

# Diamonds, Oil, and the American Media

## Filtering Out the Logic of Plunder in the Angolan Civil War

CHRISTOPHER R. COOK, PHD\*

**T**he Angolan Civil War lasted from 1975, the year of Angola's independence, to 2002 with some brief intermissions. The war, which destroyed the country's economy and infrastructure, killed up to half a million civilians. The Soviet- and Cuban-backed Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the official Angolan government, opposed the American- and South African-backed Jonas Savimbi and his National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). At any given time, the conflict brought in troops and mercenaries from Zaire, Cuba, and South Africa as well as billions of dollars' worth of aid and materiel from the United States and Soviet Union. When the Cold War and foreign aid ended, the war dragged on in slow motion as it morphed into a "resource war" funded through the sale of oil and illicit diamonds until Savimbi was killed in 2002 and UNITA unraveled.

From a twenty-first-century perspective, it would be easy to say that Angola was the Cold War stereotype of a third world conflict. However, this dichotomy of good and evil would be an oversimplification. Both the MPLA and UNITA became what the Cold War demanded of them. For one, members of the MPLA were not good communists since they searched for international capital to loot. They even held business junkets in the 1980s during which they reassured Western businesses of the importance of private profit. The American multinational Chevron Corporation was busy drilling and pumping oil for Luanda, Angola's capital. The revenue derived by the MPLA from these oil rents represented a major source of cash that it needed to buy military hardware and materiel from the Soviets to fight (and ultimately defeat) UNITA.

Contrary to glowing reports in the US press, UNITA was never really interested in Western-style democracy. Beyond desperately wanting to be president, Savimbi seemed to have no ideology. At one point he was a Maoist; the next he

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\*The author is an assistant professor of political science at the University of Pittsburgh–Johnstown.

was allied with South Africa, claiming to represent the indigenous black population against the MPLA. Naturally, because of the financial importance of the oil facilities, the rebels attacked them, leading to a scenario in which Cuban soldiers were brought in to protect an American oil company from American-backed rebels.

Given these glaring inconsistencies, Angola presents a fascinating case study of media coverage of a conflict. This article examines the Angolan Civil War in the pages of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, gatekeepers of the American foreign policy debate. Would these newspapers follow the White House narrative of the conflict in what media theory refers to as “indexing” (the theory that the media will index its coverage to reflect the views of government officials)? To answer this question, the article examines two time periods: 1985 to 1989 and 1998 to 2002. These two phases allow comparison and contrast of media coverage during the Cold War years of the Ronald Reagan administration, as well as that during the administrations of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, to determine whether White House framing had an impact on covering Angola and to identify the dominant press narratives.

## Background of the Angolan War

This section provides the necessary background information on the conflict to put American media coverage in its proper historical context.<sup>1</sup> Portugal was the last European nation to decolonize on the African continent. Angolan rebel groups had been fighting a brutal war for independence since 1961. Unlike other African colonies, the three major rebel groups could not work together.

The year 1975 saw three actors in the Angolan conflict. First, the National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA) led by Holden Roberto, originally perceived as an ethnic group, eventually moved towards a nonethnic nationalist-conservative position and became the favored group of the United States. The second group, the socialist MPLA, founded in 1956, had close connections to the European left and became the recipient of Cuban and Soviet foreign aid. The MPLA has been marked by the personal charismatic rule of President José Eduardo Dos Santos, described as a tactical arbiter of oil rent, and his entourage. The party dropped any Marxist pretensions in 1990. Angola under the MPLA can best be described as a “petro-regime.”<sup>2</sup> The base of strength of the third group, Savimbi’s UNITA, resided in the central highlands (the MPLA was on the coast). Like the ideology of the MPLA, UNITA’s was difficult to pin down. The organization began as a Maoist breakaway group from the FNLA when it received funding from China, but its rhetoric changed to democracy and free markets when it obtained backing from

the United States and South Africa. Over the years, Savimbi showed that beyond his desire to be the president of Angola, he was ideologically flexible in obtaining that position.

The United States found itself stuck in a unique Cold War bind. In short, Portugal's control hampered America's ability to find an acceptable nationalist group to replace that country. Washington could not openly challenge the Estado Novo regime on decolonization because of the importance of American air bases in the Azores, so US policy played both ends. Starting in the 1960s, the United States helped the FLNA's Roberto replace Portuguese rule by clandestinely funneling cash and weapons through African allies like Mobutu Sese Seko's Congo while the Portuguese fought the rebels with American weapons as well.

By 1974 the Angolan War of Independence had ground to a stalemate. If anything, Portugal had gained the upper hand. The turning point occurred not on the battlefields but in Lisbon itself. In April of 1974, a group of leftist officers removed Prime Minister Marcello Caetano (António de Oliveira Salazar's replacement) in a coup. The new government not only moved to introduce democracy to Portugal but also started the process of granting overseas colonies their independence. However, the road to Angolan independence was marred by the fact that all three major rebel groups claimed to speak for the people—but none of them could agree on a power-sharing solution.

Working closely with Portugal, in January of 1975 the MPLA, UNITA, and FLNA hammered out the Alvor Agreement, which negotiated a multiparty transition government for an independent Angola with elections to follow. As soon as the agreement was signed, however, the groups turned on each other. The MPLA captured Luanda and in November unilaterally declared itself the People's Republic of Angola, reinforcing its position in most of the country with Cuban aid and troops. UNITA retreated to its bases in the south and with Chinese aid got the South Africans to join its side. The South Africans wanted to remove the MPLA because it supported the leftist South West Africa People's Organization guerillas fighting for the independence of Southwest Africa (in what is now Namibia). The FNLA, the odd man out, was routed by a joint Cuban-MPLA force and ceased to be a player.

With the emasculation of the FNLA, the administration of President Gerald Ford switched its aid to UNITA. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger felt that Angola was too important to lose, but Congress and the American public were deeply distrustful of American intervention in the third world after the war in Vietnam. The Clark Amendment of 1976, which banned all financial aid to Angolan groups, blocked Ford's attempts to funnel more aid to UNITA. The Carter administration continued Ford's policies, refused to recognize the legitimacy of

the MPLA government in Luanda, and turned a blind eye as the South Africans stepped up their military aid to UNITA—sometimes with American military hardware.

### Literature Review of Media Effects

The media's power to influence foreign policy has been the subject of ongoing debate.<sup>3</sup> To test how the American media covered the Angola war, we need to examine the existing literature of indexing and media effects. Robert Entman notes that the debate within media studies is not about the "CNN effect" but about two competing schools of thought.<sup>4</sup> The first is what he calls the hegemonic school, best articulated by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky in their book *Manufacturing Consent*, in which they argue that the American media is subservient to powerful vested economic and political interests. Corporate media will rarely question policy and, in fact, will actively filter out stories that do so. The authors contend that elite control over the media influences what the public thinks about issues and thus helps manufacture consent (to borrow a phrase from Walter Lippmann).<sup>5</sup>

The second school of thought, indexing, is best articulated by W. Lance Bennett in his seminal article on government and press relations: "Mass media news professionals, from the boardroom to the beat, tend to 'index' the range of voices and viewpoints in both news and editorials according to the range of views expressed in mainstream government debate about a given topic."<sup>6</sup> In their exhaustive review of the media and agenda-setting literature, Eric Herring and Piers Robinson argue that most scholars of media effects believe in some form of indexing even if they do not call it by that name.<sup>7</sup>

Entman argues that for most of the Cold War, the media accepted at face value what bipartisan American foreign policy makers already believed—the threat of aggressive, monolithic international communism led by Moscow. The media, in turn, became a compliant partner in the dissemination of the government's anticommunist policies at home and abroad. When the Cold War ended, this particular paradigm of media compliance collapsed. The media were now free to produce their own counternarratives to events, which, according to Entman, weakened the "journalists' habit of deference," and they became critical of President Clinton's humanitarian missions.<sup>8</sup> Instead of communists, the conflict could be framed as the White House versus Congress or Democrats versus Republicans to fill up the endless need for 24-hour news coverage.<sup>9</sup> Scott Althaus maintains that official indexing of government positions should be the exception, not the rule, in the post-Cold War paradigm.<sup>10</sup>

Those who are afraid that indexing would lead to Washington's ability to manufacture consent, however, should remember that the US government does not speak with one voice. Warren Strobel notes that some politicians use the media to push their preferred narrative at the expense of others.<sup>11</sup> When journalists discover a policy or communication vacuum within elite opinion, they are free to report the debate in Washington. The possibility of government control is further dampened by the drive for journalistic ethics and the fact that media companies are profit-driven organizations.

The media, though, does try to offer *compelling narratives* of news events.<sup>12</sup> Instead of simply relying on selling government policy, the media searches for stories with rich characters and a sellable plot. Bennett observes that "increasingly sensationalistic narratives and dramatic production values both bridge and reflect the tensions among the various norms and practical rules that guide journalists."<sup>13</sup>

Building on the existing literature, Entman notes that politicians still actively try to frame issues: "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described."<sup>14</sup> It is in fact a game between various political and media actors across different levels of access points in a decentralized political system and media structure. The narrative frame can run "along a continuum from total dominance by the government . . . to a completely evenhanded standoff between competing frames."<sup>15</sup> What were the narrative frames for Angola?

## Methodology

Research for this article made use of a key-word search of the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* to test the indexing model of American media coverage of the Angolan Civil War and its main actors—the Soviet-backed MPLA and Savimbi's UNITA. These two newspapers exert elite clout in coverage of American foreign policy, having the power to drive the national media agenda in the way they choose to frame stories.<sup>16</sup> The study examines key terms in two time frames: (1) between 1985 and 1989, years that correspond with the announcement of the Reagan Doctrine and the removal of the Clark Amendment, and (2) 1998–2002, the final five years of the war. The data-gathering phase employed the NVivo software program for content analysis and word counts, utilizing the latter as a measurement of the importance of key words to each newspaper across time.

Such data has some utility in measuring coverage of foreign affairs: the more important the word, concept, person, or place, the more it is used, and vice versa.

### The Reagan Years, 1985–89

Washington's relationship with southern Africa changed with the election of Ronald Reagan, whose administration ramped up its campaign against the MPLA, both rhetorically and covertly, and increased its aid to UNITA.<sup>17</sup> The White House had a clear narrative: the United States needed to fund UNITA to stop the spread of communism in southern Africa. Reagan called Savimbi "Angola's Abraham Lincoln," and United Nations (UN) Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick referred to him as "one of the few authentic heroes of our times."<sup>18</sup> Administration goals called for getting Cuba out and establishing peace negotiations to move UNITA into the government in a power-sharing arrangement. A secondary goal involved resolving the Namibian crisis on terms favorable to South Africa. However, the Clark Amendment still blocked overt military aid to UNITA.

During the 1985 state of the union address, President Reagan announced the "Reagan Doctrine," whereby the United States would publicly and aggressively help its allies and friends push back against Soviet aggression. No longer content with simple containment, the administration wanted to roll back communist gains. Although most people think that rollback applies to Latin America and Afghanistan, one of the most notable beneficiaries of the new policy was UNITA. By July the Clark Amendment had been repealed (under the premise of allowing humanitarian aid), and tens of millions of dollars went to UNITA over the next several years. (In 1985 the *New York Times* mentioned the Clark Amendment 90 times and the *Post*, 95 times.) Even then, the Reagan administration followed a careful path of publicly advocating negotiations and an end to hostilities while pursuing an increase in covert military aid.

However, that aid did not necessarily change the balance of power in Angola. In late 1987, the South Africans and UNITA scored what would become a Pyrrhic victory at the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale, one of the largest conventional clashes on the African continent. The ambiguous outcome (as the battle resumed in 1988) made the South Africans reassess their commitments to the region. (The *New York Times* mentioned the battle a total of 107 times in 1987–88 and the *Post*, only 46.)

If the battle did not go as the South Africans had hoped, the ground shifted for the MPLA as well. Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of perestroika prompted the Soviets to reassess their role in the conflict. With all parties seeking some sort of deal, representatives from the United States, Soviet Union, Cuba, South Africa,

and the warring parties of Angola met in New York and Geneva for peace talks culminating in a Tripartite Accord that led to the first real substantive cease-fire and the pathway for Namibian independence. In August of 1988, the UN created the Angola Verification Mission and within a year deployed peacekeepers.

### American Media Coverage between 1985 and 1989

Coverage of Angola in the two elite newspapers was quite extensive throughout the 1980s (fig. 1). The *New York Times* does not drop below 220 mentions in articles and editorials in a year, and the *Post*, 116. For the most part, the papers follow each other, the *Times* dedicating more space to foreign affairs and the *Post* having more coverage of events inside the beltway. A definite uptick in coverage occurs as the White House placed Angola on the agenda and the press followed the lead. In 1988 we see the highest coverage since 1976—coverage that corresponds to the Tripartite Peace Process and the pathway to Namibian independence. Comparatively speaking, though, Angola (649) lags behind the reporting of Afghanistan (1,762) and Nicaragua (2,445) in 1988 (fig. 2).

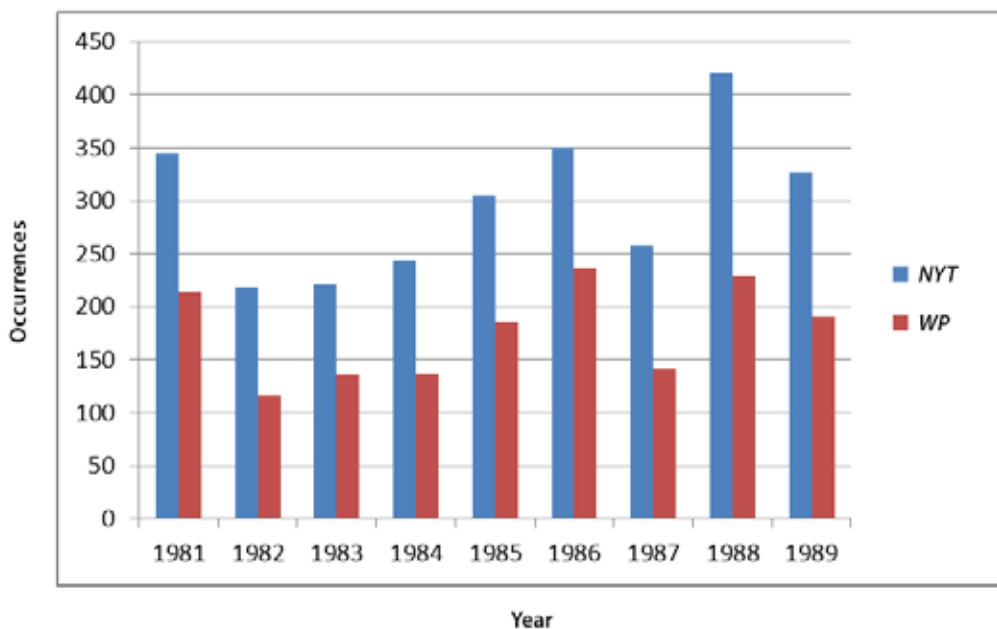


Figure 1. Coverage of Angola in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*

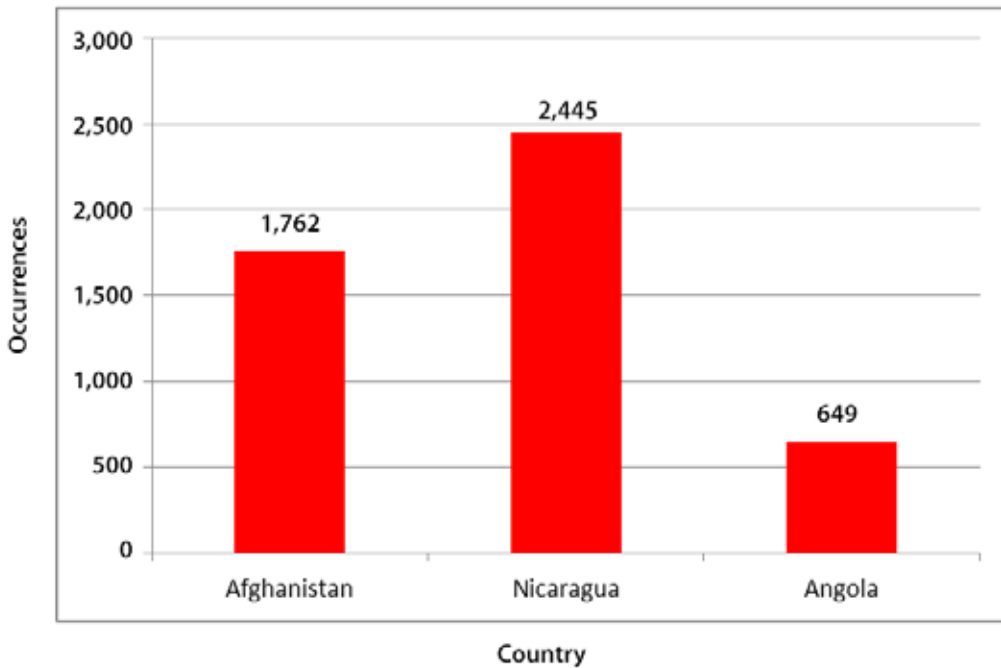


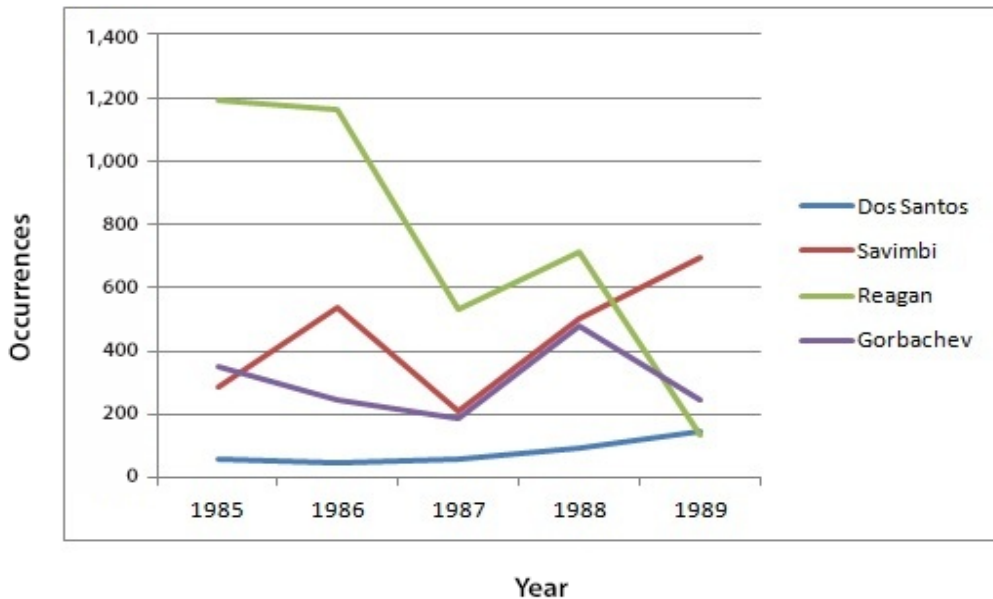
Figure 2. Combined coverage of Afghanistan, Angola, and Nicaragua in 1988

### Framing Angola through the Cold War

A lively debate about Angola appeared in the press, and many editorials were critical of the White House, clearly indicating elite dissension regarding Reagan's framing of the Angolan war. White House policy was complicated by the fact that the MPLA, if not universally liked, was the sovereign government. Moreover, a broad coalition of American groups, ranging from Chevron to human rights organizations concerned about South Africa, opposed the president's policies for a variety of reasons.<sup>19</sup> Savimbi's expensively orchestrated Washington charm campaigns were often met with embarrassing protests.

Disaggregation of the media data of 1985–88 reveals the domination of the Cold War framing (or compelling narrative) as in the 1970s. Note the consistent use of terms such as *Soviet* (5,629 occurrences), *Gorbachev* (1,504), *Fidel Castro* (814), and *Cuban* (2,798). *Reagan* occurs 3,733 times (fewer than *Soviet*, we might add, but more than *Savimbi*, the leader of UNITA [2,223]). Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Chester Crocker is mentioned 636 times, but Angolan president Dos Santos of the MPLA is accorded only 407 mentions in the same five years. Angola was not so much about the MPLA as it was the Soviet Union (fig. 3).





**Figure 3. Comparison of Cold War names in the Angolan conflict**

A second narrative emerges from the data as well: Angolan coverage in the press is inextricably linked to South Africa and the conflict in Namibia (2,574 mentions). Considering that President Dos Santos is mentioned only 407 times and Luanda 613 times, it is a telling statistic that references to South Africa occur 5,609 times in the five-year time frame. Overall, Namibia (southwest Africa) has more mentions (2,574) than Savimbi. We also see exclusive references to South Africa: President P. W. *Botha* (1,161), *apartheid* (480), and *Pretoria* (1,301). Angola is a story of the Cold War (and disagreements occurred regarding Reagan's policy of funding UNITA), but Angola is also about South Africa. Roger Govea's analysis of African violence indicates that apartheid broke through the Cold War paradigm.<sup>20</sup>

It is important to point out that the administration still drove the press agenda. Reagan wanted to talk about Savimbi and the Soviets, and the press followed. Regardless of one's agreement with the policy, the Soviet Union in Angola mattered more to the press than the Angolan people. One sees the breakdown of the Cold War narrative in the importance of South Africa to the discussion of Angola. The apartheid narrative represented a challenge to Reagan's Cold War framing. The growing American awareness of and disgust with apartheid act as a kind of independent variable that assails not only the White House's pro-Savimbi frame but also the larger Cold War frame in general.

## The Final Phase of the War, 1998–2002

Sadly, the conflict did not end with the 1988 treaty. For most of the war, the MPLA held the capital and the coast while UNITA controlled the interior. With Angolization, the war settled into an uneasy stalemate that favored the MPLA over the long run. Fragile cease-fires led to failed attempts at political reconciliation such as the Bicesse Accords (1991) and the Lusaka Protocol (1994). The Bush and Clinton administrations tried their best to force the MPLA into a power-sharing agreement with an electorally unpopular UNITA. In 1992 Angola attempted to hold elections, President Dos Santos winning the first round against Savimbi. UNITA refused to recognize the results, and Savimbi refused to stand in the second round. Of course UNITA was not entirely to blame since the MPLA had massacred UNITA officials in Luanda.

Time was running out for Savimbi. The Cold War patronage system that had funded him was gone, and in 1993 the Clinton administration officially recognized the MPLA government as sovereign. In 1996–97 the two Angolan adversaries tried (or were forced by the international community) once again to create a unity government, even giving UNITA the portfolio on minerals. That effort failed as well. With American support, the UN passed Resolutions 1127 (1997) and 1173 (1998), which isolated UNITA, froze bank assets, and limited travel. The resolutions even created no-fly zones in UNITA territory.

In the final years of the war, Savimbi became nothing more than a warlord. William Reno points out that he jettisoned any pretense of ideology.<sup>21</sup> UNITA survived by looting the Angolan countryside. Starting in the early 1990s, Savimbi weathered the loss of foreign aid by selling diamonds. The MPLA owned the oil, and UNITA territory was conveniently located in the diamond-mining regions. By means of exploiting the illegal diamond market, Savimbi obtained the cash he needed to keep his organization afloat.

In 1998 both UNITA and the Angolan government were dragged into the Second Congo War. President Laurent Kabila, now in power after overthrowing Mobutu, was hostile to UNITA. However, when Kabila turned on his patrons—Rwanda and Uganda—they launched a second invasion of the Congo. Those two countries now accepted UNITA, and in return UNITA helped fight Kabila. Naturally, Luanda sided with Kabila. The war offered an excellent opportunity to destroy the rear bases of UNITA and disrupt its finances and supply lines. Additionally, Angola was also flexing its regional muscle and wanted a say in the Congolese outcome.

With international backing and growing economic power, the MPLA made its final push to destroy UNITA. In February of 2002, Savimbi was killed by

government troops, and UNITA, for all intents and purposes, collapsed. The new leadership quickly signed a cease-fire, and by August of that year, the armed wing of the political movement had disbanded. A remnant of a political party is all that remains.

### Framing Angola through the Congo

Media coverage of the Angolan conflict changed during its final phase. Although overall numbers never reached those of the 1980s, Angola remained a compelling story to the elite American press albeit for different reasons. Not only was the conflict a remnant of the Cold War but also it conveniently fit into the narrative of African violence occurring in Liberia, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, Sierra Leone, and the Congo. Angola was no longer compared to superpower flash points like Afghanistan and Nicaragua but to the strife that raged closer to home. Further, Angola became partially a story of diamonds, oil, and the growing trend of resource wars. The final spike in reporting comes from Angola's entry into the Second Congo War (starting in 1998) and the last Angolan offensive that led to Savimbi's death in 2002 (fig. 4).

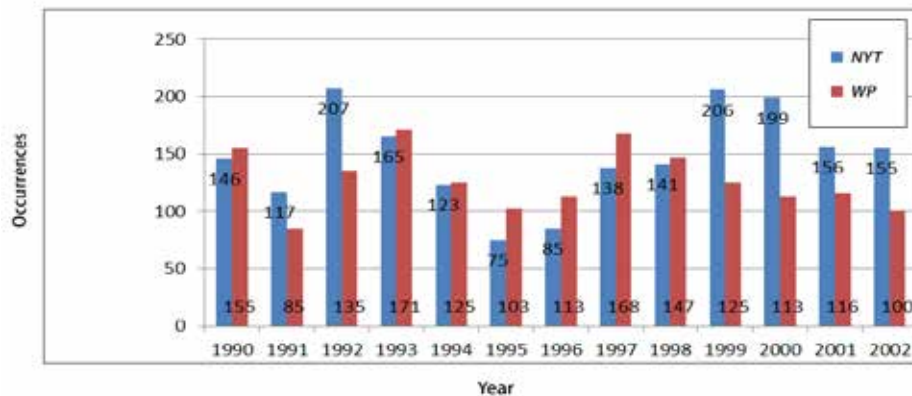
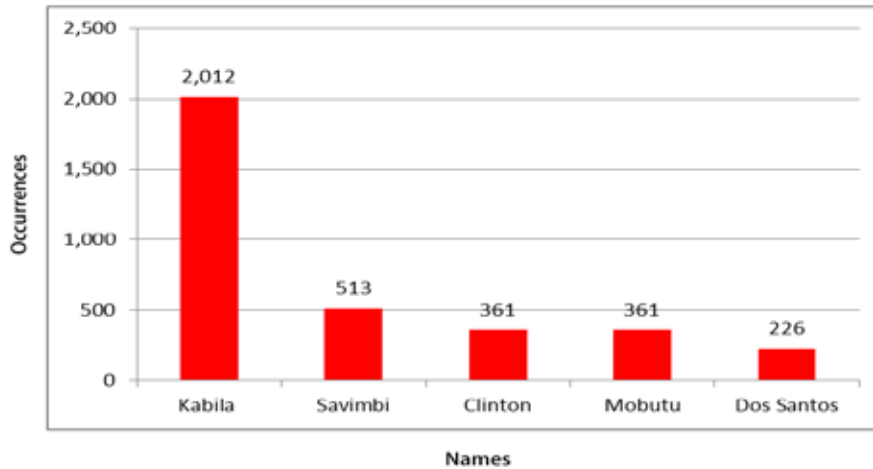


Figure 4. Coverage of Angola, 1990–2002

Reporting on the Congo dominated Angolan stories in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* (fig. 5), which include terms exclusively associated with the Congo wars and not Angolan politics: *Congo/Congolese* (3,717), *Laurent Kabila* and his son (2,012), *Rwanda* (1,823), *Uganda* (819), *Zimbabwe* (761), and the city of *Kinshasa* (525). The papers even covered ethnic groups not part of Angola: *Hutu* (388) and *Tutsi* (357). In fact no exclusive Angolan term reached the 1,000 mark. For Angola, *UNITA* led reporting (926), *Savimbi* had fewer occurrences than the Congolese capital (513), *Luanda* only 322, and, once again, President *Dos*

*Santos*, an anemic 226—fewer than *Mobutu*, who had already died. Angola had become a footnote to the Congo war.



**Figure 5. Congo frame through key names**

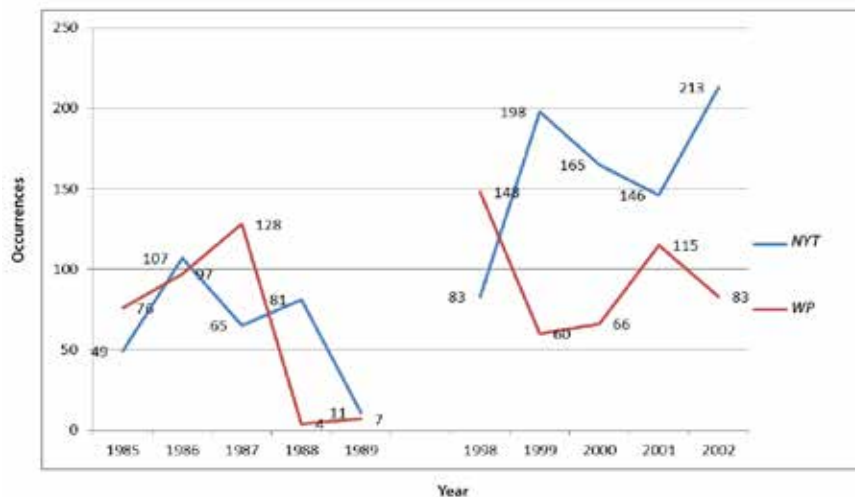
Further, the reporting of American foreign policy changed. During the 1980s, the Angolan conflict seemed a potential threat to American interests, but it was clearly on the back burner of the Clinton administration. Out of the top 1,000 words in the *Times* and *Post* between 1998 and 2002, *American* appears only 1,360 times; President *Clinton*, 361; and American diplomat *Richard Holbrooke*, 148.

### The Narrative of Natural Resources: Oil and Diamonds

The Congo, however, is not the only frame. As mentioned previously, Chevron helped the Angolan government drill and pump oil, Savimbi referring to the latter as “genocidal oil.”<sup>22</sup> Having once remarked that Luanda produced sand while UNITA-held territory produced the food, Savimbi might have been correct in thinking that the sand was worth nothing, but the oil underneath it produced a steady revenue stream. The MPLA could leverage its oil to finance international loans and make legal deals with multinational oil corporations. Some have argued that 90 percent of Angola’s cash reserves came from oil revenue. The MPLA reaped at least \$2 billion a year, every year.<sup>23</sup> Granted, most of it went out the door in corruption, but during the 1980s the Angolan government purchased \$2 billion worth of Soviet military hardware. It could lose a tank and replace it—something that proved more difficult for UNITA, which brought in only \$15 million of American aid.<sup>24</sup>

Savimbi could never exclusively rely on foreign aid. By the 1980s, UNITA was specializing in diamond mining and timber operations to supplement cash flow. However, with the loss of American and South African patronage, it came to rely heavily on diamonds for cash liquidity. Philippe Le Billon estimates that between 1992 and 2000, UNITA received about \$3–4 billion from diamond sales.<sup>25</sup> Savimbi's diamonds allowed him to cut ties with international public opinion, and no one could tell him when to quit. By 1996 UNITA production had peaked with an estimated \$600–700 million that year alone.<sup>26</sup> However, the world community determined that the Angolan war (and other conflicts) would end only by banning the trade of “blood diamonds.” In this last time period, stricter UN sanctions, greater MPLA military pressure, and tapped-out mines (with no means of investing in new ones) made UNITA unable to afford the war.

Oil and diamonds, not ideology, were essential to the conduct and length of the Angolan War. An examination of the 1985–89 time frame reveals that mentions of *oil* and *Chevron* are quite low compared to the dominance of the Cold War and South Africa narratives (fig. 6). On the one hand, the data fits Entman's expectations. The *Washington Post's* peak number for *oil* and *Chevron* stories (two distinct searches combined) came to 127 stories in 1987—respectable, considering that *Savimbi* occurred 115 times and *UNITA*, 181 that same year. The *Times* recorded a high of 107 in 1986 and 215 for *Savimbi* in 1987.



**Figure 6. Coverage of the terms *oil* and *Chevron* in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post***

In 1986 both newspapers explicitly pointed to the irony of having the United States refuse to recognize the government of Angola while so many American corporations like Chevron, Bechtel, Boeing, Conoco, General Electric, IBM, and Texaco were all doing business there. In one article, the *New York Times* quotes the

Angolan foreign minister as saying that “we are very open to American investment” and offers a “business” critique of Reagan’s Angolan policy, citing the amount of trade lost between these two nations.<sup>27</sup> During the same year, Jesse Jackson’s editorial in the *Washington Post* declared that “America is Angola’s No. 1 trading partner. Angola exports 60 percent of its oil to America, and there are nearly 100 American firms doing business there.” He goes on to argue that American workers were under the constant threat of attack from both UNITA and South Africa.<sup>28</sup>

The *Times* article mentioned that Assistant Secretary of State Chester Crocker had warned that these “companies ‘should be thinking about U.S. national interests as well as their own corporate interests,’” a not-too-subtle hint to disinvest.<sup>29</sup> American groups sympathetic to Reagan’s policies tried to shame Chevron. The South African-backed US-Namibian (Southwest Africa) Trade and Cultural Council attempted to pressure the company with a proxy shareholder campaign, which ultimately failed. The media showed little interest. If these groups achieved anything of substance, it was that Chevron no longer publicly advocated recognition of the Angolan government. Nevertheless, the fact remains that its oil operations in Angola helped the MPLA garner the needed cash to win the war.

Diamond coverage was almost nonexistent in the first phase, and the Cold War reflected no real concept of “conflict diamonds” (fig. 7). The South African company De Beers monopolized the diamond trade, and not many people knew or cared how that industry worked. Given the lack of reporting in the American press, it would have been easy to forget that Angola had diamonds. However, in the second phase, one notes a significant jump in coverage related to the minor conflict-diamond narrative.

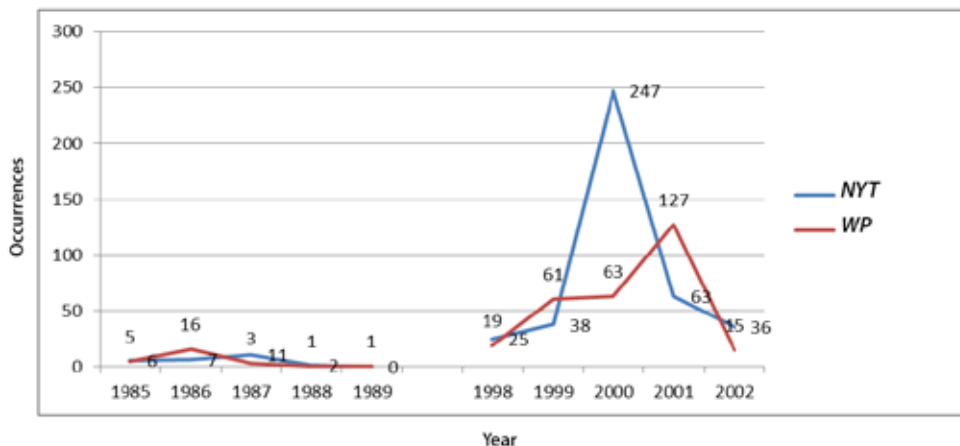


Figure 7. Coverage of the term *diamonds* in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*

Diamonds became the center of attention not only in Angola but also in Sierra Leone and the Congo wars.<sup>30</sup> In the Congo, control of diamond mines was routinely the source of fighting, the *New York Times* mentioning this 247 times in the year 2000. Further disaggregation of the data on diamonds, though, indicates that most of the coverage is really about diamonds in Africa overall and the Congo in particular. Angolan diamonds are not the primary story.

As we can see, one of the most significant problems with the resource-wars narrative is that it is not really about Angola; rather, it reinforces the Congo narrative. The larger media problem of covering resource wars concerns the difficulty of fitting the topic into a concise narrative that has a clearly defined antagonist and protagonist. “Neutral reporting” needs a story and a plot. Consequently, the Cold War frame features heroes and villains, but in the complicated world of globalized economics, who are the main characters? Who plays the protagonist and antagonist? Regarding Angolan oil in the 1980s, the press knew that the Chevron story was unusual. At one level, based on White House rhetoric, it made no sense; however, in the final five years of the war, Chevron’s oil production in Angola is no longer unusual but normal. Conflict diamonds create a temporary narrative buzz, but there was no substantive press coverage of the exploitation of natural resources in Angola.

## Conclusions

The Angolan war presents us with an excellent opportunity to take the existing theory of press indexing in new directions. First, the conflict, which lasted from 1975 to 2002, offers a unique “before and after” case study. If Entman argues that the press was a compliant partner with Washington during the Cold War and if Althaus maintains that the official indexing of government positions should be the exception rather than the rule after the Cold War, then Angola straddles both time periods. But Angola is an important case study for other reasons. Specifically, the fact that the conflict was on the periphery of American national security concerns and that African conflicts are often ignored and underreported in the American press leads us to some interesting questions about the limitations of indexing theory.

The evidence suggests that the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* indirectly indexed their coverage to White House policy. A Cold War framework was still driving the “conversation.” Reagan framed the war as an example of growing Soviet influence in the developing world, but for those who disagreed with the White House, the conversation was still about the president’s framing of the issue and not Angola itself. The data also reveals another unexpected narrative present

in Angolan coverage of the 1980s—American policy towards South Africa. Angola had become linked to American attitudes regarding the apartheid state. Although the Reagan administration saw South Africa as its anticommunist linchpin, most Americans were already changing their minds about this morally bankrupt regime. To a lesser extent, when the elite news media pushed back on the dominant Cold War framework, they covered South Africa—not Angola.

During the second time frame (1998–2002), the Cold War had ended, and the media were now free to report what they chose. Angola was now on the periphery of national interests, however, and without any Washington prodding, coverage declined. Given a growing trend in African small wars and insurgencies involving raw materials, we do find (and expect) an increase in reporting on oil and diamonds. Once the data was disaggregated, though, Angola disappears and becomes part of the larger narrative of the Congo war. Although coverage of Savimbi's control over diamonds occurs frequently, it is usually slotted into minor stories about the diamond industry across the continent that cite him as an example. Once again the actual reporting on the Angolan people and the continued war remains hidden behind other issues.

Thus, this article contributes to the literature by noting that beyond the question of indexing and framing, there lies another academic puzzle within this case study. Why was coverage of the war superficial and shallow? Why did Angola disappear in its own story? Part of that answer lies in the fact that this study analyzed American newspapers—but we are still left with the question of why the media did not seriously entertain a more nuanced discussion of the Angolan war, its actors, their motives, and the role of global economics. To be sure, oil and diamonds did appear, and the average American could read how Chevron was hiring the Cuban military to protect American workers from American-backed rebels. There were too few of these stories, however, to challenge Reagan's communist menace. Ironically, one could argue that the Angolans themselves were not fighting for political ideology but for profit motivated by greed—a point that not many Americans could pick up from the media.

The press plays an important role in American society by educating and informing the public so we can keep government accountable. This function is all the more important when it comes to foreign policy because the conflicts of the developing world are far removed from everyday life. With regard to reporting these kinds of conflicts, the press should become less Washington-centric and take the time to explore the historical context as well as the economic and political aspects that motivate conflicts like the one in Angola. The public will learn more about African conflicts only when Angolans become the main characters in their own story.



## Notes

1. Much has been written about the Angolan War. See, for example, George Wright, *The Destruction of a Nation: United States Policy towards Angola since 1945* (Chicago: Pluto Press, 1997); and William Reno, *Warfare in Independent Africa* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
2. Philippe Le Billon, "Resource Wealth and Angola's Uncivil War," in *Rethinking the Economics of War: The Intersection of Need, Creed, and Greed*, ed. Cynthia J. Arnson and I. William Zartman (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Press, 2005), 118.
3. See, for example, Piers Robinson, *The CNN Effect: The Myth of News, Foreign Policy, and Intervention* (London: Routledge, 2002).
4. Robert M. Entman, *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 4–5.
5. Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon, 1988). See also Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922).
6. W. Lance Bennett, "Toward a Theory of Press-State Relations in the United States," *Journal of Communication* 40, no. 2 (Spring 1990): 106.
7. Eric Herring and Piers Robinson, "Too Polemical or Too Critical? Chomsky on the Study of the News Media and US Foreign Policy," *Review of International Studies* 29, no. 4 (2003): 558.
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9. Guy Gugliotta and Juliet Eilperin, "Tough Response Appeals to Clinton Critics," *Washington Post*, 21 August 1998, A17.
10. Scott Althaus, "When News Norms Collide, Follow the Lead: New Evidence for Press Independence," *Political Communication* 20 (2003): 404.
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14. Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43 (1993): 52.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Robert L. Handley, "Israeli Image Repair: Recasting the Deviant Actor to Retell the Story," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 32, no. 2 (April 2008): 145.
17. Wright, *Destruction of a Nation*, 120.
18. John McMillan, "Promoting Transparency in Angola," *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 3 (July 2005): 157–58.
19. Wright, *Destruction of a Nation*, 136. See also Ted Galen Carpenter, *U.S. Aid to Anti-communist Rebels: The "Reagan Doctrine" and Its Pitfalls*, Cato Policy Analysis no. 74 (Washington, DC: Cato Institute, 1986).
20. Roger M. Govea, "Reporting African Violence: Can America's Media Forget the Cold War?," in *Africa's Media Image*, ed. Beverly G. Hawk (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1992), 94–108.
21. William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 77.
22. Le Billon, "Resource Wealth and Angola's Uncivil War," 124.
23. Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States*, 77.
24. Le Billon, "Resource Wealth and Angola's Uncivil War," 129.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*
27. James Brooke, "Policy Aside, America Does Business As Usual with Angola," *New York Times*, 30 November 1986.
28. Jesse Jackson, "An Invitation to the President," *Washington Post*, 7 September 1986, C8.
29. Brooke, "Policy Aside."
30. Note also in 2006 the appearance of the film *Blood Diamond*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Jennifer Connelly.

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