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Keeping business in and politics out: Angola's multi-vector foreign policy

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Recently back from decades of civil war, Angola is rapidly making itself noticeable in important international and regional forums. The progress made in a very short timespan is nothing but remarkable. Yet, the political and psychological perception of Angola is still very blurry. While Angolans and some observers argue that the country is today a regional power, others refrain from speculating because there is still a long path ahead. Nonetheless, Angola is becoming increasingly central in the international agenda. The answer to this resurgence is very straightforward: Angola has made it into the petro-state club.

Most petro-states have become hostile to western agendas in the last ten or twenty years. Oil revenues have empowered national champion companies and political populism, used by politicians to nationalize the energy sector – thus most of the country's economy – which then transpires to the business class, becoming more arrogant and less open to social or regional obligations. As a consequence, this modus operandi has profound reflections in a country's foreign policy direction and inclination.

Nevertheless, Angola is a somewhat different case with regards to its foreign policy. As witnessed in Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela, oil incomes have been used to strengthen the international image and importance of the country and to defend the values of the elite in power, often through alignment to a specific field or ideology in the international sphere, commonly anti-western.

Yet Angola has shown no inclination or appreciation in supporting global or regional powers. It has made business deals with China, Brazil, Europe, India, Iran, Russia and the US, among others, without taking a stand on sanctions on Iran, nor agreeing with Brazil, the US or Russia on the matter. It has not shown fear of China's economic and military growth but rather learnt to cooperate with it in order to achieve multiple gains. Through its uncritical and unpartisan position in world affairs, Angola has operated a multi-vector foreign policy, which is singularly based on maximizing profits by attracting foreign investment in order to develop and rebuild the country.

Angola has managed this multi-vector foreign policy not only at the state level, but is also increasingly connected to global and regional organizations. Holding the presidency of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP), an organization it founded along with other Portuguese-speaking countries and a central pillar in its foreign policy, Angola has today become one of its most promising members. In fact, the CPLP is becoming a mainstream organization greatly due to Angolan and Brazilian crescent influence and importance in the world.

Angola is also starting to show its capacity to solve some of Southern Africa's problems through the Southern African Development Community (SADC). SADC's vision and goal is to eliminate poverty in the region. It proposes to achieve such goals through



the promotion of regional economic integration, and a reinforcement of peace and security. Angola is increasingly becoming more suited to contribute to SADC. It has revealed the necessary political will to achieve lasting peace in the region while remaining open to instigating regional economic growth, the cure for most of Southern Africa's 'diseases'.

On the energy field, Angola is considered one of the best providers of energy in the region. In fact, up until 2001, Angola was responsible for the energy commission of SADC, one of the most relevant jobs in the organization, as the most important factor for sustaining the development of a country is a steady flow of energy.

Turning to a global perspective, Angola has also been profoundly engaged in working with international organizations. Counting almost three decades of civil war, Angola takes immense pride in participating in the United Nations (UN), an organization which represents a vital pillar of international peace and security. Angola understands this to be central in its participation in global affairs, especially in its struggle to maintain peace and security in Africa, in particular the sub-Saharan region. Accordingly, Angola was a non-permanent member of the Security Council in 2003/2004, having presided over the same council in November of 2003. It also played a valuable role in enhancing the effectiveness of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime, in the development of international legal instruments and norms, on issues of arms control initiatives and, most importantly, on the promotion of policies which enable UN peacekeeping operations.

However, issues regarding the extension of such power loom ahead. Angola has been able to strongly participate in global forums because the international community is waiting for it to become a regional power in Southern Africa. However, this regional powerhouse's goal is intrinsically connected to oil revenues, which are limited. Hence, the issue of

whether Angola will be able to sustain this political perception of power is central to this assessment. In fact, there could be a situation where Angola is perceived as an influential player in the international stage, but possesses no way to back its bid or to project its power except for political rhetoric.

Hence, the key word for Angola's continuing participation in global forums is sustainability. Angola must use its international influence and political image as a fast developing country to attract investment that enables the diversification of its economy, away from oil and precious stones. Being present in the various sub-organizations of the UN, the CPLP, the African Union and the SADC is a strong first-step to begin working on such matters.

Angola is in a very strong position to do so. Because of its multi-vector foreign policy, Angola has no enemies to speak of. It has shown to be able to interact and have a business relationship with several players representing different sides and views. It has also managed to keep a balance of interests regarding foreign intervention in its domestic market. Angola has many different countries and interests from opposite political spheres operating and investing in its economy. Yet while dealing with all of them, Angola has not seen any hostile behavior or even attempts to start some sort of proxy war within its borders. Above all, this is a very strong diplomatic trump card that Angola must use to reach its economic and development goals.

Angola must take advantage of the dynamics of its foreign policy and extract the necessary gains for its development. Aligning itself with the developing world would be a mistake, as it would open hostilities with other powerful interests. Hence, the country must remain open to the world without taking any partisan position. This means it must not become too absorbed with its growing power, but rather play along until the time to assume a position congruent to its national interests and identity arrives.

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