The logistics of sanctions busting: the airborne component

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Over the last decade, a unique package of sanctions has been imposed as a tool to force *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (UNITA) to the negotiating table. But these sanctions have been poorly implemented and have, ironically, had quite the opposite effect. There have been less opportunities to influence the rebels' position and, even more seriously, an additional incentive has been created for those parties profiting from prolonging the war.

UNITA has always depended on the support of a great number of external sources and sponsors. At times the movement has been nothing more than an army of rebel soldiers fighting the battles of distant powers that supplied it with the strategy, the mercenaries, the weapons and the money to do so. These supply operations have always remained shadowy and far from transparent. The international arms embargo imposed in 1993 and the strengthening of sanctions in subsequent years, has not substantively changed the covert *modus operandi* of UNITA's suppliers, even though the role of the former outside powers was largely taken over by private brokers and supply networks. The constant logistical challenge for the old and new suppliers to UNITA has always been how to transport their commodities into UNITA-held territory without being seen or caught.

On the receiving end of the line, the constraints of the terrain and the nature of large-scale guerrilla warfare have created a dependency on airborne support for practically every aspect of the war effort. Weapons, ammunition, spare parts, fuel, food, beverages, medical supplies, mining equipment or foreign advisors and mercenaries have constantly had to be flown in over great distances. UNITA is also dependent on aviation for rapid domestic troop movements and the overseas travel of its officials. The rebel movement has its own logistical infrastructure, including several large airstrips, control towers and sophisticated communication network to guide incoming planes. Jonas Savimbi is reported to be the owner or shareholder of some airline companies.

Access to port facilities, airports or critical roads and cities along the borders or at the coast, often dictated the course of the war in Angola. Transport and the particular role of aircraft in the networks connecting UNITA territory to the outside world of sponsors and suppliers, needs special attention in order to fully understand UNITA's procurement strategy and its ability to survive as a warring party. Consequently, a better understanding of the logistics of sanctions busting

and the difficulties involved in monitoring would enable sanctions regimes to be more efficiently implemented.

Sanctions were first imposed on UNITA in 1993 after Jonas Savimbi refused to recognise the results of the 1992 elections, but the United Nations were largely ineffective in dealing with UNITA's sanctions-busting, even after UN observers were deployed under the provisions of the Lusaka Protocol.² In 1997 the Security Council imposed an additional package of restrictions on UNITA. Apart from the original arms and oil embargo, UNITA representatives were prohibited from travelling abroad and United Nations members states were instructed to close the rebels offices in their countries and freeze UNITA's bank accounts. In June 1998 the Security Council imposed yet another mandatory embargo, prohibiting the purchase of diamonds from UNITA or from UNITA controlled areas. Finally, in May 1999, an independent Panel of Experts was authorised by the United Nations to investigate violations of the different sanctions. The report of this sanctions committee, chaired by Canada's ambassador to the United Nations Robert Fowler, was presented to the Security Council in March 2000. The 'Fowler Report' showed in detail how UNITA had been able to "procure what it needed for its war machine, sell its diamonds and have its representatives travel abroad with little restriction"³ despite the imposition of an ever more restrictive package of sanctions.

The privatisation of logistics

During the Cold War, South Africa, Portugal and NATO-countries developed strategies to covertly supply and sponsor UNITA, and other guerrilla movements, with which they shared a common objective. Northern and southern supply operations were set up and UNITA's backers used Angola's neighbouring countries as logistical and dispatching centres for the continuous transfer of goods into the war zone. Zaïre, under President Mobutu, and the Cabinda enclave played a crucial role in the efforts of Portugal and the NATO-countries, while South Africa and Rhodesia fed the southern front.

Over the years networks developed, with local station agents overseeing airport facilities and weapons and ammunition warehouses in the region. These agents connected UNITA to weapons suppliers, mercenaries and recruitment bureaus, secret bank accounts and support centres across the globe. Although under tight political supervision, these networks included private operatives and real or dummy corporate businesses were used as fronts, in order not to compromise the sponsoring states.⁴

When the ideological motive to support UNITA had disappeared, the networks were not dismantled, but many former agents who were no longer of use to the networks started their own business relationships with UNITA. They were able to capitalise on their knowledge of the secretive world of clandestine weapons procurement and the logistics of covert war supplies. UNITA's ability to generate enormous amounts of diamonds compensated for the loss of outside support and

enabled Jonas Savimbi to carry the war throughout the 1990s, despite a supervised disarmament effort and a mandatory arms embargo.

As such, UNITA and its allies in the subregion transformed the former supply networks into lucrative business ventures, extracting the resources in the territory under UNITA control through relationships with international commodity traders, diamond dealers and even organised crime groups. The former networks of the Cold War in Africa turned private while other private players joined forces with the local business community or with Lebanese, Belgian, or Portuguese expatriate merchants in the region and started acting as local sales agents, shipping diamonds out and war supplies into the region.

The structure of the smuggling networks

Arms merchants or brokers work hand in glove with shipping agents. When the recipient is a non-state actor or an embargoed warring party, the shipping agent is the arms dealer's most important accomplice. A shipping agent may not be the actual owner of a freighter company, but organises the crew and the planes for the safe delivery of the goods and takes care of the paperwork and the complex procedures required to transport cargo across several borders and finally, to the client. The shipper may have his own network of accomplices, at airports or at border crossings, or he may be part of a larger integrated network including the arms merchant or broker.

Existing evidence of deliveries to UNITA are either identified landings in the UNITA area, often involving the arrest of the pilot and crew, or documented incidents of grounded or crashed aircraft. A list of cargo aircraft detected in the UNITA area, made available to the United Nations in 1997, shows registration markings of airlines from Ukraine, Moldova, Russia and Liberia. However the registration of a plane is only one element of identification and planes registered in one country may be stationed, permanently or for maintenance purposes, in different countries.

Planes are usually chartered for one or more supply flights on behalf of a private client, linked to UNITA by some business interest. They collect consignments of diamonds, transport UNITA officials or deliver weapons or other supplies, such as spare parts or mining equipment to set up an illicit diamond production facility in rebel area. While the supplier's motive may have shifted from an ideological one to a purely commercial one, the mechanics of airborne supply remain basically the same.

The typical profile of the mercenary pilots and their contract crew is that of war veterans specialised in the risky jobs of supplying remote bases and bush strips or flying search and rescue missions behind enemy lines. Flights are often conducted at night with minimal or no radio guidance to avoid interception by enemy radar systems. The high level of expertise required for these operations automatically creates a niche market for pilots, crews, mechanics or loadmasters

with a military background and, preferably, expertise in the region. Companies and pilots involved in the sanctions busting business often have the right expertise to fly humanitarian missions as well. In an advert of a company based in Burundi the description of its operations manager reads:

"Mike's unique operating experience has been especially valuable for operations on behalf of relief organisations and in situations where it is not unknown for the aircraft to come under ground fire ..."

Technically, the illegal character of the delivery schemes is not any different from the logistical supply operations these pilots may have carried out in Central America in the 1980s or indeed in the Angolan sub-region during the Cold War. Russian or Ukrainian pilots and crews are also in strong demand to fly Soviet-designed cargo planes, military helicopters or fighter aircraft from surplus stocks in Central and Eastern Europe that find their way to African conflicts. Very often, the planes are 'wet-leased', crew included. In many Central African capitals, Russian or Ukrainian pilots and crews are based permanently in one of the international hotels, either waiting for a new assignment or under contract with a particular group of companies for war supply operations.

Some of the pilots operate their own private cargo plane or business jet and thus make a bigger profit. Most of the pilots or airline owners mentioned in the Fowler Report, one of the first reports to recognise the critical role of cargo transportation companies, would fall into under this category. In July 1999, the US State Department released a report from the Bureau of Intelligence and Research which named commercial carriers Air Alexander International, Busy Bee, Sky Air, Planet Air and United Airlines. All were operating from East-African airfields and transporting military supplies into eastern Congo, where the economies of Rwanda and Uganda overlap with those of eastern Congo and UNITA activity in these areas. Most of the airlines are owned by local businessmen, involved in freighter services for private operations or on behalf of the Ugandan, Rwandan or rebel forces operating in the region.⁸ Small planes, not necessarily with a large cargo capacity, may equally be involved in the supply operations. The delivery of communication equipment to UNITA, picking up diamonds or transporting a UNITA-delegation can be done with smaller VIP-jets, civilian helicopters or small planes, provided the pilot can organise the necessary fuel stops at one of the many smaller airports or landing strips in the wider region.

Continuity of smuggling networks

The use of commercial airlines for war supply operations is not new, although there is hardly any scientific literature on the issue. Apart from a few dramatised biographies of American pilots in the wars in Indochina, the information has to be collected from news reports, aviation magazines or customs investigation reports and interviews. Even then, the fragmented findings from a variety of sources in different countries need thorough analysis in order to reconstruct an

actual case file. To gather sufficient evidence to start an official investigation would require the reconstruction of a trail of paperwork from the archives of aviation, airport and customs authorities in the countries used by the transporter for a war supply operation.

A recently unclassified report from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) on its operations in Central America in the 1980s includes a section on the role of "pilots, companies, and other individuals working for companies used to support the Contra program". ¹⁰ This chapter of the report sheds light on eight privately owned airlines that were used for covert operations to the Contras under supervision of American intelligence. One of the companies in the report is Southern Air Transport, a Miami based company that, in the mid 1980s, was advertising its cargo capacity for "operations in Latin America, the Far East and Africa, including Angola" despite a congressional ban on American support to UNITA. ¹¹

The main incident that resulted in Contra-gate, was the crash of a privately owned C-123 cargo plane loaded with weapons in October 1986. The company operating the plane used the same address in Miami as Southern Air Transport. The subsequent Iran-Contra investigations and hearings in the American Congress, are probably some of the best sources on how sanctions busters operate. The entire operation to covertly supply the allies of the United States was mainly executed by a network of private corporations, holdings, bank accounts and small shipping and air cargo companies, registered in countries and tax havens all over the world. The pilots had previously operated in the Vietnam war or had been part of US operations in African decolonisation wars, often on the payroll of private companies, such as Southern Air Transport¹² or Santa Lucia Airways.

Santa Lucia Airways was a small cargo airline operating as a subsidiary to Belgium's national carrier Sabena in the 1980s. In 1986 and 1987, Santa Lucia planes were spotted in Zaïre by two independent journalists. ¹³ Both saw a Santa Lucia plane, used for flights into UNITA controlled areas, operating out of the military base of Kamina. One year later the evidence was part of a parliamentary investigation in Belgium, that started a few weeks after Santa Lucia cancelled the rent for a maintenance and storage hangar at a cargo airport in Belgium. ¹⁴ Santa Lucia was leasing the planes from a Texas based company that is still in business today. Documents from the Zambian government gazette show that the company was licensed to provide aeroplanes to Aero Zambia Ltd. ¹⁵ The Angolan authorities' strong allegations regarding the involvement of Zambian officials and Zambian based planes in early 1999 centred around the activities of some of these planes. ¹⁶ This case illustrates the continuity in UNITA's supply networks over a period of almost two decades.

Throughout the 1980s, however, overland supplies may have become more important than aerial supply. From the end of the 1970s the South African-controlled area of Namibia played a vital role in UNITA's logistical effort, particularly in securing the southern supply line which ferried large-scale and regular shipments of weaponry, ammunition, medicine and food. Bases south of Jamba or at

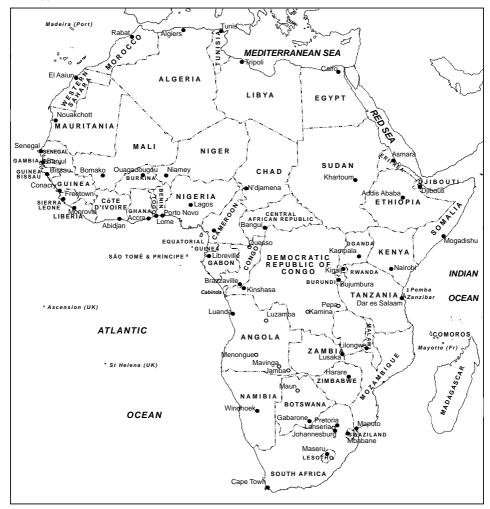
Mavinga were supplied by air as well as overland by a large fleet of supply trucks under UNITA command. By the end of the 1980s up to 300 UNITA trucks carried South African deliveries through northern Namibia to Angola's southern provinces or into the central plateau and to UNITA's eastern outposts. By the end of the 1980s the conflict centred around these supply routes north of Jamba but Namibian independence in March 1990 caused a significant problem for UNITA. William Minter describes how Namibian independence meant the end of the overland supplies and increased dependence on airborne CIA-supplies from Zaïre. After a brief fallout between Savimbi and Mobutu in 1989 the resumption of flights was immediately evident when the first plane departing from the former Belgian base of Kamina crashed on its way to Jamba. The Hercules from a Florida based company was reported to be carrying guerrillas and weapons on behalf of the CIA¹⁸

In this context it is worth mentioning that the 1996 Kumleben Commission of Inquiry into ivory and rhinoceros horn smuggling in Southern Africa collected valuable information on smuggling across Namibian-Angolan-Zaïre routes. It highlighted the involvement of the South African military, ¹⁹ a host of private players and front companies. It might be of interest to compare the routes and techniques exposed by this commission to the findings of the Fowler Commission. An in-depth study of the private individuals and company structures that were part of the whole ivory and rhino horn trafficking business in the 1970s and 1980s might possibly shed more light on current diamond or weapons trafficking in Southern Africa. The airports or border crossings mentioned in the ivory-report seem to coincide with airports and transhipment points mentioned in contemporary reports on possible UNITA-supply routes. Given the limited means and infrastructure available for the implementation of sanctions in Africa, the participation of anti-poaching and protected species teams to monitor weapons movements or sanction busting might be warranted. In general, continuity is an important feature of organised smuggling networks. An in-depth analysis of cigarette smuggling in southern Italy and the Mediterranean shows that the same families have been involved in the illegal trafficking operations from the 1940s until the present.²⁰

Private operations today

In January 1996, an Antonov 32 crashed shortly after take off at Kinshasa's intown airport of N'Djili and slammed through a crowded open market at the end of the runway, killing over 300 people. The Russian cargo plane was flying for a little known company, African Air, but had been chartered from Scibe Airlift, an airline owned by Bemba Saolana, a wealthy businessman in the then Zaïre under Mobutu and serving in the Democratic Republic of Congo's (DR Congo) central government since 1999. Scibe's sales agent was Scibe CMMJ, a company that kept offices at the airport of Ostend in Belgium. 22

Africa



Together with an elite group of Mobutu's closest security advisors, Bemba Saolana and one of Mobutu's sons controlled several small airline companies, that formed the vital lifeline that enabled UNITA's to re-emerge as a highly capable rebel movement in the mid 1990s. The head of Mobutu's presidential guard, the head of the national intelligence service and the head of the civil guard were all overseeing supplies of food, construction materials, mining equipment or weaponry to UNITA. They were doing this in collaboration with a handful of Lebanese, Portuguese and other arms brokers and diamond dealers that guaranteed the players access to the international grey and black markets. Scibe Airlift, Air Excellence, ATO, Guila Air and Service Air²³ were reported to be operating from the capital of the former Zaïre and were all part of the lucrative triangular deals - involving speculation with black market currency, dollars, fuel, weaponry and cash - that kept both UNITA and the ailing Mobutu regime running while being isolated by the international community. Scibe, according to several sources in Kinshasa had one of its planes grounded when it refused a customs check after arriving at N'Djili in Kinshasa from Belgium in early 1997. Even at the time when Mobutu's position was threatened by a rebellion in eastern Zaïre and the chief of staff of the army was complaining about the poor state of the army's military equipment, Mobutu's closest relatives and confidants were still fully focused on their lucrative trade alliance with UNITA.²⁴

After Mobutu's demise many smuggling airline companies lost the protection of their powerful masters in Kinshasa and shifted their operations to other countries and airports of convenience. A number of companies based in Zaïre, now the DR Congo, turned their attention to the military build-up in the neighbouring Congo-Brazzaville. In September 1997 a mixed Russian-Angolan crew of an Antonov 32, flying for Jonas Savimbi and operated reportedly by Air Continental Express, was captured by the Cobra-militias in Ouesso, in the north of Congo. The plane was trying to deliver diesel to the forces of president Lissouba, one of Savimbi's last allies at the time, ²⁵ and had previously been flying from Kinshasa.

ATO, one of the companies that had been operating under the protection of Mobutu's close security advisor Honore N'Gbanda, was identified as one of UNITA's most reliable suppliers. ²⁶ In January 1998, the Angolan Air Force intercepted a Liberian registered DC-4 with registration number EL-WLS, and forced it to land at Cuando Cubango. The sanctions-busting plane was loaded with mining equipment and had been chartered by Johnny Pareira, a South African national of Interstate Airways. Interstate's own DC-4 had been grounded since March 1997 in Maun, Botswana²⁷ and Pareira had chartered another plane from a company in Brazzaville. The company, Air Cargo Express, is a wholly owned subsidiary of ATO, UNITA's main supplier. ²⁸

Until at least 1997, another company, Trans Air Cargo, was flying almost exclusively between Zaïre (later DR Congo) based airports and the Cuango valley in Angola. Trans Air Cargo, operated by one of the UNITA-suppliers identified by the Fowler commission, was also operating through a sales agent in Belgium. According to the owner, cargo was flown to UNITA on behalf of David Zollman, an

Antwerp based diamond dealer with interests in Angola, DR Congo and Namibia and the owner of a mining company in Lubumbashi.²⁹ In 1998 the airline owner moved a number of planes to airports in South Africa (Lanseria and Rand Airport). The remaining network consists of a UNITA representative and a diamond dealer of Dutch origin in Antwerp, a cargo agent in Ostend and a web of subsidiary and associated companies in DR Congo, Lebanon and Belgium.³⁰ An airline within this network, close to Mobutu's late son Kongolo, was also used to ship a plane stuffed with forged dinar bills to Bahrain in the Persian Gulf, via a Belgian airport. A Congolese national, formerly involved in a similar case in Zaïre, was extradited from Belgium to Switzerland in January 2000 in relation to this case.³¹

Many of the smaller airlines operating from airports in the wider subregion of Angola, including DR Congo, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Zambia, Malawi, Namibia and Lesotho, have working alliances with European based shipping agents and charter companies. Many are operating old Boeings but former Soviet military cargo planes are increasingly being chartered directly from the Antonov design bureau or from the Russian and Ukranian air forces through the services of Russian or Ukrainian owned commercial airlines. The relationship between the charterers, who operate the plane, the shipping agent who organises the delivery for his clients and the company that actually owns the plane, is often very complex. This makes it difficult to see which of the contracting parties is actually responsible for the illegal aspects of the transactions. The Antonov that crashed in Kinshasa in January 1996 was operated by African Air. The company had rented the plane and crew from Scibe, the company of Bemba Saolana. Scibe's Belgium based sales agent had leased the plane to the company in Zaïre. The Belgian company in turn had contracted with Moscow Airways.³²

The local operators may thus be only at the final end of a globally organised network. The companies often work through loose corporate alliances, but increasingly the arms suppliers, aviation brokers and financiers develop more integrated organisations, with one main centre overseeing a host of corporate representations and companies in different countries. Small individual airline owners simply do not have the capacity to organise these integrated operations on their own.

Unless the airline owners themselves have access to the network structures to organise such an integrated operation on behalf of UNITA, commodity traders and mining houses seem to be the only regional operators capable of organising discrete international transactions. Such transactions require access to international financial institutions, good infrastructure, the organisation to guide military cargo through the loopholes of export and transit procedures, the logistical capacity to deliver and, in the case of UNITA, access to the diamond markets or polishing centres in India, Israel, South Africa, Belgium, the UK, Russia or the United States. Apart from multinational companies, only international criminal organisations or indeed, states would be capable of such an effort.³³

The Air Cess family of companies is one of the more integrated and globalised networks currently active in Africa. The group is also one of the most creative in circumventing and undermining existing regulations or avoiding inspection.

Victor Bout, a former KGB-officer controls Air Cess and its associated companies. A host of subsidiaries, sales agents, planes, associated companies and representatives in Russia, Bulgaria, Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Belgium, France, the United Kingdom, Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Sudan, Rwanda, Uganda, Liberia, Swaziland, South Africa and the DR Congo can be activated depending on the client or the nature of the operation. The network of companies is supervised from a business address in the United Arab Emirates. 34

The group is not only active in aviation. It is known to have its private bank in Switzerland and has diamond mining interests in the Central African Republic and possibly also in West Africa. The owners are Russians and Belgians, but in each of the countries mentioned partnerships exist, including operating alliances or joint ventures with local investors and partners that are usually well-connected to domestic political or business communities. The group operates throughout Africa, Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East and can organise cargo for regional African deliveries or for intercontinental operations, including the brokering of weapon systems from Eastern Europe for use in the Great Lakes region and Angola. 35 Different branches of the group may supply different warring parties at the same time. The group's planes, although under different company names, have been identified in the UNITA area as well as flying cargo for the Angolan and the DR Congo governments.³⁶ The leasing of a significant number of cargo planes to the Rwandan Ministry of Defence since September 1998 has also been confirmed by aviation sources operating in the Great Lakes region. Russian crew and pilots were based permanently at the Meridien Hotel near Kigali, where an entire wing was hired to accommodate them. After serious delays in payment by the Rwandan Ministry of Defence, another airline presented its services, hiring the same crew.³⁷

One plane of the group made an illegal landing in South Africa in April 1997³⁸ and other planes have been grounded after inspections at South African airports.³⁹ The activities of the group even led to the introduction of tighter control measures at these airports but the Air Cess planes, operating through a joint venture company called AirPas in South Africa, simply moved to other less monitored airports of convenience elsewhere on the continent.⁴⁰

In Swaziland, the Air Cess group used different company names and fraudulent documentation to register more than 40 planes. Many of the planes, although registered in Swaziland, operated from South African or other airports in the region. When the Swazi authorities received repeated allegations that their aviation register was being used by gunrunning aircraft, they found that irregularities had occurred in their files but had no idea of the whereabouts of most of the planes listed on their official register. Official notice was given to airports in the region, where the planes were thought to be based, requesting them to ground these planes. But months after the Swazi aviation authorities had withdrawn the flight authorisation of Air Cess, the company's planes were still flying with Swazi registration numbers, delivering cargo in Central Africa. ⁴¹ The group subsequently moved its planes to the registers in Equatorial Guinea and the Central

African Republic. In the latter country, the local partner is a former prime minister with extensive interests in the republic's diamond mines. 42

Apart from Victor Bout and his local subsidiary company, a group of Eastern Europeans, all operating in alliance with South Africa based companies, became the subject of a combined effort by aviation and law enforcement authorities to clamp down on their smuggling activities. Subsequently, the number of airports used for international flights in South Africa was reduced from over 20 to 10, of which eight could still be used for international cargo transport. ⁴³

Tricks of the trade

A compendium of tricks and ruses can be compiled from interviews with pilots or aviation inspectors at the African airports used for smuggling operations. One of the oldest tricks in the book is to stage an emergency landing in UNITA area, in order to divert a plane from its scheduled course. In early 1981, an American pilot who had landed a small aircraft in Cuando Cubango, clearly a UNITA-area, while scheduled to fly from Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire to Cape Town, was arrested in Angola and charged with espionage. The pilot was flying for a Florida based company, Globe Aero Ltd. In April 1979 and April 1980 two other pilots with Globe Aero were arrested in Angola and charged with similar charges. All three pilots claimed they had made emergency landings, and all officially had been on their way to South Africa. Hemergency landings give sanctions busters an alibi, both upon arrest by Angolan authorities or upon arrival at the airport where they issued their flight documents and airway bill.

Another common technique is the issuing of a flight schedule for a destination other than a UNITA controlled area. A plane departing from South Africa would then choose a flight route consistent with the stated destination, but divert the plane as soon as it is out of reach of the South African radar and navigation controllers. Poor or even totally lacking radar capacity in many sub-Saharan African countries and a lack of actual feedback from aviation authorities at the scheduled airport of arrival minimises the risk for the trafficker. In some countries constant power shortages only allow radar surveillance during a few hours a day. In Sudan (Khartoum), a very capable and new Italian radar system only functions three to four hours a day due to power shortages.

A plane, which arrives very late at its scheduled destination, may have been involved in an illicit landing. Only a thorough inspection of the plane's cargo before departure and upon final landing, including coordinated information sharing by both the inspecting agents in the country of departure and the country of final destination would provide the necessary evidence that an operation had possibly been illicit. Such coordinated, cross-checking procedures are rarely the case. Moreover, when an aircraft delivers the cargo at a legitimate destination, where another plane picks it up for further delivery into an embargoed zone, it becomes nearly impossible for the authorities that originally authorised the ship-

ment to reconstruct the entire journey of the cargo. In early 1998, representatives from Angola, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe met in Harare for an Inter-State Defence and Security Committee meeting, to consider matters relating to cross border criminal activities. Specific attention was given to UNITA-supply networks operating from the region and a regional information exchange network was set up, ⁴⁶ leading to the identification of a number of suspicious flight movements to or from, among others, UNITA's headquarters in Jamba. It remains unclear if any of the identified planes and companies were actually charged or banned from the region but good information exchange between national aviation authorities and traffic controllers is clearly needed.

The use of fraudulently obtained or fictitious documents, flight plans, proforma invoices or end user certificates is another technique. Describing the cargo as 'agricultural equipment' when in fact it includes tank engines rather than engines for agricultural vehicles is commonly used, with pilots generally secure in the knowledge that a clearing agent or a customs official may not be equipped to notice the difference.⁴⁷

Another way to avoid detection would include a departure for a domestic flight. In some countries, including South Africa, domestic flights do not require authorised flight plans. While smugglers may try to skirt customs inspections or law enforcement officers, the bribery of airport inspectors, especially for 'frequent flyers', is more often a matter of routine for the professional sanctions buster. The organiser of frequent operations involving empty departures from a maintenance base to a transhipment point where weapons and ammunition are loaded on board, may have a dispatching unit and customs agents working in alliance with his network to take care of deliveries. An informant explaining the mechanics of his operation, told a police agency in Western Europe about two loadmasters based at an airport in Bulgaria, who worked on a full-time basis for his trafficking network. At times, three to four flights a day of small Antonov planes would leave from the dispatching point in Bulgaria to deliver large consignments or weaponry to a conflict area in Central Africa. The weapons arrived by rail at the dispatching airport from different countries in Eastern Europe and were picked up by planes stationed at Western European airports. 48

Regulating the industry

UNITA-suppliers not only operate from airports in the region but have to coordinate their delivery schemes with arms brokers and shipping agents sending in cargo from Europe or elsewhere. More sophisticated tricks of the trade are intrinsically linked to the weaknesses of international security measures with respect to the civil aviation industry and the nature of the contemporary cargo market.

The International Aviation Transport Association (IATA) is the oldest and most pro-active of the international bodies regulating air transport. Together with the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), the aviation wing of the United

Nations, IATA dominates the rule making in the world of civil aviation. Basically, the guidelines and rules agreed upon at the 1944 Chicago Conference for International Civil Aviation are monitored by both these organisations that develop and publish international standards and urge the member states (ICAO) and member airlines (IATA) to implement them. But these organisations have no real power to enforce their rules on the national aviation authorities. Such authorities remain responsible for their national airports or the airlines registered within their territory.

A third organisation developing safety and security measures is the European Civil Aviation Conference or ECAC, a regional but largely autonomous body of ICAO. ECAC, regional in responsibility and with a more limited number of member states than ICAO can respond more quickly to emerging security threats and develop updated standards and recommendations for its members. However, like the other two bodies, ECAC cannot enforce its policies and the decision for implementation remains with the individual governments.

A final regulatory organisation is ACI, the Geneva based Airport Council International. Over 1 200 airport administrations are members of the organisation that also offers practical support to developing countries of interest to European civil air operators.

Most of the security and safety measures developed by these bodies are designed to reconcile the aviation industry's economic and commercial interests with security and safety concerns. Apart from airworthiness and safety checks for planes, the threat of terrorism and air piracy has traditionally been the main security concern. Surveillance and control measures at airports are designed to minimise this particular threat with minimal interference, delays or costs for the transport industry or the travellers. With regards to drug smuggling a similar philosophy is followed and most security measures focus on passenger aircraft or passenger and baggage screening, both visibly and covertly by customs or airport inspectors. ⁴⁹

Checking cargo airports in order to counter smuggling is a much less developed area of regulation. The international average of containers inspected at airports is five percent but many airports are below this norm. The ever growing number of flight movements at international airports and the demands of just-in-time deliveries and interconnecting arrangements with road, rail or sea transport in a highly competitive market, weigh heavily on the security aspects. Globalisation is also fundamentally altering the air transport industry. Cross border mergers, marketing alliances, code sharing, leasing arrangements, the use of tax havens and registers of convenience are turning aviation into an increasingly complex industry. Regulating and monitoring the internationally organised cargo industry is increasingly difficult for national aviation and customs authorities.

The market processes aggravate the difficulties already experienced in monitoring and tracing uncontrolled arms flows and the enforcement of embargoes. It is almost impossible to control the sophisticated networks of corporate/individual suppliers and brokers, the transport operations organised through alliances

of African and non-African airlines, the shipping agents with chartering, leasing and sub-leasing arrangements and subcontracted crew and pilots. The use of subcontractors, circuitous routes, including fictitious documents, corrupt and negligent customs agents and officials and an array of transhipment points further complicate the matter.

Apart from the obvious plane diversions and falsification of cargo documents, trafficking networks increasingly abuse and exploit the loopholes in national and international regulations to conceal the true nature of their business and the identity of the decision-makers behind the scenes. The use of fake plane or company registrations is probably the most immediate matter of concern. Conversations with pilots, loadmasters and aviation inspectors show how easy it is to evade existing controls in countries that lack regulatory resources. A cargo plane was named as landing at an airport with one registration number and then taking off with a different one. Another airline was said to have changed its corporate structure and name overnight when its name became linked to illicit activities. An operator used an old licence that had been cancelled by aviation authorities to fly several 'ghost planes' to hot spots in Africa. Another corporate owner used the logo and colours of a licensed company to fly non-licensed planes. Finally, at airports across Central Africa, several aircraft are operating without any visible registration marking. In early 2000 a newspaper in Kampala reported that Polonia Airlines, a non-registered company, had been operating illegally from the military occupied zone of the old airport of Entebbe. 50 According to the reports an Eastern European crime syndicate, in cooperation with local officials and a mechanic of the Uganda People's Defence Force's air force, removed the original markings of cargo planes, repainted them and printed fake registration numbers onto them. The planes were then used for operations in the rebel areas in eastern DR Congo, where no aviation authority exists to monitor or register planes. The planes were allegedly stolen from the former Soviet republics. Certificates of airworthiness and insurance documents for the planes were thought to be forged. After an ownership dispute between an Ugandan based company that wanted to lease an aircraft, one of the planes was flown to Kigali in Rwanda where the Rwandan army started using it for flights into DR Congo. One of the planes supplied by the East Europeans linked with the syndicate crashed in DR Congo in April 2000, after take-off from the airport of Pepa, near the Zambian border, with 57 Rwandan officers on board. 51

Vulnerability of the networks' logistics component

The role that air transport and airports play in the uncontrolled flows of military and related equipment across international borders is a neglected area of rule making and analysis. It is self-evident though that the secure transport of military or related equipment, both for legitimate parties and for illegal traffickers constitutes one of the essential aspect of an international arms transaction. The Fowler Report⁵² has clearly underlined the critical role of transport in sanctions busting.

After the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, a United Nations Commission of Inquiry was established to probe the continuous flows of weaponry to the region. It was able to shed light on some of the mechanisms used to circumvent the weapons embargo imposed on the former Rwandan Armed Forces and the *Interahamwe* militias. The reconstruction of the logistics of one operation, based on available information about the exact dates and places of the departure and the delivery of the weapons, produced the key paper trail needed to expose the individuals and identify the companies and the bank accounts used.⁵² Many of the Fowler Commission's findings suggest that the same individuals and companies are still in business, feeding the Angolan war as they had been feeding other conflicts.

Following the weapons means following their movements across international borders via transhipment points, from the arms producing company or the location where they are stockpiled, to the delivery point or at least the point where the aircraft disappears from the radar screens. Although sea or road transport is an important aspect in the procurement chain, the focus on aerial shipment and delivery has many advantages.

The complexity of the matter notwithstanding, transport is the Achilles heel of UNITA's procurement strategy. Loading and unloading of cargo, clearance at borders, registration of the plane, insurance of the cargo, landing rights at international airports, overflight rights and the paperwork required to transport military equipment across international borders, all constitute physical or documented evidence that can be used to reconstruct suspect transactions. However, in the case of air supply routes to UNITA, the planes, pilots and shipping companies involved in the transport of goods to or from the area, often operate on the fringes of the law and make a mockery of existing international rules regulating the cargo industry.

Nevertheless, research shows that the entire trafficking business is controlled by a relatively small group of key airline owners and experienced pilots. The oldboys networks of apartheid, the old intelligence operatives of NATO-countries, the expatriate community in DR Congo that were part of Mobutu's UNITA-network and a number of UNITA-friendly countries and governments are well known. Whatever the shortcomings of the Fowler Report, the Sanctions Committee has clearly raised the stakes and created enough awareness to seriously alter the international community's attitude with regards to arms embargoes or sanctions regimes in general.

Belgium, South Africa, Lebanon, Israel, France and Portugal all have nationals that are traditionally part of UNITA's procurement channels. There should also be concern about the logistics component of a discrete military presence of US and British special force units which are used to oversee training in some allied countries in the region. They may be used for covert transport purposes as well. Wealthy commodity traders and especially diamond dealers in the DR Congo or the wider region all have their special arrangements with air cargo companies, given the size of the territory and poor road conditions in the region. Uganda and Rwanda have become UNITA's newest allies and both these countries have been

hosting meetings of UNITA-officials in recent years. Their territories are being used as regional hubs for departures into UNITA-area while Zambian airports have clearly been used for transhipment and refuelling purposes by the traffickers. Airports in Egypt and Bulgaria are used for loading and fuelling purposes. The capitals of Western Europe, including the Channel Islands, are known to be used for offices, airport maintenance facilities and banking infrastructure while most weapons cargoes originate in Eastern Europe. Repeated allegations from different sources that arms flow through all these countries to UNITA needs further investigation by national authorities who are ultimately responsible for the enforcement of international embargoes.

Some results are evident from the practical and individual approach of some airport and national aviation authorities in different countries but few of the trafficking airlines or crews have effectively been charged or brought to court. South Africa's decision to reduce the number of airports used for international departures or landings in the country and increased safety and security checks at some airports will certainly bear results. Swaziland has also taken the issue of aircraft registration and safety very seriously and Zambian authorities have initiated investigations into the Ukrainian plane that was grounded at Lusaka airport in August 1999. Belgian authorities also investigated the use of certain Belgian airports for trafficking purposes, but the outcome of most of the investigations remains unclear. Nor has there been any information sharing between these countries on the activities of airlines that may be using more than one territory, and nowhere have the findings of these investigations been made public. The Angolan government has not been very forthcoming with public information on UNITA-procurement networks either, apart from a published report addressed to United Nations Security Council and fragmented allegations serving their war propaganda.

Conclusion

Grand schemes for conflict resolution, that purport to address the multiple and complex 'root causes' of the armed conflict, have clearly failed in the case of Angola. Choking the supply of military hardware to the belligerents seems to be an imminently practical and logical means to address the symptoms, in the absence of a more comprehensive 'miracle cure'. However, successes in this realm have been few, and the resilience of the smuggling networks remarkable. The conventional wisdom on arms management points to comprehensive approaches to the challenge, such as 'strengthening sub-regional (security) organisations', but these are long-term projects that offer little solace to the Angolan people. The notion of targeting the airborne component of the illicit war logistics chain, however, is action-oriented and can produce real successes in a relatively short space of time, with fairly limited resources.

A more robust regulatory regime at the airports and ports where arms cargoes to UNITA are known to originate or pass through, requires customs, port police

and aviation officials, better laws and sufficient resources to make detailed routine checks of cargo manifests against actual cargo, as well as flight plans against flight directions, times and registration numbers of carriers. Law enforcers should routinely inspect physical cargoes and question members of crew, cross-checking information and documentation with that submitted by crew and operators to their home-country authorities.

Immediate Measures

Practical measures that are quite simple and focussed could be adopted by states to reduce the flow of illicit airborne war material to UNITA. The continuity and involvement of the same individuals in arms trafficking and transport to and across the region could be addressed much more easily if airport authorities and inspectors on the ground had shared lists available of the identified individuals, companies and planes. This would not reduce the need for sufficient manpower at international airports, but it would increase the effectiveness of inspections and certainly create a deterrent for the illicit traffickers.

After a decade of failures, the United Nations has all but abandoned Angola. The new United Nations Office in Angola (UNOA) is focussed only on humanitarian issues and 'capacity building' in human rights. However, the United Nations has some 6 000 international police officers currently deployed on seven United Nations missions – with over 3 000 in Kosovo alone. The creation of something like an International Aviation Police Task Force for Angola would provide the United Nations with the opportunity to return to the cause in a dignified and meaningful way. The mandate of such a force would be quite simple. Firstly, to compile and distribute a list of arms traffickers to customs and aviation authorities in those countries of Africa and Europe that are known or suspected to be points of origin or transit bases. Secondly, to train and assist local authorities in more vigilant procedures. And finally, to monitor and report on the efforts and effectiveness of enforcement actions by national authorities.

Given the lack of resources in many African countries, the United Nations should establish an international fund specifically to support the training and equipping of customs officers, air traffic inspectors and port police. In the longer term such a fund could help national authorities develop better satellite and computer technologies to monitor the movement of such cargoes in less developed states.

Amended laws and regulations

With relatively little legislative effort, all states could adopt a more coherent version of the United States law on arms brokers and arms transporters. First, all bona fide operators and agents dealing in arms would be registered, with all convicted traffickers removed from the register. Secondly, each proposed arms transaction and delivery requested by those on the register could then be considered

on its merits using internationally agreed criteria, before it was given a specific detailed licence. Other governments affected by the proposed deal could be consulted. One major advantage of the United States law covers the arms brokering and arms transport activities of *all* citizens at home and abroad, regardless of their shifting residences or company registrations. If such a law was accompanied by severe criminal sanctions and introduced in as many states as possible, this would immediately act as a strong deterrent to any arms brokers and arms transporters, including those who migrate from country to country to escape proper regulation.⁵³

In order to enable customs, police and aviation officials to properly investigate breaches of the sanctions against UNITA, the international aviation bodies should help improve standards for the submission and recording of information on all customs, air traffic and accompanying commercial documentation for easy crosschecking. In particular, states should all require transport agents, charterers and operators to submit accurate and detailed information describing the cargo in detail, its ownership, who is sending and receiving it, details of the vessel or carrier and its owners and operators, as well as the names and background details of all sub-contracting parties involved in the purchase, storage and delivery, including the sub-leasing of international over-flight permissions. Any transport agent or operator seeking to ship an arms cargo should also be required to provide customs officials, air-traffic controllers and port police with advanced warning of the exact date and time of departure, transit and arrival of authorised arms cargoes. The regulating officials could then be required to properly verify in writing to the sending state the safe and proper arrival of an incoming or outgoing weapons shipment, so as to help guard against diversion by arms transporters and their subcontractors.

Overall, the sanctions instrument as a political and economic tool can only be viable under conditions of efficient monitoring and implementation. Sanctions that are not being fully enforced may create an even more counterproductive situation and prolong wars, when quasi-criminal sanctions-busting networks develop to connect the warring parties to the global grey and black markets. In Angola, the disastrous consequences of such developments on the dynamics of war are clearly visible. Unless the key traffickers, suppliers and shipping agents can be identified and stopped, the criminalisation of the war economy and the continuity of the trafficking networks will not only prolong the war, but also cast a shadow over the opportunities for the post-conflict reconstruction efforts in Angola and the subregion.

Endnotes

1 Company names are Air Cargo Express and Vansco Air Freight. According to the Report of the Panel of Experts established by the Security Council pursuant to resolution 1237, on violations of Security Council Sanctions against UNITA (cited as The

- Fowler Report), S/2000/203, 10 March 2000, par 143 (Vansco Air Freight); and Congo rebels hold UNITA mercenaries, *Electronic Mail & Guardian*, 11 September 1997 (Air Continental Express).
- 2 The United States Congress barred further covert United States aid to Angolan parties, the FNLA of Holden Roberto and UNITA, in 1976 under the Clark amendment that was only repealed a decade later, after continuous lobbying campaigns in Washington.
- 3 The Fowler Report.
- J Stockwell, In Search of Enemies: A CIA Story, Futura Publications, London 1979; A Humbaraci & N Muchnik, Portugal's African Wars: Angola, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, The Third Press, New York, 1974; W Minter, Apartheid's Contras: An Inquiry into the Roots of War in Angola and Mozambique, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1994; R Faligot & P Krop, La Piscine: Les services secrets français 1944–1984, Seuil, Paris, 1985.
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- 6 The list was also published in A Vines, *Angola Explicada : Ascensão e Queda de Processo de Paz de Lusaka*, Human Rights Watch, New York 1999, p 207. (The English version of the book, *Angola Unravels*, does not include the list.)
- 7 The report mentions Dominique Lemaire (Air Espace, Air Mwazi and Trans Air Cargo), Johannes Pareira (Interstate Airways) and Manuel Roque, but many more small scale operators are actively involved.
- A report published by the Congolese research group *Observatoire gouvernance-transparence* mentions a business network in eastern DR Congo, called the Victoria Group, that would be active in smuggling operations across regional borders. The report mentions Salim Saleh, brother of Ugandan president Museveni, as one of the main strongmen of this network. The report also mentions a number of the Lebanese diamond dealers mentioned in the Fowler Report, showing an overlapping of the war economy in eastern DR Congo and the UNITA-networks, although this is not specifically mentioned. Airlines mentioned in the Report are Planet'Air, Air Navette, Sky Airlines, CAGL, Air Boyoma and Sun Air Service. *Observatoire Gouvernance Transparance, Guerre en Rdc: ses enjeux économiques, intérêts et acteurs*, Kinshasa, 16 April 2000.
- 9 Exceptions would be the work of F Lert, *Les Ailes de la CIA Histoire and Collections*, Paris 1998, p 518 or some sections in J Bloch & P Fitzerald, *British Intelligence and Covert Action*, Brandon, Dinglem Co, Kerry, 1983.
- 10 Office of Inspector General, Investigations Staff, Report of Investigation: Allegations of connections between CIA and the Contras in Cocaine trafficking to the United States, vol II, The Contra Story, 29 January 1998.
- 11 The Contras' Proxy War, Newsweek, 20 October 1986.
- 12 LE Walsh, Independent Counsel, Final Report of the Independent Counsel for Iran/Contra Matters, Part V, Investigations and Cases: the Flow of Funds and the Private Operatives, US Court of Appeals for the District of Colombia Circuit, Washington DC, 4 August 1993, also Lert, 1998, op cit. Southern Air Transport filed for bankruptcy in 1999.
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- 14 Enquête parlementaire sur les livraisons d'armes et de munitions faites par la Belgique

- aux pays impliqués dans un conflit armé ou frappés d'embargo sur les armes, Rapport, fait au nom de la Commission d'Enquête par MM. Vanvelthoven et Neven, Chambre des Représentants de Belgique, Session Ordinaire 1988–1989, 28 February 1989.
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- 21 Le Crash d'un Avian cargo sur un marche au Zaïre fait pres de 250 morts, *Le Monde*, 10 January 1996.
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- 24 Rupert, op cit; D Bryson, Zairians running guns to Angolans, Associated Press, 28 March 1997.
- 25 Congo rebels hold UNITA mercenaries, *Electronic Mail & Guardian*, 11 September 1997, interview with Mr Obia, Ambassador of Congo (Brazzaville) in Brussels on, January 1999.
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- 34 P Hain, *House of Commons Hansard Debates*, 18 January 2000; Founding documents of NV Trans Aviation Network Group, Trade register of Ostend, enacted 17 March 1995; Documents of the registration of AirCess Swaziland; Certificate of plane registration of Air Cess GE SA in Equatorial Guinea; Document of TIT Insurance Company in Moscow for Air Cess planes; Interviews with police and Aviation Authorities in Zambia, South Africa, Belgium, United Arab Emirates and Swaziland; interview with former employee of Air Cess.
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- 53 See Wood & Peleman, op cit, Chaper 11, for a fuller list of recommendations to control arms brokers and transport agents.