

The Passing of Angolan President Jose Eduardo dos Santos (1979-2017). From a Wartime President to Leading Energy Producer

The Southern African state fought to end colonialism and settler colonialism in the region while later becoming the continent's largest petroleum producer

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One of the most important heads-of-state in the struggle to end Portuguese domination in Africa died in a Spanish hospital on July 8.

Jose Eduardo dos Santos served as president of the Republic of Angola from 1979 to 2017 as well as the Secretary General of the ruling Popular Movement for Liberation of Angola (MPLA-Worker's Party).

The MPLA was the leading liberation movement which fought for the independence of Angola from Portugal. After the armed struggle against Lisbon and its NATO allies between 1961-1975, the MPLA became the target of the United States and the then racist apartheid regime in South Africa in their strategic aim of curtailing the genuine independence of the entire sub-continent. Rather than recognize the legitimacy of the MPLA, Washington and its cohorts backed two rival groupings, the FNLA (Front for the Liberation of Angola) and UNITA (Union for the Total Independence of Angola), which were funded and assisted by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the South African Defense Forces (SADF).

Image on the right: Angola MPLA founding President Agostino Neto (Source: Abayomi Azikiwe)



Angola founding President Agostino Neto, turned to the Republic of Cuba and other socialist and progressive forces across the continent and internationally in order to secure the independence of the state under MPLA rule. Cuban internationalist forces remained in Angola from late 1975 to 1989, when an agreement was reached with the apartheid rulers of Namibia and South Africa to withdraw from the country as well as neighboring Namibia, then known as Southwest Africa. Namibia won its independence in 1990 after 14 years of armed revolutionary warfare. The military defeat of the SADF in southern Angola also led to the release of political prisoners in Namibia and South Africa and the negotiated transition from apartheid to democratic rule in the Republic of South Africa in 1994.

Dos Santos and the MPLA

The deceased former president had joined the MPLA (founded in 1956) during its early years in 1961. He was granted a scholarship to study petroleum engineering in the Soviet Union during the 1960s. By 1970, Dos Santos had returned to the region to serve as a guerrilla soldier in the MPLA.

Dos Santos served in the Second Front of the MPLA military department known as the People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FAPLA). He was stationed in the oil-rich Cabinda province and often served as a representative for the MPLA in international forums. He was a member of the MPLA Executive Committee and after the independence of Angola on November 11, 1975, he was appointed as the first prime minister.

The UNITA rebel organization largely based in southern Angola continued with a civil war which lasted from 1975-2002, when the U.S. and apartheid-backed Jonas Savimbi was killed by FAPLA forces. During the administration of President Gerald Ford and later Jimmy Carter, clandestine support for the UNITA rebel grouping continued. During the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan championed Savimbi as a proponent of bourgeois democracy in opposition to the Soviet-Cuban aligned Marxist MPLA.

Founding President Dr. Agostino Neto died in 1979 resulting in the ascendancy of Dos Santos as head-of-state. He was elected on numerous occasions over a period of 38 years and oversaw the resolution of the civil war and the establishment of peace and stability in Angola.

In the aftermath of the defeat of the SADF in southern Angola in 1988, UNITA had committed to participating in multi-party elections. However, when the MPLA was victorious in the voting which took place in 1992, UNITA resumed the armed attacks against the Angolan government and people. Since the 2000s in the wake of the death of Savimbi,

Angola has emerged as a major producer of oil internationally. There has been substantial growth in various sectors of the economy.

From a Wartime President to Leading Energy Producer

Dos Santos announced in 2017 that he was leaving the presidency while remaining as leader of the MPLA ruling party. His successor was Joao Lourenco who remains as president today. Lourenco later took over as leader of the party in 2018.

Image below: Angola oil rig (Source: Abayomi Azikiwe)



Africa News website reported that the Angolan president expressed his condolences on behalf of the government and people. The [article notes that](#):

“Angolan President Joao Lourenco, who is seeking re-election in August, said the country had suffered a ‘big loss’. He declared five days of national mourning, starting Saturday (July 9). ‘This is very sad news... He has done a lot for the country,’ said Luanda resident Santos Camuenho, a 40-year-old mason. Dos Santos was admitted to a hospital in Spain and placed in intensive care after suffering a cardiac arrest on June 23. Namibia’s President Hage Geingob called dos Santos an ‘outstanding revolutionary’. ‘Another giant tree has fallen,’ Geingob said. Portugal’s President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa described him as a ‘decisive protagonist’ in the relations with Angola’s former colonial power. Former Portuguese prime minister and ex-head of the European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso recalled a leader of exceptional intelligence, who was able to guarantee Angolan national unity’.”

In neighboring South Africa under the ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC), President Cyril Ramaphosa expressed his condolences and solidarity with the people of Angola during this time of loss and mourning. The ANC was a direct beneficiary of the solidarity extended by the MPLA and the Republic of Cuba during the 1970s and 1980s. The ANC armed wing, Um Khonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation), maintained training camps in Angola while the MPLA, the Southwest Africa People’s Organization (SWAPO) of Namibia were fighting to fully liberate the region from the occupation of the apartheid SADF.

Angola and South Africa are important members of the 16 member-states Southern African Development Community (SADC), which works towards greater cooperation and economic integration throughout the region. The SADC has been able to assist in the security needs of other member states such as Lesotho and Mozambique.

[In a statement issued by the South African President’s Office](#), it stated:

“I offer, on behalf of our government and nation, our sincerest condolences to the

Republic of Angola on the passing of an outstanding revolutionary and leader of a nation. President Dos Santos' humble beginnings, his militancy, his exile from the country of his birth and his education in the then Soviet Union resonate profoundly with the journey many South Africans in our own liberation movement experienced. Indeed, José Eduardo dos Santos and the MPLA (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola) came to lead and extend their revolutionary solidarity and material and military support to our liberation movement. This support provoked the apartheid regime and its allies to violate the sovereign Republic of Angola by turning Angola into a battleground for preserving the apartheid regime. In the end, through the sacrifices of the Angolan people and the unwavering leadership of President Dos Santos, freedom dawned in a democratic South Africa. Today, our two nations are united in mourning as we were in struggle, and South Africa will continue to honor the contribution President Dos Santos made to building the Republic of Angola and bringing peace to our region. May his soul rest in peace."

Over the last few years, Angola and the West African state of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, have contended as the largest oil-producers on the continent. Since May of this year, Angola has led Nigeria in the amounts of barrels per day being supplied to the international market.

These developments are significant in light of the burgeoning energy crisis in Europe where the war in Ukraine has prompted unprecedented sanctions by the U.S. and the EU against the Russian Federation, one of the largest producers and exporters of oil and natural gas. Many countries in Eastern and Western Europe are highly dependent upon Russian energy resources.

One television network in Nigeria [said](#) of the current situation:

"New data released by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) on Tuesday (July 12) shows Angola produced more crude oil than Nigeria in June. This is despite Nigeria recording its biggest production jump in months by 134,000 barrels per barrel (bpd) to 1.158 million bpd in June from 1.024 million in May, based on direct communication. However, Angola's oil production rose to 1.175 million bpd in June, up from 1.162 million bpd in May, based on direct communication.

IGBERETV had reported last month that Nigeria lost its status as Africa's top oil producer to Angola as its output declined the most in May among its peers in OPEC."

Amid an inflationary spike largely due to the precipitous rise in oil prices at the pump, the industry will be a central focus of many observers who are predicting a global recession. The 55-member-states African Union (AU) is already scheduled to hold a continent-wide summit with the Russian Federation beginning in November in Sochi. Undoubtedly, Angola will be an important player in the upcoming summit and the repositioning of the international energy markets.

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Featured image: Angolan Presidents Dos Santos and Joao Laurengo (Source: Abayomi Azikiwe)

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