By William Minter

In the wake of the long-awaited meeting in May between Angolan President José Eduardo dos Santos and Unita leader Jonas Savimbi, observers of the Angolan peace process are cautiously hopeful for more rapid progress in implementing the peace treaty signed last November. Additional contingents of the expected 7,000 United Nations troops are trickling in, the disengagement of government and Unita troops from close proximity is almost completed, and mutual accusations of cease-fire violations are down from the high point of tension earlier this year.

Yet the critical tests are still to come. According to the peace plan, there is to be freedom of movement for people and goods throughout Angola. Unita troops are to be disarmed by the United Nations, and government troops are to be confined to barracks. Then Unita forces should be incorporated into the national army, after which the combined army will be trimmed down by demobilization to a total of 90,000 troops. On the political side Unita is to take up the designated government posts promised it under the November treaty, while central government administration is to be extended throughout the country.

Despite the increased optimism of the last few weeks, those involved in the process, whether Angolans or representatives of the "international community," are painfully aware
that the previous peace treaty of May 1991 ended in a disastrous return to war, despite a relatively unbroken cease-fire and internationally praised elections in September 1992.

In 1993 and 1994, there was much commentary on what went wrong in 1992. But different parties have very different views of what lessons have been learned, or should be learned. In this critical implementation stage for the new treaty, it is essential to look carefully at what may be missing from the conventional wisdom.

A U.S. State Department review in April 1993, for example, singled out errors including "winner-take-all vs. power-sharing," "elections without prior agreement on shape of political system," "premature construction of a national army," and "no neutral control of transition." In slightly different wordings, other common elements often cited are the small and ineffective United Nations presence and the failure to demobilize the two armies.

These critiques, while containing elements of truth, are often presented in misleadingly simplistic terms. Like the State Department, moreover, most accounts evade the issue of the responsibility of the international community, and the United States in particular, in setting the scene for disaster and failing to respond as it developed. Most commentators and analysts do criticize Unita for its decision to return to war, acknowledge that the election process was free and fair, and dismiss Unita's claims of fraud as unsubstantiated. Still many have drawn 'lessons' which imply concessions primarily from the government rather than from Unita. And there is a serious lack of contingency plans for international action should Unita again balk at compliance.

Each reason given for failure can be interpreted in ways implying very different practical lessons. Thus the focus on absence of sufficient power-sharing in the electoral system can and has been used as if to justify Unita's return to war. The policy implication: the primary way to promote future conflict resolution is to more adequately satisfy Unita's concerns. A focus on the failure to demobilize the armies, in contrast, may be used primarily to critique Unita, the party most guilty in this regard, or to castigate the international community for turning a blind eye to this failure. The policy implications: the need to limit Unita's access to the means of war, and for the international community to react more vigorously to violations of the peace accord.

The lesson most generally agreed is that the UN forces are the ground were clearly inadequate.

As UN Special Representative Margaret Anstee quipped, noting that the resolution laying out her mandate was numbered 747, she was "flying a 747 with only enough fuel for a DC3." The numbers speak for themselves: In Angola there were less than 600 UN officials for a population of 10 million, as compared with more than 7,000 for the elections in Namibia with less than 1.5 million population. The mandate was also restricted to observation rather than administration of the process. The three outside powers formally involved (U.S., Russia and Portugal) were also observers. Implementation of the agreement was in the hands of the two parties themselves, or, in other words, the agreement was to be "self-implementing."

This critique is correct but incomplete. It fails to ask why the mandate and the resources of the force were so insufficient, and why there was no little will to correct the mistake once it was clear that they were inadequate. The reasons are complex, ranging from the inadequacies of UN bureaucratic structures
through U.S. concerns about budgets for peacekeeping operations to Angolan government sensitivities about sovereignty. But the fundamental reason lies in the context of the end of the Cold War. Dominant influence was in the hands of the one remaining superpower, beginning to waver in its unconditional support for its former Angolan client but still unwilling to admit past errors and slow to abandon its enmity to the Angolan government.

The UN mission, various critics have noted, was generally not well informed. It was weakened by internal bureaucratic squabbles, lack of local knowledge, inadequate numbers of Portuguese-speaking personnel, and no strong leadership independent of the major Western powers. Delays and violations on both sides went unchallenged, for the sake of moving the process along. Human rights issues involving both sides, but particularly the tightly controlled population administered by Unita, were conspicuously uninteresting to the UN team.

Most seriously, with Cuba removed from the scene, and the Soviet Union collapsing into Russia, there was no outside party with a serious interest in ensuring Unita's compliance with the peace treaty. There was a double standard most visible in the failure to insist on freedom of movement in Unita-controlled areas. Most U.S. personnel, as well as diplomats from other key countries and many within the UN mission itself, remained more sympathetic towards Unita than towards the Angolan government. They also expected it to win.

If Unita had won, and there had been a revolt against the results by the Angolan government or factions within it, international pressure would have likely been prompt and high-profile. It was known that the government was not really prepared for war, despite complaints about their new anti-riot police. Savimbi's readiness to fight was public knowledge. Nevertheless, the UN mission and the international community in general were unprepared for the scenario of a government electoral victory and a Unita revolt. As tensions escalated in the weeks following the election, Unita threatened and then resorted to arms, and the government responded, including handing out weapons to civilians in Luanda. The international reaction was largely passive. The election was recognized as free and fair, but there was no move to deter Unita. The U.S. refused to recognize the new Angolan government, on the grounds that the second round of presidential elections was still to be held.

The U.S. eventually conceded diplomatic recognition in May 1993 and the UN Security Council imposed a nominally enforced arms and fuel embargo on Unita in September. But in general the international response over the next two years of war focused almost exclusively on relief and on providing new incentives for Unita to sign a new peace agreement. Talk of "power-sharing" tended to be defined operationally as more power for Unita and alleviating Unita's security concerns. There was little attention to assuaging government security concerns, nor to weakening Unita to the point that it would be forced to accept the subordinate role of the loser in a democratic election.

The point is not that a focus on power-sharing was necessarily wrong. But without a simultaneous stress on respect for the results of the election and on the need to deter Unita through depriving it of military power, it became a recipe for bias in favor of Unita, under the guise of even-handedness. Allocating posts to Unita in the new Lusaka agreement can be justified if it indeed aids in promoting reconciliation. It is also true that a more decentralized political order, particularly for
the purpose of greater responsiveness and participation at local levels, is desirable in any case. But the question is whether such arrangements would have been, or will be, sufficient, to deter renewed war.

Although most commentators prefer to omit or evade the issue, no serious approach to conflict resolution in Angola can avoid asking a further question. Did Savimbi return to war because he did not get a *share* of power, or because he did not get it *all*? Or in other words, what share, short of giving the election loser more power than the winner, would have been sufficient to persuade him that further resort to violence and maintaining a military capacity under his own control was unnecessary?

The new agreement is generous to Unita but still acknowledges the elected Angolan government as the dominant national authority. Savimbi's failure to come to the treaty signing in Lusaka last November, and a series of contradictory statements from Unita officials since then, make it clear that they are profoundly ambivalent over even this degree of acceptance of the election results. The new treaty was signed at a low point in Unita's military fortunes, a result both of the reduced access to outside arms after South Africa's new government under President Nelson Mandela took office in May 1994, and of the buildup of government forces with new supplies and training from former South African commandoes now on contract to Luanda.

There is no easy formula to ensure success this time, as compared with last. Angolans are indeed deeply war-weary and desirous of peace. But the return to war in 1992 was decided by a small group of Unita leaders, not by popular demand even of those who had voted for Unita. Unita no longer has easy access to clandestine support from its friends in South Africa. But unlike in Mozambique, where neighboring Malawi as well as South Africa had experienced political change, Angola borders Zaire, which still serves as a supply line for new weapons to Unita and a link to its supporters in France and Francophone Africa. The increased numbers and expanded mandate of UN forces are more adequate to the task. But the political will of the international community to act, if things should go drastically wrong, is still highly doubtful.

In Security Council debates on deploying the UN forces, the U.S. has pushed hard for conditionalities, implying an "even-handed" posture of demanding that the Angolan parties both prove their good will. If there are delays, or failure to implement the agreement, the threat is to go away. Unfortunately, such a threat may endanger the peace process itself, giving leverage precisely to those most willing to return to war.

In conflict situations an interpretation of 'neutrality' as staying half-way between, regardless of the relative merits of the parties, puts the process at the mercy of the most belligerent parties. Total exclusion of a group from access to power, on the basis of its minority status at the polls or of the abhorrent conduct of its leadership, is not a solution. But the rhetoric of power-sharing and evenhandedness may easily slide into appeasement when the need to satisfy a party's complaints is seen to be appropriately determined by firepower and bloodymindedness rather than the ballot box or respect for human rights.

Just as war in Angola--and Unita's present military capacity--was previously fueled by the Cold War and the apartheid regime, so the international community now shares the responsibility for failure or success of the peace process. If the international community...
is to contribute to a sustainable peace, it must not allow its participation to be held hostage if Savimbi should again balk at implementing another peace agreement.

"Objectivity" is certainly appropriate in identifying and condemning violations of the accord or delays by either party. There can be no blanket endorsement of either side, in a confused situation of mistrust which requires patient confidence building and careful checking of conflicting reports. But it would be foolish and contrary to the facts not to recognize that the will to implement the accord is still most doubtful on the side of Unita—particularly when it comes to the critical point of integrating its military forces and surrendering the dictatorial control which it exercises over the population in the zones it occupies.

This key issue was ignored in 1992. Neither the government army nor Unita was totally demobilized. But the two armies differed fundamentally. The government army at the level of the rank and file was by and large a drafted army, multiethnic and with relatively low political commitment. It had substantial previous experience of incorporating former enemies. Unita, in contrast, imposed a brutally tight discipline and rigid political loyalty to Unita leader Savimbi. Its troops were almost all from Savimbi’s Umbundu-speaking ethnic heartland. A significant number of government soldiers went AWOL, in a kind of de facto self-demobilization. Within Unita fear combined with loyalty made such cases almost unheard of.

Can it be different this time? The rebuilt government army is open to incorporation of troops regardless of their background, but is still justifiably suspicious of the intentions of Savimbi and Unita’s top military leadership. Although military leaders have ceded to the government’s political leadership to give a chance to the peace accord, they fear that Unita may have agreed to the cease-fire at a moment of weakness only in order to win time to build up their forces again. The international community needs to recognize that these suspicions are not irrational paranoia, but are based on bitter experience of the past. While the international community deplored Unita’s return to war in 1992, it did little to stop it. It is not just the credibility of the Angolan parties that is at stake this time, but of the international community itself.

Both carrots and sticks, as well as sustained international involvement, will be necessary in order to implement the key peace agreement provision, namely that Unita forces be disarmed and integrated into the national army. Otherwise, May’s optimism may turn out to be as much a disappointment as that just before the election in 1992.