

WARID: Congo-Brazzaville 1997-1999 (Cobras/Cocoyes, Ninjas, Ntsiloulous)

STARDATE: 6 June 1997

ENDDATE: 29 December 1999

Related cases: Angola (UNITA) 1975-1995

Angola (UNITA) 1998-2002

Zaire/DR Congo (AFDL) 1996-1997

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Conflict overview

Though the war in Congo-Brazzaville started in 1997, the underlying conflict concerning governmental power traced back to the violent outbreaks that occurred in 1993 and the elections one year prior. Pascal Lissouba from the Pan-African Union for Social Democracy (UPADS) had won the elections in 1992 and managed to hold onto power despite political blockage and severe, violent resistance from the former unity party PCT (Congolese Labor Party), led by former president Denis Sassou-Nguesso. The third protagonist in this conflict, Bernard Kolélas, from the Congolese Movement for Democracy and Integral Development (MCDDI), first supported Sassou-Nguesso but then changed sides and supported Lissouba. All three parties disposed of armed militias that were rapidly mobilized, turning the capital Brazzaville into a battleground along ethnic lines: the Aubevillois and Zoulous fought for Lissouba in 1993 and were allegedly dissolved when hostilities ended in 1994. In the same year, Lissouba created the Cocoyes (Themnér 2001: 72); the Cobras fought for Sassou-Nguesso and the Ninjas were the MCDDI and Kolélas' militia (de Beer/Cornwell 1999: 1-2; Clark 2008: 2-5; Yengo 2006: 178-185). The clashes in 1993 did not exceed the threshold of war, defined as 1,000 fatalities.

In 1997, tensions arose again on account of the impending elections. On 5 June 1997, government forces¹ surrounded the residency of Sassou-Nguesso in order to disarm his militia, the Cobras. The Cobras immediately fought back and seized parts of the capital. Despite several mediation attempts and ceasefire declarations, fighting continued and Sassou-

1 Until today, it is not clear which government unit surrounded the residency of Sassou-Nguesso. Lissouba did not have much support in the army; some claim that police forces were involved while others assume that Lissouba gave the order to the Aubevillois or the Zoulous (Clark 2008: 166-167).

Nguesso took control of several towns in the north of the country. After several months of neutrality as the Mayor of Brazzaville, Bernard Kolélas again decided to side with Lissouba, and his Ninja militias joined the fighting. However, Sassou-Nguesso had, at the same time, won support from the Government of Angola. The Congolese army was not of much help to Lissouba, as their loyalties were divided with only some units supporting Lissouba and others still supporting Sassou-Nguesso (Clark 2008: 144; 165). Subsequently, Angolan troops invaded the capital and were vastly superior to the Cocoyes and Ninjas. On 15 October 1997, Sassou-Nguesso returned to power while Lissouba and Kolélas were forced to flee the country (Yengo 2006: 274-294). For several months, fighting was confined to efforts on the part of the Cobras – now integrated into the new governmental army – to eliminate the remainders of the other militias, often at the expense of the civilian population. The Cocoyes retreated to the Nibolek region and resumed fighting the following year. The Ninjas fled to the Pool region and had greater difficulties regrouping. This gave rise to a new rebel movement: the Ntsiloulous, led by ‘Pasteur Ntoumi’², claimed to fight for the Lari people and had a deeply religious background. While there were initially clashes between the Ntsiloulous and the Ninjas, the three militias decided to coordinate their military actions in March 1999 and founded the ‘Conseil national de résistance’ (CNR). Faced with continuing upheaval and increasing international pressure, Sassou-Nguesso undertook efforts to achieve a peace agreement by the end of 1999. On December 29, the conflict parties declared the cessation of hostilities and agreed to start a national dialogue (Amnesty International 1999: 12; Bazenguissa-Ganga 1999; Yengo 2006: 345-379).³

According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), the war lasted 31 months⁴ and ended with a peace agreement signed at the end of 1999 [**WARDUR=31; WARENDUC=1**].⁵ Beyond a cessation of hostilities, the agreement provided for a ‘dialogue’ between the protagonists of the conflict (Agreement 1999). Though this dialogue did take place, Sassou-Nguesso’s opponents, Lissouba and Kolélas, were not allowed to return to the country and

2 Whose real name is Frédéric Bitsangou.

3 In the view of many case experts, the war did not really end in 1999, but rather lasted until 2002, when fighting between the Ntsiloulous, Ninjas and the government came to an end. In contrast, the UCDP considers the fighting in 2002 merely as a re-escalation of the conflict that did not hit the threshold of a war. We follow the assessment of UCDP, because the reported number of hostilities decreased substantially after 1999 which means an end of war according to our project definition.

4 UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset v.4-2014a, 1946 – 2013 (P1958 and S1960), http://www.pcr.uu.se/digitalAssets/124/124920_1ucdparmedconflict4-2014a.xlsx (1 Apr 2015).

5 UCDP Conflict Termination Dataset v.2010-1 (T553-T555), http://www.pcr.uu.se/digitalAssets/124/124924_1ucdp_conflict_termination_2010_dyad.xls (1 Apr 2015).

had to remain in exile (Yengo 2006: 380-381). This was an unusual provision for a peace agreement, but the peace agreement itself was exceptional, as the war was won by Sassou-Nguesso [**WARENDOS=4**].⁶

The UCDP Conflict Encyclopedia reports 13,800 battle-related deaths and 1,200 people killed by one-sided violence committed by the government or militias.⁷ The total number of fatalities amounts to 15,000 [**FATALUC=15000**]. Systemic Peace reports a number of 10,000 deaths.⁸ Global Security claims that the “civil war resulted in more than 10,000 deaths in Brazzaville alone” but does not give the total for fatalities.⁹ Data in the Africa yearbooks for the period 1997-1999 point to at least 7,000 and perhaps even more than 13,500 fatalities (Körner 2000: 209; Stroux 1999: 200; Weiss 1998: 207). Later, Peter Körner (2002: 213) reported a death toll up to 20,000. As in almost all other cases in our project, the case-specific literature indicates a much higher number of people killed than the UCDP; as such, the last figure quoted by Körner seems appropriate [**FATALOS=20000**].

For the last year before the war, the World Bank reports a population of 2,798,000 [**PREWARPO=2800000**]. Consequently, the death toll, according to the UCDP, amounts to 0.54% of the pre-war population [**INTENSUC=0.54**]. Applying the higher estimate, this number stands at 0.71% [**INTENSOS=0.71**].

The military balance at the end of war

De Beer and Cornwell (1999) indicate a military stalemate at the end of 1999: “Indications are that neither the militia forces loyal to Lissouba and Kolélas, nor the government forces supported by the present Angolan contingent have the capability to win the civil war in the Republic of the Congo” (de Beer/Cornwell 1999: 5). Other sources (Clark 2008: 256) report that during the last months, “the governmental [Sassou-Nguesso’s] forces gained the upper hand and dealt blow after blow to the opposition militias, which fragmented into ever smaller groups”. Our reviewer states that Lissouba’s forces were unable to fight after 1999 and Ntoumi’s troops were in a state of disorganization. We therefore consider Sassou-Nguesso as the military victor of this war [**VICTORY=1**].

Cunningham et al. (2009) do not indicate any territorial control by the Ninjas, Cocoyes or Nstiloulous. This judgment is not supported by Patrice Yengo, who describes that the

6 Clark 2008: 256

7 http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdata/gpcountry.php?id=37®ionSelect=2-Southern_Africa# (1 Apr 2015).

8 <http://www.systemicpeace.org/warlist/warlist.htm> (1 Apr 2015).

9 <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/congo-b.htm> (1 Apr 2015).

regrouped Cocoyes and Mambas increased their territorial control and established a parallel administration (Yengo 2006: 360). However, as Sassou-Nguesso represents the side rebelling at the beginning of the war, his control of territory is more relevant. He already controlled parts of the north before 1997 and gradually moved into the southern regions after seizing power, although some small areas were (re-)conquered by Cocoyes or Ninjas (Clark 2008: 254). Therefore, Sassou-Nguesso still controlled the larger part of the territory **[REBTERR=1; MORETERR=1]**.

Cunningham et al. (2009: cells W527-529) only assess the relative fighting capacity of the Ninjas, Cocoyes and Ntsiloulous and only refer to the time after Sassou-Nguesso had seized power. As Sassou-Nguesso originally represented the rebel side, his fighting capacity is relevant, but was not assessed by Cunningham et al. 2009. Given the fact that he assumed control over the army while already possessing a militia and additionally received substantial support of Angolan troops, his relative fighting capacity can be assessed as high **[REBFIGHT=1]**.¹⁰ With fighting continuing throughout November and December 1999 despite the ceasefire agreement, we assume that both sides retained the capability to continue fighting in more than a sporadic manner. Even though the Cocoyes were substantially weakened, the Ninjas and Nstiloulou retained their ability to continuing fighting **[CONFIGHT=0]**.¹¹

With Kolélas and Lissouba in exile since October 1997, no leaders were killed or captured shortly before or at the end of the war **[LEADER=0]**.

In sum, the military balance at the end of the war shows an advantage for Sassou-Nguesso **[WARBAL=0.67]**.

The military balance in the post-war period

According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS 2000-2013), the state's armed forces comprised of 10,000 active personnel throughout the post-war period. The Gendarmerie consisted of 2,000 people. The Agreement on Ending Hostilities provided for the integration of former militia-members into the army and the police. Many militia members were former soldiers or policemen who had deserted when the allegiance in the government split between Lissouba and Sassou-Nguesso. The government was obliged to accept all former rebels who wished to join the army. This resulted in an estimated total of 500-1,200

10 Clark 2008: 254.

11 ACCORD/Republic of Congo (Congo Brazzaville) 2000: 56.

Ninjas, 700-1,600 Cocoyes and 3,200-5,200 Cobras joining the army. Furthermore, in 2002, 450 Ntsiloulous were integrated after fighting erupted once again. 500 Ntsiloulous and 600 Cocoyes were integrated into the police force, representing more than 20% of the total of 10,000. We do not count the integrated Cobras for the army, as they sided with Sassou-Nguesso. The higher estimates also reached our threshold for integration. The integration was implemented in February 2000 and lasted throughout the post-war period [**STATEFOR 2000-2012=0**].¹² The militia members who did not join the army were supposed to be demobilized and disarmed. Different initiatives were undertaken by the government, the UN and the World Bank; but, lacking funds, coordination and access to regions where violence re-erupted in 2002, these efforts did not succeed (Muggah 2004: 26-27). Parts of the Ninja militia remained armed until at least 2002, at which point they fought government troops (Muggah 2004: 23), and the Ntsiloulous remained at Pasteur Ntoumi's disposal throughout the post-war period (Dickovick 2014: 175). Sassou-Nguesso retained a portion of the Cobras as his Presidential Security Guard while others were promoted to high ranks in the army. We consider his guard as a separate force [**SEPFORCE 2000-2012=0**].¹³

As the estimations for the strength of the militias vary from 7,000 to 25,000 men (Muggah 2004: 25), we conclude that the database is not reliable enough to make any comparisons [**TROOPS 2000-2012=n.d.; ARMS 2000-2012=n.d.**].

Although the Ninjas and the Ntsiloulous obviously remained capable of launching occasional attacks, especially in the Pool region, they did not control territory in terms of a civilian presence. Sassou-Nguesso controlled the country [**TERRCON 2000-2012=1**] and the army's access to the former battlefields was enhanced, especially in the Pool region [**TERRWIN 2000-2012=1**]. Holding no territory, his opponents were more vulnerable [**VULNERAB 2000-2012=1**].

There were no foreign forces that kept the peace after the war [**PEACKEEP 2000-2012=n.r.**].¹⁴ Regional involvement in this conflict was high; Angola, in particular, could be expected to have intervened in the case of a new conflict. France also played a considerable role during the war; upon withdrawing its support for Lissouba in 1997, it certainly gave an advantage to Sassou-Nguesso, who had influential networks in France (Yengo 2006: 296-

12 <https://peaceaccords.nd.edu/accord/agreement-ending-hostilities-republic-congo#> (25 Jun 2015); Samuel 2005.

13 See https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print_cf.html (25 Jun 2015).

14 Fortna 2008: dataset rows 39-31.

302). However, a military intervention by a permanent member of the UN Security Council is considered unlikely [P5ALLY 2000-2012=n.r.].

The average value for the military balance in the post-war period points to an advantage for Sassou-Nguesso [POSTBAL 2000-2012=0.6]. The military balance at the end of the war combined with the military balance in the post-war years also indicates that Sassou-Nguesso prevailed [BALANCE 2000-2012=0.63].

Economy

The Republic of Congo's gross domestic product (GDP) per capita started at a low level and shrank in the second post-war year. Up to the end of the period under investigation, however, it roughly tripled, reaching a preliminary peak in 2011.

Table 1: GDP per capita in current USD¹⁵

<i>Year</i>	<i>Population (total)</i>	<i>GDP per capita</i>
2000	3126204	1030
2001	3205636	872
2002	3283719	920
2003	3363418	1039
2004	3448868	1348
2005	3542867	1718
2006	3646653	2120
2007	3758858	2233
2008	3876475	3059
2009	3995146	2401
2010	4111715	2920
2011	4225359	3414
2012	4337051	3154

The scale of compromise after the war

Sassou-Nguesso held the presidential mandate throughout the entire period of investigation. In 2005, Kolélas was granted amnesty and returned from exile. He changed sides once again and collaborated with Sassou-Nguesso. From 2007 onwards, two or three ministers in the government hailed from the MCDDI, Kolélas' party (Bazenguissa-Rémy 2007; Carter 2012). Lissouba was granted amnesty in 2009, but he did not return. The leader of the Ntsiloulous, Pasteur Ntoumi, who had retreated to the Pool region, returned to the capital in 2009 and became the president's general delegate, responsible for the promotion of peace values and

15 <http://api.worldbank.org/v2/en/country/cog?downloadformat=excel> (1 Apr 2015).

war reparations. With two of the three former opponents included, we can determine that participation by former opponents in the government was the case, despite the fact that Sassou-Nguesso clearly continued to dominate [**GOVERN 2000-2006=1; GOVERN 2007-2012=0**]. This is also reflected in the fact that none of his former opponents hold any veto powers [**VETO 2000-2012=1; VETOSAT 2000-2012=n.r.**].

Elections took place in 2002, 2007, 2009 and 2012. Freedom House unequivocally judges each election to be ‘not free or fair’. In these years, political rights achieved the second-worst rating possible. Clark (2008: 249-252) describes the regime of Sassou-Nguesso as “electoral authoritarianism” that is “far toward the authoritarian end of the range”. Although the African Union and ECOWAS described the elections in 2009 as ‘free and fair’, we consider the judgment of Freedom House and Clark to be correct, given the vast majority achieved by Sassou-Nguesso in this election [**ELECT 2000-2012=1**].

The war in Congo-Brazzaville was mainly motivated by a struggle among the three leaders for power. Case experts do not identify any other, more substantial conflict items; UN envoy E. Leonard states: “The violence here is largely the result of conflict between leaders whose ambitions know no limit and no decency [...] It is not the people, their communities or even their political parties who are driving this confrontation. They are!” (cited in de Beer/Cornwell 1999: 3).

As the issue of governmental power has already been coded, we do not have any other relevant items to assess [**EXBORDER 2000-2012=n.r.; INBORDER 2000-2012=n.r.; COMPETEN 2000-2012=n.r.; ECONOMY 2000-2012=n.r.; SPECPRO 2000-2012=n.r.; ISSUE 2000-2012=n.r.**]. In 2002, conflict again erupted between Pasteur Ntoumi Ntsiloulou’s militia, parts of the Ninja militias and Sassou-Nguesso’s troops.¹⁶ Demands made by the militias included the re-opening of the national dialogue and the return of exiled leaders.¹⁷ The national dialogue did not change, but, in 2005, Kolélas, the former leader of the Ninjas, was granted amnesty, returned to the country and later participated in the government. This can be considered as a partial fulfillment of the demands and therefore a compromise [**NEWCON 2000-2001=n.r., NEWCON 2002-2004=1, NEWCON 2005-2012=0; NEWCON2 2000-2012=n.r.**]. This ‘reconciliation’ with Kolélas was highly favorable for Sassou-Nguesso and further consolidated his power [**BENEFIT 2000-2004=n.r., BENEFIT 2005-2012=1; BENEFIT2 2000-2004=n.r., BENEFIT 2005-2012=1**].

16 This conflict did not reach the threshold of war and therefore does not count as a recurrence.

17 <http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdata/gpcountry.php?id=37®ionSelect=2-Southern Africa#>; Samuel 2005.

The scale of compromise from 2000 to 2004 shows a complete imbalance in favor of Sassou-Nguesso, only decreasing slightly with the return of Kolélas and his participation in the government [**COMPROM 2000-2004=1; COMPROM 2005-2006=0.83; COMPROM 2007-2012=0.67**].

Stability of Peace

According to the UCDP, there was a new armed conflict between the government and the Ntsiloulous in 2002. As it did not exceed the threshold of 1,000 fatalities, this dyad did not constitute a relapse into war [**SAMEWAR=0; DATESAME=n.r.**]. No other conflict escalated into a war, either [**ANYWAR=0; DATEANY=n.r.**]. Thus, we can count 156 months of peace until the end of the period under investigation [**PEACMON1=156; PEACMON2=156**].

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