

Two done, one to go 13 December 2018

A year ago, Cyril Ramaphosa was elected President of the ANC by 52% vs 48%.

As analysed here previously, Ramaphosa is now standing much stronger than 52/48. It is not 100% to zero, as the nominations in some provinces for Jacob Zuma to go to Parliament indicate; but it is also no longer 52/48. So, we can argue whether it is 60/40 or 70/30, but it is beyond argument that he is much stronger this December than last December.

Systematically Stronger

What is also beyond argument, is that erstwhile pillars of the Zuma establishment are falling, almost by the week. Tom Moyane at SARS; Shaun Abrahams at the NPA (with his previous two deputies also on their way out the door even before the new boss has taken over); Siyabonga Gama and four others at Transnet; Zuma acolyte Malusi Gigaba and nine others from cabinet; the entire boards of Eskom, Denel, Transnet and PRASA; and the DG at Public Enterprises. Eskom has laid charges against 11 senior managers who have already left its employment; five senior executives have left Transnet and investigations are continuing; and the CEO at Prasa has been fired. The Transnet board under Popo Molefe and the PRASA board under Khanyisile Kweyama are showing the same grit as Eskom's in cleaning up. Clearly, they know they have political support.

No fewer than eight senior officers at SAPS were shown the door. The Ramaphosa-appointed task team reviewing the security cluster must still submit its findings, so more casualties can be expected. The power base Zuma built in the security cluster is likely to be dismantled even more in the coming months.

The former Zuma strongman in the Zuma stronghold of North West Province, Supra Mahumapelo, has not only lost his job, his political position and the court cases challenging his removal, but his son has also now lost an education bursary that his father's buddies (who were in charge of Denel) gave him outside the rules. When you fall, you fall far; and so do your families.

Zuma's son has returned more than once from Dubai to appear in court on charges the NPA previously declined to prosecute. Zuma himself is also appearing in court at regular intervals as his case grinds its way through the tedious court-cases-within-the-main-court-case. The wheels of justice turn slowly, but they turn.

(As an aside, this November John Block, the former ANC strongman in the Northern Cape, started the 15-year jail sentence handed to him for corruption back in 2016. Block appealed and petitioned to stay out of jail, but two weeks ago in he went. Those wheels grind slowly but they grind...)

In his home province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Zuma's personal approval rating is at 59% and Ramaphosa's is at 63%. The ANC has been losing by-elections to the IFP, including by-elections where Zuma himself campaigned for the ANC. It all makes one wonder to what extent his famed power base in KZN is holding up.

The Real Struggle

Ramaphosa's real struggle is no longer against Zuma. It is against the corrupt patronage networks that flourished under Zuma, the dismantling of which is obviously very painful to Zuma supporters. Not only painful, but fatal – their oxygen is being cut off.

There is of course a huge push back against this clean-up. One sees it in the attacks on Pravin Gordhan; the desperate court cases to try and reverse clean-up decisions; the dark murmurings of a National General Council where Ramaphosa can be challenged and dethroned; and even in the EFF's switching from an anti-corruption party to one now defending Tom Moyane!

The EFF itself has become embroiled in the VBS banking saga, linked to contracts from Johannesburg Metro Council, and with Malema living in a luxury house belonging to unsavoury characters, the EFF is quickly shedding its 'pay-back-the-money' image for one of 'our-snouts-are-in-the-trough-too'. This story is not over yet; and one must wonder what it will do to the view held by some that the EFF and ANC will link up in future. Will the ANC really

choose to partner with a party like that?

The process of cleaning up is by no means complete. The Nugent Commission on SARS has finished its proceedings and the report will probably be published soon. The Zondo Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture is proceeding and got a two-year extension to finish its work. It has also already drawn some blood – two people resigned as a result of evidence before Judge Zondo to date. The Mpati Commission into the Public Investment Corporation (PIC) must still get going, but is required to table a final report by 15 April 2019. The head of the PIC, dr Dan Matjila, has recently resigned. Add the review of the security sector (mentioned above), and there is a lot more cleaning up to come.

Open Society Dynamics

Here it is worth stepping back a bit and taking stock. There is more happening here than just Ramaphosa taking action, although the President cannot get too much credit for what is happening. Certainly, hats off to him and determined co-fighters like Pravin Gordhan, Jabu Mabuza, Popo Molefe, Khanyisile Kweyama and others.

Some of the clean-up started back in 2017 already. Hlaudi Motsoeneng and his deputy James Aguma left the SABC in mid-2017. The tide also started turning at Eskom in May 2017 when Mark Pamensky resigned, followed by chairman Ben Ngubane and then Brian Molefe with his infamous ‘early retirement’ in November 2017 (later declared invalid by the High Court). These dislodgements took place as a result of persistent public exposure and reporting. Hats off to the journalists and news media who exposed all this.

Public outrage was fuelled by the publication of the Gupta emails in May 2017. That really broke the dam walls. The emails confirmed what two public reports, the one by the South African Council of Churches and the other by a group of academics from several universities, drew the public’s attention to. They gave a glimpse of the extent of state capture, but the actual forensic evidence was in the emails. Hats off to the South African Council of Churches, independent academics, and the AmaBhungane investigative reporters.

One can also go further back to 2016, when the Public Protector at that time, Thuli Madonsela, published her preliminary report on state capture. Zuma squirmed and twisted and tried to take refuge in the courts, all to no avail. Hats off to the institution of the Public Protector. (It was also the current Public Protector’s finding that sealed Malusi Gigaba’s fate.)

In March 2016, it was the Constitutional Court judgement about the Nkandla matter that proved to be a turning point in Zuma’s relationship with the ANC and the country. Hats off to the courts for that and many other decisions.

This build-up during 2016 and 2017 was capped in October 2017 by the publication of Jacques Pauw’s book ‘The President’s Keepers’. Hitting the shelves – and cyber space – less than two months before the ANC elective conference, one can only wonder about its impact on the election. Certainly, the revulsion against state capture that built up in South Africa’s body politic was palpable, and it certainly helped focus the ANC members on who they were going to elect.

For me, the most intriguing political question of the last 12 months is why ‘DD’ Mabuza swung his support behind Cyril Ramaphosa. He was after all already nominated as deputy president by the Zuma camp, which he would have become if Mrs Dlamini-Zuma had won. So why did ‘DD’ switch sides, literally in the last hours, providing the critical votes that carried Ramaphosa over the line?

Perhaps it was the realisation that the ANC was doomed at the ballot box if it was not seen to be creating a decisive break from the Zuma legacy. Call it self-preservation or opportunism ... it was also the ultimate realisation that you can lose power unless you change trajectory.

In short, the clean-up is the result of what one can call open society forces at work in South Africa – exposing, reporting, persisting against all denials and abuse, until the truth is out. It is a great victory for open society dynamics.

New Problems Clamouring for Attention

However, time and tide wait for no man. The sudden deterioration of governance at the SABC, after a very promising start, is a set-back. So is the request for more money from SAA and load-shedding at Eskom. The future shape of the utilities and how their debt should be dealt with will have to be settled. The country simply cannot afford Eskom in its current shape and operational structure, and money for SAA can obviously be better used.

So What?

- The first ten months of Ramaphosa's tenure must be counted as hugely successful in consolidating his position in the ANC and in commencing the clean-up of the Zuma networks. Substantial progress was made with those two tasks. Two down.
- Although nobody is in prison overall yet, significant numbers of people – from cabinet ministers to state-owned enterprise (SOE) executives to senior police officers – have lost their jobs and are out of the system.
- More are likely to follow with the commissions of inquiry and review processes currently under way. The clean-up is not finished.
- The urgent outstanding item on the President's agenda is structural reform. The term means different things to different people, but currently it is about the SOEs and particularly Eskom. One very important task to go.

I wish you a happy and peaceful festive season.