



CHATHAM HOUSE

Chatham House, 10 St James's Square, London SW1Y 4LE
T: +44 (0)20 7957 5700 E: contact@chathamhouse.org
F: +44 (0)20 7957 5710 www.chathamhouse.org

Charity Registration Number: 208223

Africa Summary

UK-Angola Bilateral Relations: Priorities, Influence and Impact

HE Richard Wildash

British Ambassador to Angola

Chair: Alex Vines OBE

Research Director, Area Studies and International Law; and Head Africa Programme,
Chatham House

21 May 2013

The views expressed in this document are the sole responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of Chatham House, its staff, associates or Council. Chatham House is independent and owes no allegiance to any government or to any political body. It does not take institutional positions on policy issues. This document is issued on the understanding that if any extract is used, the author(s)/ speaker(s) and Chatham House should be credited, preferably with the date of the publication or details of the event. Where this document refers to or reports statements made by speakers at an event every effort has been made to provide a fair representation of their views and opinions, but the ultimate responsibility for accuracy lies with this document's author(s). The published text of speeches and presentations may differ from delivery.

INTRODUCTION

The following document provides a summary of a meeting held at Chatham House on 21 May 2013. The meeting looked at UK-Angola bilateral relations.

At this roundtable discussion, the British ambassador to Angola, HE Richard Wildash, gave a briefing on trends in Angola, the political and economic context, and how the bilateral relationship has evolved.

The meeting consisted of a presentation followed by a discussion, both of which were on the record. The following summary is intended to serve as an *aide-mémoire* for those who took part and to provide a general summary of discussions for those who did not.

HE RICHARD WILDASH

Mr Wildash gave an overview of bilateral relations between the United Kingdom and Angola, highlighting recent trends and their future.

Relations have improved and the relationship between the UK ambassador and Angolan ministers is positive; more subjects are now open for discussion with the Angolan government. Some examples were given of this transition.

The Lord Mayor of London, Roger Gifford, visited Angola in April 2013 and met a host of senior ministers and business representatives.

Also in April, the Royal British Navy frigate *HMS Argyll* docked in Luanda. There was a formal visit to the ship by the Angolan government and delegations from the Angolan Armed Forces. The aim of the visit was to build on the defence relationship with the Angolan Armed Forces, particularly the Angolan navy.

A number of themes constituting the relationship between the United Kingdom and Angola were discussed. The Angolan government's attitude towards human rights continues to hold UK and global attention. There has been positive dialogue and information-sharing between the Angolan and British governments, and there is hope that Angola will support the United Kingdom's application to renew its term on the UN Human Rights Council.

Angola now has a clear, defined foreign policy view, as demonstrated by its vote at the Human Rights Council in Geneva. Angola has twice voted against human rights abuses in Syria. There has been a clear change in Angolan policy from an emphasis on internal issues to a focus on foreign relations and developing an international role.

Expert meetings have been held in Angola on the subject of chemical and biological weapons, in preparation for the country's accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. These shifts in Angola's focus can be taken as a sign of international solidarity.

Angola demonstrated its regional aspirations when it assumed the chair of the African Union Peace and Security Council. This shows the country is testing its role as a regional leader, asserting its international profile.

Angola has become more open, sending a positive message to the international community that it is ready for engagement by seeking out new partnerships. On the other hand, this positive outlook for Angola's future must be balanced with an awareness of certain realities, particularly for potential British investors.

One inhibiting factor is a capacity constraint in terms of policy-making and implementation. Furthermore, there has been some mistrust of the United Kingdom's interest in Angola in areas such as chemical weapons, human rights and trade; a UK Trade & Investment business event held in early 2013 to increase partnerships between British and Angolan companies via Portuguese intermediaries failed. While there is a degree of ease and familiarity for Portuguese companies working in Angola, some of these companies lack niche skills that British companies can provide.

Visa issues are often cited as a constraint for Angolans coming to the United Kingdom, although many of the problems can be solved by fully understanding the visa process; allowing enough time for visas to process and understanding the bureaucratic procedure. There is a need to improve communication on the British side, so the process of applying for visas is made clearer.

Nine months have passed since Angola's national elections, with numerous statements issued by the leadership on the pressing needs in health and education, but there has been a slow pace of reform. This lack of action may well lead to tensions in the country. This is of concern to many of Angola's international partners.

Debate surrounding the eventual successor to President José Eduardo dos Santos' does not affect British policy on Angola; the British government will work with whomever is in power and does not seek to influence political processes. This issue should not be of concern to investors as Angola is stable politically.

Angolan opposition leaders are becoming more assertive, speaking out in parliament and holding the executive to account. However, more needs to be done regarding freedom of expression and freedom of the press.

In terms of British policy on Angola, the United Kingdom seeks to encourage more high-level exchange between the two countries, and will continue in its efforts to help bind Angola to the international system. The British government wishes to see more British companies investing in Angola and establishing long-term partnerships with Angolan companies. The Angolan diaspora in the United Kingdom is the second largest in Europe, presenting a valuable cultural and linguistic asset for developing partnership opportunities.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question

What is motivating the repositioning of Angola in the international community?

HE Richard Wildash

The ambassador noted that Angola is keen to build up a positive post-war legacy; establishing partnerships and reforming its economy. Angola has been conducting its own credit ratings, which shows that the country is conscious of international perceptions. There has been a realization that the world is changing, with political isolation no longer an option. IMF involvement was welcomed during the oil price crisis, and Angola still receives technical assistance from the institution.

Question

What actions has the United Kingdom taken along with the Angolan government or international organizations to combat human rights abuses in the Lunda provinces?

HE Richard Wildash

The ambassador stated that human rights are an integral part of good governance. The issue of human rights is relevant for business interests as well as for civil society groups. The only people who can solve human rights abuses are those in government, and the government in Angola needs to take action. There has been dialogue between the British and Angolan ministries of justice and British visits to the Lunda provinces. The British government continues to work with ombudsmen, NGOs, civil society and the Angolan government to support human rights projects.

Question

Militarily, how do you see Angola's future role in terms of regional security?
How does Angola see its role, particularly around the Great Lakes region?

HE Richard Wildash

The ambassador noted that Angola's military is one of the better equipped and trained forces in sub-Saharan Africa. However, Angola's military engagement is not always up to international standards. Angola had a difficult experience in Guinea-Bissau, where military engagement was well-intentioned but appeared unilateral to UN observers and ECOWAS efforts.

Due to past experiences it may be a while before Angola involves itself internationally again in terms of regional security. Angola is cautious about intervening in the DR Congo, which presents a serious threat to stability in the region. Angola could do more to provide logistical support throughout the region and more widely in Africa, as it is well-placed geo-strategically. Teaching English to its military forces could help Angola lend more support to regional and continental security.

Question

Does the British Council have a role in teaching English in Angola?

HE Richard Wildash

The ambassador replied that the British Council is independent from the British government. There is a need in Angola for the British Council, in language training and other schemes, including building management capacity in Angola. From a recent scoping mission headed by the British government, this could be improved by sustaining links between British and Angolan universities, promoting PhD and industry sponsorship programmes.

Question

If Angola is politically stable, what is discouraging British companies from investing in Angola?

HE Richard Wildash

The ambassador stated that disincentives for investors in Angola are not centred on political hindrances, but bureaucratic demands. Start-up costs can be around \$1 million, and investors must adhere to the Portuguese system of legal requirements and bureaucracy. There are a dozen FTSE 100 companies with a permanent or semi-permanent presence in Angola,

showing that international companies can be successful in Angola. However, smaller companies may face practical difficulties.

Question

To what extent do perceptions of corruption deter British companies?

HE Richard Wildash

The ambassador stated that perceptions of corruption do not match the reality in Angola. The ambassador and the governor of Luanda held a bilateral meeting on corruption, where the governor emphasized his 'zero tolerance' policy. There have been improvements and an increase in prosecutions. Despite these changes, there will not be real change for British companies until there is a change in perceptions.

Question

What is your view on the visit to Angola by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights?

HE Richard Wildash

The ambassador replied that the visit was important. The commissioner was in Angola at the invitation of the Angolan government, and was very positive about current developments in the country. Her main concern was over the fragility of civil society. Civil society needs support from the government, with an effective balance between government, the private sector and civil society. Angola is weak in the area of civil education, so the international community must work with Angolan civil society to improve this.

Question

Is China's engagement with Angola strengthening or weakening? Has there been any change in the relationship?

HE Richard Wildash

The ambassador stated that he does not have a negative view of the relationship between China and Angola. Standards of workmanship have not

always been high but he asked: would Angola be where it is today without China's involvement early on? Angola has made it clear that it wants to diversify its partnerships in the long term, but the relationship between China and Angola remains deeply entrenched. Relations are positive between the British and Chinese embassies in Luanda, with similar views held on many issues. There may be scope for a tripartite relationship between China, Angola and the United Kingdom.

Question

What is your view on democracy in Angola after the protests in April, when youth movements were suppressed? Were these protests highly attended by youth movements?

What do you think about the Angolan government's response to the unrest?

HE Richard Wildash

The ambassador noted that demonstrations are a sign of democratic opportunity, so the fact that they were held is a positive step for Angola. Demonstrations should be conducted in an orderly way; although suppression of peaceful demonstrations is not a valid response.

Younger people are becoming more active in Angolan political parties, and the government must learn to accept this. There needs to be a debate on the consequences of the demonstrations: some responses were heavy-handed; others less so. There needs to be equilibrium in the government's response to protests.

Question

Democratic protest was suppressed by police forces during the demonstrations. How can those in authority in the international community respond to this?

HE Richard Wildash

The ambassador stated that it is important the international community explains its concerns over Angolan civil society to the Angolan government, to help civil society groups speak out. It is important that young Angolans ask these questions of their government; it is not a role for British involvement.

The British government will continue to engage diplomatically with the relevant Angolan ministries.

Question

Visa problems are one of the biggest impediments for Angolan investment in the United Kingdom. What can be done to resolve this?

HE Richard Wildash

The ambassador noted that the British government is keen to increase Angolan investment in the United Kingdom: currently no Angolan banks have a presence in London, despite Angola being the third largest economy in sub-Saharan Africa. There are no Angolan companies on the London Stock Exchange.

For visas, information is the key component. There is a need to be realistic: the global working time for UK visas to be processed is 15 working days. Visas are valid for a minimum of six months, and are all multi-entry so there is no need to apply at the last minute. The necessary documentation can be around 18 pages and although there is an element of difficulty involved, there are clear instructions in English.

Question

Have political leaders in Europe been meeting with senior members of Angolan opposition parties?

HE Richard Wildash

The ambassador noted that he could only speak on behalf of British leaders, and that the British government in Angola regularly meets with the opposition leaders. Opposition leaders are vital in challenging government policy and encouraging new ideas.

Question

Although there have been visits by Angolan opposition parties to the United Kingdom, there have not been any recent visits by the Angolan government to the United Kingdom. Is there an imbalance?

HE Richard Wildash

The ambassador stated that invitations are often sent to the Angolan government to meet with senior ministers in the United Kingdom. No Angolan ministers attended the UK Trade & Investment events in London and Lisbon.

Question

How can bilateral engagements between the United States and Angola be improved? Is there a role for both governments to improve this?

HE Richard Wildash

The ambassador noted that the private sector has a positive role facilitating bilateral engagements between both countries. The private sector could engage in dialogue with the government, especially on Angola-focused businesses.