

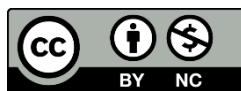
مداخله، نفوذ و منابع: بازیگران خارجی و همگرایی راهبردی در جنگ داخلی آنگولا

شالینی سینگ*، ناگالا کسمی ام رامن

مؤسسه مطالعات بین‌المللی آمیتی، دانشگاه آمیتی، اوتار پرادش، هند.

مشخصات مقاله	چکیده
مقاله پژوهشی موضوع: روابط بین‌الملل حوزه موضوعی: آنگولا	در متون موجود درباره جنگ داخلی آنگولا (۱۹۷۵-۱۹۹۱م)، اغلب از مقطعی کوتاه امام مهم از همگرایی راهبردی میان بلوک‌های کمونیستی و سرمایه‌داری غفلت شده است؛ به‌ویژه زنهانی که کوبا در اوایل دهه ۱۹۸۰م مدافع منافع تأسیسات شرکت آمریکایی گلف اویل در منطقه کابیندا بود. درحالی که این جنگ معمولاً در چارچوب تقابل دوقطبی میان صف سوسیالیستی جنبش مردمی آزادیبخش آنگولا (MPLA) و نیروهای ضد کمونیستی اتحادیه ملی برای استقلال کامل آنگولا (UNITA) و تحت حمایت ایالات متحده تبیین می‌شود، در این چارچوب تفسیری ابعاد این رویداد مهم پنهان می‌ماند. در آن زمان کوبا با تأمین نیروی نظامی، از عملیات شرکت گلف اویل محافظت می‌کرد؛ شرکتی آمریکایی که درآمد آن هم‌زمان بخشی از منابع مالی دولت تحت رهبری جنبش مردمی آزادیبخش آنگولا را تأمین می‌کرد. این همگرایی راهبردی این پرسش مهم را پیش می‌آورد: آیا مداخله‌های خارجی در جنگ‌های داخلی در شرایطی که منابع راهبردی در معرض رقابت است، روابطی از وابستگی را شکل می‌دهد که بر مرزهای ایدئولوژیکی فائق آید؟ برای پاسخ به این پرسش، از نظریه وابستگی نئومارکسیستی آندره گوندر فرلنک بهره برده‌ایم تا نشان دهیم چگونه بازیگران خارجی قدرت‌مند ساختارهای اقتصادی و سیاسی دولت‌های ضعیف‌تر را شکل می‌دهند. مطالعه موردی آنگولا نشان می‌دهد که مداخله‌های صورت گرفته با توجیه هنجاری و ارزشی، ممکن است دولت‌های درگیر منازعه را به روابطی نامتقارن سوق دهد؛ روابطی که در آن منابع راهبردی و اهرم‌های سیاسی به بهای دریافت کمک خارجی تمام شده است.
تاریخ دریافت: ۱۴۰۵/۰۲/۱۲ تاریخ بازنگری: ۱۴۰۵/۰۳/۱۲ تاریخ پذیرش: ۱۴۰۵/۰۳/۱۳ تاریخ انتشار: ۱۴۰۵/۰۴/۰۲	
واژگان کلیدی: اصلاح مالیاتی، آثار کلان اقتصادی، درآمدهای مالیاتی، کارایی درآمدی، مالیات بر کالاها و خدمات (GST).	

ارجاع به این مقاله: سینگ ش، رامن ن. (؟؟؟؟). «مداخله، نفوذ و منابع: بازیگران خارجی و همگرایی راهبردی در جنگ داخلی آنگولا». *مطالعات کشورها*. (؟): ۱-۲۰. doi: <https://doi.org/10.22059/jcountst.2026.413606.1511>



وبگاه: <https://jcountst.ut.ac.ir> | رایانامه: jcountst@ut.ac.ir
 شابای الکترونیکی: ۹۱۹۳-۲۹۸۰ | ناشر: دانشگاه تهران

Intervention, influence, and resources: Foreign actors and strategic convergence in the Angolan civil war

Shalini Singh*, Nagalaxmi M Raman

Amity Institute of International Studies, Amity University, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Article Info	Abstract
<p>Original Article</p> <p>Main Object: International Relations Scope: Angola</p> <p>Received: 02 May 2026 Revised: 02 June 2026 Accepted: 03 June 2026 Published online: 23 June 2026</p> <p>Keywords: Angolan Civil War, foreign policy, neo-dependency theory, normative intervention, U.S.</p>	<p>Existing literature on the Angolan Civil War (1975–1991) often obliterates the brief yet significant moment of strategic convergence between the communist and capitalist blocs; most notably when Cuba protected the U.S. company Gulf Oil’s facilities in Cabinda during the early 1980s. While the war is commonly situated within a binary contest between the MPLA’s (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) socialist alignment and U.S., backed anti-communist forces of UNITA (The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola), these framing obscures a critical episode in which Cuba militarily protected Gulf Oil’s Cabinda operations, an American corporate asset whose revenues simultaneously financed the MPLA. This convergence raises a broader question on foreign interventions in civil wars produce dependency that override ideological boundaries when strategic resources are at stake. To address this situation, the paper uses Andre Gundre Frank’s idea of Neo-Marxist dependency theory to explain how powerful external actors shape the economic and political structures of weaker states. The Angolan case illustrates that interventions justified in normative terms might push the conflict-affected states into asymmetrical relationships where strategic resources and political leverage become the price of foreign aid.</p>

Cite this article: Singh S, Raman NM. (???). “Intervention, influence, and resources: Foreign actors and strategic convergence in the Angolan civil war”. *Countries Studies*. ?(?): 1-20. doi: <https://doi.org/10.22059/jcountst.2026.413606.1511>.



Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License
 Website: <https://jcountst.ut.ac.ir/> | Email: jcountst@ut.ac.ir |
 EISSN: 2980-9193
 Publisher: University of Tehran

* Corresponding author: ✉ shalini.singh2@s.amity.edu,  <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-1996-7198>

1. Introduction

International intervention has long been embedded in the foreign policy strategies of powerful states, historically driven by national interest and strategic imperatives. In today's neoliberal world order, however, such actions are increasingly framed in the language of humanitarianism, peacebuilding, and normative commitments to ensure regional stability, especially under the institutional gaze of bodies like the United Nations. This rhetorical shift often conceals the enduring logic of geopolitical competition, creating a disjuncture between declared principles and actual practices. Nowhere is this contradiction more visible than in Cold War interventions, where proclaimed ideological battles often masked pragmatic calculations (Ogo et al. 2024).

A striking and underexplored episode of this dynamic is the Angola Civil War (1975-1991), often analyzed through the binary lens of Cold War rivalry between U.S.-backed capitalist proxies and Soviet-aligned socialist movements. Yet this dominant framing obscures what might be called a rare convergence event, an instance of *de facto* collaboration between adversarial blocs amid an intense proxy war. In Angola, ideological boundaries blurred when Cuban forces, deployed to defend the socialist MPLA government, were tasked with protecting Gulf Oil's installations in Cabinda- a U.S.-owned enterprise whose revenues were crucial to the MPLA's war economy. This arrangement, in which Cold War enemies cooperated to safeguard strategic oil flows, exposes the deeper political economy of intervention, where resource imperatives override ideological commitments. The Angolan case thus offers a compelling challenge to conventional narratives proxy conflict, revealing how material interests can foster unlikely alliances beneath the surface of ideological antagonism (Oberdorfer 1978).

Angola is often viewed as a classic East-West proxy battleground: a Marxist-Leninist government fought U.S.-backed rebels in a conflict that mirrored global ideological divides. However, beneath the public rhetoric of communist versus capitalist, a rare convergence took shape in Angola's oilfields, where sworn enemies found common ground. In an interesting turn of events, Cuban troops deployed to support Angola's socialist government ended up protecting American oil installations, effectively safeguarding the profits of a U.S. corporation that bankrolled the very regime the United States sought to topple. This peculiar collaboration, which might be called the Cuba-Gulf Oil dilemma, highlights how strategic resources can override ideological cleavages. This paper examines why Cold War adversaries cooperated in Angola's oil sector and traces the consequences of that cooperation for Angola's post-war economic sovereignty.

Existing research by Wright (1997: 57-118) and Barber (1994) have often analysed conflicts like Angola's through the lens of great power rivalry, emphasizing the opposing goals of the United States and Soviet Union. Yet this focus obscures moments when opposing powers aligned

their efforts in pursuit of mutual interests. Angola's civil war offers a compelling case of cross-bloc convergence, where geopolitical foes tacitly collaborated due to a shared stake in Angola's petroleum wealth. A neo-Marxist dependency perspective helps explain this anomaly. Dependency theory posits that peripheral states, even under socialist governments, remain structurally reliant on foreign capital, technology, and markets. In the Angolan case, the Marxist-led state was profoundly dependent on Western oil companies and global oil markets for its survival. The result was pragmatic alignment across ideological lines: the combatants in the Cold War put aside doctrine when it came to protecting oil revenues.

This study implements a qualitative, single-case research design, treating the Angolan Civil War (1975-1991) as an extreme case for examining how strategic resource dependency conditions foreign intervention in peripheral states. The choice of Angola is methodological rather than incidental. Single-case research is most productive not when the case is typical, but when the conditions of theoretical interest are present in unusually concentrated form, allowing the operation of the proposed mechanism to be observed without the noise that more average cases introduce. Angola meets this standard. The features that make the case unusual, a Marxist-Leninist government, the presence of Cuban expeditionary forces, and an economy organized around a single high-value extractive commodity controlled by foreign capital, are not incidental peculiarities but the precise structural conditions under which dependency theory predicts cross-bloc convergence around resource flows.

This research design carries methodological implications that should be stated plainly. The paper does not claim that its findings can be generalized to other conflict-affected states without further investigation. Its purpose is theory-refining rather than theory-testing or theory-generating; it specifies the scope conditions and causal mechanism through which structural resource dependency produces convergence between ideologically opposed external actors, using Angola as the analytic site at which those conditions are most clearly visible. Whether the mechanism identified here operates in cases with different structural profiles oil-producing states without Cuban troops, mineral-dependent economies in Central Africa, or contemporary resource conflicts is a question this paper raises but does not resolve. Comparative testing across such cases is open for further research.

The paper uses André Gunder Frank's (1978) neo-Marxist dependency theory to assess dependency in action across three registers: (i) Angola's structural position within the global capitalist economy; (ii) the role of foreign capital and external military actors in shaping the domestic war economy; and (iii) the reproduction of asymmetrical core-periphery relations across ideological divides. The paper traces the historical events Cuban protection of Gulf Oil

4 Intervention, influence, and resources: Foreign actors and strategic convergence in ...

installations in Cabinda, the passage and subsequent repeal of the Clark Amendment, and the continuity of U.S. corporate operations under MPLA rule and their consequences for Angola.

The analytical strategy is process-tracing within a single case (George & Bennett, 2005). Rather than treating dependency and convergence as correlated outcomes, the paper identifies a sequence of decision-points at which the structural conditions specified above produced observable choices by the actors involved. Five such moments anchor the analysis: Cuba's November 1975 commitment of combat forces under Operation Carlota, which Gleijeses (2002: 246-272) reconstructs from Cuban operational archives; the MPLA's 1976 establishment of Sonangol as a state holding company that took equity stakes alongside foreign operators rather than as an instrument of nationalization (Soares de Oliveira, 2007); the 1977 internal MPLA crisis associated with the Nito Alves faction, after which the party's orthodox-Marxist tendency was politically marginalized; the 1985 repeal of the Clark Amendment, to which the MPLA did not respond by retaliating against Chevron's operations; and the 1989-1991 transition, during which Cuban forces withdrew and Soviet support collapsed but Western oil partnerships expanded. At each of these points, the choices of the relevant actors are consistent with the dependency-driven mechanism and are not adequately explained by ideological commitment or strategic posture alone. The internal deliberations behind these decisions Cuban command discussions of Cabinda deployment priorities, MPLA party debates over the structure of the oil sector are not accessible in the primary documentary record available for this study, and the decision-points traced here are therefore identified through their visible outcomes and through the secondary literature that has worked in those archives.

Evidence is drawn through triangulation of primary and secondary sources. Primary materials include declassified CIA intelligence memoranda, U.S. Department of State historical records, IMF staff country reports, World Trade Organization trade statistics, and contemporary journalistic coverage from outlets such as *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and the *Financial Times*. These are supplemented by peer-reviewed scholarship on Angolan political economy, Cold War intervention, and dependency studies. Consistent with the logic of qualitative case research, the study pursues analytical rather than statistical generalization, contributing to the theoretical refinement of dependency perspectives on foreign intervention.

2. Background: Angola's Civil War

2.1. Cold War conflict in Angola

Angola's civil war began as a struggle for power after the end of Portuguese colonial rule in 1975. Three nationalist movements contended for dominance: the Popular Movement for the Liberation of

Angola (MPLA), the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA).

The Alvor Agreement of January 1975 had nominally paved the way for an inclusive independence government, but it collapsed as these factions clashed (Office of the Historian, n.d.). The MPLA, led by Agostinho Neto, established control over Luanda and was ideologically aligned with the Soviet Union and Cuba. Its rivals received Western backing: the FNLA (led by Holden Roberto) drew on Zaire and some U.S. assistance, while UNITA (led by Jonas Savimbi) was supported by the United States, China (initially), and apartheid South Africa. By late 1975, full-scale civil war had erupted, quickly acquiring a Cold War character as external powers intervened. Fearing a pro-Western victory, Cuba launched a military intervention in support of the MPLA (Glejises, 2002: 246-272), eventually stationing up to 50,000–55,000 troops in Angola during the 1980s, while the Soviet Union provided weapons, instructors, and economic aid (Westad, 2005). South Africa's army invaded from the south to aid UNITA, and the CIA covertly funneled arms to Savimbi's forces until such aid was curtailed by U.S. law in late 1975. The Clark Amendment, passed by Congress in 1976, prohibited direct or indirect military aid to any Angolan faction, reflecting post-Vietnam war-weariness (Central Intelligence Agency, 1983). It halted official U.S. support to UNITA for the rest of the 1970s, though South Africa continued its assistance and the CIA pursued covert channels despite the legal restrictions. Throughout the late 1970s, Angola remained divided: the MPLA held the cities and the vital oil-producing region with Cuban-Soviet support, while UNITA waged insurgency with intermittent external assistance.

2.2. The strategic role of oil

A central factor in Angola's war was the country's petroleum wealth, concentrated in the exclave of Cabinda. The Cabinda Gulf Oil Company, a subsidiary of Gulf Oil (USA), had discovered large offshore reserves in the 1960s under Portuguese colonial rule. By 1972, Gulf was extracting approximately 9 million tons of crude annually and paying Portugal about \$400 million per year in taxes and royalties revenues that accounted for an estimated 60% of Portugal's military expenditures in Angola (Central Intelligence Agency, 1970). The colonial power had literally funded its counterinsurgency through oil payments from an American corporation. When the MPLA took power in 1975, it nationalized the oil sector but chose to continue partnerships with experienced Western firms. Gulf Oil (later Chevron)¹ decided to remain and work with the MPLA regime despite the Marxist rhetoric from Luanda: the MPLA lacked the technical capacity to run offshore

1. Gulf Oil¹ refers to the U.S.-based Gulf Oil Corporation, not the Persian Gulf region

6 Intervention, influence, and resources: Foreign actors and strategic convergence in ...

drilling, and Gulf valued the stable continuation of its concession. Unlike many other sectors that collapsed after the Portuguese exodus, the oil industry never stopped pumping. Production expanded from roughly 150,000 barrels per day in 1980 to nearly 500,000 by 1990 as new fields came online (Duquet, 2006). By 1988, oil revenues accounted for almost 90% of Angola's total export earnings, with the United States emerging as Angola's single largest customer; by the early 1990s, oil also provided 80–90% of government revenues, epitomizing a rentier economy (IMF, 1995). The survival of the Angolan state and its ability to finance warfare depended overwhelmingly on oil money from the capitalist world.

2.3. The Cuba-Gulf Oil contradiction

The dominant U.S. policy narrative under Kissinger claimed that Cuban combat troops were active in Angola as early as August 1975, framing the MPLA's battlefield gains as the result of communist presence rather than domestic consolidation. This framing carried significant weight, as it justified U.S. covert assistance to the FNLA and UNITA and lent retrospective legitimacy to South African military incursions. Archival evidence suggests otherwise. Piero Gleijeses's research in the closed Cuban archives, including the operational reports of Cuban military envoy Raúl Díaz Argüelles from August to October 1975, indicates that no Cuban combat units were deployed inside Angola until early November (Gleijeses, 2002: 256-265). CIA reports from August and September 1975 corroborate the later timeline, referencing only Cuban advisers and technicians (Westad, 2005). The MPLA's territorial consolidation through October 1975 including control of twelve of sixteen provinces, all major ports, and the Cabinda oilfields was therefore achieved largely before the arrival of Cuban combat forces (Gleijeses, 2002: 270-272). This chronology undermines the narrative of a preemptive Soviet-Cuban offensive that was later used to justify sustained U.S. covert engagement.

Once deployed, Cuban expeditionary forces were tasked not only with fighting UNITA and deterring South African incursions, but also with protecting the oil installations in Cabinda, which UNITA's guerrillas viewed as prime targets. Thousands of Cuban soldiers were dispatched to guard Chevron/Gulf's production sites and personnel; in effect, soldiers from a socialist country defending the operations of a major American corporation. U.S. Ambassador Andrew Young cited this situation as proof that a purely ideological reading of African conflicts was oversimplified (Hovey, 1977).

The arrangement was indispensable to the MPLA: by the mid-1980s, payments from Chevron-Gulf constituted most of Angola's hard currency earnings, with one estimate placing Gulf-derived taxes and royalties at 60–80% of government expenditures by 1986 and another suggesting Chevron-Gulf lease payments amounted to roughly 95% of

foreign exchange income during the 1980s (IMF, 1995). Without the oil money safeguarded by Cuban troops, the MPLA's war effort and basic governance would have collapsed.

2.4. U.S. policy contradictions

Washington had to reconcile its hardline Cold War posture with its economic interests in Angola. The U.S. refused for years to recognize the MPLA government, castigating it as a Soviet-Cuban puppet, and the Carter Administration in the late 1970s linked any warming of relations to the withdrawal of Cuban troops. Nevertheless, the oil business quietly continued. Washington had no objection to American companies operating in Angola and in fact encouraged firms like Boeing and Citibank to pursue opportunities there despite the lack of diplomatic ties (Center for National Security Studies, 1975).

The contradiction sharpened in the 1980s: even as President Reagan denounced the MPLA and embraced Savimbi's UNITA under the anti-communist Reagan Doctrine, American-owned Chevron was pumping oil in MPLA territory and paying taxes to Luanda.

Tensions came to a head after the 1985 repeal of the Clark Amendment, when covert aid to UNITA resumed: with CIA support flowing to Savimbi again, the United States was effectively funding both sides of the Angolan war; backing UNITA's guerrilla campaign with taxpayer dollars while U.S. oil firms' revenue kept the MPLA solvent. Congressional attempts to penalize Chevron's Angolan operations had limited impact, and U.S. officials largely looked the other way as American companies maintained working relationships with the MPLA authorities (Potts, 1987).

3. Theoretical framework: Neo-marxist dependency theory

The event of Cuban soldiers guard American oil rigs in a war the United States being funded against them cannot be explained by the classical theories. The two sides were enemies in every other respect in propaganda, in proxy battles across the continent, in the rhetoric of their leaders. But in Cabinda, their interests met. The MPLA needed the oil revenue to survive. Cuba needed the MPLA to survive to justify its presence in Africa. Gulf Oil needed production to continue to keep its concession. The United States, whatever its public position, needed Gulf Oil to keep operating because Gulf Oil is an American corporation. The convergence in Cabinda was more than a contradiction. It was what the demand of the situation.

A framework that treats states as actors driven by ideology or strategic calculation cannot explain this, because the actors in question were not behaving as states pursuing well-defined strategy. They were behaving as participants in an extractive economy whose continued operation served them all. Explaining this kind of arrangement requires a framework that takes the economy seriously as a determinant of

8 Intervention, influence, and resources: Foreign actors and strategic convergence in ...

political behavior, one that asks who gets paid, by whom, for what, and what those payments make possible. Neo-Marxist dependency theory offers such a framework. It treats peripheral economies not as junior partners in a global market but as structures whose function is to deliver resources outward, and it treats peripheral states not as autonomous agents but as nodes in that delivery system. For a war fought over an oil-producing enclave between actors who all depended on the oil, this is the appropriate framework.

André Gunder Frank gave the framework its sharpest form. His central claim was that underdevelopment is not what societies suffer from before they develop; it is what the global system produces in them so that other societies can develop. "Underdevelopment was and still is generated by the very same historical process which also generated economic development: the development of capitalism itself" (Frank, 1978). The poverty of the periphery is not a starting condition but a result. Frank's argument built on earlier work by Prebisch on terms of trade, by Baran and Sweezy on surplus extraction, and by Latin American writers including Dos Santos, Marini, and Amin (Ellner, 2024; Kvangraven, 2021). What united them was the conviction that peripheral states cannot be understood in isolation from the global economy that shaped them.

Frank has had his critics, and any careful use of his framework must acknowledge them. Cardoso and Faletto (1979) argued that he was too rigid and that peripheral economies vary, internal class politics matters, and that capitalist development is possible under dependent conditions, as their concept of associated-dependent development showed. Bill Warren (1980) went further stating that Frank had Marx wrong, he argued, because capitalism in the periphery is genuinely productive and not merely extractive. The East Asian industrialisers— South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore— provided the empirical ammunition for both critiques, showing that peripheral status need not mean permanent stagnation. Postcolonial scholars have added that dependency theory can flatten the agency of peripheral societies even as it tries to defend them, treating them as objects of core action rather than as actors.

These are real objections, and they have changed what it means to use Frank's framework well. But they do not apply with equal force to every case. Frank's model was built for a particular kind of economy, one organized around the export of a few primary commodities, governed by a state that lives on royalties from foreign firms rather than on taxes from a productive population, lacking an industrial bourgeoisie, lacking a developmental state. The East Asian cases worked precisely because they did not look like this. They had land reform, manufactured exports, disciplined capital, and states that directed industry rather than depended on rents. Angola had none of these things. It had oil, foreign companies pumping that oil, and a government that funded itself from the royalties. This is the situation

Frank wrote about. Cardoso's critique applies, but in a particular way: the MPLA's deal with Gulf Oil is exactly the kind of elite-foreign alliance Cardoso identified only without the productive industrialization that would have made it associated-dependent *development*. In Angola it was associated-dependent extraction. By the mid-1980s, oil generated about ninety percent of Angola's foreign exchange and most of its state revenue. The Soviet Union sent weapons but not dollars, and dollars were what kept the state alive. The structural conditions Frank's framework presupposes were present in Angola in unusually pure form.

This explains why dependency theory fits Angola, but not yet how the framework produces the specific convergence the paper analyses. The answer lies in what the oil revenue did. It paid for the MPLA's army, its administration, and its survival. It paid, in effect, for the Cuban presence because the Cubans could not operate without an Angolan state to host them, and there was no Angolan state without the oil money. It paid Gulf Oil's costs and generated its profits, which mattered to a U.S. administration that, however much it denounced the MPLA, could not be seen to destroy an American corporation's largest African operation. Every party in the war had a stake in the rigs continuing to pump. Their interests were not aligned by negotiation or by shared values; they were aligned by the fact that they all drank from the same well. This is the mechanism dependency theory identifies, and it is one no other framework specifies as cleanly. Ideology shaped what these actors said. The structure of the oil economy shaped what they did.

Other frameworks would describe this differently, and it is worth saying briefly why they describe it less well. Realism would call the arrangement a strategic accommodation, which it was, but realism cannot say why the accommodation took this shape rather than another. A ceasefire would have been strategic accommodation. A great-power deal would have been one. The specific form the Angolan convergence took- Cuban troops physically defending American oil installations was not produced by strategic logic alone, because strategic logic does not pick between functionally equivalent forms of cooperation. Liberal institutionalism has a different problem. It explains cooperation through institutions, regimes, and reciprocity, but there were no institutions in Angola, no regime governing Cuba-U.S. economic relations, and no diplomatic recognition between Washington and Luanda. The arrangement worked anyway, for sixteen years, which is hard to explain if institutions are what make cooperation possible. Constructivism captures something the others miss the way the actors talked about what they were doing, the languages of liberation and anti-communism they used to make sense of themselves. But constructivism cannot explain why the talking and the doing diverged so sharply, why Cuban internationalism guarded capitalist rigs and American anti-communism protected an American corporation's deal with a Marxist regime.

10 Intervention, influence, and resources: Foreign actors and strategic convergence in ...

Dependency theory does not deny what these frameworks see. It identifies the layer beneath them the structure of the oil economy itself that produced the arrangement they each describe only partially.

4. Consequences: The Cold War convergence and its afterlife

The arrangement examined in the preceding sections did not end with the Cold War. Cuban troops withdrew between 1989 and 1991. The Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. The civil war itself, after a brief settlement and a return to fighting, ended with UNITA's military defeat in 2002. Yet the structural feature that organized the wartime convergence, Angolan state revenue derived almost entirely from foreign-operated oil extraction survived all of these transitions intact. The MPLA remained in power. Chevron, holding the concession Gulf Oil acquired under Portuguese rule, remained the dominant American producer in Cabinda. Oil's share of state revenue and export earnings, far from declining, expanded. This section traces that continuity. The argument is that the dependency structure produced during the war was not contingent on Cold War politics; it outlasted them, and the post-war oil economy is best understood as the institutional residue of the wartime arrangement.

4.1. The wartime rentier state (1975–1991)

By the late 1980s, the Angolan state had taken on the fiscal architecture of a classic rentier economy: oil revenues funded warfare and basic governance; non-oil tax bases remained narrow and unreliable; and the regime's survival was tied to the continued operation of a small number of offshore wells. Between 1990 and 1994, although nominal state revenue rose from 78.6 billion new kwanzas to 260.9 trillion, this expansion reflected hyperinflation and currency redenomination rather than economic growth.

The composition mattered more than the total. Oil-related taxes overwhelmingly dominated state income throughout the period, while taxes on foreign trade fluctuated sharply with war-related disruption of ports and administrative control, and revenue from the diamond sector remained negligible because diamond-rich areas were largely under UNITA control (IMF, 1995). When the civil war resumed after the 1992 elections, offshore oil production continued operating independently of the territorial conflict, allowing the regime to finance military operations even as parts of the country slipped from its control.

The rentier structure also organized Angola's external accounts. By 1994, oil exports generated virtually all of the country's foreign exchange earnings, a sharp departure from the more diversified pre-war export base. Until the early 1990s, rising oil revenues combined with strict import controls and Soviet assistance enabled Angola to maintain a basic external balance, persisting even through the foreign exchange stress of the 1986 oil price collapse (IMF, 1995). The system also

produced political distortion. Oil revenues centralized state power reduced the regime's reliance on domestic taxation, and weakened mechanisms of public accountability, embedding elite patronage networks rather than financing inclusive development. By the mid-1980s, this arrangement had made Angola the United States' principal trading partner in sub-Saharan Africa, with U.S. oil multinationals supplying as much as 65 percent of Angolan export earnings. Foreign firms repatriated profits while supplying the Luanda regime with the share of revenues it required to function (Cook, 2013). The core-periphery linkage of oil for hard currency persisted across the entire war and was the precondition for everything else in Angolan fiscal life.

4.2. Continuity through transition (1991–2002)

The end of the Cold War tested whether the arrangement examined in this paper had been a creature of Cold War politics or of something more durable. Cuban forces withdrew under the terms of the New York Accords; Soviet support evaporated with the USSR itself; the Bicesse Accords of 1991 and the resumption of war after the 1992 elections rearranged the political landscape entirely. Two features of the wartime political economy did not change. First, the MPLA, freed from the need to balance Soviet patronage against Western commercial relationships, deepened rather than diluted its accommodation with foreign oil capital. Second, the foreign oil corporations Chevron foremost among the did not retreat. They expanded production, took on additional concessions, and prepared for the post-war investment boom that arrived after 2002. The MPLA's wartime decision to partner with rather than expropriate Western oil capital, institutionalized in Sonangol's 1976 founding structure (Soares de Oliveira, 2007), provided the legal and contractual scaffolding on which post-Cold War operations were built. The end of the Cold War altered the diplomatic register of the arrangement; it did not alter the arrangement itself.

4.3. The post-war oil economy (2002–present)

By the early 2000s, Angola had emerged from the war as a textbook petro-state. Oil accounted for approximately 95% of export earnings, 60-70% of government revenue, and 30-50% of GDP. This extreme reliance was a direct result of wartime devastation in other sectors: agriculture and manufacturing had been destroyed or neglected during the conflict, leaving petroleum and, to a lesser extent, diamonds as the only viable engines of growth. Production rose from approximately 750,000 barrels per day in 2001 to nearly two million by 2008, making Angola Africa's second-largest crude producer and driving double-digit GDP growth rates through the mid-2000s. The pattern, however, was structurally identical to the wartime configuration: revenue volatility tracked global oil prices, with booms in 2004-2008 and 2010-2013 followed by fiscal crisis when the 2014-2016 price collapse plunged the

12 Intervention, influence, and resources: Foreign actors and strategic convergence in ...

country into recession (World Bank, 2007). Post-war prosperity was simply wartime dependence operating under more favourable conditions.

The trade data for the post-2002 period demonstrates this continuity directly, and it is on this basis that data from 2001 onward is presented in Table 1, focused on the Cold War years. The structural arrangement established between 1975 and 1991 has not been a transient feature of the Cold War period but the enduring shape of the Angolan economy. Across fifteen years of post-war reconstruction, Angola has continued to import the foundational goods and equipment of an industrial economy manufactures exceeded \$18 billion at the 2013 peak and remained above \$8 billion in 2024; machinery and transport equipment exceeded \$4 billion in 2024; food and agricultural products together represented over \$2.2 billion (World Trade Organization, n.d.). The consumption habits but the *absence* of domestic industrial and agricultural capacity the same absence, the war produced and the post-war reconstruction has not reversed. Angola's external account is configured exactly as dependency theory predicts raw commodity exports outward, manufactured and capital goods inward.

Table 2 makes the same argument from the other direction. Fuels and mining products climbed from \$5.8 billion in 2001 to a peak of \$69.4 billion in 2012, with crude oil representing roughly 96% of that value. Manufactures and agricultural exports remained essentially flat, never exceeding a small fraction of the fuels line even at the bottom of the oil cycle. The peaks and valleys of the export series- the 2015 crash following the 2014 oil price collapse, the recovery to \$35.8 billion by 2024- track global oil prices, not Angolan policy. As Le Billon (1999) observed even before the war ended, Angola's economy was already overwhelmingly dominated by the oil sector, and its vulnerability to global price swings and external manipulation was structural rather than circumstantial. Two decades of post-war reconstruction have not altered this picture; if anything, the export concentration has intensified.

The continuity becomes most visible at the level of corporate ownership. Figure 1 shows that by 2020, French major TotalEnergies controlled 45.57% of Angolan crude output through its lead role in offshore mega-projects, while Chevron and ExxonMobil operating in Angola as Esso together held roughly one-third (Chevron at 19.31%, ExxonMobil at 14.33%). The Angolan state oil company Sonangol's direct production share stood at 1.85% (Soares de Oliveira, 2007; Sasu, 2025). The specific figure that matters for this paper's argument is Chevron's. Chevron's share in 2020 derives from the same Cabinda concession that Gulf Oil acquired under Portuguese colonial rule, that Cuban troops guarded through the 1980s, that survived the Clark Amendment's repeal in 1985, that persisted through the Cuban withdrawal in 1991, and that operated continuously through the resumption and conclusion of the civil war.

Table 1. Imports by Angola by commodity (2010-2024) (World Trade Organization, 2007)

Years	Agricultural products	Food	Fuels & mining products	Manufactures	Iron and steel	Chemicals	Machinery & transport equipment	Telecommunications equipment	Transport equipment	Automotive products
2010	2882	2764	3233	10521	1046	963	6475	369	2090	1204
2011	3999	3866	2562	13664	981	1285	8366	538	4142	1377
2012	5956	5764	1392	16357	1887	2148	10917	730	5308	3140
2013	4894	4750	2250	19181	1430	1670	12127	520	6936	2262
2014	5138	4882	1825	18136	1880	1954	9355	561	3620	3051
2015	2990	2841	1531	12985	1512	1558	6390	436	1551	1093
2016	2046	1966	1650	7873	643	1185	4031	184	708	279
2017	2906	2742	1780	8656	350	1463	4517	220	1113	680
2018	3437	3277	2521	9453	352	1589	5344	238	2275	614
2019	2881	2749	2067	8948	379	1420	4939	202	2272	614
2020	2213	2123	983	6113	298	1154	3038	143	983	489
2021	2181	2075	1947	7245	384	1312	3513	190	959	716
2022	3338	3179	4077	10323	518	2102	4947	238	1690	1264
2023	2387	2265	3578	9709	563	1491	5264	357	1597	1224
2024	2270	2192	2938	8676	617	1348	4418	198	939	659

14 Intervention, influence, and resources: Foreign actors and strategic convergence in ...

Table 2. Exports by Angola by commodity (2001-2024) (World Trade Organization, 2007)

Years	Agricultural products	Fuels and mining products	Manufactures	Machinery & transport equipment
2000	44	7120	626	-
2001	45	5803	584	-
2002	47	7706	568	-
2003	48	9126	329	-
2004	88	13221	166	-
2005	59	23357	693	-
2006	62	31204	596	-
2007	52	42394	454	-
2008	24	62721	1154	-
2009	32	39435	1352	-
2010	29	49283	1258	-
2011	26	65762	1516	-
2012	45	69428	1602	-
2013	51	67661	-	-
2014	55	58617	-	-
2015	118	32250	809	585
2016	235	26574	779	455
2017	239	33909	465	270
2018	288	40109	268	138
2019	135	34630	668	544
2020	136	20825	1173	1073
2021	93	32894	1482	1281
2022	119	49646	1504	1272
2023	170	36734	2599	2321
2024	161	35781	3304	3021

The corporate continuity is not metaphorical. It is the same concession, in the same exclave, operated by the same corporation across three political regimes and two phases of armed conflict. To finance post-war reconstruction, Angola has further mortgaged future oil production in exchange for Chinese loans, adding a new external creditor to the older configuration of Western corporate operators (World Bank, 2007). The form of external dependence has diversified; the fact of it has deepened.

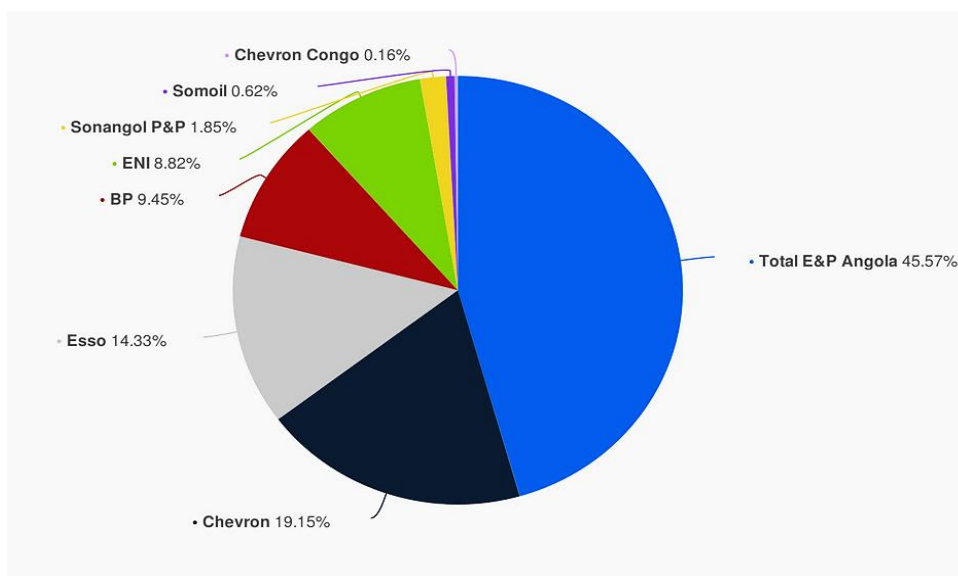


Figure 1. Distribution of crude oil production by Corporations in Angola as of 2020 (Sasu, 2025)

The post-conflict outcomes reveal a central pattern to the argument. Regardless of which faction prevailed militarily in the proxy war, regardless of which Cold War bloc survived the 1990s, U.S. and Western corporate access to Angolan petroleum resources was secured and secured in forms substantially continuous with the wartime arrangement. The convergence examined in earlier sections was not, then, an episode of Cold War history but a stable feature of Angola's position in the global oil economy, of which the Cold War episode was the moment when the configuration was first made visible through the unusual spectacle of communist soldiers defending capitalist installations. The political surface changed. The structural configuration did not.

The political consequences track the economic ones. The MPLA's consolidation of power after 2002, the absence of meaningful power-sharing (Soares de Oliveira, 2007), the de facto one-party character of the post-war state (Hanson, 2008), the lengthy intervals between multiparty elections, and the centralization of authority in the presidency (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024; Cook, 2024) are not separate phenomena from the oil economy described above. They are the political form a rentier state takes when its revenue is independent of domestic taxation and broad-based consent. A government that lives on royalties from offshore wells operated by foreign corporations does not need its citizens' tax compliance and has limited incentive to seek their political consent. The dependency-driven convergence that organized the wartime political economy thus produced, as its long-run consequence, a post-war political settlement in which formal

16 Intervention, influence, and resources: Foreign actors and strategic convergence in ...

democratic institutions coexist with the substantive concentration of power that rentier conditions tend to generate.

4.4. Contemporary resonances of the Angolan pattern

The structural logic identified in the Angolan case -actors aligned by shared revenue interests despite declared ideological opposition does not end with Cold War. Two contemporary cases illustrate the framework's continued explanatory power.

The Russian oil sector under post-2022 Western sanctions present the clearest parallel. After the invasion of Ukraine, the EU banned seaborne imports of Russian crude and joined a G7+ price cap intended to constrain Russia's war revenue. In practice, Russian crude was redirected to India, China, and Turkey, often at discounts, with India's imports rising from virtually zero to an average of \$144 million per day by 2024 (Harris et al., 2026). By November 2025, sanctioned shadow tankers carried 65% of Russian crude exports, while refineries in India and Turkey re-exported refined products partially made from Russian crude back to EU, UK, and U.S. markets (Raghunandan, 2026). Declared geopolitical hostility coexists with sustained commercial flows mediated by third-party intermediaries, the Angolan pattern, distributed across a wider geography.

The Venezuelan case is a more precise recapitulation, because it involves the same American corporation that operated in Cold War Angola. The Treasury authorized Chevron to resume operations in Venezuela in 2022 (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2022). By 2024, Chevron was producing roughly a fifth of Venezuela's oil and supplying nearly a third of the country's legal hard currency (Kurmanaev & Pager, 2025). A confidential supplement to the license permitted Chevron to pay taxes and royalties to the Maduro government that the public license had expressly forbidden (*Bloomberg*, 2025). Chevron, which inherited the Gulf Oil concession in Cabinda, now sustains a structurally identical arrangement in Caracas: A Western corporation paying revenues to a regime its home government refuses to recognize.

5. Conclusion

This paper concludes that Angolan case changes the conventional narratives of Cold War ideology by demonstrating how material interests, particularly control over strategic resources including oil or minerals, shaped alliances more strategically than publicly declared political doctrine. Analyzed through a neo-Marxist dependency lens, the convergence between revolutionary Cuba and the American oil firm Gulf Oil was not a case of anomaly in the cold war history, but an example of how resource dependency can produce pragmatic alliances despite ideological divides. Oil revenue was indispensable source of survival for Angola and importance natural resource for the external

powers, and its uninterrupted flow became a shared priority for both the otherwise positioned on opposite sides of the Cold War rivalry.

When situated within the backdrop of U.S. foreign policy, the Angolan case also features a recurring tussle between normative rhetoric and material practice. The United States has consistently conveyed its global engagement in terms of democracy promotion, stability, and conflict resolution. Yet, as Angola and other cases such as Chile, Afghanistan, and Iraq suggest, foreign interventions happened keeping in mind the economic interests and geopolitical leverage during the contest with the Soviet Union. The pursuit of immediate strategic advantage often outweighed long-term stated alignment with state-building or institutional development. In Angola, support for factions and the implied accommodation of oil operations reflected an underlying calculation that securing resource flows and countering rival influence were indispensable objectives.

From a neo-dependency perspective, the long-term consequence of such interventions is not merely regime survival or regime change, but the reproduction of asymmetrical relationships. Assistance, whether military, financial, or diplomatic may entrench structural reliance on external capital and security guarantees, especially when strategic commodities are involved. In conflict-affected states, foreign aid and external backing may stabilize governments in the short term, but they can also deepen patterns of resource extraction and limited or controlled domestic institutional diversification. Strategic resources thus become both leverage and liability: the very assets that attract foreign engagement can simultaneously anchor states within unequal global arrangements. Great powers, including the United States, operate within a system where normative commitments coexist with, and are frequently subordinated to, assessments of strategic utility and economic return. As profitability or geopolitical value declines, the intensity of ideological preference tends to recalibrate accordingly. Angola illustrates how the language of global responsibility can be overshadowed by pragmatic calculations tied to resource security and power competition. Recognizing this duality does not negate the role of ideas; rather, it underscores the need to analyze foreign policy through a structural lens that accounts for both rhetoric and material incentives. The Angolan case does not establish what the country's trajectory would have been in the absence of Cold War interventions; Angola's position in the global oil economy and its inherited colonial-extractive structure predate the events analysed here. What the case shows is rather how foreign interventions have the power to shape the configuration through which an existing dependency is reproduced, and how even ideologically opposed interventions can converge on configurations that reinforce rather than dissolve it.

Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

Authors' contributions

All authors contributed to the original idea, study design.

Ethical considerations

The authors have completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc. This article was not authored by artificial intelligence.

Data availability

The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

References

- Barber J. (1994). "High noon in Southern Africa: making peace in a rough neighbourhood". *International Affairs*. 70(1): 182-183. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2620807>.
- Bertelsmann Stiftung. (2024). "BTI 2024 Country Report—Angola". Bertelsmann Stiftung.
- Bloomberg. (2025). "Secret Biden deal allowed Chevron to pay Venezuela millions". *Fortune*. 2025. <https://fortune.com/2025/03/22/secret-biden-deal-chevron-venezuela-taxes-royalties-maduro/>.
- Cardoso FH, Faletto E. (1979). *Dependencia Y Desarrollo En America Latina*. Siglo Veintiuno Editores. https://docs.enriquedussel.com/txt/Textos_200_Obras/Filosofia_liberacion/Dependencia_desarrollo-Cardoso_Faletto.pdf. [in Spanish]
- Center for National Security Studies (1975). "CIA's secret war in Angola". *Intelligence Report*. no. 1. September. <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP88-01314R000100660020-1.pdf>.
- Central Intelligence Agency (1983). "Angola: Impact of the Clark Amendment". CIA Intelligence Memorandum. April. <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP85T00287R000400320002-3.pdf>.
- (1970). "Oil in Angola". CIA Intelligence Report. October. <http://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP85T00875R001600030145-8.pdf>.
- Cook CR. (2013). "Diamonds, oil, and the American Media: Filtering out the logic of plunder in the Angolan Civil War". *SAGE Open*. 3: 1-13. <https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA400786039&sid=googleScholar&v=2.1&it=r&linkaccess=abs&issn=1931728X&sw=w&p=AONE&userGroupName=anon%7Ee2ca0688&aty=open-web-entry>.
- Duquet N. (2006). "Angola's rise to regional power: A theoretical approach on oil and conflict in central Africa". *St Antony's International Review*. 2(1): 96-112. <https://researchportal.vub.be/nl/publications/angolas-rise-to-regional-power-a-theoretical-approach-to-oil-and-/>.
- Ellner S. (2014). "Dependency theory and its revival in the twenty-first century". *Latin American Research Review*. 59(3): 744-757. <https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2024.12>.
- Frank AG. (1978). "Development of underdevelopment or underdevelopment of development in China". *Modern China*. 4(3): 341-352.

- <https://www.jstor.org/stable/188950>.
- George A, Bennett A. (2005). *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Gleijeses P. (2002). *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959–1976*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Hanson S. (2008). "Angola's political and economic development". Council on Foreign Relations. July.
- Harris B, Koh HH, Marshall L, Brooks R. (2026). "Stiffening European sanctions against the Russian oil trade. Brookings" February 3. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/stiffening-european-sanctions-against-the-russian-oil-trade/>.
- Hovey G. (1997). "Young feels U.S. Is 'Paranoid' on communist activities in Africa". *New York Times*. April 12. <https://www.nytimes.com/1977/04/12/archives/young-feels-us-is-paranoid-on-communist-activities-in-africa.html>.
- IMF: International Monetary Fund (1995). "Angola: Recent economic developments". *IMF Staff Country Reports*. 122: 1-85. <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/downloadpdf/view/journals/002/1995/122/002.1995.issue-122-en.pdf>.
- Kvangraven IH. (2021). "Beyond the stereotype: Restating the relevance of the dependency research programme". *Development and Change*. 52(1): 76-112. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12593>.
- Kurmanaev A, Pager T. (2025). "Trump revised Chevron's Venezuela deal. Maduro's oil trader profited". *WLRN*. December 18. <https://www.wlrn.org/americas/2025-12-18/trump-revised-chevrons-venezuela-deal-maduros-oil-trader-profited>.
- Potts M. (1987). "Chevron's Marxist Angola connection raises some eyebrows at home". *Los Angeles Times*. June 10. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1987-06-10-fi-3679-story.html>.
- Le Billon P. (1999). *A Land Cursed by its Wealth? Angola's War Economy 1975-99*. WIDER Working Papers 295366. United Nations University, World Institute for Development Economic Research (UNU-WIDER). <https://ideas.repec.org/p/ags/widerw/295366.html>.
- Oberdorfer D. (1978). "Cuban troops in Angola Guard Gulf Oil works". *Washington Post*. June 17. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1978/06/18/cuban-troops-in-angola-guard-gulf-oil-works/f984f26d-acfb-410b-add9-596b782487af/>.
- Office of the Historian (n.d.). "Foreign relations of the United States, 1969–1976". Volume XXVIII: Southern Africa. Document 101. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v28/d101>.
- Ogo NC, Nwokike KI, Mbam NM. (2024). "National interest in international relations: Whose interest?". *Ideal International Journal*. 17(4): 10-19. <https://www.acjoi.com/paper/5963.pdf>.
- Raghunandan V. (2026). "Monthly analysis of Russian fossil fuel exports and sanctions". Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air. <https://energyandcleanair.org/november-2025-monthly-analysis-of-russian-fossil-fuel-exports-and-sanctions/>.
- Sasu DD. (2025). "Distribution of crude oil production in Angola, by Operator 2020". *Statista*. November 27. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1187261/distribution-of-crude-oil-production-by-operator-in-angola/>.
- Soares de Oliveira R. (2007). "Business success, Angola-style: Postcolonial politics and the rise and rise of Sonangol". *The Journal of Modern African Studies*. 45(4): 595-619. https://gppi.net/assets/Soares_2007_Business_Success.pdf.
- US Department of Treasury. (2026). "Treasury issues Venezuela General License 41 upon resumption of Mexico City talks". U.S. Department of The Treasury. <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1127>.
- Warren B. (1980). *Imperialism: Pioneer of Capitalism*. London: New Left Books.
- Westad OA. (2005). *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making*

20 Intervention, influence, and resources: Foreign actors and strategic convergence in ...

- of Our Times*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- World Bank. (2007). *Angola: Oil, broad-based growth, and equity* (World Bank Country Study). World Bank. <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/6759>.
- World Trade Organization (2007). "WTO Statistics Database". <https://stats.wto.org/>.
- Wright G. (1997). *The Destruction of a Nation: United States' Policy towards Angola since 1945*. Pluto Press.

in Press