeff Shantz

With the cessation of conflict between the Angolan government and UNITA (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola) militias, in April 2002, attention turned to the ongoing separatist conflict in Cabinda. An oil-rich enclave separated from the rest of Angola by a slender strip of territory of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cabinda has been the site of a decades-long war of independence between the Angolan government and various separatist factions, a struggle that has been called "Africa's forgotten war." Approximately 30,000 people have lost their lives in almost 30 years of struggles for independence. Despite the severe humanitarian crisis, access to the enclave has been largely closed to all but those who work in the oil industry.

Cabinda's massive oil wealth has made the enclave an essential contributor to Angola's national economy as well as a much contested site. Cabinda's oil fields generate approximately sixty percent of Angola's oil. The province accounts for the majority of Angolan oil revenues that contribute 42 percent of gross national product and 90 percent of the state budget. Cabinda's offshore deposit, Block Zero, is among the world's most lucrative oil fields and the cornerstone of Angola's petroleum industry. Concession rights to Block Zero were initially granted in 1957 and exploration began shortly thereafter. Since production started in 1968, Block Zero has produced more than two billion barrels of oil. By 1983 Gulf Oil had invested \$1.3 billion in the Cabindan operation, accounting for 90 per cent of Angola's foreign exchange.

The 1980s and 1990s saw substantial new investments in development and were a period of increased production. Oil exports from the enclave stood at \$2.5 billion in 1997. By 2000, Angola's production was almost 800,000 barrels per day, almost six times 1980's levels. This placed Angola behind only Nigeria as the largest oil producer in Sub-Saharan Africa.

During the period of Angolan independence struggles, Cabindan oil provided Portugal with a major source of revenues to finance its wars against the independence movement in the colonies. Taxes and royalties from Gulf's operations provided

almost half of the military budget of the Portuguese administration in the early 1970s. Since independence oil revenues have flowed to the Angolan government which has similarly relied on the resource to fund its struggles against Cabindan separatists.

Chevron Texaco (which bought Gulf) has dominated the province's development from its near-colonial operational base at Malongo. The company's complex, including oil storage depots, a residential area for Chevron employees and a small refinery, is set apart from the rest of Cabinda and guarded by private security companies. Local staff do not live within the settlement and there is much resentment over disparities in living standards. This has fueled much local resentment regarding exploitation of the area's vast resources by outsiders.

Cabindans have been deeply critical of the role of oil companies in the region. In 1999 an oil spill near the Malonga base severely damaged fish stocks. Cabindan fishers have sought compensation for destruction caused by oil spills but have only received \$2000 (US) in compensation from Chevron Texaco and this was paid to only 10 per cent of the fishers. In addition to spills, ongoing pollution from regular production has also been identified as contributing to reduced fish stocks.

Cabinda's relationship with Angola has been a point of great conflict since the time of colonial rule. The territory was linked politically to Angola in the Treaty of Simulambuco of 1885, which acknowledged Cabinda's distinct status as an enclave. Cabinda was governed by Portugal as a separate colony until 1956 when it was incorporated into Angola and brought under direct authority of the Portuguese Governor General of Angola. Despite its administrative connection to Angola, Cabinda has remained geographically, linguistically and ethnically linked with what are now Congo-Brazzaville and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Many Cabindans have long maintained that theirs is an autonomous territory and separatists insist that Cabinda should have been granted its own independence following the end of Portuguese colonial rule.

The first independence movement, the Movement for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (MLEC) was founded in 1960, the year of

emergence of armed struggle against Portuguese rule in Angola. Two other groups, the Committee for Action and Union of Cabinda (CAUNC) and the Maiombe Alliance (ALLIAMA), emerged around the same time. In 1963 the three movements combined to form the Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (FLEC).

FLEC was excluded from participation in the April 1974 Alvor talks between the Portuguese colonial authorities and three Angolan nationalist groups, the MPLA, FNLA and UNITA, which set the stage for Angolan independence. Article three of the Alvor Accord, signed in January 1975, maintained that Cabinda would remain an integral part of Angola. FLEC appealed to the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations, but, receiving no satisfaction, took up armed struggle against the MPLA (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola) government of Angola. The ensuing guerrilla war saw attacks on government troops stationed in Angola and the occasional kidnapping of Chevron employees. During the 1980s FLEC split over strategic differences to form FLEC-FAC, the main armed faction of FLEC, and FLEC-Renovada. FLEC-FAC has maintained some armed activities but was severely weakened by the overthrow of their patron, Zaire's president Mobutu Sese Seko, in 1996.

The talks between the Angolan government and UNITA during 1991-92 that culminated in the signing of the Bicesse Accords also excluded the Cabindan separatists. Left out of the peace agreement they continued the war in the enclave. Once again, in 1994, a new peace agreement, the Lusaka Protocol, failed to include the Cabindan separatists, meaning that fighting continued unabated. FLEC-FAC did not participate in a 2002 conference on the constitutional future of Angola that was held in Angola and which discussed such matters of importance to Cabindans as local autonomy, decentralization and constitutional reform.

Meetings throughout the 1990s between the various Cabindan independence groups and the Angolan government brought no resolution to the conflict. The Angolan government's involvement in the civil wars in the DRC and the Republic of Congo rendered those countries unavailable as bases of operation for the Cabindan rebels. Since the 1990s the Angolan government has begun to address Cabindan grievances concerning the lack of infrastructure and development in the province. To date, only 10 percent of oil revenues are returned to the province. Cabinda's oil wealth has ensured that the Angolan government, like the Portuguese

before them, would never willingly grant independence to the enclave.

A massive sweep of the enclave by Angolan forces in October 2002, targeted at driving secessionists out of Cabinda, destroyed FLEC-FAC's main base and forced many independence fighters to abandon the guerrilla struggle. By the end of the year the army had also captured the main base of FLEC-Renovada causing the group to cease operations. The 2002 offensive which militarily defeated FLEC left its leaders in exile and renewed government hopes for an end to the lengthy conflict. A meeting in July 2003 between Angolan authorities and Ranque Franque, FLEC co-founder and leader, further raised hopes that a negotiated settlement was on the horizon. While the military defeat left FLEC leaders willing to negotiate a settlement, any successful outcome of peace talks will depend in part on whether civil society groups, rather than only the FLEC leaders, take part in the process. Civil society groups have demanded a ceasefire, improved rights and conditions for local oil workers, and the end of human rights violations by the Angolan army, which carried out atrocities against civilian populations.

Calls by the separatists for Portugal to intervene and establish a transitional government have been rejected by the Portuguese government which views the conflict as an internal Angolan issue. Similarly, FLEC calls for a referendum on independence, similar to the one held in East Timor and supervised by the United Nations, in which only Cabindans would vote, have been rejected by the government which argues that all Angolans should vote on an issue of national importance. While Cabindans still desire independence, many would now settle for autonomy, some form of which the Angolan government has claimed it would be willing to negotiate.

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