

**UNAVEM-II**  
**(UN Angola Verification Mission-II)**  
from April 1991 to February 1995



(Figure 1: Map of Angola)

## Angola

Angola - officially the Republic of Angola (Portuguese: República de Angola), is a country located on the west coast of Southern Africa. It is the second-largest Lusophone

(Portuguese-speaking) country in both total area and population (behind Brazil in both cases), and is the seventh-largest country in Africa.

It is bordered by Namibia to the south, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire) to the north, Zambia to the east, and the Atlantic Ocean to the west.

Angola has an exclave province, the province of Cabinda, that borders the Republic of the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Zaire).

The capital and most populous city is Luanda.

The People's Republic of Angola was the self-declared socialist state which governed Angola from its independence in 1975 until 25 August 1992, during the Angolan Civil War.

After a protracted anti-colonial struggle, Angola achieved independence in 1975 as a Marxist–Leninist one-party Republic. The country descended into a devastating civil war the same year, between the ruling People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), backed by the Soviet Union and Cuba, the insurgent National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), an originally Maoist and later anti-communist group supported by the United States and South Africa, and the militant organization National Liberation Front of Angola, backed by Zaire. The country has been governed by MPLA ever since its independence in 1975.

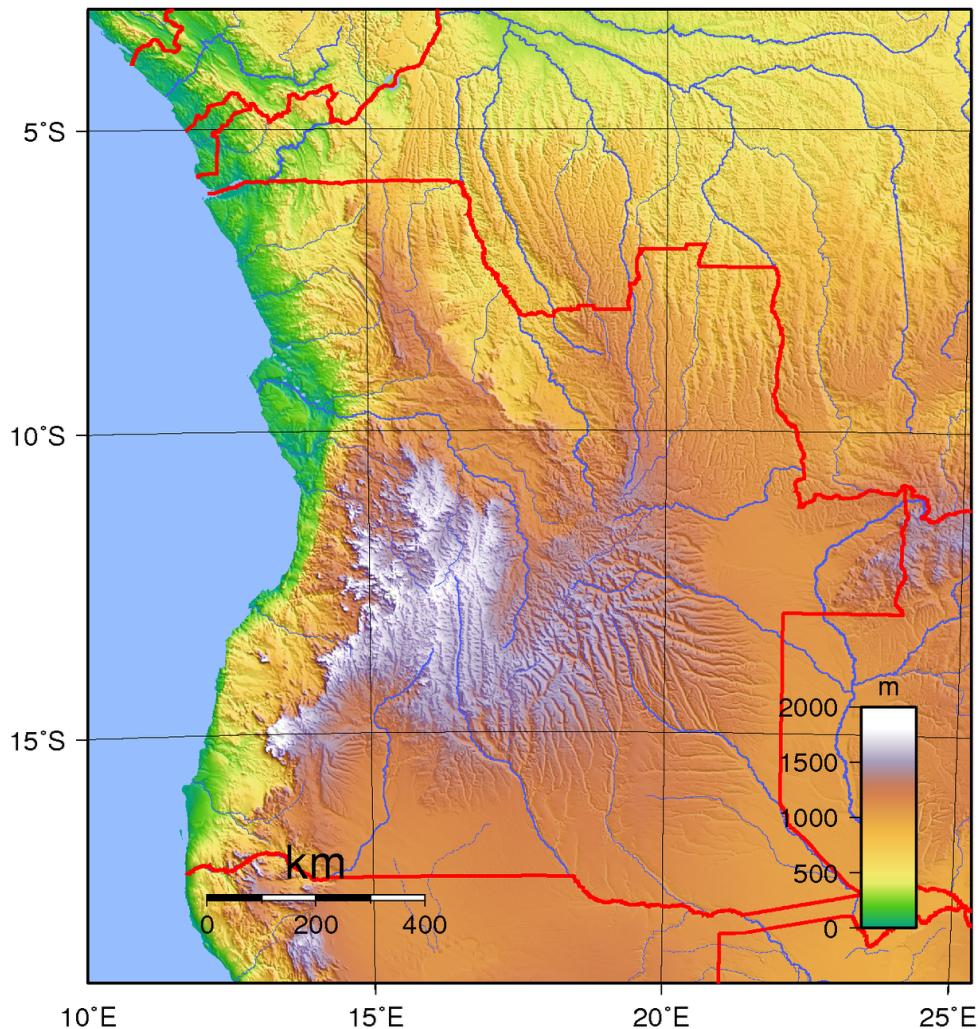


(Figure 2: Flag of Angola)

## Land

Angola is roughly square in shape, with a maximum width of about 800 miles (1,300 km), including the Cabinda enclave, which is located along the Atlantic coast just north of Angola's border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

At 1,246,700 km<sup>2</sup> (481,400 sq mi) Angola is the world's twenty-fourth largest country — comparable in size to Mali, or twice the size of France or of Texas. It lies mostly between latitudes 4° and 18°S, and longitudes 12° and 24°E.



(Figure 3.: Relief of Angola)

## Relief

From a narrow coastal plain, the land rises abruptly to the east in a series of escarpments to rugged highlands, which then slope down toward the center of the continent.

The highest point in the country is Mount Moco, near the city of Huambo, which reaches an elevation of 8,596 feet (2,620 meters).

## **Climate**

Angola has a tropical climate with a marked dry season. Like the rest of tropical Africa, Angola experiences distinct, alternating rainy and dry seasons. The rainy season lasts from September to May in the north and from December to March in the south. Droughts frequently afflict the country, especially in the south.

Temperatures vary much less than rainfall, however, and generally decrease with distance from the Equator, proximity to the coast, and increasing elevation. The average annual temperature in the north (Soyo city), for example, at the mouth of the Congo, is 26 °C (79 °F), whereas in the south (Huambo city), on the Bié Plateau, it is 19 °C (67 °F).

## **Economy**

Angola is a country with abundant natural resources that include diamonds, oil, gold, copper, and diverse wildlife, although the latter has been significantly depleted due to the devastating effects of the civil war. The country also boasts vast forested areas and fossil fuels reserves.

Since gaining independence, Angola has mainly relied on its oil and diamond reserves as the cornerstone of its economy. These resources have been vital in driving the country's growth and development. However, it's important to note that Angola also has a rich agricultural sector, comprising smallholder and plantation farming, which once contributed significantly to the country's GDP. Unfortunately, during the civil war, the sector experienced a massive decline and has not fully recovered.

## **Currency**

Novo kwanza, AON, 1990–1995

In 1990, the novo kwanza was introduced (code AON). Although it replaced the kwanza at par, Angolans could only exchange 5% of all old notes for new ones; they had to exchange the rest for government securities.

This kwanza suffered from high inflation.



(Figure 4.: Angolan currency in 1993, Novo kwanza)

## Languages

Angola has a diverse linguistic landscape that comprises indigenous languages spoken by different ethnic groups and Portuguese, which was introduced during the colonial era. The most widely spoken native languages in Angola are Umbundu, Kimbundu, and Kikongo, with Umbundu being the most commonly used, followed by Kimbundu and then Kikongo.

It's worth noting that Portuguese is the official language of Angola and is widely spoken and used in official settings, such as in government, education, and business. While the indigenous languages have a significant place in the country's cultural heritage, Portuguese serves as a unifying language that enables communication among different ethnic groups and with the wider international community.

## Religion

Angola has a diverse religious landscape that comprises approximately 1,000 religious communities, with Christianity being the dominant faith. Although there are no official statistics available, it's estimated that more than half of the country's population are Catholics, with the religion having a strong historical presence in Angola.

In addition to Catholicism, Protestant churches, which were introduced during the colonial period, are also prevalent in Angola, with around a quarter of the population adhering to various Protestant denominations. Other Christian denominations such as Seventh-day Adventists, Baptists, and Methodists also have a notable presence in the country.

While Christianity is the dominant religion in Angola, there are also some followers of indigenous beliefs, particularly in rural areas. Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism have a limited presence in Angola, with only a small number of adherents.

## **Health**

Angola is plagued by a range of communicable diseases, including cholera, malaria, rabies, and African hemorrhagic fevers, such as Marburg hemorrhagic fever. These diseases are prevalent in various parts of the country and pose a significant public health challenge.

Additionally, Angola has high incidence rates of tuberculosis, which is a leading cause of mortality in the country. The country also has a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, with an estimated 2.2% of the adult population living with the disease, according to UNAIDS.

As a result of these health challenges, Angola has one of the highest infant mortality rates globally, with an estimated 53 deaths per 1,000 live births. The country also has one of the world's lowest life expectancies, with an average life expectancy of just over 60 years. Factors contributing to this include poor healthcare infrastructure, limited access to healthcare services, and high rates of poverty and malnutrition in some parts of the country.

## **The Angolan Civil War.**

The Angolan Civil War (Portuguese: Guerra Civil Angolana) was a civil war in Angola, beginning in 1975 and continuing, with interludes, until 2002. The war began immediately after Angola became independent from Portugal in November 1975. It was a power struggle between two former anti-colonial guerrilla movements, the communist People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and the anti-communist National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA).

The MPLA and UNITA had different roots in Angolan society and mutually incompatible leaderships, despite their shared aim of ending colonial rule. A third movement, the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), having fought the MPLA with UNITA during the Angolan War of Independence, played almost no role in the Civil War. Additionally, the Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (FLEC), an association of separatist militant groups, fought for the independence of the province of Cabinda from Angola.

The Angolan Civil War was notable due to the combination of Angola's violent internal dynamics and the exceptional degree of foreign military and political involvement. The war is widely considered a Cold War proxy conflict, as the Soviet Union and the United States, with their respective allies Cuba and South Africa, assisted the opposing factions.

Land mines still litter the countryside and contribute to the ongoing civilian casualties.

### **Situation in Angola in 1993**

In 1993, Angola was in the midst of a long-lasting civil war that began in 1975 between the government of the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and the rebel forces of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). The war, which lasted until 2002, was characterized by widespread human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, torture, and forced displacement of civilians.

The conflict in Angola was fueled by political and economic interests, as well as ethnic tensions between the ruling MPLA party and the UNITA opposition group. The civilian population suffered greatly during the war, with famine, disease, and displacement affecting their daily lives. Many were forced to flee their homes and seek shelter in overcrowded and unsanitary camps where food and healthcare were scarce.

Despite various attempts to broker peace, such as the Bicesse Accords signed by both sides in 1991, the conflict continued to escalate. The United Nations deployed a peacekeeping mission to Angola in the same year, but it was unable to bring about a lasting resolution to the conflict. The war finally ended with the death of UNITA's leader, Jonas Savimbi, in 2002, and the signing of a peace agreement between the government and UNITA.

### **Task and Mandate of UNAVEM-II**

The United Nations Security Council created UNAVEM-II to address the ongoing conflict in Angola. The primary objective of this mission was to monitor the implementation of the Bicesse Accords and support the ceasefire agreement between the government and the opposition forces.

UNAVEM-II was composed of military, police, and civilian personnel from various countries. Its main objectives were to oversee the disarmament of UNITA, facilitate the

demobilization of its troops, and monitor the withdrawal of foreign military personnel from Angola.

Despite some successes, including the establishment of a Joint Commission to oversee the implementation of the peace process, UNAVEM-II faced many challenges in its efforts to bring about lasting peace in Angola. The conflict continued to escalate, with both sides accusing each other of violating the ceasefire.

Mandate of UNAVEM-II was to:

- monitor the implementation of the 1991 peace agreement between the government of Angola and the rebel group UNITA,
- facilitate the country's transition to peace and security,
- monitor the implementation of the ceasefire,
- supervise the demobilization and reintegration of former combatants,
- demobilization of UNITA forces, and the integration of UNITA personnel into the Angolan armed forces.
- monitor the movements of military forces,
- provide assistance in the implementation of national reconciliation measures, and help to coordinate humanitarian assistance.

## **Strength**

The United Nations peacekeeping mission in Angola was initially authorized in May 1991, and it began with 350 military observers and 126 civilian police personnel. The mission also included a civilian air unit, which used Russian helicopters (Mi-8 and Mi-17 types) provided by Tumen Air in 1993. There was also a medical unit from the Brazilian Army, along with 87 international civilians and 155 local staff.

During the mission's operation, the number of military and civilian personnel varied as the mandate and objectives of UNAVEM changed. At its height in 1995, the mission had more than 7,000 military and civilian personnel, including troops from Portugal, Brazil, and other countries.

## **Contributions of Military and Civilian Police Personnel:**

Algeria, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Congo, Czechoslovakia (Slovak Republic from January 1993), Egypt, Guinea-Bissau, **Hungary**, India, Ireland, Jordan, Malaysia, Morocco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Senegal, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Yugoslavia and Zimbabwe.

UNAVEM-II, the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Angola, achieved significant success in its mandate of monitoring the ceasefire between the Government of Angola and UNITA. The mission facilitated the withdrawal of foreign troops, primarily Cuban and South African, from Angola.

UNAVEM-II was instrumental in the implementation of the Lusaka Protocol, which was signed in 1994 and aimed at ending the civil war. The mission was involved in various activities, including the demilitarization of UNITA and the monitoring of the ceasefire, which helped to reduce violence and promote stability in the country.

As a result of UNAVEM-II's efforts, a peace agreement was signed between the Government of Angola and UNITA in 1994, leading to the establishment of a government of national unity. The mission's success in facilitating the withdrawal of foreign troops also helped to reduce external interference in Angola's affairs and contribute to the country's sovereignty.

### **Hungarian MILOBs in Angola in 1993**

In 1993, the United Nations Angola Verification Mission II (UNAVEM-II) sent military observers (MILOBs) to Angola to monitor and verify the implementation of the peace agreements signed between the Angolan government and UNITA in Lusaka, Zambia. The primary task of the UNAVEM-II MILOBs was to oversee the ceasefire and ensure the movement of forces, demobilization of combatants, and integration of UNITA personnel into the government's security forces. They also provided technical and operational advice to the Angolan Government's Joint Military Commission, which was responsible for implementing the Lusaka Protocol.

The UNAVEM-II MILOBs played a crucial role in facilitating the peace process by providing impartial and independent verification of the implementation of the agreements. They monitored the deployment of troops, the cessation of hostilities, the removal of landmines, and the creation of cantonment areas for demobilized soldiers. The MILOBs also reported any violations of the ceasefire to the Joint Military Commission and the United Nations Security Council.

Overall, the UNAVEM-II MILOBs were instrumental in the success of the peace process in Angola, helping to stabilize the situation and pave the way for a more peaceful future.

### **Role and Activity of Colonel Laszlo Forgacs in UNAVEM-II**

In 1992, the Peace Keeping Operations Directorate at the United Nations headquarters in New York raised the possibility of Hungary sending a colonel-ranked soldier to Angola to serve as a regional commander.

Although Colonel Forgacs believed that the idea was excellent, he was the only colonel at that time with both UN experience and a high level of proficiency in English. The officials asked him in 1993 if he would be willing to serve as part of the UNAVEM II mission in Angola. He responded by saying that he would agree to go only if he was in good health and if it was in Hungary's best interests to send him. After ensuring that Forgacs was fit for the mission, they appointed him to go to Angola.

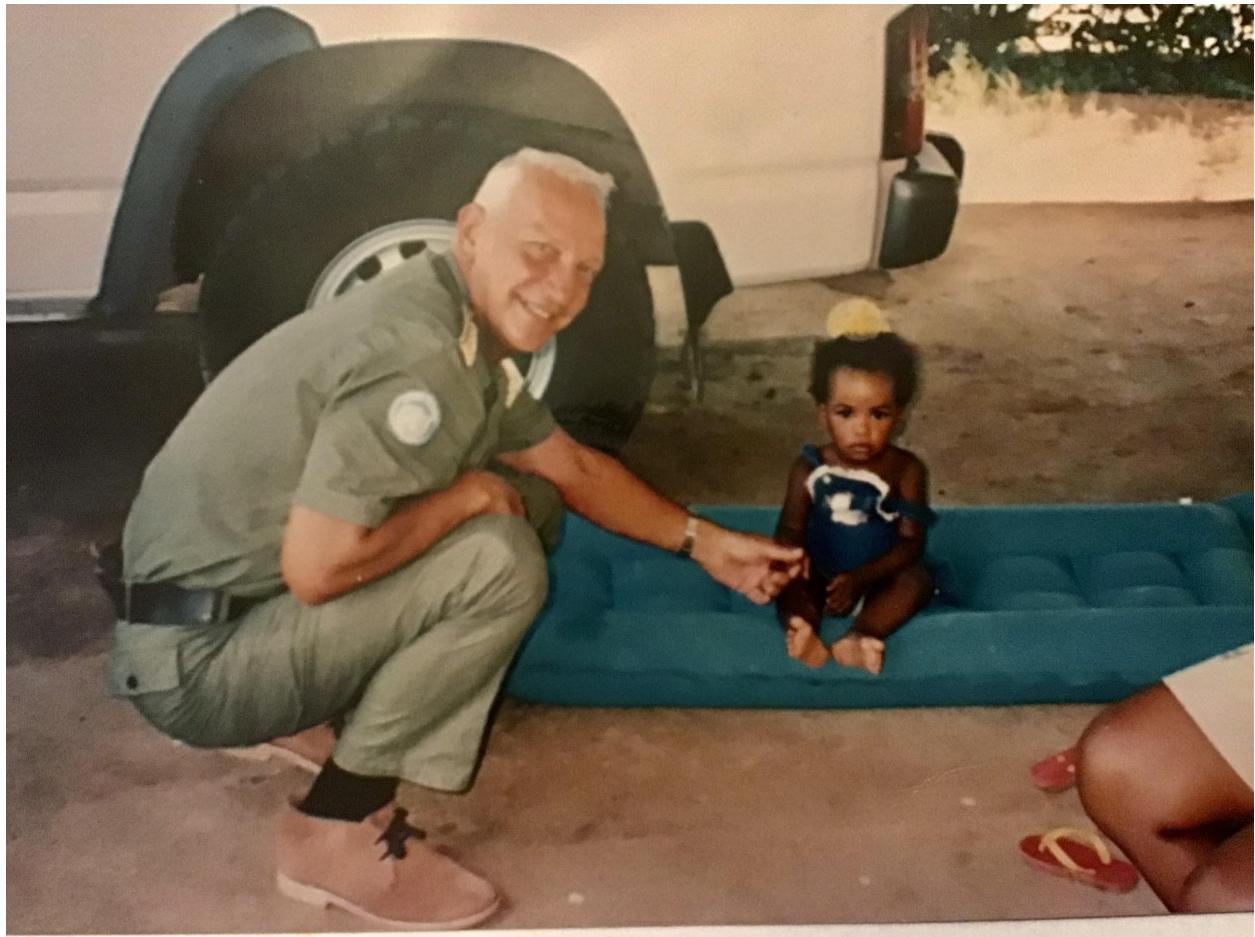
The initial plan was for Colonel Forgacs to assume the position of the South-East Regional Commander based in Mavinga, which was one of the six regions in Angola at the time. However, 1993 was marked by intense conflict and uncertainty, making the situation quite chaotic and unpredictable. Colonel Forgacs departed from Ferihegy with ten Hungarian soldiers, and before their departure, they were bid farewell by officials from the Ministry, who sought to motivate them by emphasizing the unprecedented and unpredictable nature of the situation in Angola.

In hindsight, sending a colonel was a wise decision because Colonel Forgacs was able to provide greater support to the Hungarian soldiers than anyone else could have. Upon arriving in Luanda, he was informed that the situation had changed, and the evacuation of Mavinga was necessary, with the staff already in Luanda. In response, the leadership of UNAVEM offered him an alternative position as the Commander of the Northern Region, based at the Headquarters in Luanda.



*UNAVEM HQ, Luanda*

(Figure 5: Col. Forgacs, front row third from the left)



(Figure 6: Col. Forgacs in front of his patrol vehicle with an Angolan child)

### **Why did Mavinga have to be evacuated?**

The conflict persisted in Angola as Jonas Savimbi, the leader of UNITA, walked away from the negotiation table and resumed the fighting. UNITA made significant advances and controlled nearly 80% of the country. The peacekeeping forces, referring to UNITA as the "roosters" due to their symbol, were forced to withdraw most of their military observers from different parts of Angola due to the ongoing conflict. Consequently, only small forces remained in the various districts, primarily stationed at the headquarters. As a result of the worsening situation, the Regional Headquarters in Mavinga had to be evacuated.

Consequently, Colonel Forgacs was appointed as the Commander of the Northern Region in January 1993. However, the task was quite unusual as the conflict intensified, and Sawimbi's forces occupied more and more territory, leading to the evacuation of nearly the entire Northern Military Region. As military observers, they were unable to perform their fundamental duties, as defined by the UN.

## **The evacuation**

The UN hired Mi-8 and Mi-17 helicopters, which were operated by Soviet/Russian personnel at the time, to carry out the evacuation since the roads were inaccessible due to the ongoing conflict. Given the challenging circumstances, helicopter rescue missions were necessary in almost all areas, and careful planning was required to ensure safe evacuation. The top priority was to dispose of all confidential materials, radios, and related items while also retrieving any relevant items that the Observers had using helicopters.

The Russian pilots agreed to fly only if a Hungarian military officer accompanied them, as Hungarian military officers were proficient in both English and Russian.

The situation was extremely dangerous for the helicopter crews as they were at risk of being caught in the crossfire. There were instances when they landed at a location, and the commanding officer (TS leader) of the group present would seek refuge in the helicopter due to the ongoing violence. In such cases, the Hungarian officers had to step in and perform the commander's duties while being under fire from UNITA gunmen. Despite these challenges, Colonel Forgacs and his team managed to evacuate the military observers in the area while trying to maintain a UN presence as best they could.

Sadly, there were several instances of atrocities against peacekeepers, including Hungarians, during this period. Some were fired upon or threatened with rifle fire to expedite their boarding of the rescue helicopter. Fortunately, no one was seriously injured.

Everything calmed down later and they step by step were able to return and continue their basic duties as Military Observers.

## **Cabinda case**

This chapter describes a distinct phase of Col. Laszlo Forgacs' military career where he served as a military officer, commander, UN soldier, and MILOB. This chapter of his life was characterized by unique challenges and experiences that helped shape him as a person and a soldier. As a military officer, Forgacs was responsible for leading and managing troops in various situations.

Being a UN soldier meant working with people from different countries, cultures, and backgrounds towards a common goal. It was a challenging but rewarding experience that broadened Forgacs' perspective and taught him the importance of international cooperation.

As a MILOB, Forgacs was tasked with observing and reporting on military activities in conflict zones. This role required him to be vigilant, analytical, and objective in assessing situations and providing accurate and timely reports to higher-ups. It was a crucial role that helped inform decisions on the ground and at higher levels of

command. But this situation required more, such as being a diplomat, knowing the military, a little bit of politics, being a flexible and persistent negotiator, etc. Overall, this chapter of Forgacs' military career was a unique and formative experience that taught him invaluable lessons and skills that Forgacs carries with him to this day.



(Figure 7.: Map of Cabinda, Angola)

### Cabinda situation and separatist movements in 1993

The Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (FLEC) initiated the Cabinda separatist movement in 1993, aiming to establish an autonomous state in the Cabinda enclave by waging war against Angola.

The movement's origins can be traced back to the colonial era when the Portuguese partitioned the region into two administrative units in 1885, namely Cabinda province and Cabinda enclave.

Following Angola's independence in 1975, Cabindans were subjected to various human rights violations such as forced displacement, torture, and extrajudicial killings perpetrated by the Angolan government. With Nzita Henriquez Tiago as its founder, the FLEC quickly gained support from the Cabindan populace and launched a guerrilla campaign against the Angolan government. Although a ceasefire was eventually

declared, the FLEC continues to promote an independent Cabinda, and sporadic clashes with the Angolan government still persist.

### **Hostage case**

During that period, Cabinda, which was a region with significant oil reserves located between Congo and Zaire, was also under the command of Colonel Forgacs. Moreover, a Hungarian major was leading their Team Site (TS) in Cabinda.

On a certain day, the TS received a communication reporting the abduction of a Jordanian captain named Fawaz Itani. According to the report, the captain's final message, transmitted via radio, was "I was kidnapped ... walking in the jungle ... they are treating me well...", after which the communication ceased. The TS immediately reported to higher command, Northern Sector HQ, to Colonel Forgacs.

Despite numerous attempts by military observers to reach the captain on his mobile or portable radio, all efforts were unsuccessful. In response, the military promptly launched a search operation, but the dispatched patrols were unable to locate any sign of the abducted captain or his vehicle, which had also disappeared.

Subsequently, it was revealed that the captain had violated the established security protocols by venturing out alone to an American-run shop where he was intercepted and abducted. Colonel Forgacs then instructed the TS leader to conduct an exhaustive search operation, utilizing all available resources while prioritizing the safety and security of the search team.

In his capacity as the regional commander, Forgacs had overseen the expansion of rescue efforts. The following day, he flew to Cabinda with two additional UN officers via helicopter. Upon arrival, they reported that the captain's car had been discovered hidden in a nearby bush, approximately 50 meters from the road. However, there was no evidence of blood or any other clues related to his abduction. While the radio in the car was functional, the captain's own portable radio was missing.

The Angolan government and army representatives in Cabinda claimed that the missing Jordanian officer had simply gone to visit his girlfriend and would return. However, some of the UN observers' Angolan staff members had clandestine connections with opposing groups in Cabinda, including FLEC, and were attempting to gather more information.

In response, these staff members threatened to expose the UN's inaction, alleging that the captain was detained by authorities and driven out of the area. Upon hearing this, Colonel Forgacs asked, "What happened to him? Don't they have any information?" - There wasn't any answer.

During this time, the TS arranged a confidential meeting between Colonel Forgacs and a Catholic priest who served as a liaison for the Cabinda rebels. As Colonel Forgacs was being monitored by the Angolan government agencies, he and his military officers met the priest covertly. The priest vowed to inform them of any developments or information he received.

After finding no new leads on the missing Jordanian officer, the Regional HQ made the decision to return to Luanda to report the situation.

However, the UN did not give up on the case and began reaching out to neighboring countries, including UN agencies in Zaire and Congo. The hope was that they may have had more information or contacts with the Cabinda rebels that could lead to the discovery of the missing officer.

Sometime after the secret meeting with the Catholic priest, the TS received a report from him indicating that the missing officer was still alive. However, no additional details were provided beyond this initial report.

On the fifth day, the UN resident in Kinshasa (Zaire) contacted UNAVEM-II HQ to report that contact had been established with the kidnappers. It was revealed that the Jordanian officer had been abducted by members of a separatist movement in Cabinda. The kidnappers demanded that the most senior UN official negotiate for the officer's release in Kinshasa.

To negotiate the release of the kidnapped Jordanian officer, the kidnappers demanded that the most senior UN official go to negotiate with them in Kinshasa. The highest-ranking UN official in Angola at the time was Ms. Margaret Anstee, Head of the UNAVEM-II mission, but it was deemed too risky to send her. Instead, it was decided that a high-ranking military official should go. Ms. Anstee nominated Col. Forgacs, the Commander of the Northern Region, for the task.

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I traveled to Kinshasa to negotiate for the release of the kidnapped officer. The day before our flight, we informed the Zaire authorities of our intentions. As we crossed the border, we were informed by air traffic controllers that we did not have permission to fly, but that we would not be shot down. This was a positive sign for us. When we arrived over Kinshasa, we were denied clearance to land and circled for an hour. The authorities asked us in French how much fuel we had, and the captain replied that we had just enough to land. They then granted us permission to land.

Upon arrival, we were immediately "arrested" and taken to the VIP lounge, where our passports were confiscated, and we were locked up. Despite explaining that we were there to negotiate the release of the kidnapped officer with a particular organization headquartered in Kinshasa, they claimed to know nothing about it.

It's worth noting the exceptional skills and quick thinking of our pilots in this situation. They were able to identify that something was wrong and immediately contacted ground control in Luanda to report the issue and request assistance from Luanda HQ. Their ability to communicate effectively and take prompt action is a testament to their extensive training and experience as pilots.

Meanwhile, as you were waiting in the VIP lounge, it sounds like the amenities were satisfactory, with working air conditioning and soft drinks available. However, the absence of food may have been inconvenient.

After waiting for five long hours, you start to feel restless and anxious, wondering when your journey will finally resume. Suddenly, you spot an all-terrain vehicle that pulls up, full of soldiers and policemen who are hanging on for dear life in groups. It's like something out of an action movie!

But the excitement doesn't stop there. As you're taking it all in, a rather rotund, dark-skinned man strides over to you purposefully. He introduces himself as the police chief of Kinshasa, and asks if you're here to negotiate. You're taken aback - negotiate ...exactly!

He goes on to explain that they don't give out entry permits or visas - instead, they keep your passports at the airport. If you want to enter the country, you'll need to negotiate with whoever you need to and then return to the airport, at which point they'll give you back your passport and let you fly away. It's a strange, almost surreal situation, but you can't help feeling a bit excited at the prospect of this unexpected turn of events.

We proceeded to engage in negotiations. Several civilians entered the room and introduced themselves as high-ranking military officials, with titles such as Brigadier General and Colonel. It was not uncommon in Africa for individuals as young as 23 to hold such positions.

One of these officials was the leader of the military wing of the resistance movement known as FLEC in Cabinda. I asked him about the status of my colleague and he assured me that he was alive. However, he also shared a political statement with me, to which I responded by stating that as a military officer, my primary concern was to ensure the safe return of the Jordanian captain.

The official then informed me that in order to secure the release of the hostage, they would require a letter to be delivered to the UN HQ in New York. While I could not guarantee that this would be possible, I promised to bring the matter to the attention of the SRSG, Head of UNAVEM-II, and report back on our discussions.

After some negotiation, the official agreed to release our officer within a week. This occurred during the second week of the Jordanian officer's captivity.

After completing this challenging diplomatic mission, colonel Forgacs and his team boarded a flight back to our HQ in Luanda, likely feeling a mixture of exhaustion and relief.

As you stepped off the plane and made your way through the airport, you were greeted by a group of your colleagues who had come to welcome you back. They shook your hand, hugged you, and expressed their admiration for the work you had done. It was a heartwarming reception that made you feel appreciated and respected.

Colonel Forgacs then made his way to the offices of the SRSG, Ms. Margaret Anstee, whom I reported to directly. As you walked through the corridors of the headquarters, you were struck by the sense of purpose and dedication that permeated the building. Everyone was working towards the same goal - promoting peace and stability in the region.

When I arrived at Ms. Anstee's office, I was greeted warmly and invited to sit down. I then gave her a detailed report of our mission, describing the challenges we had faced and the strategies we had used to overcome them. I talked about the people we had met, the conversations we had had, and the progress that had been made towards your goals.

Ms. Anstee listened intently, nodding along and occasionally asking questions to clarify certain points. When I had finished my report, she expressed her admiration for my and our courage and diplomatic skills. She praised our ability to think on our feet and to adapt to changing circumstances, and she thanked me for my hard work.

As I left her office and made my way back to my desk, I felt a sense of pride and accomplishment. I knew that the work we had done was important and meaningful, and I was grateful to be part of a team that was making a difference in the world.

A couple of days later, I received surprising news that FLEC had fallen out with both the political and military factions, and tensions were escalating. I contacted the military officer to discuss the situation, and he confirmed that the politicians were unwilling to let him go, even though he wanted to distance himself from FLEC.

My HQ staff officers and I promptly returned to Kinshasa for the second time, with all necessary permissions and no issues. I renegotiated with the military, and they agreed to release our Jordanian captain within a few days. However, determining the method and location for his release and handover posed a challenge. This occurred near the conclusion of the third week.

Their sole demand was to conduct an international press conference in Cabinda or Kinshasa. We forwarded their request to UNHQ New York, which approved it. However, the question of where to transfer the peacekeeper arose. Ultimately, it was decided to hand him over in Boma (Zaire), a small town in the border jungle, accessible only by plane.

We returned to Luanda with the agreed-upon details, briefed the SRSG, and immediately prepared for our flight to Boma the next day. Accompanied by a Brazilian doctor and a press officer, we flew to Boma. As our plane stopped and parked aside from the grass landing zone, our UN light Beechcraft plane sank into the wet subsoil, so those of us on board pushed the plane out to the airstrip, because they weren't expecting any more planes.

Then we proceeded on foot to the brewery located at the jungle's edge.

At the brewery, the captain was transferred to our custody and emotionally embraced us while sobbing. Our doctor conducted a first, quick medical examination, revealing that the captain had contracted various diseases common to Africa, such as malaria and diarrhea. Additionally, a centipede was removed from his ear.

As agreed, we proceeded to Kinshasa with the captain. The representative of FLEC held an international press conference on the liberation of Cabinda, which we attended. However, the international press sharply and strongly criticized FLEC, stating that freedom cannot be achieved through kidnapping. During the conference, the captain made a statement, and I, as the commander of the team rescued him, also addressed the press.

Subsequently, we returned home triumphantly, where the captain was received and offered evacuation to his home country of Jordan. However, he declined and chose to remain with the mission, having been treated and cured by Brazilian doctors at a hospital in the area.

***To my great surprise, about a month later I received a letter of thanks from the King of Jordan himself.***

Furthermore, this was not the first instance of kidnapping in Cabinda, and unfortunately, it may not be the last. In a previous kidnapping, the victim was held captive for six months, and a ransom of one million dollars was paid for their release. In contrast, we made no promises of payment (not any penny!), yet were able to secure the release of the officer within three weeks.

## **CONCLUSION**

The hostage rescue mission in Cabinda in 1993 served as an exemplar of the United Nations' unwavering commitment to peacekeeping and security in Angola. Guided by the leadership of Colonel L. Forgacs, the UNAVEM-II mission successfully negotiated the release of the captain and ensured his safe return. This mission stands as a

testament to the UNAVEM-II remarkable courage, perseverance, and unwavering dedication to restoring peace in Angola.

The UNAVEM-II mission's efforts in Cabinda in 1993 served as a resounding success, affirming the United Nations' staunch commitment to peacekeeping and security in Angola. Thanks to the mission's decisive action, the Jordanian Captain Imad Fares was successfully released and returned home safely. This daring hostage rescue operation was a testament to the unwavering courage and determination of the UNAVEM-II mission and its steadfast dedication to restoring peace and stability in Angola.



(Figure 8.: “In the service of peace“, UN Medal)

Colonel Laszlo Forgacs, who served as the Commander of the Northern Region of UNAVEM-II, received high praise for his pivotal role in the peace process, earning the prestigious United Nations Medal "In the Service of Peace." In particular, his successful negotiation for the release of a Jordanian captain who had been kidnapped stands out as a remarkable achievement. Colonel Forgacs' efforts were a testament to the unwavering commitment of the UNAVEM-II mission to restoring peace and security in Angola.

## **Other events, tasks, missions and assignments, activities, adventures for Colonel Forgacs**

Uganda and Liberia assignment parallel with daily duty as Northern Region Commander:

- It is my belief that my appointment to prepare a UN Military Observer Mission in Uganda was due to my previous achievements as the Northern Region Commander and my experience with UNIIMOG in Iraq. Furthermore, my success in leading a hostage rescue operation may have played a role in my selection.
- To carry out this mission, I was given a team of five UN military officers who were placed under my leadership. The team included an experienced Hungarian military observer (MILOB), Captain Makai, who later served in Uganda, a Brazilian medical officer, a UN MILOB with expertise in cartography, and a UN MILOB with communication skills. These individuals were selected for their skills and experience and were essential in ensuring the success of our mission.
- In addition to being tasked with preparing a UN Military Observer Mission in Uganda, I received an unexpected order from the UN New York HQ to travel to Bamako, the capital of Mali. This was because peace negotiations were taking place in Liberia, and I was requested to become a military advisor to the SRSG for Liberia. After a quick briefing on the situation in Liberia, I was given instructions on what could and should be done to ensure the success of the Liberian ceasefire agreement and peace talks.
- Before I could complete my preparations to travel to Bamako as a military advisor to the SRSG for Liberia peace negotiations, I received an unexpected order to stay in Angola and continue my work on preparing for the upcoming UN Military Observer Mission in Uganda.
- Being a UN soldier is not always easy, as I was now again tasked with traveling to Geneva in August 1993 to serve as a military expert and advisor to the SRSG for the ongoing peace talks in Liberia.
- After the Geneva talks, the next proposed course of action was to travel to the UN HQ in New York with the SRSG and his team to complete preparations for Liberia. However, there was no response from the UN HQ in New York, and as a result, I flew back to Angola instead. Despite this setback, preparations for Uganda continued.
- A couple of days later, another unexpected event followed with instructions from UN HQ to travel to Abidjan (former capital of Ivory Coast) as I was part of the Liberia Mission Preparation Team coming from New York and traveling from there to Monrovia (Liberia).
- Just a note - traveling by air in Africa can be challenging. In my case, I flew with Ethiopian Airlines from Luanda and had layovers in Burundi and Rwanda before

reaching Addis Ababa. From there, I connected to Abidjan via Togo. However, our plane was not able to land in Lome, the capital of Togo, due to ongoing riots, so I arrived at my destination two hours ahead of schedule.

- I embarked on a fascinating adventure, which was quite typical for this region of Africa! Prior to my arrival in Abidjan, I was informed that a UN representative would be there to greet me and assist with obtaining my visa. Afterwards, I was to be taken to a hotel where I would join the Technical Preparation Mission team for Liberia the following day.

Wearing a Hungarian field uniform and a blue UN beret on my head, I was standing in the crowd in front of the passport control, when an individual wearing a UN field cap waved at me from the other side. He told me that he was waiting for me but that I had to pay \$10 for the visa, strange, UN staff don't pay for visas. He also drove me to the hotel, we got into a taxi which again I paid for, even stranger, where is the UN car?

He took me to a third class hotel and promised to be there by 10am the next day, because he knew where the UN headquarters was and what time to be there. I was overwhelmed by the situation and didn't know what to do next. I realized that I needed to clarify my status and confirm my suspicions, but I wasn't sure how to go about it. I attempted to contact the local UN headquarters, but unfortunately, nobody picked up the phone. This made me feel like I was completely lost and without any hope of finding a solution to my dilemma.

"God's spark!" - Next, I tried calling one of the embassies for help, such as the American embassy. Fortunately, someone answered the phone, but unfortunately, they had no information and couldn't connect me with the UN. I felt like I had exhausted all my options and didn't know what else to do.

About half an hour later, the phone rang and someone was asking for Colonel Forgacs. It was the UN envoy. Colonel Forgacs himself, who had arrived at the airport two hours after my departure. He had been looking for me but couldn't locate me. Eventually, he found out where I was staying and came to pick me up in a UN vehicle.

- From this point on, a new chapter in my personal career with the United Nations military began. You can find more information about this phase of my journey in UNOMIL.