

**ANGOLA'S ROLE IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE GREAT LAKES
REGION: THE CASE OF THE RDC (2014-2023)
O PAPEL DE ANGOLA NA RESOLUÇÃO DE CONFLITOS DA REGIÃO DOS GRANDES
LAGOS: O CASO DA RDC (2014 À 2023)
EL PAPEL DE ANGOLA EN LA RESOLUCIÓN DE CONFLICTOS EN LA REGIÓN DE LOS
GRANDES LAGOS: EL CASO DE LA RDC (2014 A 2023)**

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Manuscript information:

Recibido/Received: 03/03/2026

Revisado/Reviewed: 19/05/2026

Aceptado/Accepted: 10/06/2026

ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Conflicts, DRC, Angola, Resolution, Foreign policy.

This article focuses on "Angola's role in conflict resolution in the Great Lakes Region: the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo 2014-2023". Based on this theme, the approach adopted is qualitative in nature, seeking to understand the political and diplomatic context through a detailed analysis of the meanings, motivations, and values underlying the events studied. Documentary and historical methods were used, with emphasis on bibliographic and documentary data collection instruments. Based on this data, it was confirmed that most current conflicts are located on the African continent, with the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola's neighbor, being one of the countries that causes great instability in the Great Lakes Region. During its two terms at the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), Angola played an important role in African regional organizations, specifically in mediating conflicts in the Great Lakes Region, neutralizing the negative forces of the March 23 Movement (M23) in the DRC and the ceasefire in the Central African Republic (CAR), weakening the Allied Armed Forces (ADF), and ensuring that the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) voluntarily surrendered their weapons.

RESUMO

Palavras-chave:

Conflitos, RDC, Angola, resolução, política externa

O presente artigo debruçou-se sobre “o papel de Angola na resolução de conflitos na Região dos Grandes Lagos: o caso da República Democrática do Congo 2014-2023”. Com base ao tema referenciado a abordagem adotada é de natureza qualitativa, buscando compreender o contexto político e diplomático por meio de uma análise detalhada de significados, motivações e valores subjacentes aos eventos estudados. O mesmo recorreu-se a métodos documentais e

históricos, com realce aos instrumentos de recolha de dados bibliográficos e documentais. Face a estes dados, confirmou-se que a maior parte dos conflitos actuais estão localizados no continente africano, sendo a República Democrática do Congo, vizinha de Angola, um dos países que causa grande instabilidade na Região dos Grandes Lagos. Angola durante os seus dois mandatos na Conferência Internacional dos Grandes Lagos (CIRGL), desempenhou um papel importante nas organizações regionais africanas, concretamente na mediação de conflitos da Região Grande Lagos, neutralizando as forças negativas dos Movimentos 23 de Março (M23) na RDC e o cessar-fogo na República Centro Africana (RCA), no enfraquecimento das Forças Armadas Aliadas (ADF) e para que as Forças Democráticas de Libertação do Ruanda (FDLR), entregasse voluntariamente as armas.

RESUMEN

Palabras clave:

Conflictos, RDC, Angola, resolución, política exterior.

Este artículo se centra en «El papel de Angola en la resolución de conflictos en la región de los Grandes Lagos: el caso de la República Democrática del Congo 2014-2023». Con base en este tema, el enfoque adoptado es de naturaleza cualitativa, buscando comprender el contexto político y diplomático a través de un análisis detallado de los significados, motivaciones y valores subyacentes a los eventos estudiados. Se utilizaron métodos documentales e históricos, con énfasis en instrumentos de recolección de datos bibliográficos y documentales. A partir de estos datos, se confirmó que la mayoría de los conflictos actuales se ubican en el continente africano, siendo la República Democrática del Congo, vecina de Angola, uno de los países que genera mayor inestabilidad en la región de los Grandes Lagos. Durante sus dos mandatos en la Conferencia Internacional sobre la Región de los Grandes Lagos (CIRGL), Angola desempeñó un papel importante en las organizaciones regionales africanas, concretamente en la mediación de conflictos en la región de los Grandes Lagos, neutralizando las fuerzas negativas del Movimiento 23 de Marzo (M23) en la República Democrática del Congo y el alto el fuego en la República Centroafricana (RCA), debilitando a las Fuerzas Armadas Aliadas (FAA) y asegurando que las Fuerzas Democráticas para la Liberación de Ruanda (FDLR) entregaran voluntariamente sus armas.

Introduction

This article examines Angola's role in conflict resolution in the Great Lakes Region: The Case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2014–2023. This study is the result of research conducted using various sources, which provide information on Angola's role in conflict resolution in the Great Lakes region. It lists theoretical suggestions for resolving issues related to the topic, particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Since the late 1950s and early 1960s, following its independence, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been plagued by conflicts stemming from power struggles, which were influenced by the foreign (Belgian) presence, aimed at maintaining control over the country's natural resources. In turn, these conflicts have led to internal instability and security threats to other neighboring countries and the region (Junior, 2021). Nevertheless, Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which are neighboring countries, share a long land border. "These two countries have peaceful relations; however, a major internal conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo could endanger the surrounding areas, especially Angola" (Sita, 2017, p. 6). Angola knows that unresolved conflicts near its borders can have consequences within its territory (Ibid., 2017).

Like the DRC, Angola has also experienced a significant period of conflict. After gaining independence in 1975, the country endured 27 turbulent years, largely due to the effects of the Cold War and the civil war that ravaged the country until 2002, when the Luena Memorandum was signed (Jovita, 2017). The country has demonstrated that it is possible to resolve political and military issues without the use of force, relying on negotiation as a means of resolving its conflicts rather than war (Armando, 2021). The country has played an important role in African regions, focusing on resolving regional conflicts. For example, the actions taken as chair of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), a forum chaired by Angola for two consecutive terms from 2014 to 2017.

In fact, the Angolan government has focused its regional foreign policy on the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC), and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), arguing that surveillance and the strengthening of security within the framework of international law serve as a means to facilitate the functioning of subregional organizations as instruments of regional cooperation in the region (Armando, 2021).

Accordingly, this article aims to understand the role played by the Republic of Angola in the process of neutralizing negative forces in order to promote greater political and democratic stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As such, it serves as an important academic tool, as it aims to contribute to future studies or research on Angola's role in conflict resolution in the DRC, in the fields of International Relations and Political Science. Furthermore, this article contributes to the recognition of scientific studies already conducted on Angola's role in the conflicts in the African Great Lakes region. Researching and discussing Angola's role in conflict resolution in the Great Lakes region—and specifically in the DRC—during the study period from 2014 to 2023 proved to be a challenge, as the research revealed a scarcity of academic work on the subject; therefore, this study aims to help fill that gap.

To this end, the overall objective is to analyze Angola's role in conflict resolution in the Great Lakes Region from 2014 to 2023. The specific objectives related to the desired outcomes include:

- Explain the real motivations behind Angola's interest in resolving conflicts in the Great Lakes region;
- Assess Angola's performance in mediating conflicts in the region following its dual chairmanship of the CIRGL.

The Origins and Causes of Conflicts in the Great Lakes Region

This region has been plagued by various waves of conflict that have lasted for more than five decades. These conflicts have deep roots; some are legacies of colonialism—notably the partition of Africa—while others arise from the dynamic nature of social circumstances, particularly the presence of various ethnic groups, diverse rebel groups in the region, and the authorities' inability to exert control over the entire region (Brinco, 2020). Accordingly, Silva (2012) describes the conflict in the Great Lakes region as a multifaceted conflict—one that is ethnic, nationalist, and economic in nature, with regional impacts, affecting the security of the countries in the region (Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo).

Based on the foregoing, the mineral resources found throughout most of the region constitute one of the world's largest reserves of natural resources, second only to the Middle East. The author cited above points out that this aspect alone explains the reasons that formed the basis of the major disputes during the colonial period among the colonizing powers (Brinco, 2020). Despite its natural resources, the Great Lakes region "is characterized by extreme poverty, hunger, disease, and the breakdown of families" (Brinco, 2020, p. 24). These problems have increased significantly in the region due to a number of "*internal and external*" factors, primarily the greed of government officials, who are enriching themselves at the expense of the people (Ibid., 2020).

In the domestic context, the characteristics of regional governments fall far short of what is desired, especially when it comes to building democracies. In many countries in the Great Lakes region, presidents become a sort of "owner" of their country by refusing to step down from office. If we look at the countries in this region, this fact is confirmed: although many countries have achieved independence since the 1960s, most have had only two or three presidents, a fact that shows how difficult it is to relinquish power in the countries of the African Great Lakes region (Tavares, 2007).

Furthermore, natural resources are often controlled by so-called warlords, who are supported by governments and politicians incapable of governing their countries, thereby causing civil unrest (Madeiros, 2010).

According to Londa (2019), cited by Brinco (2020, p. 27), he emphasizes above all "the misallocation of resources as one of the main factors contributing to conflicts in the Great Lakes countries, coupled with the fact that some ethnic groups feel disadvantaged compared to others." Consequently, the rise of religious movements—not only within Islam but also among other religions present in the region, as highlighted by Tavares (2007)—is one of the factors contributing to the region's insecurity, and in some cases, this has led to a kind of confrontation among them. This led to the emergence of rebel groups making demands of their government (Brinco, 2020).

In the international context, "in Africa, particularly in the Great Lakes countries," assets and liabilities from colonial rule were inherited. "Because many of the conflicts that occur in the region can be explained by the historical context that allowed two peoples with distinct cultures to coexist" (Brinco, 2020, 27). In turn, this idea—on the one hand, because the Berlin Conference held in 1884–1885 was an important milestone on the African continent, as it led to the partition of the continent; on the other hand, because it was the reason certain conflicts arose in the Great Lakes region— since the demarcation

of these borders did not reflect the political, economic, social, and cultural realities of the colonized peoples (Ibid., 2020).

However, the boundaries established by the countries participating in the Berlin Conference resulted in different ethnic groups from various countries—each with their own distinct customs and traditions—coming to share the same regions, as peoples of the same territory or state, subject to the same government and similar administrative regulations (Sacalumbo, 2016). “The desire to explore the African continent was so great that the European powers did not question the extent of the damage they might cause” (Artur, 2018, p. 21).

In Europe, the thirst for land in Africa was already almost palpable. There were some conflicting claims that needed to be resolved, and, obviously, it was urgent to establish some basic rules for the final division of the African spoils; Bismarck offered to host a diplomatic conference in Berlin to discuss some of these issues. For Leopoldo, the conference was yet another opportunity to strengthen his position in the Congo. (Artur 2018, p. 21)

As a result of European greed and a lack of understanding, various types of conflicts have arisen on the African continent, some of which are conflicts in the Great Lakes region. These take many forms, ranging from border disputes between countries to conflicts over natural resources, as well as ethnic and cultural conflicts, which are often fueled by colonialism. A policy was implemented that would ultimately divide the continent and force these countries to maintain relations with their former colonies (Artur, 2018).

Accordingly, “The bitter legacy of the colonial system—which gave rise, first and foremost, to ethnic conflicts—has left its mark on Africa’s political, economic, and social history, and one of the best-known examples is the conflict in Burundi and Rwanda” (ibid., p. 21). “Now classified by many as an ethnic conflict—since it involves two groups, the Tutsis and the Hutus—the disputes between these two tribes have been described as one of the greatest conflicts in the Great Lakes region,” as noted by Nyer (2009), cited by Miranda (2018, p. 14). These conflicts trace their origins to 1994, when one of the greatest genocides in human history took place, in which more than 1,000,000 Tutsis were killed, following the assassination of former Hutu leader Juvenal Habyarimana, who was returning from a trip to Tanzania, where he had signed a peace agreement. Unfortunately, things did not go as planned; his plane was shot down, resulting in his death (Miranda, 2018).

In light of these events, many survivors of this genocide were forced to flee to neighboring countries, such as Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Uganda, where they became victims of persecution (Artur, 2018). Their presence led to conflicts in other parts of the Great Lakes region, particularly in the Kivu provinces of the DRC, for which then-President Mobutu was blamed for siding with the Tutsis. For many Congolese, the conflicts in North Kivu and South Kivu only broke out because Rwandan refugees crossed the border to escape the genocide and brought with them long-standing rivalries (Miranda, 2018).

Consequently, it is generally accepted that the greatest mistake made in the management of the refugee camps was the failure to identify and separate extremist members of the Hutu militias and the former Rwandan government from the rest of the refugees (Miranda, 2018). The author points out that “as a result of this failure, discrimination arose between Congolese Tutsis, Rwandan Tutsis, and Rwandan Hutus, who laid claim to the Congolese areas where they had settled” (p. 14). The lack of national cohesion in North Kivu has caused many hardships for the Congolese population; unfortunately, one of these hardships is the rape of women (Miranda, 2018).

“These disasters have been denounced by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the United Nations. “In 2009, more than 7,500 cases of violations committed by

militias and the Congolese regular forces were reported" (Valenzola, 2014, p. 79). The fact is that the causes of these wars have been more complex than ethnic rivalries; proof of this is that some militias, such as the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of the Congo (AFDL)—an opposition force to President Mobutu—had members from various ethnic groups: Hutus, Rwandan Tutsis, and Congolese Tutsis (Miranda 2018). However, "this coalition advanced through the territory, scoring victories against the Congolese army and attacking refugees." "It was a war known as the First Congo War, which only ended when rebels led by Laurent Kabila seized power" (Aguilar & Pereira, 2014, p. 3).

The Regional Role of Angolan Diplomacy and Its Interests in the Great Lakes Region: The Case of the DRC

"Angola's foreign policy is characterized by its *realpolitik*¹ approach and by the diversification of its international relations, which protects it from excessive dependence on the West" (Oliveira, 2015, p. 239). Consequently, Angola has been developing strategies to improve its reputation in order to diversify its relations with rapidly developing countries (Oliveira, 2015).

At the regional level, Angola has adopted a policy of integration. It, in turn, belongs to several regional groups, including the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR). The former President of the Republic, José Eduardo dos Santos, stated that Angola's foreign policy continues to be guided by direct action aimed at strengthening understanding and cooperation among countries and preserving international peace, stability, and security (Kissaca, 2017). This statement, made in 2011, continues to shape Angola's foreign policy and the defense of the state's sovereignty (Miranda, 2018).

Angola "is committed to a policy of improving its international reputation." "In recent years, Angolan diplomacy has stood out and raised the country's profile internationally" (Miranda, 2018, p. 36). This role is linked to his commitment to conflict resolution, particularly the work he has been carrying out at the CIRGL during his presidency. All of these actions taken by Angola led to it receiving overwhelming support (190 votes out of 193 cast) from the United Nations member states to become a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the second time on October 1, 2014, for a two-year term (MIREX, 2023). Thus, "these two simultaneous appointments of Angola to the United Nations Security Council and the ICGLR have brought the country into the spotlight of international relations, affirming Angola's pivotal role in the sub-Saharan region" (Miranda, 2018, p. 36).

Angola is a peaceful country whose stability depends heavily on both its immediate and more distant neighbors; the author cited above points out that, in addition to ensuring security, Angola is also interested in increasing its influence in the Great Lakes region and, consequently, in the DRC. During its presidency of CIRGL, Angola took the opportunity to assert its influence on political decision-making in the region (Miranda, et al., 2018).

Angola and Its Co-Chairmanship of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (2014–2017)

Angola assumed the presidency of the CIRGL from January 10 to 15, 2014, for a two-year term, "at the 5th Conference of Heads of State and Government of the CIRGL, held in Luanda, under the theme: 'Promoting peace, security, stability, and development in the Great Lakes region.'" (Pedro & Garcia, 2020, pp. 848–49). The authors note that Angola assumed the presidency of the Organization and that the various member states

¹ **Realpolitik**, a word of German origin meaning "realistic politics," refers to politics or diplomacy based primarily on practical considerations, rather than ideological notions.

also committed to complying with all the Conference's decisions and to working toward peace, stability, and socioeconomic development in the region (Armando, 2021).

In light of this, "the impact of this rotation stems primarily from the fact that Angola has fostered dialogue and consensus among countries in the Great Lakes region, with the aim of developing a common strategy to maintain and preserve peace and prosperity in the Great Lakes region" (Armando, 2021, p. 47). During its presidency, Angola has been addressing issues that affect the region's peace process and stability—issues related to political divisions in the region—while emphasizing the promotion of youth employment as a key pillar for effective peace and security in the development of the RGL, and paying special attention to security issues as a central focus of its presidency (Pedro & Garcia, 2020; Armando, 2021). Consequently, (Ngeli 2021) states that

Angola's former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gorge Rebelo Chikoti, traveled to several countries in the region from February 10 to 15, 2014 — Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, Sudan, the Central African Republic, and the DRC — with the aim of assessing the situation in light of the implementation of the recommendations from the 5th Summit held in Luanda in 2014 under the aforementioned theme. He sought to ascertain *in loco* the status of the Executive Secretariat. (p. 39)

During its first term at CIRGL, "Angola hosted a tripartite mini-summit on June 6, 2014, attended by the Republic of the Congo and Chad, with the aim of examining the causes of and solutions to problems in the Great Lakes region" (Pedro, 2019, p. 329). Also on June 11 and 13, 2014, in Luanda, "a meeting was held between the defense ministers and the chiefs of staff of the member states of the CIRGL, where they discussed issues related to defense, security, economic development, and crime" (Armando, 2021, p. 49). In this context, Miranda (2018) points out the following:

During its first term, Angola took on many challenges, including that of neutralizing the rebels in eastern DRC. Having monitored, throughout its term, the process of disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, reintegration, and renewal of the former M23, as well as the attempt to neutralize the FDLR and the Allied Defense Forces (ADF)—since, at a second joint meeting held in Luanda, between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the ICGLR and SADC, on July 1 and 2, 2014, an ultimatum was issued to the FDLR and ADF forces to observe a ceasefire and surrender voluntarily; otherwise, military action would be taken against the insurgent forces operating in the region. (p. 44)

Nevertheless, "during the 3rd meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the CIRGL and the SADC, held from September 18 to 20, 2014, the level of voluntary disarmament by the FDLR during the six-month period allotted to this organization was assessed" (Armando, 2021, p. 51). As the six-month deadline set by the ultimatum expired on January 2, 2015, the ADF and the FDLR continued to sow terror, even though the latter had begun to surrender voluntarily in exchange for negotiations with the CIRGL and the SADC. On the offensive, the FARDC, with the support of MONUSCO, launched Operations SOKOLA1 and SOKOLA2 to neutralize the two hostile forces. All of these actions, carried out with Angola's support in its capacity as chair of the CIRGL, helped to calm the situation in eastern DRC, although much remained to be done—such as accelerating the process of Disarmament, Repatriation, Reintegration, and Resettlement (DRRR) for former M23 combatants; although the group had been dismantled, there were still occasional incidents of attempted attacks (Miranda, 2018).

Thus, at the end of its first term and based on the results achieved, "Angola assumed a new term on June 14, 2016, during the Sixth Conference of Heads of State of the CIRGL; under the rotating system, Angola was to be replaced by Kenya" (Pedro & Garcia et al., 2020, p. 45). According to (Miranda, 2018), Kenya, with the assistance of several countries in the organization, asked Angola to continue the programs outlined in the previous mandate and to place greater emphasis on the situation in the DRC. Thus, the

Angolan presidency moved forward with the plans presented during the previous term—which will be outlined in more detail later—and emphasized the conditions in the DRC, as highlighted by Miranda (2018).

During this second term, Angola placed greater emphasis on political issues in the DRC, but also continued its efforts to counteract the negative forces in its neighboring country. At the regular meeting of the Chiefs of Staff of the CIRGL held on May 23, 2017, the objective was “to analyze the security and humanitarian situation in the Great Lakes region, particularly in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.” The former chairman of the CIRGL Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, Geraldo Sachipengo Nunda, called for special attention to be paid to the resurgence of the M23 in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. (p. 45)

CIRGL (2017) reports that more than 800 former M23 members disappeared from the Bihanga camp in Uganda, where they had taken refuge. Although the FDLR had surrendered, the FDLR-FOCA alliance and the Mai-Mai attacked the FARDC in Kitshanga on May 8, 2017, killing two police officers and four civilians. The likelihood of these militias reemerging was very high, especially given the Disarmament, Demobilization, Repatriation, Reintegration, and Resettlement (DDRRR) process, unless the circumstances that led to their emergence—namely, the DRC’s extreme fragility—are addressed. Its appearance does not change, which is the main weakness of the DRC (Ibid., 2018).

Angola's Position in the CIRGL Following Its Two-Year Presidency

After its dual presidency at CIRGL, Angola did not stand still. His position was therefore to continue working toward conflict resolution in the region. With Congo-Brazzaville holding the presidency of the CIRGL, the situation in the DRC remained tense during the organization of the 2018 elections (Armando, 2021). When former President Joseph Kabila announced his intention to run for a third consecutive term, the President of the Republic of Angola, João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço, met with his counterpart from Congo-Brazzaville, Denis Sassou Nguesso, to participate in a virtual debate on the Great Lakes region with Joseph Kabila, and took this opportunity to discuss Kabila’s political future, as it was considered the fundamental basis for determining the region’s future; President Kabila refused to step down after serving two consecutive terms, a situation that created instability in the region and in the country (Armando, 2021).

In turn, a new date has been set for the upcoming elections: December 23, 2018. Angolan President João Lourenço called for a national dialogue between the government, the opposition, and civil society, with the aim of organizing the elections (Miranda, 2018). This event marked an important milestone in the Angolan government's commitment to resolving conflicts in the Great Lakes region. Furthermore, on November 20, 2020, Angola assumed the organization’s interim presidency for the second time for the next two years, following the end of Congo-Brazzaville’s term, during the 8th Conference of Heads of State and Government of the CIRGL, under the motto: "To continue supporting the implementation of the Pact on Security, Stability, and Development in the Great Lakes Region," by strengthening economic cooperation and regional development, Angola was assured that it would once again be ready to serve as a support group for all member states (Jornal Angola, 2020).

According to Deutsche Welle (WD, 2023)², the eastern part of the DRC was attacked again in late 2021, leading to an increase in violence as the rebel group March 23 Movement (M23) seized territory in the region. In fact, tense situations continued to arise

² **Deutsche Welle**, is a German term meaning “German Wave,” an international broadcaster based in Germany that airs television, radio, and online programs and offers content in 30 languages.

in 2023, with the M23 still heavily involved in the eastern regions of the DRC, which once again necessitated the convening of a mini-summit on February 17, 2023, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on peace and security in the Great Lakes region.

The heads of state and government attending the conference mandated Angola, in coordination with former Kenyan President Uhru Kenyatta—acting as the coordinator appointed by the East African Commission—to maintain contact with the leader of the M23 rebel group in order to convey the decisions made at the Addis Ababa Mini-Summit. In light of these responsibilities, Angola has been in contact with the M23 leadership since February 28 of that year (DW, 2023).

According to Teté António, Minister of Foreign Affairs, a ceasefire has been announced several times since the M23 resumed its activities in November 2021, but it has not been honored; fighting has escalated between the DRC and Rwanda, which Kinshasa has once again accused of supporting the M23 (Miranda, 2018; WD, 2023).

However, as a result of intense fighting followed by several rounds of negotiations, the Angolan Presidency announced that a Contingent to Support Peacekeeping Operations of the Angolan Armed Forces (CAOMPFAA), consisting of approximately 500 soldiers, would be sent to the DRC, and this was carried out following approval by the Angolan National Assembly, pursuant to Article 5, paragraph 1, of Law No. 5 of June 21 on the Deployment of Angolan Military Contingents and Forces Abroad (DW, 2023). Accordingly, António Furtado, Minister of State and Head of the President's Security Office, stated that the purpose of this unit was to secure the M23's cantonment areas and protect the members of the "Ad Hoc" Verification Mechanism, which is tasked with monitoring compliance with the ceasefire. On the other hand, despite certain limitations acknowledged by the Angolan government, these were viewed as the final active measures aimed at maintaining stability in the DRC until the end of the election period in December 2023 (DW, 2023).

Angola's Limitations in Establishing Peace in the DRC

It is argued that during its chairmanship of the bloc, Angola sought to respect the sovereignty of the ICGLR member states, did not interfere in the internal affairs of the DRC, and did not intervene without authorization, respecting the limits of the prerogatives that the DRC had delegated to the ICGLR when it became a member of that organization (Armando, 2021). The author emphasizes that Angola's intervention was through diplomatic channels.

In this regard, CIRGL's decisions do not override the national sovereignty of the organization's members; therefore, its recommendations remain purely advisory. Given that relations between states are based not on subordination or dependence but on equality, and that peaceful coexistence among states requires respect for sovereignty—so that no state or organization encroaches upon the sphere of another state, as clearly stipulated in the United Nations Charter (Mazzuolli, 2011). However, it is important to note that, in the context of conflict resolution, CIRGL's interventions have been repeatedly hindered by the overt resistance of militias in that region. The support provided to militias and their interest in remaining in eastern DRC has often hindered the establishment of dialogue with the ICGLR. Since it is a very rich area, and this has a lot to do with illegal logging (Miranda, 2018).

Method

This study aimed to examine Angola's role in conflict resolution in the Great Lakes region: the case of the DRC (2014–2023). It sought to understand the political and diplomatic context through a detailed analysis of current situations in the region, as well as the motivations and underlying values behind the events studied.

In this case, the present study is qualitative in nature. According to Alvarenga (2012), in qualitative research, the results are presented in narrative form, including descriptions of interviews or observed situations and behaviors, and often include specific summaries of the collected data. Thus, to establish a theoretical foundation, documentary and historical methods were employed, with an emphasis on tools for collecting bibliographic data available in various databases, electronic repositories, and official documents in Angola, such as: reports, diplomatic dispatches found in the Ministry of Defense Library, articles from the Angolan newspaper, TV Zimbo, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MIREX), the libraries of the Angolan Armed Forces (FAA), and CIRGL, which served to enhance the analysis of the subject matter and provide a revised and expanded perspective based on the sequence of objectives outlined in this study.

Results

Research findings “are of little use unless the relevant data are communicated to the general public and, in particular, to the scientific community” (Freixo, 2018, p. 253).

Based on the topic, the overall objective was to analyze Angola's role in conflict resolution in the Great Lakes Region from 2014 to 2023. Consequently, the results were highlighted based on the specific objectives that guided this study:

1- Explained the real motivations behind Angola's interest in resolving conflicts in the Great Lakes region; the “*geostrategic*” reasons—based on expanding its influence in the Great Lakes region and aligned with its defense, development, and diplomacy framework—constituted the primary interest behind the Angolan state's involvement in the path toward resolution and, consequently, the achievement of effective peace in the region, as referenced by Miranda (2018; DW, 2023); nevertheless, the Great Lakes countries neighboring Angola, especially the DRC, have strong ties to Angola's seven border regions; thus, a major internal conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo could endanger the surrounding areas of Angola” (Sita, 2017, p. 6). This is evident and very important and interesting for Angola, as it is a country that plays a major role and has extensive experience in conflict resolution in this region.

It is worth noting that Angola's actions as a member of the African Union (AU), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) have demonstrated its interest in security and defense issues on the continent and in various regions.

2- After assessing Angola's performance in mediating conflicts in the region following its co-chairmanship of the CIRGL, Angola's Minister of Foreign Affairs considered it positive, noting that, following its co-chairmanship of the CIRGL, Angola did not remain stagnant in its conflict resolution efforts (MIREX, 2023). Consequently, Armando reports that his stance was to continue working toward conflict resolution in the region. Under Congo-Brazzaville's presidency of the CIRGL, the situation in the DRC remained tense during the 2018 elections, with conflicts intensifying significantly each year (Armando, 2021; MIREX, 2023).

Consequently, the Angolan government launched a series of programs aimed at reestablishing the foundations for a peaceful and constructive dialogue between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, in order to reduce tensions between the two neighboring countries stemming from the resurgence of the M23 (Armando, 2021). However, during the dialogue, the Angolan government acknowledged that it faced limitations in establishing peace due to the need to respect sovereignty, and that it would intervene in internal affairs only with the prior authorization of the Congolese government (Ibid., 2021). However, these limitations posed obstacles for CIRGL; in fact, its decisions were blocked on several occasions due to resistance from militias in the region (Miranda, 2018).

Discussion and Conclusions

Due to the complexity of the topic, the results were analyzed qualitatively and aligned with the objectives described above. First and foremost, Angola's interest in resolving conflicts in the region stems from the moral strain caused by the conflict there, as it is a concern for the entire international community and especially for the countries in the region. Angola's position is perfectly understandable, given that the ongoing conflict in the DRC affects the security of their shared borders, undermines the hard-won peace in Angola, and considers these borders to be a vital area. For the Angolan government, the main objective was to achieve disarmament and, consequently, to ensure the maintenance of peace.

The findings indicate that "geostrategic" reasons have thus consistently shaped the Angolan government's approach to resolving regional conflicts, with the aim of establishing peace along its borders, particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Second, in light of the findings outlined above, it can be confirmed that, in conflict mediation in the region, Angola plays a pivotal role in neutralizing negative forces in the DRC; throughout its two terms on the ICGLR, it has contributed to the neutralization of the M23 in the DRC, the ceasefire in the CAR, and the weakening of the ADF, as well as the FDLR's voluntary surrender of its weapons (Miranda 2018).

However, it is capitalizing on its political influence in the regions by ensuring that general elections are held in the DRC in the near future; nevertheless, on the one hand, the Angolan armed forces' presence in the border areas is unprecedented in its aim to ensure security in these areas and prevent unpredictable situations during the early stages of the conflict. On the other hand, the findings indicate that Angola's performance, viewed from a broader perspective, has brought new momentum and visibility to the CIRGL and has ensured that the issue of conflict resolution in the Great Lakes Region occupies a prominent place on international peace and security agendas (Miranda, 2018).

It can be concluded that it was necessary to conduct a research study that adhered to the defined scientific methods proposed from the outset. In turn, this research begins to demonstrate the importance of the subject under study—namely, Angola's role in conflict resolution in the Great Lakes region—while simultaneously situating the study within the framework of the "international" study program focused on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2014–2023); where the problem manifests itself with the greatest intensity. It was possible to confirm that conflicts in the Great Lakes region currently exhibit a high incidence of conflicts of interest, meaning that many are fighting to preserve strategic territory and, consequently, others are fighting to maintain power; Another related factor is the misallocation of resources, which Londa (2019, cited by Brinco, 2020, p. 27) attributes to the fact that "these reasons are related to the fact that some ethnic

groups feel disadvantaged compared to others.” These factors have contributed significantly to the conflicts in the Great Lakes region, a situation that political scientists view as serious—as in the case of the DRC, which exhibits characteristics similar to those mentioned above.

Therefore, it can be concluded that Angola has managed to play an important role on the African continent with regard to peacekeeping operations because, in a very subtle way, it has used every possible means to neutralize insurgent groups (M23) and avoid the use of force in conflict resolution. Angola has invested heavily in diplomacy, in its broadest sense, and has also prioritized frequent meetings among regional leaders to resolve conflicts, as António Carvalho (2014) pointed out. In other words, having defense and security structures such as the Angolan Armed Forces (FAA), which have extensive experience in matters of peace, internal security, and regional security. It was concluded that Angola plays a key role in countering negative forces in the DRC and has leveraged its political influence in the region to ensure that general elections are held in a stable environment in the short term in that country.

Finally, the data collected also confirm that the objective was to use its influence to stabilize this highly troubled region while maintaining its territorial integrity. Although their efforts have not been sufficient to establish lasting peace in the region, as similar signs are still evident today. On this basis, regional security organizations and member states need to promote and implement, specifically, a culture of peace that fosters sustainable development. It is clear that the issue of the DRC is an international matter that requires diplomatic intervention due to the situations that have been occurring in this region.

As such, this article serves as an important academic tool, contributing to future studies or research on the topic in the fields of international relations and political science. The conflicts in the region and in the DRC therefore represent an ongoing challenge for Angola and for the member states to find a peaceful solution, since the matter is not yet resolved and requires further investigation and input.

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