



SUCCESSION DRAMA CRIPPLES SOUTH AFRICA

This article analyses various aspects of the drama that has engulfed South Africa surrounding the potential succession of President Zuma, following a number of scandals. This political uncertainty under normal circumstances is part of politics in a democracy. What makes the situation critical is the widespread belief in South Africa that the Zuma camp will not give up without a fight, a fight that could be ugly and could be carried out without regard to the future of the ANC party, the entire country, its people, and the wider region.

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On January 8th the ANC celebrated its 105th anniversary. During his speech at Orlando Stadium in Johannesburg President Zuma praised the achievements of his party since it took power in 1994. Nearly at the same time the Time Magazine listed South Africa as one of the top 10 risks to the world. The list starts with an unpredictable America after the election victory of Donald Trump and mentions among others “a power vacuum in Europe” or the “ongoing crackdown in Turkey”. The magazine argues that the infighting in the ANC over the succession prevents the country from dealing with necessary economic reforms and from offering leadership to stabilize conflicts inside neighbouring countries.

In a surprise move in November last year an unprecedented number of senior members of the National Executive Council (NEC) of the ANC among them six cabinet ministers urged the President to resign. The meeting had to be extended from 2 to 3 days to fly sufficient Zuma supporters in and the President just avoided a majority vote against him in the 86 member strong council. Legally, the NEC cannot remove the president of the party. This can only be done by an elective conference which takes place every five years and is due to be held at the end of this year.

One would expect that the President would have fired the six cabinet ministers who supported the call for his resignation. So far he has not done this. It seems that the NEC had urged Zuma not to retaliate against his critics. Among them is his Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan who managed to prevent a further downgrading of South Africa’s credit rating to junk. His sacking would accelerate the downturn of South Africa’s economy.

The call for unity during the celebrations by the President and other prominent ANC speakers cannot hide the fact that the party is deeply divided. Every move, every election in the party structures, and every appointment into political offices will be judged under the pro or against Zuma label. Under these circumstances a country cannot be run efficiently.

In his celebration speech the President said the economy is likely to grow by 2.9% in 2017. But the fact is that the GDP growth rate for 2016 was just about 0.5% and the predictions for 2017 are 1% and for 2018 1.6%. According to the National Development Plan a growth rate of 5% per annum is required to create the necessary jobs for the growing population. Not surprising, the official unemployment rate reached a 13-year high of 27.1% in November 2016. And one cannot see how this could change in a climate of political uncertainty created by the corruption allegations against the person of the President and the open question of his succession.

In October 2016 after a long legal battle the North Gauteng High Court reinstated against the President 783 fraud, racketeering and corruption charges which the National Prosecution Authority had dropped. A President who is under threat of criminal conviction is hardly convincing when in his speeches he promises to fight corruption.

In the “State Capture Report” of the now retired Public Protector (Ombudswoman) Thuli Madonsela it is alleged that the President and members of his family as well as members of his cabinet are too closely related to the Indian business family Gupta and that this relationship interferes with the affairs of the state. The report calls for a Commission of Inquiry which the President so far has failed to establish.

A wake-up call for the ANC was the Local Government Elections in August last year when the ANC lost three metros to the opposition party, Democratic Alliance. Commentators stated that unlike in

other post-liberation states South Africa would not experience a coup but that the ANC is facing the grim prospect of losing the elections in 2019¹.

At present there are two main candidates discussed in public for the succession of Zuma: Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma and Cyril Ramaphosa. Zuma favors his ex-wife Dlamini-Zuma and said that South Africa is ready for a female president. It is expected that she will protect her ex-husband and followers from prosecution after her election and that she will continue and protect the kind of close cooperation between certain companies and politicians as alleged in the State Capture Report. However, she is a politician in her own right, a renowned former Minister of Foreign Affairs and currently the chairperson of the AU (African Union). While she certainly is not a puppet of the Zuma camp one does not believe that she would be able to dissociate herself completely from this camp on which she has to rely to be elected.

Ramaphosa as Deputy President should be the first choice to succeed Zuma. In the 1980's he founded the NUM (National Union of Mineworkers) which played a decisive role in the fight against apartheid. In 1997 his comrades Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma were chosen ahead of him for the two top jobs of the party. After that he went into business and with the support of the Black Economic Empowerment program became a successful businessman. His most controversial role was in 2012 when the police shot 34 strikers of the Lonmin mine of which his company was a minority shareholder and he a non-executive member of the board. In 2012 he returned to the centre of the ANC as Deputy President. He is not associated with the corruption that surrounds the Zuma camp. He is an accomplished negotiator who would be able to unite the divided party and could set the economy back on track. COSATU, the national trade union organization, publicly declared to favour him. The trade unions do not have voting rights in the ANC but are members of the tripartite alliance together with the ANC and the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA). Leading members of the CPSA had asked President Zuma to step down and can be counted in Ramaphosa's camp.

Other contenders are the National Assembly Speaker Baleka Mbete and ANC treasurer Zweli Mkhize. While Mbete is a strong defender of Zuma Mkhize could be counted as a compromise candidate.

At the elective conference numbers count. The "Zuma camp" is led by the premiers of the Free State, Mpumalanga, North West, and KwaZulu Natal. In addition Zuma can count on the ANC Women League and the ANC Youth League. Commentators believe that even if Ramaphosa was to get all the votes from the remaining provinces' delegates, he would lose². Probably his present low profile against Zuma is directed by his behind-the-scene strategy to split the Zuma camp. Once he becomes more certain to have a chance to be elected he must battle more openly.

Still, after a new ANC president has been elected at the end of this year, the drama would continue because Zuma will remain state president for more than a year until national elections around April 2019. If the new ANC leader wants to re-establish the ANC as a trustful and corruption free party ahead of the next national elections he or she would have no other choice but to force the party to recall Zuma. He or she could get elected with the ANC parliamentary majority as state president or propose an intermediate president as was the case in 2008 when President Mbeki was recalled and Kgalema Motlanthe became president until the ANC won in the national elections and Zuma took over.

¹ Lebogang Seale and Thabiso Thakali: *Netshitenzhe lays out why the ANC got captured* in Sunday Independent, 18.12.2016

² Adriaan Basson: *President Dlamini-Zuma's four headaches* in news24, 01.10.2017

The electoral uncertainty in the ANC under normal circumstances is part of politics in a democracy. What makes the situation critical is the widespread belief in South Africa that the Zuma camp will not give up without a fight, a fight that could be ugly and could be carried out without regard to the future of the ANC, the country of South Africa and the people living there. The agony that cripples Zimbabwe because President Mugabe clings to power and does not firmly organize his succession is in the minds of people in South Africa. A climate of hopelessness is spreading and the disregard by many at the top of the ANC for parliamentary control and the rule of the courts undermines the trust of the people in state and government.

The crisis in South Africa is aggravated by the impending racial question. Whites agree enthusiastically with Zuma's black critics and many whites feel that the countrywide criticism had again brought whites and blacks together. Julius Malema, leader of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) warned: "You white people mustn't cheer me on because I'm opposing Zuma. He is my enemy exactly because he protects white privilege." And the spokesperson of the EFF said: "You don't love us when we talk about uncomfortable questions like race and land, only when we talk about Zuma". Journalist Max du Preez states: "It is an uncomfortable truth: in some circles Zuma grows stronger the more he's cursed and attacked by white people".³

In such a climate speculations about another option do not seem to be farfetched. Zuma would stay on for a third term as president of the ANC. There are no limits on terms any person can serve as ANC president while the terms of state president are limited to two times five years by the constitution. Such an outcome would mean that the majority in the party still favours Zuma and that he could exert considerable influence to safeguard his position and to influence his successor.

The Time Magazine is also worried about the negative consequences of South Africa's succession battle for its neighbouring countries. South Africa is the most industrialized and economically strongest country on the African continent. If such a country fails to have a peaceful and democratic change of government leaders of other countries may be encouraged to ignore or abolish the constitutional requirements of their countries.

At present President Joseph Kabila in the DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo) continues his repressive policies against the opposition, delays the constitutionally required elections after his two terms expired and seeks to establish himself as a president for life. South Africa has widespread economic interests in the DRC but does not use this leverage on Kabila so that he observes a democratic change of government.

Human Rights Watch in its World Report 2017 says that South Africa remained silent in the face of a rapidly deteriorating human rights situation in Zimbabwe. The Secretary General of the ANC, Gwede Mantashe, dismissed protests against police brutality in Zimbabwe as "sponsored elements seeking regime change." In view of the military intervention in Gambia by ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) to force Ex-President Yahya Jammeh out of power after he lost at the polls Zimbabweans tweet: "We need an ECOWAS in southern Africa." In their minds is that SADC (Southern African Development Community) of which South Africa is the most important member did not urge Mugabe to retire when he was about to lose elections. On the contrary, it elbowed the opposition into a coalition agreement with Mugabe through which he survived up to today. After the end of the coalition government the economy collapsed, the US Dollar became standard currency, and the country, once a net food producer, now depends since years on supplies from the World Food Program.

³ Max du Preez: *Be careful how you criticize Zuma* in news24, 29.11.2016

After apartheid under President Nelson Mandela South Africa became a moral authority in support of developing Africa into a continent of democracy, peace, stability and shared development. The country was open to joined international efforts against dictators and for democracy. The unconditional support for Robert Mugabe and the increasing importance the country is giving to non-interference have more and more eroded its moral standing. The scandals surrounding President Zuma contribute to this decline. South Africa is preoccupied with its own affairs and the international community cannot expect that at present it will positively contribute to the de-escalation of the many conflicts that occupy its neighbouring countries.