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## Angolan State security/intelligence services, and their support of the MPLA and presidential hegemony

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### ABSTRACT

Despite the so-called transition in Angola from a single-party Socialist regime to a multiparty liberal democracy in the 1990s, alongside several formal organizational, legal, and institutional changes, this article argues that the Angolan security/intelligence services have been able to maintain their primary purpose since their creation in 1975 up to the present day – to support and protect the hegemony of the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) party, its elites and, above all, its President. The article outlines the evolution of the Angolan security/intelligence services in terms of their long-term continuity, exposing how changes in Angola's political system in response to domestic and international challenges were circumvented by the security services without altering their main foundational objective, or making them more accountable to democratic civilian control.

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### Introduction

Despite the so-called transition in Angola from a single-party Socialist regime to a multiparty liberal democracy in the 1990s, and several formal organizational, legal, and institutional changes, the Angolan security/intelligence services have been able to maintain their foundational purpose since their creation in 1975 to the present day – to support and protect the hegemony of the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) party, in power since independence in 1975, its elites and, above all, its President.

Within an authoritarian political system that did not effectively democratize (despite the transition from a single-party to a multiparty system), but instead reconstituted or camouflaged its party's hegemony and presidential control over the three branches of government, one should not expect that the intelligence services would democratize, humanize, and become more accountable to the executive, legislative or judiciary either. The security services remain under the direct personal guidance of the President of the Republic and President of the MPLA, and are not accountable to any other institutions, despite new legislation having been introduced.

Such stability has also meant that the services have been growing in competence and relevance, reliably delivering their effective mission. As well as helping the government to

win the renewed civil war (after the first 1992 election up to 2002), the security/intelligence services have been instrumental in each election won by the MPLA since then (in 2008, 2012, 2017, and 2022), and have played a major role in Angola's rise as an important strategic player in the African continent, and especially in Southern Africa.

This paper outlines this evolving path in terms of its long-term continuity; exposing how changes in Angola's political system in response to domestic and international challenges were circumvented by the security services without altering their main foundational purpose, or making them more accountable to democratic civilian control.

The argument is presented chronologically in four parts. Part I outlines the initial structuring of the services, in the period before the attempted coup in 1977 (a period mainly influenced by the USSR, Cuba, and other Eastern bloc allies), and the period after the attempted coup, where the services were isolated from other influences except Cuba, and evolved into a pragmatic political-partisan-presidential-State security police. Part II focuses on the 1990s transition to a multiparty system up to the end of the civil war in 2002, where the services assimilated some of the new international thinking on the role of security services in a post-Cold War era affected by global terrorism, but still pragmatically and effectively focused on helping the MPLA win the civil war and secure the regime.

Part III deals with the post-war redesign of the MPLA hegemony under the new cover of a multiparty setting and the reshuffling of the services into an intelligence community, through to the 2008 electoral win with 81% of the vote and the new 2010 made-to-fit constitution, reinstating the previous characteristics of the State security. Part IV looks at the new threats and challenges to the party and President emerging from 2010 onwards, and the approach to the new models on international illiberalism as a possible option to help legitimately secure the status quo and President/MPLA hegemony into the 2020s.

## **Part I – Angolan security services' foundational model**

Angola entered independence already immersed in a civil war within the global Cold War setting. The bi-partition and then tri-partition of the nationalist movement, with open military conflict between movements and myriad unstable international alliances throughout the liberation struggle, did not augur well for the independent State. The struggle between the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), and the National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola (UNITA) escalated into military action with direct and indirect foreign involvement even before independence day on 11 November 1975.

With the support of Cuban troops and USSR military material, the MPLA managed to repel the South Africa/UNITA attacks from the South and the offensives of the FNLA, Zairean military and CIA-funded mercenaries from the North. Although the FNLA was soon neutralized and disbanded (by 1979), the war raged in the 1980s with a stronger UNITA, openly supported by South Africa and Zaire, and covertly funded and supported by the US between 1976 and 1985 (the US Congress Clark Amendment banned the supplying of arms to Angolan groups), and then openly and increasingly supported by the Reagan administration after the Clark Amendment was repealed in 1985.

Central to this context is the fact that Angola is a major oil producer (Africa's second-largest) and also a significant diamond producer, reinforcing its geo-strategic economic importance and raising the stakes in the international arena.

The MPLA won the struggle for the new independent State in 1975, assuming a single-party regime with an official Socialist orientation from October 1976 onwards.

Given this domestic, regional, and international context, one can easily imagine the importance of security/intelligence services in the country, with these becoming a key structural part of the MPLA's hegemonic drive from independence up to the present day.

Unsurprisingly, the creation of the new State security agency was one of the first measures taken by the new independent State, 18 days after independence on 29 December 1975, as the Direction of Information and Security of Angola (DISA - *Direcção de Informação e Segurança de Angola*) (Art. 2, Decree-Law 3/75).<sup>1</sup>

In a country at war, with a government backed by Cuban forces and Eastern Bloc advisers, the new intelligence services followed the models provided by these advisers, who already had experience in dealing with the CIA (by then supporting the FNLA/Zairean/mercenary forces). The DISA assumed the characteristics of a secret police – a partisan/ideological orientation, a militarized structure and hierarchy, reduced institutional scrutiny, and autonomous budget – and was under the direct control of the President of the Party/President of the Republic (constitutionally, the President of the MPLA was also the President of the Republic).

The DISA had broadly encompassing objectives (e.g. defending the revolutionary conquests, the State and party organs and members; promoting the re-education of 'deviant' individuals), and in the face of increasing domestic and foreign security threats and the administrative institutional weakness of the new State (due to a lack of cadres), it assumed increasing powers.

The number of mercenaries involved in the Angolan war and the capture of some of them in combat, led to the approval of a specific law on mercenaryism in February 1977 (Law 4/77),<sup>2</sup> which extended DISA's powers to instruct such judicial processes. After an attempted coup on 27 May 1977, led by former members of the MPLA Central Committee – Nito Alves and José Van-Dunem – these powers were further extended.<sup>3</sup>

The attempted coup killed several top members of the party, and the administration of President Agostinho Neto was saved *in extremis* by the Cuban military, who effectively crushed the *putchistes* attempt, proving their loyalty to Neto. Shockingly for the government, DISA's investigation revealed that the *putchistes* had counted on the involvement of the Soviets up to a very late stage.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, from then on, Neto isolated DISA and the Presidential security from any other influences besides the Cubans.

Despite its international Socialist rhetoric, the Angolan State security agency evolved into a pragmatic political-partisan-presidential-State security police. The purpose of the services was to defend the President of the Party/President of the Republic/Chief of Government and Commander-In-Chief, similar to the role of the security services in

<sup>1</sup> *Diário da República – DR, I, Decree-Law 3/75 (December 29, 1975).*

<sup>2</sup> *Diário da República – DR, I, Law 4/77, (February 25, 1977).*

<sup>3</sup> Nuno Fragoso Vidal, "The International and Domestic Fabrics of an Ideological Illusion: The Socialist MPLA," *Tempo & Argumento* 13, n. 34 (2021): e0102. set./dez.

<sup>4</sup> Iko Carreira, *O Pensamento estratégico de Agostinho Neto* (Lisboa: Dom Quixote, 1996): 155.

Cuba (Lockhart, 2021).<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the regime became ever more personalized, with power increasingly centralized and concentrated in the hands of the President.<sup>6</sup>

The attempted coup was followed by a bloody purge, led by DISA, of all those who might have been or were imagined to be involved with the *putchistes*, with an undetermined number of deaths (in the thousands) from summary executions without formal accusations or trials.<sup>7</sup> The purge soon spiralled out of control throughout the country, in part legitimised by the President, who publicly stated that a hunt for the *putchistes* should start immediately and that no time would be lost with trials.<sup>8</sup>

As there was no legal framework to support such purges, in May 1978, the Law on Crimes against State Security (Law 7/78)<sup>9</sup> assumed that DISA had the competences to undertake secret investigative operations, criminal and operational investigations, instruct juridical processes (collect evidence and judicially accuse), judgment (court competencies) and penal re-education (in so-called re-education camps). By the end of the purge, DISA's functions juxtaposed those of a police force, public attorney office, judiciary, penal system, and of the special military forces (with its own militarized units).

Popular discontent grew due to the escalation of DISA's repression and arbitrariness following the attempted coup. Complaints to the Presidency mounted, from families in search of their missing relatives. By 1979, after the purge and subsequent action by the MPLA to carefully select new (loyal) party members, the President and his party felt secure enough and, understanding that the purge had gone too far, decided to abolish the DISA.

A restructuring of the central State administration re-established the Ministry of the Interior (suspended since the *putchistes'* leader Nito Alves was sacked as its Minister by Neto) and determined that the Ministry would have two deputy ministers, one each for internal order and State security (Law 7/79).<sup>10</sup> The DISA's previous cadres, personnel and activities were integrated into the new Ministry of the Interior in June 1979.

It soon became obvious that the move was merely a reconstitution of DISA, to assuage public hostility and provide a scapegoat to take responsibility for the bloody purge out of the President's hands. The President announced DISA's abolition as punishment for the alleged abuses perpetrated by the agency that he, allegedly, only came to know through the myriad letters from families. However, no DISA agents were ever put on trial.

This arrangement lasted for a year. In July 1980, a new structure for the security services was announced through the creation of the Ministry of State Security (MINSE) (Law 5/80).<sup>11</sup> The cadres and personnel of the former DISA were transferred again, from the Ministry of the Interior to MINSE. A hardline general belonging to the Political Bureau of the MPLA – Kundy Paihama – was appointed minister by the new President, Eduardo dos Santos, who had succeeded Agostinho Neto (who died in September 1979).

<sup>5</sup>James Lockhart, "Cuba and the Secret World," *The International History Review* 43, n. 1 (2021): 170–184.

<sup>6</sup>Nuno Fragoso Vidal, "The Angolan Regime and The Move to Multiparty Politics," in *Angola: The Weight of History*, eds. Patrick Chabal and Nuno Fragoso Vidal (London: Hurst, 2007).

<sup>7</sup>Jean-Michel Mabeko-Tali, *O MPLA perante si próprio 1960–1977. Guerrilhas e lutas sociais* (Lisboa: Mercado de Letras, 2018): ch. XIV.

<sup>8</sup>Agostinho Neto, "Comunicações de Agostinho Neto ao país, entre 27 e 30 de Maio," *Boletim do Militante* (Luanda: MPLA, 1977).

<sup>9</sup>*Diário da República – DR*, I, Law 7/78 (May 26, 1978).

<sup>10</sup>*Diário da República – DR*, I, Law 7/79, *DR*, I, 157 (June 22, 1979).

<sup>11</sup>*Diário da República – DR*, I, Law 5/80, *DR*, I, 159 (7 July 1980).

Ministry status gave the security services a more elevated position within the State apparatus, maintaining the partisan and military character of DISA (political police), but allowing the services to be more organized, efficient, and discreet, protected from the previous public exposure brought about by undertaking regular arrests and searches, that were now primarily left to the police.

As the war raged in the 1980s and as internal civil order became better structured through the Ministry of the Interior – the police and several paramilitary organizations in neighbourhoods and villages (Organization of Popular Defence – ODP, and the Popular Brigades of Surveillance – BPV) – the new Ministry focused on supporting the armed forces.<sup>12</sup> Its predecessor's militarized units were replaced by special commandos, to be directly involved in surgical military operations that required smaller units of special forces, according to intelligence gathered by MINSE. MINSE also assumed responsibility for the surveillance of frontiers and sensitive areas, and securing strategic infrastructure and economic sites (e.g. diamond mining areas, onshore oil fields and compounds, roads, railways, and ports).

MINSE became part of the structure of the regime and its war against UNITA, until the very end of the single-party Socialist system. Like DISA, it was under the direct control of the President of the Party/President of the Republic, with institutional oversight a mere formality. The MPLA's National Security Commission (later the Cabinet of Security, operating under the President of the Republic), was supposed to prepare a periodical report to the Commission on Defence and Security of the Parliament (People's Assembly), for it to analyse and present to the plenary for approval. However, such reports, as well as being few and far between, were devoid of any meaningful content, as the People's Assembly was merely an echo chamber of the President and his party and government.

## **Part II – The end of the single-party era, the new multiparty setting, and the necessary reconstitution of state security services**

By the late 1980s, as the Cold War was coming to an end, the civil war in Angola seemed to be heading towards a negotiated solution. Diplomatic talks had progressed since 1986/87 and led to the New York tripartite accords, signed in 1988 between Angola, Cuba, and South Africa, agreeing on the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola and the independence of Namibia. Subsequent peace accords were signed in Bicesse in May 1991 between MPLA and UNITA, outlining the new multiparty elections and a new multiparty era.

However, the MPLA had already initiated the transition process prior to the peace accords. In December 1990, the MPLA Congress ended the single-party regime and opted for a multiparty liberal democratic system. This allowed the MPLA to autonomously manage the transition, adapting State legislation and institutions to the new multiparty democratic setting, while ensuring that all aspects of State administration (legislative, executive, and judicial) remained under the party's exclusive control to serve the electoral campaign. This was a key strategic move that gave the MPLA an advantage that later proved crucial to retaining power.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Thomas Collelo, *Angola, a Country Study* (Washington: Federal Research Division, 1991).

<sup>13</sup>Christine Messiant, "Angola les voies de l'éthnisation et de la décomposition – II — Transition à la démocratie ou marche à la guerre? L'épanouissement des deux 'partis armés' (Mai 1991–Septembre 1992)", *Lusotopie* 3 (1995): 181–221.

The State security services are a striking example of such advantage. There was immediate pressure to reform these services as MINSE was wholly identified with the MPLA's single-party regime. The solution resorted, in part, to the 1979 DISA cosmetic recycling formula, whereby MINSE was officially abolished on 23 February 1991 (Law 2/91),<sup>14</sup> while effectively concealing a recycling of the services using two tactics.

Part of MINSE's structures, cadres, and personnel were transferred to the Ministry of the Interior, disguised as regular cadres of the Ministry. The President appointed a former Minister of State Security to directly command these services, Fernando da Piedade 'Nandó', who then became Deputy Minister of the Interior. 'Nandó' had been Minister of State Security in 1986, having led a restructuring commission to modernize the security services. He became Deputy Minister of MINSE after the restructuring and up to its dissolution in February 1991 (with General Kundi Paihama also in place as Minister up to this point).<sup>15</sup>

The remaining part of the services, that had been detached into several units of the armed forces operating as military intelligence, were to remain disguised in those units as regular military, continuing their work undercover.

Controlling the whole State apparatus, using a professional political marketing company from Brazil, and unexpectedly helped by bellicose and hateful discourse from UNITA, the MPLA won the election (receiving 53.74% of the vote, against 34.10% for UNITA). The presidential election required a second-round runoff (José Eduardo dos Santos having received 49.56% of the vote, against Jonas Savimbi's 40.07%), but UNITA alleged electoral fraud and returned to war without the runoff taking place.

As the war resumed in October 1992 and grew in intensity, there was an urgent need to operationally and officially reinstate the functions of the State security services within the State apparatus. This occurred in August 1993, with the approval of the Organic Statute of the Ministry of the Interior (Decree-Law 28/93),<sup>16</sup> under the coordination of Deputy Minister 'Nandó' (who held this position until 1996).

The Law on National Security officially consecrated the new liberal democratic concept of national security and the non-partisan character of the security services (Law 8/94)<sup>17</sup> but was once again a cosmetic move to disguise the continuation of the partisan character of those services. Nevertheless, this time there was an organizational difference; learning from the experience of 1991–1993, the reinstated activities were no longer centralized, but decentralized in three autonomous branches, which were easier to camouflage and allowed increased operational flexibility:

- (1) The Service of Information of the Ministry of the Interior (SINFO), dedicated to internal/domestic threats, under the authority of the Minister of the Interior (Art. 19, Law 8/94),<sup>18</sup> but with the autonomy to manage their own finances and assets in the course of their operations (Decree-Law 28/93; Decree-Law 8/94; Decree-Law 14/02).<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup>*Diário da República – DR*, I, Law 2/91 (February 23, 1991).

<sup>15</sup>As mentioned, Paihama had been appointed Minister of the Interior in 1979, after DISA's transformation.

<sup>16</sup>*Diário da República – DR*, I, Decree-Law 28/93 (August 27, 1993).

<sup>17</sup>*Diário da República – DR*, I, Law 8/94, *DR*, I, 18 (May 6, 1994).

<sup>18</sup>*Diário da República – DR*, I, Law 8/94, *DR*, I, 18 (May 6, 1994).

<sup>19</sup>*Diário da República – DR*, I, Decree-Law 28/93 (August 27, 1993); *Diário da República – DR*, I, Decree-Law 8/94 (March 25, 1994); *Diário da República – DR*, I, Decree-Law 14/02 (December 6, 2002).

- (2) The Service of Foreign Security, focused on external security threats, under the direct control of the President of the Republic (Art. 20, Law 8/94).<sup>20</sup>
- (3) The Service of Military Security of the Ministry of Defence, focused on military affairs, under the direct control of the Minister of Defence (Art. 21, Law 8/94).<sup>21</sup>

This new organizational structure rendered the services more effective, with better defined competences in a more efficient relationship with the military and the police, increasingly dissimulated and harder to be politically targeted (contrary to DISA and MINSE).

The new structure was the result of several interconnected factors. First, it was an operational adaptation to the new constitutional setting, which evolved through the 'camouflaged' experience of 1991–1993. Second, it was set within a longer trend that had started with the restructuring of the services initiated in 1986 by 'Nandó' at MINSE, who originally ascended within the national police, and whose experience led to a better definition of powers and relationships with the police and military.

Third, it was a reaction to the so-called third wave of democratization in the 1990s and its conditionality agenda on the enforcement of political rights, freedoms, and transparency, as well as to deal with increasingly demanding civil societies.<sup>22</sup> Fourth, it was influenced by the emerging new international thinking on the role of security services in a post-Cold War era (early 1990s), or in 'developing democracies', especially needed for services that had previously been modelled on Eastern Bloc structures.<sup>23</sup>

It was not the case that a new, Western, school of security services was incorporated (imposing principles of democratic accountability on the services), but rather the need to understand how to better adapt to a quickly changing international and domestic context, in order to preserve still major and immutable (though unofficial) role of the security services: to defend the President/party/State machinery, as the country was once again at war and in dire trouble given UNITA's guerrilla operations.

UNITA was now able to control several cities, large swaths of territory, and threaten, as never before, important economic sites such as onshore oil fields and even the capital city, with new long-range artillery bought with diamonds from mines they controlled. By then, no longer able to count on the Cuban expeditionary armed force, the government had even resorted to Executive Outcomes (a private military contractor), to help train the Angolan military and fight alongside the Angolan armed forces, due to their deep knowledge of UNITA; several of their operatives were former members of the South African Defence Force and had fought in support of UNITA in the 1980s.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup>*Diário da República – DR*, I, Law 8/94, *DR*, I, 18 (May 6, 1994).

<sup>21</sup>*Diário da República – DR*, I, Law 8/94, *DR*, I, 18 (May 6, 1994).

<sup>22</sup>Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave – Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma, 1991).

<sup>23</sup>Florina Cristiana Matel and Thomas Bruneau, "Intelligence reform in new democracies: factors supporting or arresting progress," *Democratization* 18, no. 3 (2011): 602–630; Thomas Bruneau and Florina Cristiana Matel, "Intelligence in the developing democracies: the quest for transparency and effectiveness," in *The Oxford Handbook of National Security Intelligence* ed. Loch K. Johnson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010): 757–773.

<sup>24</sup>Khareen Pech, "Executive Outcomes – a corporate conquest," in Peggy Mason and Khareen Pech *Peace, profit or plunder? The Privatisation of Security in War-Torn African Societies* eds. Jakkie Cilliers (Johannesburg: Institute for Security Studies in Africa, 1996): 86.



Meanwhile, the international setting had changed. Previous Western allies of UNITA now saw the rebels as an inconvenience to the new business opportunities opened up by the MPLA government within a market economy.

Understanding this favourable context, the MPLA devised an all-encompassing domestic, regional, and international strategy to suffocate UNITA, with important contributions made by the security services at the domestic, regional, and international levels. There was a huge investment in weaponry and restructuring of the armed forces that required the secret creation of a complex international undercover network to circumvent the international arms sales ban imposed on Angolan belligerents. The secret schemes involved top members of the French government,<sup>25</sup> along with international arms dealers (Israeli-French-Russian Arkadi Gaydamak and Franco-Brazilian Pierre Falcone), in what came to be known as the 'Angolagate scandal'.<sup>26</sup>

The schemes were later extended to overcome the international blockade on 'blood diamonds', certifying production in government areas while making it difficult to sell 'UNITA's diamonds', in a business arrangement involving the daughter of President Eduardo dos Santos, Isabel dos Santos, and Israeli diamond tycoon, Lev Leviev.<sup>27</sup>

At the regional level, in parallel to the international and domestic moves, a military operation was undertaken in 1997 to support Kabila/Rwandan military forces to depose Mobutu in Zaire, a move that cut UNITA off from significant logistical support in neighbouring countries.

It is not possible to know to what degree these links to influential Israeli businessmen (Leviev and Gaidamak) helped to improve the relationship between the Angolan and Israeli governments, or in what extent such an approach between governments, with the support of US administrations, helped to get rid of a no-longer useful UNITA. For this paper, the importance is that this increasing political, diplomatic, and economic relationship existed and the State security services worked hard at all levels – domestically, but above all regionally and internationally – to support such a strategy. Meanwhile, the powers of these same services grew immensely through this process, as they were significantly involved in a new international dimension involving Western financial and arms networks, and security services related to the Western world.

The events that led to the death of UNITA's leader, and to the end of the civil war, for instance, are one example of the impact of such newly acquired knowledge. As SINFO undertook some of MINSE's previous surgical military actions in support of the armed forces throughout the 1990s,<sup>28</sup> the support of Israeli Mossad and Israeli security services' technology seems to have been crucial, particularly with the monitoring of UNITA's military manoeuvres since 1999, and the decisive intelligence to precisely locate UNITA's leader and to eliminate him in February 2002.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Among those involved were: Charles Pasqua, French Interior Minister; Jean-Christophe Mitterand, Presidential advisor for African Affairs (and son of former French President François Mitterand); Jean-Charles Marchiani, former officer of the French external intelligence agency (DGSE); Jacques Attali, counsellor to President François Mitterand up to 1991 and first head of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

<sup>26</sup>Global Witness. *All the President's Men*. Report (London: Global Witness, 2002).

<sup>27</sup>Marissa Moorman, "Along the Edges of Comparison," in *Apartheid Israel: The Politics of an Analogy* eds. Sean Jacobs and Jon Soske (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015).

<sup>28</sup>Marcelino Bonzela Franco, "A evolução do conceito estratégico do serviço de inteligência e de segurança do estado da república de Angola, 1975–2010," (Ma. Dissertation, Lisbon ISCS, 2013), 43.

<sup>29</sup>Marissa Moorman, "Along the Edges ..."

Besides 'Nandó', his successor in the position of Deputy-Minister of the Interior and chief of SINFO, General Fernando Garcia Miala (from May 1996 to April 1999), was also responsible for a more efficient and effective articulation of the services with the military. Miala was previously in military counterintelligence, reaching the position of Auxiliar-Director. His experience in the 1990s also made him an expert on foreign intelligence, as he was involved in the 'internationalization' of the security services outlined above. From then on, he rose as a major strategist within the Angolan security services, up to the present day (*cf. infra*).

It is important to note that during the 1990s, despite the conjectural influence and productive exchanges with Western and Israeli intelligence services, and the experience and competency acquired, the model and nuclei of the Angolan security services remained stable around a school of cadres. From April 1999 onwards, these homegrown cadres began to regularly rise to the position of chief of the security services.<sup>30</sup>

### Part III – Reconquest of the political hegemony in the 2000s

Coming out of the war as the uncontested victor over a humiliated and destroyed UNITA, it was time for the MPLA to renew its hegemony, which it had partially lost in 1991 with the first elections within the new multiparty setting and the resumption of the civil war.

A public relations operation was put in place to soften the image of the security services and apparently bring them in line with the new Western ideas on information services in emerging democracies, replacing the designation of security services with intelligence services.

By then, the SIE had gained ascendancy within the intelligence community due to the increasing interaction in the 1990s of Angolan politics and security services with the international capitalist world of State-private business networks (both legal and illegal), and the accumulated experience and political leverage of its Director General, Miala.

Miala had a close relationship with the Chief of the Presidency's Civil Office and Minister of State, Carlos Maria Feijó, a long-time aid of Eduardo dos Santos, former secretary of the Council of Ministers, and the new image and legislation package for the security services seems to have been closely influenced by both. The legislation included the: Law on National Security (Law 12/02)<sup>31</sup>; Law on State Secrets (Law 10/02)<sup>32</sup>; Law on the Access to Administrative Documents (Law 11/02)<sup>33</sup>; the Organic Statute of the SIE (Decree-Law 13/02)<sup>34</sup>; Organic Statute of SINFO (Decree-Law 14/02)<sup>35</sup>; and Regulation on the functioning of the Intelligence Community (Decree 80/02).<sup>36</sup>

The new discourse and the phrasing on the new legislation was another cosmetic operation. A closer look at the legislation quickly revealed that, despite the rhetoric, the security services were to proceed as usual, would be even more dependent on the Presidency, and the usual opacity, secrecy and unaccountability was assured by the

<sup>30</sup>Marcelino Bonzela Franco, "A evolução . . .", 45.

<sup>31</sup>*Diário da República* – DR, I, Law 12/02, DR, I, 65 (August 16, 2002).

<sup>32</sup>*Diário da República* – DR, I, Law 10/02 (August 16, 2002).

<sup>33</sup>*Diário da República* – DR, I, Law 11/02 (August 16, 2002).

<sup>34</sup>*Diário da República* – DR, I, Decree-Law 13/02 (December 6, 2002).

<sup>35</sup>*Diário da República* – DR, I, Decree-Law 14/02 (December 6, 2002).

<sup>36</sup>*Diário da República* – DR, I, Decree 80/02 (December 6, 2002).

Law on State Secrets (Law 10/02) and the Law on the Access to Administrative Documents (Law 11/02).

The new Law on National Security (Law 12/02), confirmed the previous format of three branches, considering them part of an 'intelligence community'. For the first time in the services' history, the word 'security' was replaced by 'intelligence', to characterize its activities in a new peaceful era. Nonetheless, the dependency on the Presidency was strengthened. The domestic branch, SINFO, was removed from the Minister of the Interior and made directly dependent on the Chief of Government (Art. 21, Law 12/02), which under the Constitution is the President of the Republic. The branch related to foreign security was now designated as Services of Foreign Intelligence (SIE), still directly dependent on the President of the Republic (Art. 20, Law 12/02), and the branch concerned with military security was designated as Services of Military Intelligence (SIM), still under tutelage of the Minister of Defence, but reporting directly to the President of the Republic (Art. 22, Law 12/02).

The UNITA opposition criticised the whole restructuring process, arguing that it was unconstitutional and filing a complaint with the Constitutional Court. Carlos Feijó defended the restructuring, resorting to the juridical opinion of a Professor of Law in Portugal (Jorge Bacelar Gouveia) known for his unconditional support to the Angolan regime and to Feijó in particular. The opinion stated that the new legislation was constitutional.

The official speech after the court proceedings was nonetheless in keeping with the modern thought on intelligence services in new democracies, and Feijó rushed to publish a book with the official collaboration of Miala to defend the new legislation, arguing that establishing a democratic regime requires an adaptation of existing legislation on the production of security information, respecting citizens' fundamental rights and freedoms, and the defence of the constitutional democratic order. He went further, admitting that in a recent past the security services had undertaken functions more akin to the police, such as investigation and instructing judicial processes of crimes against State security; such confusion between the activities of security information gathering/analysis, maintenance of public order, criminal investigation, and instruction of judicial processes is halfway towards political persecution, and the denial of civil rights of expression, public demonstration or public association.<sup>37</sup> The following decades proved that he was right about such consequences, as the practices of the services did not alter (*cf. infra*).

Much later, in response to the criticism, in 2006 a new head of SINFO was appointed – Sebastião Martins – who tried to modernize the services, which probably led to his downfall in 2013. In a public speech in 2013 he maintained that the service was no longer one that assassinated people, focusing instead on the creation of professional analysts and intelligence technocrats.<sup>38</sup> The speech occurred after an assassination of two activists in May 2012, with the involvement of two agents from the services. He tried to distance the services from both the agents and the assassination order, leading to his dismissal (*cf. infra*).<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup>Carlos Feijó with Fernando Garcia Miala and Carlos Teixeira, *A Produção de Informações de Segurança no Estado Democrático de Direito. O caso Angolano* (Lisboa: Principia, 2003): 9.

<sup>38</sup>Alexandre Martins speech in January 2013 at the opening of the Methodological seminar on the integrated planning system of SINSE, cit. in Paula Cristina Roque, *Governing in the shadows. Angola securitised State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021): 103.

<sup>39</sup>See Voice Of America – VOA news. November 15, 2013. Angola Fala Só - Alexandre Neto: "Demissão de Sebastião Martins é para proteger o Presidente", <https://www.voaportugues.com/a/angola-fala-so-alexandre-neto-demissao-de-sebastiao-martins-e-para-protger-o-presidente/1791036.html> (accessed February 1, 2023).

The support of the services to the MPLA and its President continued unabated. Although the war effectively ended in 2002, it took the MPLA another six years to schedule the first post-war elections, in 2008. The long period served to carefully prepare the whole process, with the MPLA controlling as many variables as possible to condition the electoral outcome, such as electoral legislation, the electoral management body, voter registration, private and State media, electoral judicial structures, party campaign machinery, private and State economic sectors, official and unofficial electoral funding, professional political marketing, and so on.<sup>40</sup>

Approaching the first elections since the end of the war, hardliner General José Maria was appointed to head Services of Military Intelligence. José Maria had a long reputation as cruel and vicious operative within all branches of the security services, with a career that was supported by Eduardo dos Santos since the very beginning of his administration in 1979. He was one of the most trustworthy and loyal aides of the President, together with his close friend General Manuel Vieira Dias 'Kopelipa' (Head of the President's Security Office and a kind of Cardinal Richelieu and oligarch of the Dos Santos regime). Given its power and position as the most-feared, violent, entity within the security structure of the regime, the appointment of José Maria as head of the Military Intelligence gave a clear message to the opposition and critics of the regime that no replica of 1992 would be allowed.

The intelligence services played a central role throughout the electoral process, supporting the Presidency's Security Office to spy on opposition parties, promote dissent within the opposition, funding factions claiming the presidency of the opposition parties, controlling the media, harassing journalists, helping to hire, fund, direct and coordinate companies, budgets, and institutions preparing the electoral processes, during the voting process and through to counting the votes and tabulating the results.<sup>41</sup>

The formula was similar to that in 1991, but this time without domestic or international constraints and aiming to follow the examples of ANC in South Africa and FRELIMO in Mozambique, which managed to get a clear majority of seats in their first elections, allowing them to proceed with introducing a new constitution designed to assure their hegemony.

The MPLA achieved this objective, receiving 81.76% of votes at the 2008 election. It then introduced and approved a new made-to-fit Constitution in 2010, blending the liberal-democratic with renewed hegemony – extreme concentration of power in the Presidency, controlling the legislative, executive and judiciary, or 'superlative-presidentialism', according to some constitutionalists.<sup>42</sup>

In 2010, the MPLA was at the peak of its hegemony and strength as party, State, and government, awash with petro-dollars from the 2008 oil boom, with a renewed political legitimacy due to the overwhelming 2008 electoral victory and a new Constitution (guaranteeing its hegemonic power for years to come). Since 2002, a new strategic partnership with China has flooded the country with financial and technical support

<sup>40</sup>Nuno Fragoso Vidal, "Angola – Election Management Bodies," in *Election Management Bodies in Southern Africa* (Johannesburg: OSISA & African Minds, 2017): 1–43.

<sup>41</sup>See Paula Cristina Roque, "Angola legislative elections: Analysing the MPLA's triumph," *Situation Report* (Johannesburg: Institute for Security Studies, 2008); also Paula Cristina Roque, "Angola's façade democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 20, no. 4 (2009): 137–150; Paula Cristina Roque, *Governing In...*: 111–115.

<sup>42</sup>Vital Moreira, "Presidencialismo superlativo – Espaço público," *Público*, February 9, 2010.

for infrastructure, allowing the government to discard the Western donor and lending community and its conditionalities around transparency and human rights.

This was the time chosen for a new reformulation of the intelligence services, focused on the domestic branch, officially and unashamedly resurrecting its State security characteristics. On March 2010, SINFO became the Service of Intelligence and State Security (SINSE), which along with the Services of Military Intelligence (SIM), and the Services of Foreign Intelligence (SIE), would be 'essential auxiliary organs' of the President of the Republic in his executive functions (Presidential Decree-Law 1/10, Ch. VI).<sup>43</sup>

SINSE and SIE were to support the exercise of legislative, executive, and judicial powers, and SINSE was to support the Ministry of the Interior and the National Police in the fulfilment of their missions (Arts. 71, 72, 73, 74, Presidential Decree-Law 1/10). As an auxiliary organ of the President with such broadly encompassing functions, the reformulation meant that the security services recovered its fearful 'big brother is watching you' role over the whole State apparatus and political system. By now, the long path of recycling and camouflaging the security services since 1991 had come full circle.

However, these new powers also brought new challenges and strains within the political structures. Transforming the whole intelligence community into Presidential auxiliary organs implied a closer relationship with the existing auxiliary security entities, namely the Presidency's Military Office (*Casa Militar da Presidência*)/Presidency's Security Office (*Casa de Segurança da Presidência*).

As well as administrative functions and coordination between the Presidency and other national security bodies, the Presidency's Security Office had effective operational activities, directly leading the militarized special Unit of the Presidential Guard (UGP – *Unidade da Guarda Presidencial*), comprising thousands of heavily armed men.<sup>44</sup>

Within an extremely concentrated political system, the auxiliary organs of the Presidency are a first layer of all State powers (legislative, executive, judicial and military). Considering the distributive neo-patrimonial character of the system, this first layer also provides primary access to the State's resource management and distribution, which is highly prized.<sup>45</sup>

Within this context, one can easily understand the clash between the security services and the Presidency's Security Office. Disagreements mounted between two 'strongmen': the head of the Presidency's Security Office, General Vieira Dias 'Kopelipa', and the Director General of SIE, General Garcia Miala. The clashes resulted in the arrest of General Miala in 2006 and his removal as Director General of SIE, under the serious accusation of preparing a coup. These accusations did not lead to a prosecution, but he was convicted to four years in prison by the Supreme Military Court in 2007 for failing to attend the ceremony of his military demotion. This was obviously a pretext, proving how the military and civil judicial systems can be politically manipulated.

The affair was later explained (after Dos Santos left the presidency in 2017), as the alleged consequence of SIE's investigation into major international corruption schemes involving multi-billion dollar contracts with Chinese reconstruction loans through

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<sup>43</sup>*Diário da República – DR*, I, Presidential Decree-Law 1/10 (March 5, 2010).

<sup>44</sup>Paula Cristina Roque, *Governing in*, ... : 93–98.

<sup>45</sup>Nuno Fragoso Vidal, 'The Angolan regime ...'.

Kopelipa's Cabinet of National Reconstruction or Special Public Works – an entity within the Presidency's Security Office.<sup>46</sup>

With the new administration of João Lourenço in 2017, a new Organic statute for the Presidency's Security Office was approved on 26 February 2018. This retained its status as an auxiliary organ of the President of the Republic, and still comprised several services and units with competing competences with other national security forces and the intelligence services, such as special military operation units, the Secretariat to National Defence, Secretariat of National Police and Internal Affairs, Secretariat for Intelligence Affairs and State Security, as well as the Cabinet of Special Public Works. The head of the Presidency's Security Office retained his status of Minister of State under the direct supervision of the President of the Republic (Presidential Decree nº62/18).<sup>47</sup>

Kopelipa lost his powerful position in the new administration and within the Presidency's Security Office, as did his friend General José Maria, dismissed as head of the Military Intelligence in 2018.<sup>48</sup> With the new administration of João Lourenço, and his publicly proclaimed fight against corruption, Miala recovered his general insignia and was appointed head of SINSE in March 2018. The security services reassumed a central role in the Lourenço administration's war on corruption and on the recovery of State funds, trying to address Lourenço's complaint of the 'empty State coffers' left by the former President.<sup>49</sup>

Initially, Kopelipa apparently became a major target for the war on corruption, along with other generals in President Dos Santos' closest entourage such as Leopoldino Fragoso, who was obliged to return funds and real estate in worth of billions.<sup>50</sup>

A so-called 'crab operation' revealed a major fraudulent scheme within the Presidency's Security Office in April 2021. A mid-ranking military officer, Major Lussaty, responsible for managing the payments of several services and the general secretariat of the Presidency's Security Office, was arrested, but he was undoubtedly a mere front for a scheme that, according to the Public Attorney Office, embezzled more than \$62 million from the Presidency's Security Office's between 2008 and 2018.<sup>51</sup> The scandal led to the dismissal of the Head of the Presidency's Security Office and Minister of State, General Pedro Sebastião, who was replaced by General Francisco Furtado, who had refused to take Miala's insignia when he was demoted (*cf. supra*).

A major reshuffle took place, and a new organic statute was approved in December 2021. This redesignated the Presidency's Security Office as the Military Office of the Presidency of the Republic, put a simpler organizational structure in place, but retained its character as an auxiliary organ of the President of the Republic and its major functions. The minister of State and head of the services is still responsible for supporting the President of the Republic in national security affairs.

<sup>46</sup>Deutsche Welle, Nelson Francisco Sul, "Fernando Miala: o homem dos sete ofícios," March 13, 2018.

<https://www.dw.com/pt-002/fernando-miala-o-homem-dos-sete-of%C3%ADcios-da-secreta-em-angola/a-42963763> (accessed January 3, 2023).

<sup>47</sup>*Diário da República – DR*, I, Presidential Decree-Law 62/18, *DR*, I (February 26, 2018).

<sup>48</sup>José Maria was replaced by his deputy, General Apolinário José Perera.

<sup>49</sup>Gustavo Costa, "João Lourenço em entrevista ao Expresso," *Expresso*, November 21, 2018, <https://expresso.pt/politica/2018-11-21-Joao-Lourenco-em-entrevista-ao-Expresso-Sao-conhecidos-os-que-trairam-a-patria>.

<sup>50</sup>Gustavo Costa, "Generais de Eduardo dos Santos entregam ativos de mil milhões," *Expresso*, October 10, 2020.

<sup>51</sup>Expansão, "Operação "Caranguejo" chega a tribunal com 51 arguidos e 213 testemunhas," December 1, 2021, <https://expansao.co.ao/angola/interior/operacao-caranguejo-chega-a-tribunal-com-51-arguidos-e-213-testemunhas-105744.html> (accessed February 14, 2023).

The Presidency's Military Office contains to have secretariats for national defence, national police and internal affairs, and intelligence affairs and State security. The organ for special public works (controversial for its opaque access to, and management of, massive funds) also remained unchanged, while the previous special military units were transformed into two units, the Unit of Presidential Security and the Unit of Presidential Defence (Presidential Decree n°294/21).<sup>52</sup>

A few months after the first revelations of corruption inside the Presidency's Security Office at the capital city, other embezzlement schemes came to light within the provincial branches of the Security Office. These schemes had existed since 2003, in the case of branches or associated companies and banks in the provinces of Cuando Cubango, Cuanza-Sul and Bengo.<sup>53</sup>

What these scandals revealed were the potential dangers of security services within an extremely personalized and concentrated political system, with political/Presidential control over the three branches of government. The affairs clearly demonstrated the still prevailing character of the services as an upgraded version of the previous intelligence praetorian presidential guard: still in defence, first and foremost, of the President, of the party in power since independence, and of the status quo (in this sequential hierarchy).

This does not mean that the security services became incompetent or unable to modernize; on the contrary, the Angolan intelligence services are probably one of the most competent institutions in the country, be it at the domestic, regional, or international levels. They can be relied upon to carry out their effective and real (although not official) mission to support the President and party (the same as since independence in 1975), as well as the generic and official objective of State security at the regional and international levels.

Besides all the essential support and role played by these services to help the government win the civil war after the 1992 election and win all the elections since the end of the civil war (*cf. infra*), the Angolan security/intelligence services have also played a major role in Angola becoming an important strategic player on the African continent.<sup>54</sup> Over the past two decades, Angola has become one of the major economic and military powers in Southern Africa thanks to the competent work of its security/intelligence services.<sup>55</sup> Angola is an influential member of the African Union Security Council, one of the key diplomatic players in the region, and has become a central player in the resolution of conflicts in Africa's Great Lakes region, as seen in the role that the country is currently playing to ease tensions between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda regarding the rebel group M23.<sup>56</sup>

Nevertheless, the services have been unable to democratize or become more accountable to other institutions over than the Presidency. Within an authoritarian political

<sup>52</sup> *Diário da República – DR*, I, Presidential Decree-Law 294/21, 231 (December 9, 2021).

<sup>53</sup> Weza Pacoal, 'Operação Caranguejo' desvenda roubo de mais de 167 mil milhões,' *Jornal de Angola*, January 30, 2022. <https://www.jornaldeangola.ao/ao/noticias/operacao-caranguejo-desvenda-roubo-de-mais-de-167-mil-milhoes/> (accessed January 21, 2023).

<sup>54</sup> Luís Bernardino, *A posição de Angola na arquitetura de paz e segurança Africana* (Lisboa: Almedina, 2013): 525–574.

<sup>55</sup> I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers of this paper for these remarks.

<sup>56</sup> Talks between the DRC and Rwanda in the Angolan capital Luanda led to a truce agreement on November 23, 2022. Under the deal, M23 was meant to lay down arms, then pull back from occupied territories; see France 24, 'DR Congo's M23 rebels pledge to retreat from strategic town of Kibumba', available at <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20221223-dr-congo-s-m23-rebels-pledge-to-retreat-from-strategic-town-of-kibumba> (accessed January 2, 2023).

system that did not effectively democratize, but recycled and camouflaged its party's hegemony and presidential control over the three branches of government, one should not expect that the intelligence services would democratize, humanize, or become more accountable to the executive, legislative or judiciary either. As in the previous single-party period, despite the existing legislation, the services remain under the direct and personal guidance of the President of the Republic and President of the MPLA.

Given this, one can easily understand the involvement of the intelligence/security services in several violations of fundamental rights and liberties, even after the end of the civil war in 2002, be it under the former President's administration or the current one. Among the cases highlighted by national and international human rights organizations, three stand out.

The first occurred on 26 November 2003, when a car washer called Arsénio Sebastião 'Cherokee' was drowned by soldiers of the Presidential Guard Unit (UGP) for being caught singing a song by rapper MCK that criticised the Dos Santos government. The song was an underground production distributed by street vendors. Despite pleas for mercy, 'Cherokee' was dragged into the sea at Mussulo quay in Luanda, in daylight, and drowned in front of a crowd gathered at the scene.<sup>57</sup>

MCK had been persecuted and in 2015 was forbidden to leave Angola to perform at a rap festival in Brazil. At the airport, immigration officials retained his passport, simply stating that they were fulfilling 'superior orders'.<sup>58</sup> In Angola, this means that the orders were issued by the security services at the Presidency, which is more than enough to prevent further questions. The expression 'superior orders' has become so common that is nowadays used by everybody who wants to refer to the security services/President (the institutions are synonymous in the minds of the general public due to their close relationship).

A second case took place in 2012. An activist and a former (disaffected) member of SINSE – Isaiás Cassule and Alves Kamulungue – were kidnapped and killed by members of the intelligence services and the national police, due to their involvement in the preparation of a rally by demobilized military and former members of the UGP, demanding due or promised benefits and pensions. A major demonstration of former military personnel, symbolically scheduled for 27 May 2012 (recalling the attempted coup in 27 May 1977), was something new to the services and raised serious concern and alarm, not only to the services but to the party and the Presidency.

The decision process and command chain collapsed, and members of the intelligence services, the national police, and MPLA operatives, ended up involved in what seems to have been a rash decision to assassinate the two people, one that was not authorised by their superiors.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup>See: Luca Bussotti and Remo Mutzenberg, "Movimentos Sociais, Estado e Sociedade Civil em África. Considerações Introdutórias," *Cadernos de Estudos Africanos* 31 (2016): 37–38; also Marissa Moorman, *Marissa, Intonations – A social history of music and nation in Luanda, Angola, from 1945 to recent times* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2008): 195; also Rafael Marques de Morais, "Rapper MCK in the Banana Republic," *Maka Angola*, December 16, 2011, [https://www.makaangola.org/en/2011/?option=com\\_content&view=archive&month=11&Itemid=246&lang=en](https://www.makaangola.org/en/2011/?option=com_content&view=archive&month=11&Itemid=246&lang=en) (accessed January 2, 2023).

<sup>58</sup>See Rafael Marques de Morais, "Rapper MCK Forbidden to Leave Angola," *Maka Angola*, November 20, 2015 <https://www.makaangola.org/2015/11/rapper-mck-forbidden-to-leave-angola/> (accessed January 2, 2023).

<sup>59</sup>Rafael Marques de Morais, "Kamulungue, Cassule, CIA, SINSE e os Mandantes dos Assassinatos," *Maka Angola*, November 17, 2014, <https://www.makaangola.org/2014/11/kamulungue-cassule-cia-sinse-e-os-mandantes-dos-assassinatos/> (accessed January 10, 2023); see also Deutsche Welle, January 28, 2014, <https://www.voaportugues.com/a/misterio-sobre-paradetro-dos-corpos-de-kamulungue-e-cassule/1839478.html> (accessed January 2, 2023); also Paula Cristina Roque, *Governing in ...* : 121–123.



Such a lack of coordination, and above all the fact that the episode ended up in court (which is quite unusual in Angola), can be explained by four major factors:

- (1) the event occurred at a time when attempts were being made to soften the aggressive image of the intelligence services, under the command of Sebastião Martins; *cf. supra*);
- (2) it was also a period when the authorities were fearful of the possible contagious effect of the so-called Arab spring on young Angolan protesters, who had been increasingly critical of the regime since the end of the civil war<sup>60</sup>;
- (3) the security services, presidency, police, and party, were all extremely nervous and overzealous, to the point of considering the possibility of a CIA and EU strategy to stimulate and support the young critics and movements<sup>61</sup>;
- (4) Sebastião Martins seems to have been ignored in the meetings that allegedly took place on 26 May under the direction of General Kopelipa (Head of the Presidency's Security Office) to deal with the demonstration; therefore, the cover-up of the assassinations was not properly arranged and supported by the services, who allowed important information to leak to investigative reporters. Several suspects' names became public knowledge, leaving the public prosecution no option but to start judicial proceedings.

The whole process was extremely detrimental to the image of the services, to the security forces in general, and to the regime at large. Consequently, in 2013, Dos Santos dismissed Sebastião Martins and appointed his deputy, General Eduardo Martins, someone allegedly more susceptible to take orders from Kopelipa.<sup>62</sup>

On 26 March 2015, the Court in Luanda passed heavy sentences on seven individuals for the assassination of Cassule and Kamulungue, including two members of SINSE, António Manuel Gamboa Vieira Lopes (Luanda chief of SINSE) and Paulo Mota. All seven went through lengthy judicial appeals: António Vieira Lopes took his case to the Constitutional Court and was absolved of all charges in October 2017.<sup>63</sup>

The third case is the so-called '15 + 2' case. In June 2015, after a few months of intelligence work, the police arrested 13 young human rights' activists and critics of the Dos Santos regime while they were in a meeting reading Gene Sharp's book, 'From

<sup>60</sup>Nuno Fragoso Vidal, "Angolan civil society activism since the 1990s: reformists, confrontationists and young revolutionaries of the "Arab spring generation", *Review of African Political Economy* 42, no. 143 (2015): 77–91.

<sup>61</sup>By then, the EU coordinator of the programme to support Non-State Actors (PAANE) had regular meetings with some of the young critics on how to support their work within the programme, while at the same time a representative of Human Rights Watch (HRW) was also in the field establishing increasingly regular contact with these youngsters as well as with the PAANE coordinator. A liaison between the HRW representative and the CIA was allegedly made by the security services. On the alleged liaison between HRW representative and the CIA see *Maka Angola*, Rafael Marques de Morais, "Kamulungue, Cassule, CIA, SINSE e os Mandantes dos Assassínatos," November 17, 2014 <https://www.makaan-gola.org/2014/11/kamulungue-cassule-cia-sinse-e-os-mandantes-dos-assassinatos/>; accessed January 10, 2023.

<sup>62</sup>See Voice Of America – VOA news. November 15, 2013. Angola Fala Só - Alexandre Neto: 'Demissão de Sebastião Martins é para proteger o Presidente'; <https://www.voaportugues.com/a/angola-fala-so-alexandre-neto-demissao-de-sebastiao-martins-e-para-proteger-o-presidente/1791036.html> accessed (February 1, 2023). See also Lusa news agency, Lisbon, November 15, 2013, "PR angolano demittiu chefe do Serviço de Inteligência e Segurança do Estado," [https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/mundo/pr-angolano-demittiu-chefe-do-servico-de-inteligencia-e-seguranca-do-estado\\_n695933](https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/mundo/pr-angolano-demittiu-chefe-do-servico-de-inteligencia-e-seguranca-do-estado_n695933) (accessed February 1, 2023).

<sup>63</sup>*Jornal de Angola*, October 29, 2017.

<https://www.jornaldeangola.ao/ao/noticias/detalhes.php?id=392090> (accessed January 10, 2023).

Dictatorship to Democracy'.<sup>64</sup> Two days later another two young women activists were accused of the same activity and detained. On 28 March 2016, the Luanda Court issued prison sentences to the group members, ranging from 2.3 years to 8.6 years, based on accusations of plotting a rebellion against the government. After mounting pressure from several international human rights organizations, on June 29 the sentences were commuted to home detention and, finally, the regime had to introduce an amnesty law to release them all on 20 July 2016.<sup>65</sup> The case highlighted the ridiculousness of prosecuting youngsters for reading a book that actually argues for non-violent revolutionary methods, but also showed how the political system effectively works – with the clear political dependency of the judiciary (having to prosecute in the first instance) and the legislative (then having to find a way to absolve the activists, following mounting international pressure).

#### **Part IV – Security/Intelligence services and the attractiveness of the new International illiberal models for the 2020s**

While still riding the oil boom, in control of the whole State apparatus and the usual variables conditioning electoral processes – the executive, legislative, judiciary, media, private and public sectors of the economy, National Electoral Commission, whole State bureaucracy and the security apparatus – the MPLA managed to win the two following plebiscites with renewed two-thirds majorities of seats, although with ever-shrinking shares of the vote (71.84% in 2012; 61.05% in 2017), and even a third election, in August 2022, although this time with 51%. In 2012, Eduardo dos Santos became President (the first and only elections he effectively won since becoming President in 1979), but then, after 38 years in power, decided to step down in 2017 and opened the way for João Lourenço to succeed as President of the Republic, although he retained the position of President of the MPLA for an extra year (proving how intertwined presidency and party were).

The role of the intelligence services in all these electoral processes was again central, repeating several of the procedures of 2008, supporting the Presidency's Security Office to hire, fund, direct and coordinate companies, budgets, and institutions before, during and after election day, controlling the counting process and the tabulation of the results.<sup>66</sup>

Meanwhile, the international and domestic context was again changing. In a country whose export revenues mainly rely on crude oil, where the State budget relies on such revenues, within a neo-patrimonial system based on distributive clientelism mired in corruption, the steady decrease in international oil-prices immediately translated into political strain.

<sup>64</sup>Gene Sharp, *From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation* (Bangkok Thailand: Committee for the Restoration of Democracy in Burma, 1994).

<sup>65</sup>On this case see Marisa Moorman's article, 2015, "Watch out Angola – repression only generates more dissent," <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/13/angola-repression-generates-more-dissent-politics-mpla>; Kayla Ruble's article, 2016, "Angola Sends a Rapper and 16 Activists to Prison for Plotting Rebellion," <https://www.vice.com/en/article/wja74m/angola-sends-a-rapper-and-16-activists-to-prison-for-plotting-rebellion>; Manuel Luamba's article, 2016, <https://www.dw.com/pt-002/lei-da-amnistia-aprovada-em-angola-contempla-os-152/a-19415207> (accessed January 2, 2023).

<sup>66</sup>Paula Cristina Roque, "Angola legislative ..."; Paula Cristina Roque, *Governing in*, ... :111–115.

The so-called Arab spring in 2010 had a major impact across the continent and criticism grew against the Angolan regime. New forms of youth activism (*cf. supra*) took to the streets and social media, targeting the President and the MPLA elites, whose lavish and ostensive wealth were in great contrast with a still impoverished population.<sup>67</sup> Mounting corruption scandals slashed the early 2000s enthusiasm about economic growth and poverty eradication. The shrinking electoral majorities since 2008 became a sign of eroding popularity and discontentment.

Meanwhile, proudly illiberal ideas were on the rise in Europe and elsewhere, the most cited example being the 2014 speech by Hungary's prime minister Victor Orbán, referring to the economic success of non-liberal democracies such as China, Russia, and Turkey.<sup>68</sup> Several African hegemonic regimes that had only apparently democratized their political systems throughout the 1990s, including Angola, quickly perceived the opportunities that this new trend opened up, and the rising international economic and political strength of some of its main proponents, including well-known African partners (and for Angola in particular) such as Russia and China.

The attraction of these new international autocratic tendencies was not only in more obvious terms of renewed funding sources, such as aid, loans and investment, from Russia and especially China. They were also attractive in terms of a political discourse that legitimised Angola's approach, to escape the decades-long Western criticism and pressures for liberalization and transparency, as well as to deal with growing domestic activism for democratization that had escalated, despite or because of the hegemonic reinforcement and controlled liberal democratization that the State had introduced.

The attraction does not seem to be the adoption of a new model of authoritarianism, replacing a neo-patrimonial model with Chinese-style totalitarianism or some form of Russian autocracy. The Russian and Chinese regimes are based upon strong hierarchical, well-organized and disciplined bureaucracies and parties, while the MPLA party and State are characterised by informality, patron-client legitimacy networks and the extreme concentration and personalization of power, that prevents the institutionalization of efficient bureaucracies and administrations. The attraction of such 'new' discourses/models is in no way ideological either, given that these illiberal experiments range from Russian imperial nationalism and Xi Jinping's 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' to Victor Orbán's Christian illiberal democracy<sup>69</sup>; all of which have little relevance within a neo-patrimonial system.

The attraction is the international legitimization of several authoritarian or oppressive procedures and mechanisms that are greatly effective for these regimes in terms of their hegemonic objectives. In general terms, this means, for instance, the limitation of individuals' and minorities' fundamental rights in the name of a higher common good or project; to protect core values as supposedly defended by the leadership and supposedly supported by most of the population; as implicitly expressed in also supposedly 'free and fair' elections or the new competitive 'electoral' authoritarianism.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Nuno Fragoso Vidal, "Angolan civil society ..."

<sup>68</sup>The Budapest Beacon, "Full text of Viktor Orbán's speech at Bálfe Tuznad (Tusnádfürdő) of 26 July 2014", <https://budapestbeacon.com/full-text-of-viktor-orbans-speech-at-balfe-tusnad-tusnadfurdo-of-26-july-2014/> (accessed February 12, 2023).

<sup>69</sup>Marc Plattner, 'Illiberal Democracy and the Struggle on the Right', in *Journal of Democracy*, 30, 1 (2019): 5–19.

<sup>70</sup>Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, "The New Competitive Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy* 31 no. 1 (2020): 51–65.

More specifically, it includes the possibility to legally and institutionally constrain or repress fundamental rights and freedoms, as in China and Russia; to legally increase State control over citizens through new technological means, constraining privacy rights; to constitutionally revoke the limits of leaders' mandates, as the case of Putin and Xi Jinping; to legally limit the independence of the judiciary and the media, as in Russia, China, Hungary and Turkey; to improve political control over the economy and ensure that the rising fortunes that emerge are politically protected, as in Russia and China. In short, it is the possibility to have international legitimization of several of the procedures and mechanisms targeting fundamental rights that the Angolan political system has been trying hard to camouflage under a façade of democratic institutions since the 1990s.

Beyond the economic relationship, it is also in these terms that one can understand Angola's increasingly politically strategic approach to China and Russia, including at the level of State security/intelligence services and the maintenance of its secretive and unaccountable activities – directly controlled by the President and escaping institutional control by the executive, legislative, or judiciary.<sup>71</sup>

When the newly elected President João Lourenço rose to power in 2017, he assumed that he would rather be seen as Angola's Deng Xiao Ping than Angola's Michael Gorbachev, with his statement evidence of the parameters he set himself.<sup>72</sup> One clear example of this was Angola's abstention, together with China and several other African countries, at the UN vote to condemn Russia's invasion on Ukraine on March 2 and 24 March 2022.

Insofar as the security/intelligence services are concerned, an increasing priority since 2010 has been cooperation with the intelligence and security services of Russia and China, without forgetting the long and always loyal Cuban partnership, as defended by a member of SINSE in 2013.<sup>73</sup>

It is clear that the foundational principles of the Angolan state security/intelligence services have persisted since their creation in 1975 to the present day – to secure the status quo and the hegemon, represented by the President, the MPLA and its regime, above and beyond anything else, including the constitutional setting.

How the new model of the Angolan intelligence services will evolve through the 2020s depends on how the new leader and the party manage to navigate the serious challenges ahead: an economic crisis; increasing popular criticism and disillusionment; a reshuffle of the presidential entourage to find new loyalists; the management of an extremely concentrated and centralized political system where every major decision depends on the Presidency and its intertwined and sometimes conflicting support services (including those related to security and intelligence); a struggle against corruption to recover funds diverted by most of the elite since

<sup>71</sup>Deborah Brautigam, Jyhjong Hwang, Jordan Link and Kevin Acker, *Chinese Loans to Africa Database* (Washington, DC: China Africa Research Initiative, Johns Hopkins University, 2020); Samuel Ramant, *Russia In Africa. Resurgent Great Power or Bellicose Pretender?* (London: C. Hurst, 2023); also (Ramant, 2023)

<sup>72</sup>Lusa/Diário de Notícias, August 29, 2017, "Angola/Eleições: João Lourenço revê-se como reformador ao estilo Deng Xiaoping".  
<https://www.dn.pt/lusa/angolaeleicoes-joao-lourenco-reve-se-como-reformador-ao-estilo-deng-xiaoping-8734634.html> (accessed February 12, 2023).

<sup>73</sup>Marcelino Bonzela Franco, "A evolução . . .", 77–8, 85.

independence (of which the President himself is part); a need to reunite the party following the loss of its two-thirds majority in the 2022 elections; and rampant corruption throughout the State system that has seemingly reached uncontrolled and self-destructive levels.

### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

### **Notes on contributor**

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