

Angola's Geopolitical Dilemma: Between the African "Heartland" and the South Atlantic

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"Peoples of Africa must be the masters of their own destinies"
Agostinho Neto

1 INTRODUÇÃO

The African continent comprises 54¹ countries, 22 of them bordering the South Atlantic Ocean. As a result of an arbitrary division imposed by European colonial rule everywhere in Africa, the strong fragmentation observed in the African Atlantic coast may have been caused by the geographical proximity of Europe and the pre-existence of naval support bases and commercial networks, that together represented competitive factors in the struggle to dominate the area.

Historically, Africa fully fit the European colonial interests in the two eras of capitalist development: during mercantilism, providing slaves for "civilizing" America; and within the context of the second industrial revolution – when slavery was completely overtaken by free labor in American countries – through the division of the continent in dozens of territories for the exclusive production of agricultural and extractive products. In this case, even after the decolonization of the 1960's and 70's, agricultural monocultures continued to be a practice in many African countries in order to serve the European market.

In the 21st century, another "Scramble for Africa" took place, focusing on the exploration of strategic natural resources and off-shore oil production. The basin of the Congo River, Southern Africa and the Gulf of Guinea are the targets of the major powers. China, for instance, has invested billions of dollars in infrastructure

¹ Fifty-five countries, depending on criterion of classification of the western Sahara: to the African Union it is a country; to the UN it is an autonomous territory, contested by Morocco and the Polisario Front.

development in the continent as a counterpart for the exploration of natural resources. Besides China, other countries with a strong presence are the United States of America, France, Brazil, India and Japan.

Angola, possessing a vast territory and placed amid the richest regions of the continent, has an important role in Africa's new geopolitics. With a territorial extension of 1,246,700 km² (the second largest territory in Atlantic Africa), the Angolan territory comprises countless mineral resources and vast fertile soil in river plains and upland areas over 1,000m. The long continental borderline (4,837 km) marks the limits of the country with its neighbors, the Republic of the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire) in the North, Zambia in the East and Namibia in the South, indicating regionally diversified diplomatic relations.

In the maritime context, its shoreline is 1,650 km long, the longest one in the African continent, ahead of Namibia (1,572 km) and Nigeria (850 km). The country's Exclusive Economic Zone, with 518,433 km², includes large stocks of fishery resources and a wealth of oil, explored in large amounts in the northern coast of the country near the mouth of the Congo River.

Having an annual average growth of 11.1% between 2001 and 2011, Angola is considered as one of the most expressive examples of the so-called "African renaissance" (PEREIRA, 2011, p.185). Their strong economic growth helped to drive their role as a regional dynamo being capable of investing even in their former metropolis, Portugal, currently suffering a strong economic crisis and dependent on Angolan investments.

These facts contrast with the troubled history experienced by the country, up to recent times. Angola was the most long-lived European colony (since 1482) and one of the last countries to conquer their independence (1975). The country still had to overcome one of the longest civil wars in Africa (1976-2002) the war between the government of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (Movimento para a Libertação de Angola – MPLA) and the leading oppositional force of the Angolan Nationalist Movement (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola – UNITA). In this conflict, foreign powers – USA, URSS, Cuba – and regional powers like Zaire and South Africa were involved.

The results of the Angolan internal policies influenced the region positively, as shown by their key role in the struggle against the apartheid in South Africa, in the independence of Zimbabwe and Namibia, besides military aid to help in the fall of the dictator of Zaire Mobutu Sese Seku. In this sense, consolidation of a time for peace and security, internally, made it possible for the country to launch a Project of international insertion through regional integration and South-South (JOVETA, 2012) cooperation.

Nowadays, Angola has to face the problem of ensuring security of their terrestrial and maritime borders, at the same time. In both, they face immense challenges. On the continental side, conflicts in Central Africa represent a potential risk factor for the stability of the national political system. On the maritime side, technological and military difficulties make the country vulnerable to threats from piracy and the advances of the major powers, avidly interested in the rich natural resources of the country.

In this text, the aim is to investigate how Angola has faced this dilemma, considering its position joining the African heartland and the South Atlantic. In order to better understand the issue, I intend to analyze the different historical contexts of the country: the shaping of Angolan borders during the colonial period; the conflict for the control of resources after their independence and the prominence of Angola to consolidate the new regionalisms during the civil post-war period.

2 PORTUGUESE COLONIAL RULE AND THE EXPANSION OF ANGOLAN BORDERS

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to sail everywhere on the African coast. Since 1419, they established commercial and naval support points aiming at the control of the "India Run". The circumnavigation of the African coast by the Portuguese (see Figure 1 below) allowed the sub-Saharan Africa to have its boundaries mapped before being effectively colonized. The absence of good natural ports, the difficulty of proceeding inland from the great Rivers (the Congo River, for instance, is navigable up to 150 km from the coast line), and the fact that commercial enslaving activities were their best business, delayed the project of effective colonization of Africa to the end of the 19th century.

Figure 1: World Discovery by Portugal



Source: Castro (1982).

To the Angolan people, at that time part of the Kingdom of Congo, the first contact with the Portuguese was in the year 1482 when a Portuguese fleet, having Diogo Cão as commander, arrived at the mouth of the Congo River. This episode marks the beginning of the long process of colonization in the history of the country, having the South Atlantic as the first platform of domination and conquest of the territory.

The process of colonization began with the evangelizing missions and, later on, with military expeditions. The main maritime support point for the Portuguese was the entrance of the Kwanza River, main waterway of communication between the coast and the inland region. Through the river, they could negotiate trade deals with the Ngola ("King" in the Bantu language), term that would later be used to name the country (SANTOS, 1996).

Up to the end of the 18th century, the Portuguese limited their presence only to specific points on the coast, like Luanda and Benguela, ports where regular transportation of slaves to Brazil

was done. Thanks to their alliances with the Congolese kingdom, establishing these strategic points on the coast represented one of the first Portuguese initiatives to effectively occupy the whole of the Angolan territory.

Therefore, the development of a kind of economy based on slavery in Brazil was an important boost to occupy the area: as the Brazilian demand for slave labor increased, penetration inland was more and more necessary in order to obtain slaves. In order to do so, a structure of intermediation was set up between the businessmen of the coast and the slave hunters, that searched for them inland in Angola. However, the Portuguese territorial expansion would only really occur in the context of the "Scramble for Africa", marked by the Berlin Conference of 1884.²

The Berlin Conference divided Africa among the European countries and established military presence in conquered places as a requisite to maintain their domination. England and France kept the largest number of areas, due to expeditions organized by geographical societies of both countries that helped to define, starting from the sources of the big Rivers, the "areas of influence" on the land that each of them would possess in the continent.³ These expeditions had explorers who became famous like Richard Francis Burton, David Livingston and Henry Stanley, of the "Royal

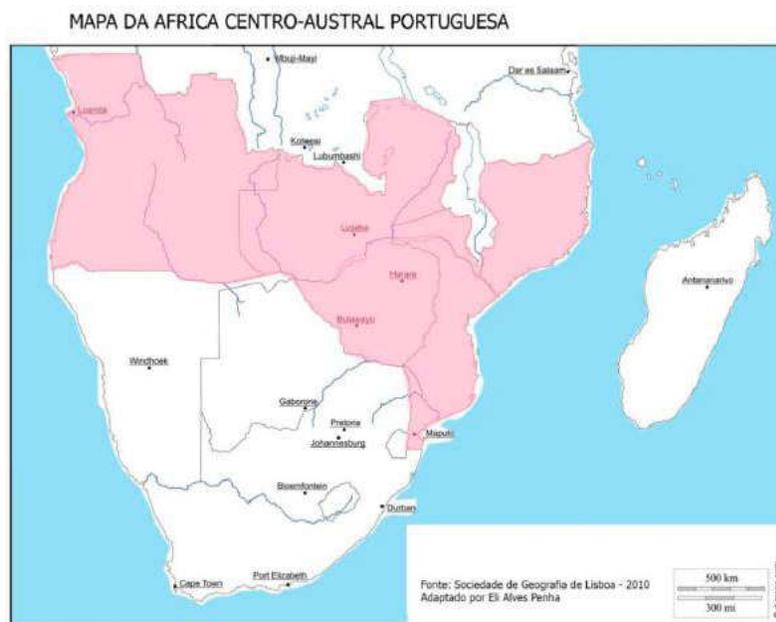
2 According to Visentini (2012), the Berlin Conference represented intensification in the run for spheres of influence in Africa, prompted by the dispute between European capitalists and African States like Ashanti Benin and N'gola that fiercely controlled the export of palm, peanuts, cotton, gold and ivory. On account of the economic crisis of the decade of 1870, it was necessary to open trade for Europeans, and necessary to break control over access inland, so far maintained by coastal states.

3 It is interesting to observe that the colonization of Africa was urgent in the context of the increasing intensification of trading flows in the North-North sense, motivated by the construction of the Suez Canal (1869) initially, and later on the Panama Canal (1914). The construction of these two canals favored the creation of the Pan-Regions that, in Haushofer's geopolitical conception, allowed an international division of labor formed by a central zone (head) and a periphery producing raw materials (body). In this respect, industrial development in the logical thinking of competitive capitalists implied opening direct trade to African products and European manufactured goods, but under territorial control. Thus, under the dogmas of "liberalism", the African lands were transformed in spaces to produce monocultures in order to serve the industrialized economies of the European metropolises.

Geographical Society” from London, and their work to identify the sources of the Nile, the Congo, and the Zambeze Rivers.

Portugal, to keep up with the “Scramble for Africa”, created the Society of Geography of Lisbon (Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa) in 1875 to give support to the exploratory expeditions. Thus, between 1877 and 1885, the Portuguese geographers Hermenegildo Capelo, Serpa Pinto and Roberto Ivens crossed Africa from Luanda to Tete (Mozambique’s central region), mapping the territory and exploring the Cuango, the Congo and the Zambeze Rivers. The result of the expedition was the Central and Southern African Charter, known as the “Rose-colored Map”, that claimed for Portugal a contiguous strip of land from the South Atlantic up to the Indian Ocean, that is, joining Angola to Mozambique (NOWELL, 1982). Figure 2 below represents the Central and Southern African Charter, as proposed by the Portuguese at the conference.

Figura 2: Map of the Portuguese central and Southern Africa



Source: Penha (2015).

In a doctorate thesis entitled *A Seção da Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa no Brasil e o Sonho de um Novo Império Africano*, Cristina Mary tells that the expeditions organized by the Society of Geography of Lisbon showed the interest that the Portuguese had to expand their territorial domination, beyond the strip of land on the coast that until that time was characteristic of their presence in the African continent. They intended to make their Portuguese possessions in the African continent a "new Brazil". They clearly intended to occupy and settle these areas, particularly from Angola to Mozambique, and their ambition was to interconnect the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans. (MARY, 2010).

This project of interoceanic connection would be blocked by England, through what was known as the diplomatic "British Ultimatum" (1890). In this case, England not only rejected the Portuguese plans, but it also demanded the immediate withdrawal of their military forces of the territories of the former Rhodesia, current Zambia and Zimbabwe.

At that time, the world lived under the aegis of the *pax britanica* of maritime and commercial hegemony. In Africa, England aimed at the construction of a railroad to connect the city of Cairo to the Cape of Good Hope. Conceived by Cecil Rhodes, the railway would form a "red line" to link the English possessions from north to south, facilitating colonization and control of trade networks all over the continent. Another objective they had was the control of all the interoceanic maritime passages. Besides the sea corridor between the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans, favored by the control of the Cape Route, England started to use the Suez Canal (from 1882 on)⁴ as a decisive factor to strengthen the monopoly of their maritime commerce between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. These would be the objective reasons to explain the fierce English opposition to the Portuguese plans of creating a continental corridor to link the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans (RAMOS, 2009).

⁴ The Suez Canal, built by France in 1869 and handed over to the British in 1882.

The outcome of this diplomatic clash was the recognition by the Portuguese of the English rule on the territories of Rhodesia (currently Zambia and Zimbabwe) in a common agreement between the parts. From 1891 on, the Portuguese began the process of demarcation of Angolan borders, largely marked by hydrographic basins, having its last mark laid down in 1926 in a common agreement with the government of the Union of South Africa, respecting the border line between the province and the territory of southwestern Africa (currently Namibia), at the time of the South African Mandate (SOARES, 2014).

3 INDEPENDENCE AND CONFLICT OVER CONTROL OF TERRITORIAL RESOURCES

After its independence in 1975, Angola inherits from the Portuguese a territory of 1,246,700 km², formed by the basins of the Kwanza, Kunene, Congo, Cubango/Okavango and Zambezi rivers, the latter ones representing potential physiographic factors of regional integration.

The Kwanza River may be called the “river of national integration”. It starts in the Bié province on the Angolan Plateau and ends at its delta on the Atlantic, approximately 50 km south of Luanda. Being 960 km long, the Kwanza is navigable for 258 km from its mouth to the inland region. There, the Cambambe and the Capanda dams were built and they produce large part of the electric power consumed in Luanda. The dams also provide water for irrigation of sugar cane plantations and other cultures in the Kwanza Valley (ANGOLAN EMBASSY, 2014).

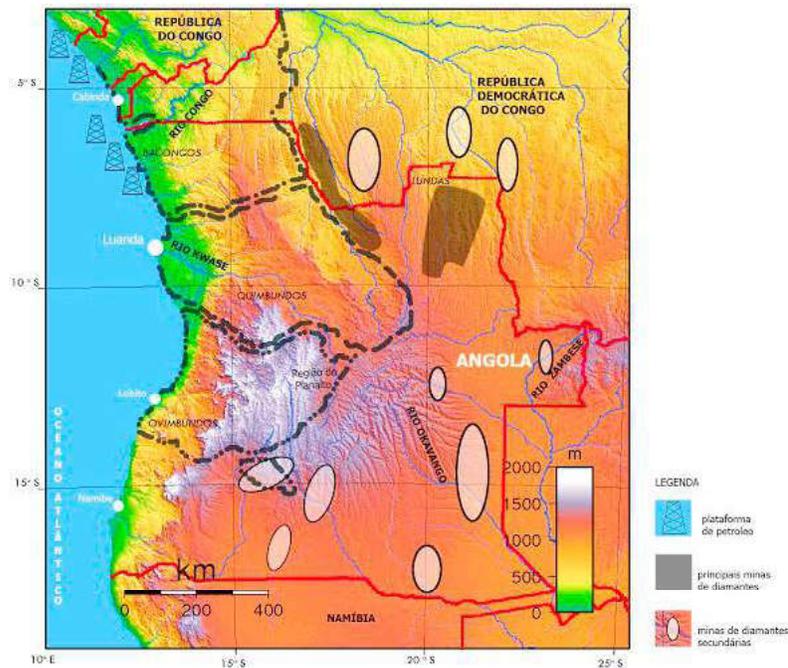
The river valley offers the only easy access inland in a region known as “The Plateau”, considered the granary of the country, on account of its diversity and large agricultural productivity. With an average height of 1,000-1,700 meters above sea level, it has the Moco Hill in the Huambo Province as its highest peak, 2,620 meters high.

The Kwanza Valley and the Central Plateau are the home of the two predominant ethnic groups in Angola: the Kimbundu (25%)

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and the Ovimbundu (37%) respectively.⁵ The third important group is the Bacongó (13%), who lives in the northern coast of the country and in the Cabinda enclave, to the north of the mouth of the Congo River. The ethnic groups of the country became pivotal to the movements of national liberation, formed respectively by UNITA, the MPLA, and the National Liberation Front of Angola (Frente Nacional pela Libertação de Angola – FNLA). Figure 3 below shows the distribution of these ethnic groups and natural riches in the Angolan territory.

Figure 3: Spatial distribution of ethnic groups and natural wealth of Angola



Source: Lacoste (1995) and 18th in a series... (2012). Organized by the author.

⁵ According to the Angolan National Statistical Office (Instituto de Estatística de Angola – INE), Angola had in 2013, 19,183,590 million people. Large part of its population lives on coastal regions, above all in Luanda, where it is estimated that eight million people live, almost half of the country's population. (info-angola.ao).

In the year of the country's independence (1975), the MPLA seized control of the Angolan State and defined, as an initial strategic aim, the avoidance of a common border for Bacongós and Ovimbundus to share because this would facilitate an alliance between the FNLA and UNITA against the MPLA government. From the MPLA's perspective, if such an alliance would occur the Bacongós would assume control of the oil deposits found in the region and the Ovimbundus would have the food produced in their rich agricultural soil. The alliance of the two groups, combining economic power and size of population, would be a decisive factor to seize the State and conquer victory (18TH IN A SERIES..., 2012).

However, the MPLA government counted on a strong asset: it dominated the capital Luanda, that had been the seat of the colonial government and represented a powerful center of administrative and military command. Besides, it counted on the support of Cuban troops, highly skilled to act in war conflicts in Africa and firmly engaged in the Angolan revolutionary process. The result was the first major victory of the MPLA government that forced the FNLA to retreat to its support base in Zaire (LACOSTE, 1995).

After establishing control over the land of the Bacongós, the MPLA finally reached control over the Angolan offshore oil production,⁶ helping the government achieve valuable resources to continue fighting with another rival group, much stronger than the FNLA: UNITA, whose leader was Jonas Savimbi. In search of support from the Lunda people, who lived in the northeast of Angola, close to the border of Zaire, UNITA took over control of the alluvial diamond deposits found in the Lunda provinces.

Alluvial diamonds have an advantage, they can be extracted manually by low-skilled workers and, besides, they have a high market value, and this is ideal for smuggling and exchanging them for weapons and ammunition. On the other hand, alluvial

⁶ In Angola, oil became a major lever for the development of the country, bringing economic and technological gains. However, these gains have not reached society as a whole: 36% live under the poverty line and unemployment reaches 26% of the population. In order to revert the situation, the Angolan government has been following the principle of progressive reduction of the dependency of economy in relation to oil and diamonds, through applying what exceeds in qualifying human capital and developing economic sectors in the intensive use of workforce (JOVETA, 2012).

diamonds are characterized by their dispersion of deposits and the low amount found in these deposits. As the war went on, the UNITA guerrilla fighters had to disperse themselves a lot in order to search for them, becoming more vulnerable to the MPLA forces increasingly better equipped and hawkish. At the beginning of the 2000 decade, the MPLA forces managed to take control of the Lunda lands, dispersing and destroying the UNITA forces (18TH IN A SERIES..., 2012).

Even though he had lost their bases at the Lunda provinces and the diamonds that financed the guerrilla, Jonas Savimbi had rather go on fighting and was only stopped by his death in 2002. From then on, UNITA began to negotiate peace with the MPLA and the war was finally over.

For the MPLA, victory over UNITA meant final control over the country's diamonds, fostering a new revenue stream for MPLA and they were the only ones – with greater funds and access to foreign markets – who would be able to deal with it. In the African concert, Angola is the third diamond producer, with eight million carats each year, behind Botswana and the Democratic Republic of Congo, quantitatively, and Botswana and South Africa, in terms of quality. The diamond resources were important factors in the engagement of Zaire and South Africa in the Angolan conflict. Zaire was a major producer of diamonds also and the South-African company De Beers, that became famous in the 80's with their advertising campaign "diamonds are forever", reached control of 90% of the high quality diamond trade in the world.

4 THE PIVOTAL POSITION OF ANGOLA IN CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

"Angola is and will always be the firm trench of revolution in Africa; In Rhodesia, in South Africa and in Namibia lies the continuity of our struggle".

The above statement, from president Agostinho Neto (1975-1979) said after the country's independence, summarized the Angolan government intention to confront in military

terms countries that would be hostile to their political regime (VAN-DUNEN, 2010).

Located between Southern and Central Africa, scene of the main conflicts engendered by the “Cold War”, Angola faced fierce opposition from its neighbors, that considered its socialist government a serious threat to regional “stability”. Countries like Zaire and South Africa, overtly supported the groups opposed to the MPLA, particularly Jonas Savimbi’s UNITA.

Zaire, under the dictatorship of Mobuto Sese Seku (1965-1997), received strong financial and military support from the USA, France and Belgium. Claiming that he was fighting pro-Soviet regimes, Mobuto tried to intervene in Angolan politics, whether supporting Portuguese colonial rule in wars of independence, or supporting groups opposed to the Marxist government of the MPLA. This support consisted in providing armaments and helping assemble commercial networks for diamonds, smuggled along 2,511 km of the Angolan northern border. Covered by forested savannas, without military protection, this border region served as an ideal shelter for UNITA’s rearguard attacks (FRANCISCO, 2013).

South Africa, in turn, was the most hostile country against the MPLA government. From military bases stationed in the South African territory of Southwestern Africa (current Namibia), in Angola’s southern border, South Africa trained the UNITA forces and launched attacks on Angolan territory, causing serious damages to the country’s economic structures. Allegation for the attacks was that Angola sheltered forces that were hostile to the South African government, like the members of the South West Africa People’s Organization (SWAPO) and those of the African National Congress (ANC), including the present-day South African President Jacob Zuma, for his struggle against the apartheid.

Another allegation, the same one used by Zaire, was the need to stop communist advances in the region, but what was peculiar was the role of South Africa as guardian of the western Christian values in the region. Through a discourse of that kind, South Africa gained support of American leaders, especially Donald Trump, who led a massive anti-communist crusade in Africa during the 80’s (PENHA, 1998).

However, in Zaire as well as in South Africa, the Angolan forces with military cooperation of other countries, acted decisively to win their victory and beat their respective regimes. In the first case, between 1996 and 1997 the first Congo war began. President Mobuto, without Western support due to a new world context with the end of the communist threat, lost power and sought asylum in Morocco. The Angolan troops, together with those of Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda, invaded the country to support the new government of Laurent Kabila (1997-2001). This was only the beginning of a set of military operations that the Angolans started to carry out in Central Africa, claiming to ensure greater regional stability¹⁶ (CASTELLANO DA SILVA, 2011).

In the case of South Africa, the battle of Cuito Cuanavale was decisive to defeat the racist regime in the country. In this battle, that happened between 15/11/1987 and 23/03/1988, the South African armed forces and armed groups from UNITA confronted the Cuban army and the Angolan forces of the MPLA. The result of the agreements, reached after the Angolan victory, was the immediate withdrawal of the South African and Cuban troops from Angola. The next step was the independence of Namibia, that occurred on March 21, 1990.

Regarding this battle, the then President Nelson Mandela said: "Cuito Cuanavale was the turning point in the struggle for liberation of our continent and my people from the scourge of apartheid" (Mills, 2006). *Madiba's* words reminded Fidel Castro's speech at the Non-Aligned Summit in Harare, in 1986. At the time, the Cuban leader assured that the Cuban troops would stay in Angola until the end of the *Apartheid* (JOVETA, 2012). The promise was fulfilled, and later on recognition was achieved: at Nelson Mandela's memorial service, in Pretoria, Barack Obama, the first Afro-American president of the USA, greeted the Cuban leader Raul Castro.

Bilateral relations between Angola and South Africa during Mandela's presidential period (1994 - 1999) were quite fruitful, but during Thabo Mbeki's government (1999 - 2008) there were differences, particularly in relation to what the Southern African Development Community (SADC) should do about the conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Angola, Namibia and

Zimbabwe favored military intervention with the approval of the African Union and the UN, but South Africa did not agree.

Angola has given special attention to regional security as a fundamental means to secure internal order, and this may explain its interventionist role in Central Africa. One example was the participation of Angolan special forces in the Republic of Congo to help overthrow ex-president Pascal Lissouba and support the present-day president Denis Sassou Nguesso's inauguration. Lissouba supported UNITA during the 90's, and fear persists that DRC and Republic of Congo may eventually support the Bacongo separatists of the Angolan enclave of Cabinda. In this case, the presence of Angolan security forces in Cabinda is not only to control the Bacongo separatists, but to intimidate their neighbors as well (Stratford, 2012).

Generally speaking, there is consensus among the countries of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), an organization Angola belongs to since 1999, of the need to join forces to reduce and solve the conflicts in Central Africa. Reflecting upon it, these countries tried to develop integrative security sectors in their institution like the Peace and Security Council (PSC), the Defense and Security Division (DSD), the Central African Multinational Force (FOMAC), and the Rapid Response Mechanism of Central Africa (REACH) (JOVETA, 2012).

In Southern Africa, good diplomatic relations with Jacob Zuma's government have allowed both countries to work together in order to keep the southern region as a politically stable zone and foster further integration in the context of the SADC. However, there is fear of seeing Angola develop strong regional influence to rival South Africa.

As far as capital assets are concerned, South Africa is the richest country in the continent. It also possesses large deposits of gold and diamonds, a great industrial complex and large populations that make this country unrivalled in the region. Besides, South Africa has expanded its powerful influence around great part of Central and Southern Africa, through financing road and railroad projects to link the countries of the region to African ports (PENHA, 1998).

Angola is the only SADC country to build its railroad system separately from South Africa. Nowadays, thanks to resources derived from oil and diamonds, it has tried to obtain greater influence on the hinterland. In cooperation with China, it develops investment projects of billions of dollars in roads and ports, exerting a powerful appeal on Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In addition, Angola has a large amount of oil, a natural resource that South Africa and other countries in the region do not have.

Currently, with 1,9 million barrels a day, the country is one of the largest producers in Africa, along with Nigeria and Sudan. The location of the deposits, added to the capacity of its production, placed the country in the regional system of the Gulf of Guinea, bringing to it deep geopolitical deployments.

5 OIL AND ANGOLA'S PROJECTION IN THE GULF OF GUINEA

Geographically, the Gulf of Guinea is defined as an indentation of the western coast of Africa with ill-defined contour, but characterized by similar climate, landscape and culture. From a geopolitical viewpoint, it has been conceived as a region of rich oil resources extending from Nigeria to Angola.

The Angolan diplomat Eduardo Beny (2007), reported that a new geopolitics about oil is being conceived, with gradual transfer from the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Guinea as the new center of oil production and all of the potential conflicts it entails. Geographic proximity of other consumer centers and the fact of having the oil deposits relatively far from the coast may be facilitating factors for control by the major world powers. Geostrategically, Ascension Island would function as a platform tailored to project its power in a similar way to the Island of Diego Garcia on the Indian Ocean.

The USA, aware of the importance of the region for their energy security, developed a Project called *Gulf of Guinea Guard*, anticipating that African oil supply to the United States would increase, from the current 15% to a level between 25% and 35%, until 2020. The main objectives of this Project are: improve physical security of the ports in the region; foster collective security and maritime cooperation; establish a communication network and control of

the movement of ships (located in the São Tome and Príncipe Islands); and exert control more directly in Angola and Nigeria, two great oil producers of major regional influence (BENY, 2007).

In spite of their interest in Angola, the USA never hid their disapproval of the MPLA government. When the Angolan President appealed to the international community to help rebuild the country, right after the end of the civil war, the USA refused claiming that the government had not been transparent on the legal reporting about production and sale of oil and diamonds. On the other hand, China and Brazil quickly answered their request to invest in the reconstruction of the country. As a first step, Brazil provided help to finish the works in the hydroelectric plant of Capanda that had been stopped due to the war in the country (JOVETA, 2012).

Angola is China's largest trading partner in Africa since 2008, with trade making an estimated 25 billion dollars, large part based on oil trade (FERNANDES, 2011). In this sense, oil became a key element in bilateral trade: credits for infrastructure revert to oil; trade is dominated by oil imports; and China's considerable investments in the country are directed to the oil industry (FERNANDES, 2011).

The importance of oil to the development of the Angolan society and national interest in exploring and controlling the deposits of oil located in its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), theoretically implies that the country, increasingly, tends to embody the maritime dimension in State policies, whether building the proper naval means or in the accomplishment of maritime security policies.

However, the Angolan naval establishment – consisting of 1,000 marines, 11 coastal boats and four patrol vessels – does not look sufficient to ensure effective security of its maritime interests. This may explain the fact that the country searches Nigeria's partnership, as Nigeria faces the same difficulties, in order to foster regional cooperation in maritime security. The Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) was one of the results of this partnership. Suggested by Nigeria in 1999, the GGC was only formalized in 2007, having as its main objectives the prevention and resolution of conflicts, definition of strategies of maritime security and management of oil resources.

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The initiative to create the GGC meant, first of all, awareness of the importance of the Gulf of Guinea as world producer of oil implying, as a consequence, a new regional and continental political-strategic realignment. Figure 4 below shows the countries that are members of the GGC: Angola, Cameroon, Gabon, Republic of Equatorial Guinea, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Republic of the Congo and São Tomé e Príncipe, GGC countries. Bringing together countries of central and western Africa, the GGC en bloc, produces more than five million barrels of oil per day (ROYAL..., 2012).

Figure 4: Gulf of Guinea Commission Signatory Countries.



Source: Penha (2015).

Angola assumed the presidency of GGC in 2008, committed to make the region a geopolitical space of strategic importance to the Central and Continental Africa's scenario. The Angolan position was totally in line with the African Union precept that stated the regional groupings constituted essential links for an integrated and

supportive Africa. But it also results of the international acknowledgement of the country's ability in leading regional cooperative processes.

Angola's prominence stems from three aspects. The first one has to do with the Nigerian difficulty in assuming the leadership of the commission within a context of crisis in international credibility, experienced by the "African giant". The second aspect results from the country's diplomatic activism well represented by President José Eduardo dos Santos, well accepted in the African political scene and recognized by his actions in favor of peace and stability in the region.

The third aspect conveys business reasons. The state-owned oil company "Sonangol" has served as an instrument for a successful process of "economic diplomacy", through consultancies in Lusophone countries and participation in the oil industry of other African countries. Internally, the company has created private economic groups and invested part of its profits in banks, insurance, air and sea transportation, telecommunications, etc. (JOVETA, 2012).

Therefore, Angola shows a profile of major stability and the best democratic credentials in the region. That is why pressure from western countries demanding greater responsibility in terms of security from Angola in the Gulf of Guinea has also increased, including the threat of withdrawing from the country investments of oil companies (ROYAL..., 2012).

To the western countries, the major threat to security regarding oil transportation and supply is piracy. The Gulf of Guinea has been considered one of the most dangerous regions of Africa because of maritime piracy and armed robbery against the ships (GUEDES, 2013). It is estimated that between 2003 and 2011, 30% of the attacks in African waters happened in the Gulf of Guinea, mainly in Nigeria. The problem is getting to know to what extent the fight against piracy represents an entry to justify the intervention of the world powers in the region.

"Whoever has the Gulf of Guinea has in hands Africa". The old colonial saying is remembered here to define the importance that the Gulf of Guinea has aroused among western countries. Besides

oil and gas; the countries in this region are also rich in diamonds, gold, uranium, manganese, nickel, aluminium, cobalt and copper. Other important riches are the oil reserves of the pre-salt layer, the seabed minerals and the fishery resources in danger of depletion in other regions of the world. In terms of biodiversity the Congo basin is, after the Amazon basin, the second largest zone of humid forests, therefore equivalent to our Green Amazon.

That way, the strategic importance of the Gulf of Guinea can be seen in the larger context of the South Atlantic encompassing the South American coast that, together, have taken position as a new "border of resources" to the industrialized world. This border focuses on the Gulf of Guinea oil reserves and the Brazilian continental platform, estimated in 60 to 70 billion barrels on each side (PENHA, 2011b).

Angolan oil was the main factor of approximation with Brazil in the context of its independence in 1975. As the first country to recognize the MPLA Marxist government, Brazil has also become one of the major trade partners of Angola with investments around US\$ 4 billion, above all in the area of large-size engineering and services.

Brazilian companies working in the country – Petrobras, Vale, the building companies Andrade Gutierrez, Camargo Correa, and Queiroz Galvão, are the ones that hire more Angolan workers allowing the development of local skills and, consequently, of better quality of services and products (PENHA, 2011a).

Petrobras, due to its savoir-faire in the technology of oil exploration in deep waters, has worked in mapping Angola's pre-salt layer, as required by the Defense Minister Van-Dunen in 2010. The pre-salt layer is a layer of sedimentary rocks under the layer of salt at sea, formed in special paleogeographic conditions in the South Atlantic, with great potential to stock hydrocarbons. On the Angolan coast, the pre-salt layer is located between two and five thousand meters below sea level and it has an area similar to the Brazilian one, 700 kilometers long (CASTRO, 2010).

The mapping of the continental platform offers the possibility of proving the theory that says the Angolan and the Brazilian coasts are a kind of mirror of one another, according to Domingos Cunha who is responsible for Sonangol in Luanda. "The results we have

so far demonstrate the quality of oil is similar in Angola and in Brazil”, he said in a press interview. According to him, it is estimated that oil production in Angola may double in the following 15 years, considering that the Angolan pre-salt may have the same amount that is expected in Brazil – about 4 million barrels a day – on each side (ANGOLA APOSTA..., 2013).

According to Vice-Admiral Antonio Valentim (2007) of the Angolan Navy, in this way the offshore oil activities would increase the value of the South Atlantic from a geostrategic point of view. The presence of islands spread from Cape Verde, São Tome and Principe to the mid-ocean and Falkland, under British administration, reinforces the basin’s geostrategic importance and the ease of military control by maritime powers.

Therefore, it is in the geographical scope of the South Atlantic that Angola’s desire of ensuring a more extensive space of security and development can come true, thanks to its initiatives of creating and revitalizing the Peace and Cooperation Zone in partnership with Brazil.

6 THE ZOPACAS AND THE SOUTH ATLANTIC BASIN

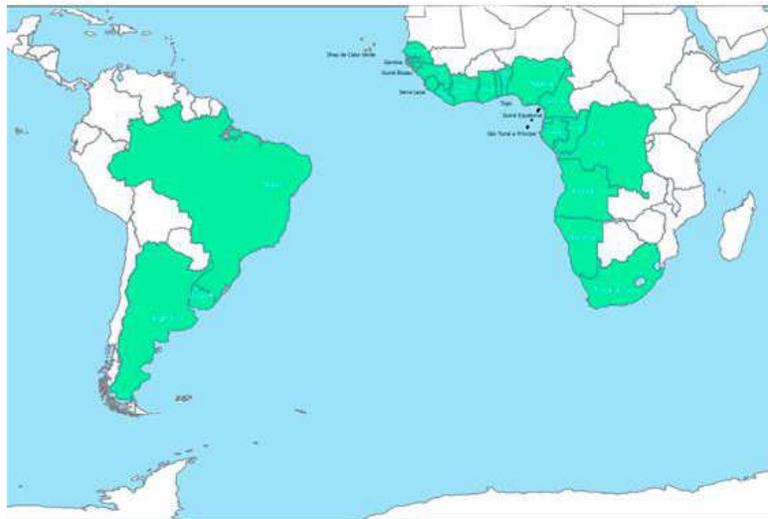
The initiative to create the ZOPACAS became real as a Resolution by the General Assembly of the United Nations: n° 41/11 of 27 October 1986. The main objective of this resolution was to promote peace and cooperation among the peoples of the south Atlantic region, or peace as a major objective and cooperation as an instrument or a means to achieve this final goal. Appearing in the context of the “cold war” to oppose the project of militarization suggested by South Africa, Argentina and the United States, the ZOPACAS suffered strong undermining since the nineties in the context of economic globalization.

However, in the nineties, Angola made a significant contribution to revitalize the entity when it put forward the “Luanda’s initiative”, a set of governmental events that would result in the 7th Ministerial Meeting that occurred in the Angolan capital on June 18 and 19, 2007. The document presented at the end of the Meeting, besides revitalizing the preceding objectives, pleaded the

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reform of the United Nations Security Council in order to make it more representative of the countries in development and a global commercial regime more equitable and fair. In this respect, the 24 countries recognize the trading potential within the Zopacas and showed their disposition to strive for the increase of investment flows between the two margins of the South Atlantic. They have also stressed "inalienable rights" in the reservation of resources for research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes (PENHA, 2011b). The map below highlights the 24 signatory countries of the Zone of Peace and Cooperation of the South Atlantic.

Figure 5: Signatory Countries of the Zone of Peace and Cooperation of the South Atlantic



Source: Penha (2015).

The nuclear issue revealed a change in the way of thinking related to nuclear energy, up to that moment seen with a lot of mistrust, because it could mask plausible intentions of development for military purposes. Mistrust generated by the development of Brazilian nuclear energy until recent times is an example of such an attitude, particularly on the part of the USA, in their

crusade to prevent the development of Iran's nuclear program. In the context of the South Atlantic, mistrust is mitigated considering the fact that the countries of this region are signatory of the treaties of Tlatelolco (in the case of South America) and Pelindaba (in the case of Africa).

Four months after the meeting in Luanda, the USA created the "United States Africa Command" or AFRICOM. In the documents about the new command there are five major interests related to the purpose of the American strategy for Africa identified: oil and global trading, maritime security, armed conflicts, terrorism, and diseases. Among the objectives: fight terrorism and piracy through naval exercises in cooperation with the Navies of riparian countries. The USA did not find the headquarters for this command yet because of the African countries' reluctance in sheltering them, certainly due to mistrust in relation to their true objectives (PENHA, 2011b).

On the south American side, a month after the announcement of the establishment of the South American Defense Council, integrated to the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) in May 2008, the USA announced the relaunching of the 4th fleet that had been out of activity since 1950. South American countries believe that behind this action there is an interest from the USA in objecting to the leftist regimes in the region and limit the expansion of the Brazilian maritime border of 350 miles where the huge oil reserves of the continental platform are found. In the two instances, the interest of the major power in inhibiting any initiative of establishment of power blocs in the South Atlantic is obvious. (PENHA, 2011b).

In the 7th ZOPACAS Meeting, held in Montevideo, on January 16, 2013, greater attention was paid to the topics concerning defense and security and this was made evident by the mere presence of the defense ministers of the member countries. It was the first time that they were called to a meeting of this organization since it was created in 1986. During the meeting, representatives of African nations recalled some of the serious problems that they have been facing nowadays like piracy, drug trafficking and

international terrorism, opening the way to external intervention in the continent.

The Brazilian Defense Minister Celso Amorim, in his speech, pointed out the importance of extending cooperation in terms of defense among participating countries. He also stressed that the relevance of bilateral and multilateral initiatives in the area of defense, within the context of Zopacas, does not restrain direct action to the crimes that devastate the South Atlantic. "These same illegal activities may attract, in a negative way for our area, the presence of external intervention", as he warned. "If we do not take care of peace and security in the South Atlantic, others will do. And not in the way we want: with the view of countries in development that disavow any colonial or neo-colonial attitude" (ZOPACAS..., 2013).

In order to survive, Zopacas will largely depend on the ability of riparian countries to create a coalition in the South Atlantic leading to a common strategic dimension. Military presence put into practice by the USA, like AFRICOM and the 4th Fleet, though able to guarantee their own and European energetic security, contribute to shatter the lines of strategic action of South Atlantic countries. In this way, the development of a uniform strategic thought will be actually a complex task, even more considering the obsolescence of the navies of the countries in the region (PENHA, 2011b).

In spite of the difficulties, the revitalized ZOPACAS, may constitute a privileged forum for actions and reflections, not only in relation to the efforts of regional integration, but as a means of ensuring defense and security for the south atlantic countries. Minister Celso Amorim's proposal for the organization of actions to strengthen cooperation in defense matters is the first step in a long way to transform the South Atlantic in a security basin. A second step is to make ZOPACAS become the central articulation forum among every regional organization of the whole South Atlantic, involving the MERCOSUL, CEEAC, CDAA-SADC and CEDEAO. The result would be the creation of an economic basin in the South Atlantic, having Angola and Brazil as key players in this new bloc of power in a post-globalized world.

7 CONCLUSION

Angola stands out as an amazing example of a South African country that was exploited during five centuries of colonial rule, suffered one of the longest and bloodiest civil wars in Africa⁷ and today is one of the most vibrant economies of the continent, a lot due to the revenue of oil exploration²⁷.

The strategic partnerships established by the MPLA government since the seventies are also remarkable aspects that help explain the assertive ways that resulted in territorial cohesion and establishment of peace as a permanent national objective. In this direction, it is possible to list the many alliances of the country according to its objectives: with Cuba to ensure the victory of the revolutionary process and assert itself geopolitically in the regional context; with Nigeria to project itself in the Gulf of Guinea's oil region, through the GGC; with China to foster economic development and the reconstruction of its infrastructure; and, with Brazil, to start economic and technical partnerships, besides consolidating the creation of a zone of peace and cooperation, origin of a future economic basin.

"Angola, at the dawn of the 21st century, longs to be a model country in Africa and a regional power", said president José Eduardo dos Santos, in a speech to the country's diplomatic corps (FRANCISCO, 2013). According to this perspective, asserting itself nationally, Angola's mission would be to radiate the benefits of this union to the entire region.

In his book, "Angola – Potência Regional em Emergência", published in 2011, the Luso-Angolan researcher, Eugênio da Costa Almeida, pursues an analysis of this possibility in context, within the integration processes led by the African Union. The key issue proposed by the author is to find out if there are possibilities of simultaneous coexistence of regional integrative processes and potentiation of Supervising-States. According to him, in order to make the interests of the regional powers compatible within the

⁷ The "Congo War", as it is known, has already killed six million people since its start, in 1994 and it destroyed the country's infrastructure. See: <<http://www.defesaaereanaval.com.br/?p=30848>>. Access on: 23 dez. 2016.

African Union framework, and in this case, it will be possible "as long as it continues to be part of the interest of the major global powers, serving simultaneously to prevent the existence or the supremacy of a single potential actor in Africa" (ALMEIDA, 2011).

The Sub-Saharan African Supervising-States would be: South Africa – 51 million people and GDP of US\$ 384 billion; Nigeria – 170 million people and GDP of US\$ 509 billion. The DRC – with 65 million people and only US\$ 18 billion GDP, goes through economic collapse because of the war and, therefore, is still uncertain. Even though possessing 2,345,409 km² (the largest territorial area in Sub-Saharan Africa), rich in energy potential and minerals that represent promising factors for the country's development expected for the near future.

In quantitative and comparative terms, Angola – with 20 million people and GDP representing US\$ 114 billion, advances as Central Africa's regional power, occupying momentarily the vacancy left by the DRC. In this perspective, its condition as a continental power is due to the importance of its political-diplomatic influence on the three geopolitical African blocs, that is, Southern Africa, Central Africa and the Gulf of Guinea. On account of having common bonds, Angola would be able to foster greater articulation among the three regions.

An example would be the geopolitical resizing of the regional logistics. In this direction, the recent rehabilitation of the "Benguela Railway" by the Angolan government has been viewed, within the scope of SADC, as an important step to expedite the regional integration process. Having regular connection with the railway systems of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Zambia, it is possible, starting from the capital Lusaka, to arrive in the city of Beira (Mozambique) and Dar Es-Salaam (Tanzania), in the Indian Ocean (CAMINHO-DE-FERRO..., 2012). The creation of this land route connecting the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans, may represent a new map of Central-Southern Africa (the Rose-colored map), reversing the original plan: now the countries covered by the transportation network would be the ones to benefit from the results of the integration.

Another important result of this new map would be the creation of a new geopolitical axis right in the African heartland to the detriment of the maritime passages (Suez Canal and Cape of Good Hope). In this case, also reversing the harmful effects of fencing, isolation and colonization of the continent, that the construction of the Suez Canal helped to cause.

Starting from this geopolitical resizing, it would be possible to foresee the merger of the economic communities of Central and Southern Africa in one single organization, due to the fact that not only Angola but the DRC also are part of the two regional associations, respectively the SADC and the ECCAS. This proposal, marked by the premises of the African Union in its search for the continental integration aimed by them, would benefit every country, through the unification of flows and of mechanisms of regional security, that would act in the prevention and the resolution of conflicts. This would allow, for instance, avoiding DRC's isolation through its insertion in the regional productive system.

Angola has a mission – to accomplish its objective of national interest according to the desired African unity striving for peace, democracy and development (ALMEIDA, 2011). In this respect, Angola's national interest is also manifested in the waters of the South Atlantic, through Angola's prominence in the creation and development of the GGC and ZOPACAS. Once more, Angola knew how to assert its pivotal position, using its strategic way of maximizing synergies to fulfill multilateral interests and establish zones of influence, on the continent and at sea.