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The watershed election of 2009

"The watershed election of 2009" – a more topical issue could not have been chosen for this edition of the Discourse. Newspapers, the radio and television are dominated by the political debates currently taking place in South Africa. In this issue the focus will be on the challenges and prospects, especially why people vote the way they do in spite of being disillusioned with promises made by government. The question of leadership, South Africa’s international relations, service delivery, the role of identity and party loyalty will be addressed. Did the Mbeki government really fail? What is the role of grassroots voters in electoral politics? Will a multiparty democracy take root soon? These are some of the thought-provoking issues the authors tackled excellently. We hope that these articles will lead to more (informed) debate on the election of 2009.

Ms Tisa Viviers
Editor
The watershed election of 2009

EDITORIAL
Ms Tisa Viviers

DEEPENING DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH AFRICA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS
Prof Lawrence Schlemmer, Executive Director, MarkData (Pty) Ltd

VOTERS AND VOICE: THE ANC VOTE AND THE 2009 ELECTION
Prof Steven Friedman, Centre for the Study of Democracy, University of Johannesburg / Rhodes University

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A POST-POLOKWANE SOUTH AFRICAN FOREIGN POLICY
Prof Gerrit Olivier, Co-director of the Centre for African and European Studies (CAES), University of Johannesburg
Deepening democracy in South Africa: challenges and prospects
ABSTRACT
Elsewhere in the world electoral formalities and the trappings of democracy often give doubtful legitimacy to persisting non-accountable, majority-based domination. Evidence from recent national surveys suggests that in South Africa as well, a weakness of the floating vote necessary for responsive governance may persist over time. Significant recent increases in voter dissatisfaction have not effectively dented the overall popularity of the ruling party. Although large majorities of black voters are remarkably non-racial in their preferences, voting is trapped in a racial mould by preferential policies and reactions to past racial domination. Political culture adds factors of unconditional party loyalty, a passive response to established authority, local pressure for political conformity, an aversion to forthright inter-party competition and hopeful trust in the stated intentions of government. The growth of a middle class can strengthen interest-based voting but the new middle class in South Africa is unusually state dependent. Current factional division in the ruling party will reduce but not curtail its unassailable electoral advantage. The accretion of black support for independent opposition is very slow but steady nonetheless, and if it is accelerated by current intra-party dissent, South Africa’s multi-party democracy will take root.

OPSOMMING
Elders in die wêreld verleen verkiesingsformaliteite en die uiterlike tekens van demokrasie dikwels twyfelagtige geloofwaardigheid aan hardnekkige, nieverantwoordbare, meerderheidsgebaseerde oorheersing. Bewyse wat van onlangse nasionale opnames verkry is, doen aan die hand dat daar ook in Suid-Afrika ’n swakheid van die suewende stem, wat nodig is vir responsiewe bestuur, wat met verloop van tyd kan volhard. Belangrike onlangse toenames in kiesers-ontevredenheid het nie die algehele gewildheid van die regerende party enige effektiewe skade berokken nie. Alhoewel groot meerderhede swart kiesers opvallend nierassig in hul voorkeure is, is die proses van stem vasgevang in ’n rassestempel deur voorkeurbefinding en reaksies teenoor vroeëre rasseoorheersing. Die politieke kultuur voeg hierby faktore toe van onvoorwaardelike lojaliteit aan die party, ’n passiewe reaksie op gevestigde gesag, plaaslike druk ten gunste van politieke konformiteit, ’n aversie teenoor regstreekse mededinging tussen partye en hoopvolle vertroue in die gestelde bedoelinge van die regering. Die groei van ’n middelklas kan ’n belang-gebaseerde stem versterk, maar die nuwe middelklas in Suid-Afrika is buitengewoon afhanklik van die staat. Die huidige faksieverdeeldheid binne die regerende party sal sy onaantastbare verkiesingsvoordeel verminder, maar nie inperk nie. Die vermeerdering van swart ondersteuning vir ’n onafhanklike opposisie vind baie stadig maar seker plaas. Indien dit egter bespoedig word deur die huidige verskille binne die party, sal Suid-Afrika se veelpartydemokrasie wel versterk.

Prof Lawrence Schlemmer
Executive Director, MarkData (Pty) Ltd
KAKARETŠO

Dinageng tša dingwe mo lefaseng tshepetšo ya dikgetho le mathata a temokrasi a fela a hlolela mebušo yeo e lego gona ya go thwana godimo ga pušo ya batho ka bontši kgakanego. Bohlatse bja go tšwa dinyakišong tša bjale bo bontšha gore le mo Afrika-Borwa, go sa tlo no tšwela pele kgonagalo ya go ba gona ga bokodiki bakgething bao ba se šogo ba tšea sephytho malebana le gore ba kgethe mokgahlo ofe, e lego se se thušago go hlohla mmušo. Koketsëgo ya bjale ya go se kgotsofale ga bakgethi ga se ya tloha e ama mokgahlo wo o bušago gampe. Le ge e le gore bontši bja bakgethi ba bathobaso ba ba lebelele mmala ge ba kgetha, go kgetha go sa huetšwa ke mmala ge go gopolwa ka dipholisi le mmušo wa peleng wo o bego o kgethologanya ya go ya mmala. Setšo sa dipolitiki se hlola gore motho a botegele mokgahlo wa gagwe ntle le mabaka, go se se šedi ye e tletšego ya gaolo ye e lego gona, kgatelelo ya selegae gore motho a ikamanye le mokgahlo wo o itšego wa dipolitiki, go se le le phenkišano mokgahlong le kholofelo go maikemišetšo ao mmušo o a tšweledišego. Go oketšega ga palo ya batho bao ba ikgonago mo Afrika- Borwa go ka maatlafatša go kgetha go ya ka dikgethlego tša batho eupša batho ba go ikgonago mo Afrika-Borwa ke bao ba itshepetšego mmušong. Dihulano tšeo di lego gona gabjale mokgahlong wo o bušago di tlo o fokotša, eupša e sego go fediša maatlala a wona dikgethong. Thekgo ya bathobaso go mokgahlo wo o ikemetsëgo wa kganetšo e gole ka lebela lo go nanyo eupša e a tshepiša, gomme ge lebelo le le ka akgofisëke le mokgahlo wo o tšwelego go wo o bušago, temokrasi ya Afrika-Borwa ya mokgahlonši e tlo gola ya tielela.

IQOQA

Introduction: background thoughts on democracy

At the time of writing, former Archbishop Desmond Tutu, South Africa’s most prominent cleric, Nobel Peace Prize winner and in many ways the religious patron of South Africa’s post-apartheid democracy, gave an extensive interview on the state of the nation. He expressed many misgivings about the state of politics in the country and among these was his concern that South Africa was in effect a ‘One-party state ... you really need to have a viable opposition ... Democracy flourishes where there is vigorous debate and people (political leaders) are actually careful about what they do ...’.¹

These remarks joined a swelling chorus of disquiet about a perceived lack of responsiveness in the country’s ANC-dominated government to the needs and concerns of ordinary South Africans from all backgrounds. Most South Africans can, or should, agree that the country’s still relatively new democracy is a vast improvement on apartheid. They should not, however, deceive themselves by thinking that because South Africa has well-deserved 'majority rule', it is firmly on the road to the kind of democracies that set the standards for stability, prosperity and respect for human rights and freedoms in the world today.

What is the problem? South Africa has had three successful elections since the end of apartheid. A host of constitutional provisions and linked institutions ostensibly ensure the protection of rights and civil liberties. The problem, however, is that elections alone do not guarantee a democratic outcome. The internationally respected constitutional expert, Giovanni Sartori points out that 'In any and all democracy, the majority principle... has to be affirmed as follows: ... the will of the majority is entitled to prevail within the limits of the respect for minority rights. ... majoritarianism is always limited or constrained ... otherwise it is democracy itself that self-destructs'.² Donald Horowitz of Yale University makes the important point that if an electoral majority or minority is significantly defined by racial or ethnic voting patterns, then the outcome is 'ascriptive ... with few if any floating voters...tantamount to a census, and it locks out the minority from any significant political power'.³

While there must be electoral 'winners' of some kind for a democracy to be as 'representative' as possible, this does not necessarily imply that there should be stark and persistent 'losers'. There are many so-called 'democracies' in the world today that fail almost all the tests of democratic responsiveness except holding periodic elections. Carl Gershman, Director of the US National Endowment for Democracy, has described a 'cynical form of 'virtual democracy''⁴ in which electoral formalities and parliamentary institutions provide false legitimacy to power hungry, dictatorial, inept or sectional regimes that perfect the art of manipulating voters and electoral outcomes in their favour. Effective opposition is subtly or brutally sidelined.

The quality of democracy in South Africa: questions arising

South Africa today is a mixed case. On the one hand there is massive imbalance in the socio-economic, ethnic and racial composition of the voting population and opposition that has thus far been numerically weak. The ANC, broadly representing a racial majority of black citizens, has increased its share of the vote in every successive election since the launching of the new democracy in 1994, to the point that constitutionally

¹ Interview in the Sunday Times, Johannesburg, October 5, 2008.
³ Horowitz, p. 98
guaranteed protection of rights can be overruled by a parliamentary majority. Effective decentralisation of executive authority is also relatively weak.

On the other hand, however, minorities have not been seriously victimised, they currently enjoy considerable constitutional and institutional protection and they have shared the benefits of improved economic growth over the past decade. Nevertheless, the jury is still out on the longer-term viability of South Africa's relatively new democracy. What is the danger of entrenched major party domination being reinforced by the coming 2009 elections? Conversely, what are the prospects for opposition growth to mitigate the strength of the dominant party?

In seeking answers, insights relevant to the questions raised above are provided by political surveys on voter attitudes in South Africa conducted in mid 2004, 2007 and 2008. 5

Firstly, what may be expected to happen to shares of the vote and the ANC's massive existing majority in the 2009 election? The 2008 survey was conducted during the ferment that erupted when a leading faction in the governing ANC Alliance, under the newly elected president of the ANC, Mr Jacob Zuma, was mobilising to demand the resignation of President Thabo Mbeki, and therefore could reflect the impact of those dramatic events. The survey results predate the more recent breakaway by some prominent members of the ANC to establish a new party, however.

Estimated outcomes of an election in 2009 are provided in table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>March 2004</th>
<th>March 2007</th>
<th>June 2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANC-SACP</td>
<td>73.7</td>
<td>76.8</td>
<td>70.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DA</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFP</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UDM</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAC</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACDP</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom Front Plus</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AZAPO</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What these findings suggest is that, all else being equal, the ANC may well lose up to 8% of the majority it would have had in a 2007 election. Nonetheless, it is likely to retain its unassailable position as a dominant party.

The modest relative loss of support for the ANC is less than might have been expected in the light of an increase in general voter dissatisfaction with government performance. The 2008 opinion survey yielded the following levels of voter dissatisfaction compared with responses to an identical question in the 2004 survey:

5 Undertaken by MarkData (Pty) Ltd, on contract, with permission granted by the clients. All three surveys are based on face-to-face interviews in the home languages of respondents, with reassurances of confidentiality. The sample designs are standard, being multi-stage, stratified probability samples. The first stage is random sample of census enumerator areas in six strata of rural and urban residential type. The second stage is a systematic sample of households, with random starting points, within the clusters. Finally in the third stage, a respondent is selected within each household using a randomly based selection grid. The samples are drawn to allow for the over-representation of smaller socio-economic categories in the population to improve precision, but the sampling ratios are computer rectified before analysis using census-based up-to-date estimates of the population distribution. Sample sizes were between 2 200 and 2 400 nationally. Fieldwork was undertaken by experienced and trained interviewers, under close supervision by field supervisors, with a 15% or higher back-check on the accuracy and veracity of responses.
Dissatisfaction with government performance 2004–2008

» Black voters: 31% increase
» Coloured voters: 4% increase
» Indian voters: 21% increase
» White Afrikaans voters: 9% increase
» White English-speaking voters: 23% increase
» All voters: 26% increase

Given that the growth in voter dissatisfaction is greatest among black voters, who make up 93% - 94% of the support base of the ANC, the decline in support for the ANC estimated in table 1 appears to be very modest indeed. Clearly the persisting popularity of the majority party in the face of rising citizen dissatisfaction raises critical questions about the viability of South Africa’s democracy.

Is the entrenched majority racially based – a periodic ethnic census?

On the one hand, the presence of racial or racially focused voter motivations is quite readily elicited in attitude questions. In the 2004 survey, for example, the following results were obtained, with the attitude questions used given in quotation marks (The results are given for black voters only simply because the majority at issue happens to be black):

Black voter attitudes on voting: % agreement:

» 'The present government policy of Affirmative Action and Black Empowerment is absolutely essential or very necessary': Agreement: 82%
» 'Present government policy of transformation to get rid of all effects of apartheid is absolutely essential or very necessary': Agreement: 78%
» 'Present government policies to compensate victims of apartheid are absolutely essential or very necessary': Agreement: 71%
» 'I will never be able to support a political party that was supported by white people before 1994': strong or partial agreement: 51%
» 'People of my race and culture should preferably all support the same political party': strong or partial agreement: 51%

At the same time, however, it is also evident in the results just above that as the items move from addressing the consequences of apartheid, which are inescapably racial by definition, to more general or intrinsic racial motivations, the proportions fall from between 70% to 80% to around 50%. This may be a significant reduction but it leaves large proportions of black voters captive of racial solidarity nonetheless.

When, however, very direct questions were posed in the 2008 survey on race as a motivating issue in comparison with other motivations, a very different picture emerges, as can be seen in the following results:

Black voter attitudes on voting: 2008:

» 'What kind of political party would you most like to vote for?'
Out of six options giving possible features of political parties, the following proportions chose:
– 'A party representing people of my race group': 4%
– 'A party representing people of my language and culture': 3%

» Notwithstanding the endorsement of affirmative action above, when asked whether or not government should appoint 'the most able people on merit irrespective of race', the proportion of blacks firmly endorsing non-racial merit appointments was no less than 83%.

» When in later questions on a hypothetical coalition of parties that the black respondents would at least approve of, a question on candidate selection was posed with various options, the responses of which were as follows:
– 'The majority of candidates should not be white': 10%
– 'There should be broad quotas of different groups': 33%
– 'The majority should be people with the best knowledge and experience irrespective of race': 53%
– 'Not sure': 4%

Hence when responding to their status as victims of apartheid, the black respondents are more or less trapped into adopting postures of racial entitlement. When it comes to choosing between expertise, effectiveness of governance and race,
however, the emphasis on race falls away among rank-and-file voters. The picture among ambitious small elites may well be different, however.

It would seem, then, that if the entrenched majority of the ANC is racially determined, it is only so to the extent that the party, by virtue of being seen as the liberation party for blacks, cannot escape a racial identity. In a less historically charged context, however, rank-and-file black voters seem to be consistently non-racial in their orientations.

Factors in the political culture that encourage unqualified majority party support

Unconditional party loyalty is one possible factor. In the 2004 investigation 50% of black voters agreed with the statement: 'I will support my political party and its leaders even if I am unhappy with its policies and actions'. In the 2007 MarkData survey the same statement was fielded and the responses were virtually identical.

Anxiety over political dissent or 'authoritarian' submissiveness is another possibility. In the 2004 study, 44% of black voters agreed with the statement: 'One must be careful about criticising government (versus everyone is free to criticise government if they wish)'. (It must be noted, however, that the population minorities were equally wary of criticising government, white English speakers least of all, namely 37%).

A similar possibility would be community pressure for political conformity. In the 2004 study, in response to the question 'How easy or difficult is it for you to have political opinions different to those of the people who live around you?' some 34% of black voters said it was difficult or impossible. Surprisingly in the 2008 study this proportion had risen to 45%.

Also on the issue of community pressure, in the 2004 study rather fewer black voters but fairly substantial proportions nonetheless agreed with the following statements: 'People in my community who do not support the most popular political party feel frightened or worried' (23%), and 'I feel pressure to vote for a party that I do not actually support' (21%).

Attitudes to opposition

Perhaps the most obvious and direct test of respect for democratic principles lies in attitudes to opposition as a democratic institution. As the well-known political analyst and director of the Centre for the Study of Democracy, Steven Friedman has correctly observed, 'If there is a swing away from the ANC at the polls, accountable government would receive its strongest boost yet ... nothing makes politicians listen to people better than a shock at the polls'.

In the 2008 and the 2004 studies, an item was fielded on the types of opposition that voters preferred, as given in table 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'What sort of opposition to the present government would you like to see?'</th>
<th>2008 survey</th>
<th>2004 survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'No opposition at all'</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'A cooperative opposition that sometimes criticises but often helps and supports the government'</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'An opposition that strongly criticises the government when it does not perform well'</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other answers</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Quite remarkably, the support for a critical and vigilant opposition has fallen since the 2004 survey results, and this over the very period when dissatisfaction with government performance was rising. The level of support for a resolutely critical opposition among voters in minority groups is significantly higher.

The results in table 3 on the next page, however, are also relevant to the principle of opposition:

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The results suggest that black voters are least likely to recognise the value of opposition vigilance. All South African voters, however, tend to be rather naive in the value they place on the promises of politicians.

Trust in the ANC

Lastly among the survey findings, notwithstanding a plethora of specific grievances among disaffected ANC supporters, there is still sufficient trust in the ANC to feel that the party is on their side, as it were. The response to the following statement is an example: 'Some people say that despite problems, the present government tries its best to improve the lives of people like myself'. Some 67% of black voters agreed strongly or partly with the statement.

This level of trust in the intentions of the ANC leads its black supporters to value the promises made by political leaders – they believe them or want to believe them despite perceived failures by government to honour election commitments.

Assessing the survey findings

The results reviewed above suggest that a rather large proportion of the ANC’s black supporter base, whether satisfied with government performance or not, is strongly bonded to the ANC. While this is not mainly due to any intrinsic racially based affinity (ordinary black voters are remarkably non-racial in outlook) it might as well be that, because over and above its performance in government or lack of it, the ANC is still seen as the vehicle of racial transformation in South Africa. Hence it gets most of the credit for the enhanced status of black people today. Bluntly put, the ANC still benefits hugely from its aura as the party of liberation.

A factor in the persistence of automatic support for the majority party lies in the absence of a large independent black middle class. In developing societies it is usually a better-educated new middle class that begins to break with identity-based allegiance to vote on the basis of economic interests. There is, however, little evidence for this in the findings reviewed among black ANC supporters. This is because the new black middle class is largely a state-dependent class in which most members either work for government or owe their rapid rise in the private sector to official policies of affirmative action. Hence identity and interests still coincide.

The ANC, therefore, is very substantially insulated from competition from opposition parties. Debate and dissent within the dominant ANC will continue to eclipse competition between parties as a basis for accountability. Put bluntly, democratic multi-party contestation is largely overshadowed by high stakes factional rivalry within the dominant ANC. Whatever the levels
of dissatisfaction among ANC supporters, shifts of black support to opposition parties will be a process of slow accretion rather than any marked 'swing' by a floating vote.

The future

In the wake of the current factional dissent within the ANC, there are renewed prospects of a breakaway faction that supported former President Mbeki becoming an independent political force. However, initial results from research just conducted in certain provinces already suggest that a very large majority of ANC supporters have swung behind the victorious faction.

On the basis of its history, its stated priorities and its affinity with the aspirations of the masses, the ANC undoubtedly deserves the electoral majorities it achieves. Democracy, however, definitely does not need such overwhelming majorities and the ANC itself is being damaged by its surfeit of electoral power. Any acceleration in the slow accretion of black support in opposition party ranks will, however, enhance the underlying conditions for responsive democracy and its accountability in South Africa.
Prof Steven Friedman  
Centre for the Study of Democracy,  
University of Johannesburg /  
Rhodes University

The ANC vote and the 2009 election
ABSTRACT

The 2009 election will raise two key issues—grassroots voters’ role in electoral politics and the role of identity in voter decisions.

An apparent decline in ANC support challenges the assumption that its new leadership speaks for ‘the masses’. That the new ANC leadership is assumed to speak for the grassroots highlights the degree to which the poor lack a voice in the national debate. But evidence that many at the grassroots are disaffected means that political leadership may be forced to take the poor more seriously, opening some prospect that they may enjoy a voice, and creating potential for more vigorous democracy.

But this is not assured for, even if it fails to connect with the grassroots, the ANC will be re-elected with a large majority. The reason leads us to the second reality at the heart of this election—that voters’ choices are shaped not by socio-economic interest but by identities. This makes party loyalties stronger, suggesting that many voters who now plan not to support the ANC will do so on election day because it is their political home. But a significant setback for the ANC would indicate an important shift in voter identities.

OPSOMMING

Tydens die 2009-verkiesing sal twee sleutelkwessies ter sprake kom—voetsoolvlakkiesers se rol in verkiesingspolitiek en die rol wat identiteit in kiesers se besluite speel.

‘n Oënskynlike afname in ANC-steun laat die vraag ontstaan of sy nuwe leierskap werklik namens “die massa” praat. Die feit dat veronderstel word dat die nuwe ANC-leierskap namens diegene op voetsoolvlak praat, beklemtoon die mate waarin die armes nie in die nasionale debat seggenskap het nie. Die bewyse dat baie van die mense op voetsoolvlak vervreemd is, beteken dat die politieke leierskap gedwing kan word om die armes meer in ag te neem en die vooruitsig van ’n groter stem te bied, en so die potensiaal daar te stel vir ’n sterker demokrasie.

Daar is egter geen waarborge nie—selfs al word dié op voetsoolvlak uitgesluit, sal die ANC met ’n groot meerderheid herkies word. Die rede daarvoor bring ons voor die tweede realiteit in die wese van hierdie verkiesing—die kiesers se besluite word nie deur sosio-ekonomiese belange gevorm nie, maar deur identiteitte. Dit maak mense meer lojaal teenoor hulle party, wat impliseer dat baie kiesers wat nou beplan om nie die ANC te steun nie, dit wel op verkiesingdag sal doen omdat dit hulle politieke tuiste is. ’n Beduidende terugslag vir die ANC sal egter op ’n belangrike skuif in kieseridentiteit dui.
KAKARETŠO

Dikgetho tša 2009 di tlo tšweletša ditaba tše pedi tše boholokwa — tema ye e kgathwago ke bakgethi ba magaeng dipolitiki tša dikgetho le tema ye e kgathwago ke boitšhupho (identity) ge go tšewe diphetho tša malebana le go kgetha.

Go fokotšega ga thekgo ya ANC go hlohlha kgopo yo gore boetapele bja yona bjo bofsa bo emela ‘mašabašaba’. Taba ya gore boetapele bjo bofsa bja ANC ke molomo wa batho ba magaeng e bontšha ka moo lentsu la bahloki le sa kwagalego ka gona ditherišanong tša maemo a bosešhababa. Eupša bohatse bja gore batho ba bontši ba batho ba magaeng ga ba amege bo hlaloša gore baetapele ba dipolitiki ba ka gapeletšega go tšeela bahloki hlogong, gomme se ya ba leswo la gore le bona lentsu la bona le tlo kgwagala, le go hlola go ba gona ga dibaka tša temokrasi ye e tiilego.

Fela taba ye ga se ye e tlogago e tiile, le ge e le gore e palelwa ke go šomišana le batho ba magaeng ka kakaretšo, ANC e sa tlo no kgethwa ka dikgetho tše ntšintši. Mabaka a a re lebiša tabeng ye nngwe ye e lego kgwekgwe ya dikgetho tše — gore bakgethi ga ya itshma godimo ga maemo a bona a leago le ekononi eupša a theilwe godimo ga boitšhupho. Še se dira gore go botegela mokgahlo e be taba ye e tiilego, e lego se bolelago gore bontši bja batho ba ba ikemišeditšego go se thekge ANC ba tlo no dira bjalo ka letšatši la dikgetho ka gobane mokgahlo wo ke legae la bona la dipolitiki. Eupša tlhohlo ye kgolo ya ANC e tlo tšwelela mo boitšhupong bja bakgethi.

IQOQA

Ukhetlhe luka-2009 luzohulisana izinto ezimbili ezibalukile — iqhaza labavoti abasezengeni eliphansi kupolitiki yokhetho kanye neqhaza lobuwena esingqumeni somvoti.

Ukwehla okusobala kokulandelwa kwe-ANC kuphonsa inselele mayelana nokuthi ubuholi bayo obusha bukholululwe 'iningi'. Ukuthi ubuholi beANC obusha kucatshangwa ukuth bumele abasemazingeni aphansi kugqamisa izinga abampofu abampofu abangenalo izwi ezimgxweni zesiswe. Kodwa ubufakazi bokuthi abaniningi ezingeni eliphansi abathintekanga kuchaza ukuthi ubuholi bezepolotiki bungaphoqeleka ukuthi buthathe abampofu ngokucophelela, baba e themba lokuthi bangajabulela ukuba nzwani, nokudala amathuba okwenzeka kwenzeka yeningi enemandla neqinile.

Introduction

The 2009 election will be about the African National Congress vote – and about two crucial, but often misunderstood, issues in South African politics. For the first time since 1994, the ANC, whose share of the vote has increased in each election, may lose ground. Reports claim that internal ANC opinion polls have found a loss of support and anecdotal evidence supports this: during a trip to the East Rand after the violence against immigrants from elsewhere in Africa this year, ANC president Jacob Zuma faced vigorous criticism from low-income voters in one of his party’s core constituencies, who accused senior politicians of insensitivity to their needs.

ANC leaders have acknowledged that it has lost ground among voters which it will need to regain during the election campaign. So this will be the first election since democracy’s advent which will be framed in the minds of politicians, voters and analysts as a battle by the ANC to hold onto its base rather than as a campaign to expand its support.

This makes the election one of interest to those students of politics for whom the ANC’s unassailable share of the vote is a constraint to democratic development. And, although the notion that democracy remains elusive as long as one party is sure of re-election over-simplifies reality, a decline in the ANC vote would indeed create unprecedented pressures for accountability. But the electoral decisions of ANC voters also raise two issues central to an understanding of South African politics – the relation between formal politics and grassroots voters, and the role of identity in voter decisions.

Spoken of but not speaking – grassroots voters and the election

The apparent decline in ANC support challenges one of the myths of contemporary politics – that the victory of Jacob Zuma and his supporters at the 2007 ANC conference in Polokwane was the product of a revolt by ‘the masses’.

Zuma and his allies are repeatedly portrayed as the voice of the poor who enjoy overwhelming support among society’s grassroots. This alarms the middle classes and delights sections of the left, who see in the shift of power in the ANC the rebellion of the poor and the marginalised expressed in ‘mass mobilisation’. But, if grassroots people are less inclined to support the ANC after Zuma’s victory, they clearly do not feel that they now have a voice. What evidence we have suggests that many grassroots voters are repelled by current political developments in the ANC.

This is hardly surprising. Since the change in leadership, the ANC has been the site of intense rivalry among politicians. Despite implausible attempts to portray this as an ideological battle, the contest has revolved around score-settling among the political elite, not the concerns of grassroots citizens.

Attempts to close down the Directorate of Special Operations (the ‘Scorpions’), or to protect Zuma from prosecution, the recall of President Mbeki and a rash of contests for office between rival factions, may be of great moment to politicians, but their relevance to people who need government to serve them is unclear. And so it is no surprise that many at the

References

8 S’Themhiso Msomi ”We vote for the ANC, but get nothing” The Times May 26, 2008
11 See for example Steven Friedman "No Easy Stroll to Dominance: Party Dominance, Opposition and Civil Society in South Africa" in Giliomee and Simkins ‘The Awkward Embrace’
12 See for example Isaac Mangena 'Investors wary of Zuma victory' http://business.iafrica.com/economy/727760.htm
14 Karima Brown ”’No policy change” and other myths of the moment’ Business Day 30 September 2008
grassroots conclude that the politicians care far more about themselves and each other than about voters.

That the new ANC leadership is assumed to speak for the poor highlights one of the key flaws in South African democracy – that the poor lack a voice in the national debate.

Of course, grassroots people vote. But, between elections, research shows that attempts to address poverty routinely ignore their needs and wants. When society’s major actors spend years debating how to get mortgage bonds to poor people when research shows that the poor do not want them, and when evidence shows that this is hardly an isolated example, it is surely clear that the effectiveness of anti-poverty action is impaired because the voice of beneficiaries is not heard.

Because people at the grassroots are spoken about but do not speak, sweeping assumptions are often made about them. Thus, in the wake of violence against African foreigners, many theories were advanced to explain the behaviour of the grassroots. In most cases, no evidence was produced to support them: the 'explanations' were, in reality, an exercise in ventriloquism: the commentators were simply projecting their own concerns onto the people.

This habit, too, is extremely common and one of its manifestations is the assumption that grassroots people support the new ANC leadership. Part of this was based on a misapprehension – that many Polokwane delegates who supported Zuma were 'the masses' because they were much less well-heeled than the ANC leadership. In reality, the 'masses' do not attend political conferences – the political class does.

Assumptions that delegates to a party congress are the grassroots illustrate just how wide the gap between the national debate and most South Africans is, as do claims that the political activists who attended Zuma’s court hearings, a fairly small group of highly motivated political actors, are 'the masses'.

Evidence that many in the ANC base are dismayed by political in-fighting challenges these assumptions; it also forces ANC leaders to take its electorate far more seriously than ever before, opening some prospect that the poor may enjoy a voice, and creating potential for a more vigorous democracy.

But this is not assured for, even if it fails to take voters as seriously as it should, the ANC will be re-elected with a large majority. The reason for this leads us to the second reality which will lie at the heart of this election – the centrality of identities in shaping voter behaviour.

Who we are: identity and the 2009 election

The ANC is likely to claw back most of its lost voters by next year’s election because identity is crucial in shaping South African voter behaviour.

To insist that electoral behaviour is shaped by identity is not to claim that elections are ethnic or racial censuses. If they were, Zulu-speaking voters would not be divided between ANC and IFP supporters, 'coloured' voters would not be spread between several parties and we would be unable to explain the votes cast for the ACDP. Rather, 'identity' is used here to denote a social self-definition based on criteria other than socio-economic interest, on common 'webs of meaning': the chief rationale for voter choices is who voters believe they are, and their assessment of which party can best provide a vehicle for...
who they are. Race remains the primary identity, but language, religion and gender may play a role. So too, on the margins, might 'political community' – membership of a group of people ascribing to similar values. In this context, weighing the programmes and policies of parties plays hardly any role. Many voters will support the ANC even if they lack a job because they believe it expresses their demand for dignity and freedom. Others in KwaZulu-Natal will endorse the IFP whether or not their residential areas have been developed because it is held to protect the tradition they revere. Many white voters will support the DA even though they know it will not influence government decisions because they believe it says what they think.

Analysts often deny the salience of identities in shaping voting behaviour – they insist that voters are voting their social or economic interests. For them, voting on the strength of identities is unsophisticated, a label they are, understandably, unwilling to pin on voters.

But shame at the continued salience of identity is itself a cultural prejudice: it assumes that 'normal' or 'sophisticated' voters vote on the strength of a 'rational' calculation of their material circumstances and 'underdeveloped' voters prefer to express identity. This notion of identity voting as abnormal and backward ignores the degree to which it is a ubiquitous feature of citizen behaviour in even the oldest democracies.

In venerable European democracies, many parties are organised around identities – the many Christian Democratic Parties, regional identity parties in Scotland and Wales, or Italy’s Northern League are only a few examples. And any notion that identity voting has ended in the United States is belied by the many analyses discussing the role of race and gender in determining voting patterns in the 2008 election.

Even where no explicit identity parties exist, voters in particular regions of established democracies routinely return to the same parties – Scotland’s preference for the British Labour Party, for example – speaks to the key role of identities in shaping electoral choices. Celestin Monga thus asks: ‘Why is the notion of an electoral base, accepted throughout the world and considered by Western political science as something every serious politician needs, systematically interpreted as a sign of backwardness when it comes to Africa?’

Voting our identities is no less rational or sophisticated than voting in our economic interests – and probably at least as common in democracies throughout the world. It is also what most South African voters do. The ANC is therefore far more than a vehicle for citizens hoping to improve their material circumstances: it is part of the identity of most of the people who vote for it (just as identities shape support for opposition parties). And this makes it likely that most voters who are now reluctant to support it will return to it by election day because it remains their political home.

Even if they do, it may lose some ground for there are parts of the country where identities – and hence party loyalties – are more fluid. Chief among them is the Western Cape, where a significant minority previously classified ‘coloured’ are ‘floating voters’, shifting party allegiances in response to assessments of performance. More than a few shifted to the ANC in 2004 and may move back in 2009, giving the opposition a possible majority. There is a similar vote in the Northern Cape, although probably not nearly enough to deprive the ANC of victory there. And, in KwaZulu-Natal, while allegiances among Zulu-speaking voters are primarily shaped by the degree to which people are connected to rural areas (the more they are, the more likely is it that they will vote IFP), there have been signs, in by-elections, of a revival of IPF fortunes which may challenge the ANC.

\[20\] Steven Friedman “Who We Are: Voter Participation, Rationality and the 1999 Election” Politikon November 1999


\[22\] Celestin Monga The anthropology of anger: civil society and democracy in Africa Boulder, Co. Lynne Rienner, 1996 p. 32
Elsewhere, however, voters who now say they will desert the ANC are likely to vote for it – if the identities which have shaped our politics since 1994 remain salient. This turns the 2009 election into a test of the continued power of the identities which have influenced voting since 1994 – if the ANC loses ground outside the areas discussed here, this would indicate a significant shift.

Conclusion: a vote and a voice

All elections are important since all offer citizens an opportunity to be heard – for poor citizens, perhaps the only chance they have. But the 2009 election will be important because it will test two important issues with implications for democracy’s future.

It will indicate whether grassroots voters are acquiring a voice – whether they are being taken seriously by politicians who have until now taken them for granted.

And it will show whether the identities which have shaped voter behaviour since 1994 have begun to shift. At issue will be not only whether traditional ANC voters continue to vote for it, but whether they vote at all. One consequence of identity voting has been that South Africans have turned out at the polls in large numbers compared to most other democracies,²³ despite the fact that the result of the election has not been in serious doubt. Since ANC voters are far more likely to stay at home than to vote for the opposition if their discontent continues, the election will also offer an insight into the persistence – or erosion – of the high percentage polls which voters’ continued desire to express their identity at the polls produce.

The outcome is certain to be a victory for the ANC, probably a comfortable one. But, despite that inevitability, students of South African politics will need to watch the results carefully to discern some important messages about who voters feel they are – and about who speaks in our politics.

²³ For details of percentage polls see Independent Electoral Commission ‘Results’ http://www.elections.org.za/
Implications of improved public service delivery in South Africa:
The 2009 election challenge

ABSTRACT

Government has to protect its citizens, regulate the interaction among them, develop its society and care for the poor and weak. Public services and facilities cut across these four categories. The discriminatory apartheid developmental legacy resulted in extremely skewed public services and facilities in the respective racial communities. Infrastructural facilities, services, officials, standards and results in more affluent 'white' communities were in many cases on par with similar situations in more developed countries, while the state of these facilities and services in traditional poor black communities were either non-existent or very rudimentary. There are major challenges for the post-apartheid government in South Africa after 1994 to upgrade the quantity and quality of facilities and services in poor black communities while simultaneously maintaining the quality of these facilities in the more affluent white communities at previous levels.

High expectations for improvement, scarce resources and bad management are major challenges that complicate the achievement of these goals. The current affirmative action strategy, insufficient training programmes and the envisaged Single Public Service Bill are major obstacles for success. If government does not improve its governance outputs and outcomes in these areas significantly after the 2009 elections, community unrest will destabilise the democratic progress made so far.

OPSUMMING

Die regering moet sy burgers beskerm, die interaksie tussen hulle reguleer, die gemeenskap ontwikkel en sorg vir die armes en swakkes. Openbare dienste en facasiteit strek oor dié vier kategorieë. Die diskriminerende apartheidsontwikkelingsnalatenskap het gelei tot uitersteskeefgetrekte openbare dienste en faciliteite in die onderskeie rasgemeenskappe. Infrastrukturele faciliteite, dienste, beamptes, standarde en resultate in die meer gegoede "wit" gemeenskappe, was in heelwat gevalle vergelykbaar met soortgelyke situasies in meer ontwikkelde lande, terwyl die stand van sodanige faciliteite in tradisionele arm swart gemeenskappe, of afwesig of baie basies was. Daar is groot uitdagings vir die post-apartheidregering in Suid-Afrika na 1994 om die kwantiteit en kwaliteit van faciliteite en dienste in arm swart gemeenskappe op te gradeer en terselfdertyd die kwaliteit van sodanige faciliteite in die meer gegoede wit gemeenskappe in stand te hou op vorige vlakke. Hoë verwagtinge vir verbeteringe, skaars hulpbronne en swak bestuur is groot uitdagings wat die bereiking van dié doelwitte kompliseer. Die huidige regstellendeaksiestrategie, onvoldoende opleidingsprogramme en die verwagte Wetsontwerp op ’n Enkele Staatsdiens, is groot struikelblokke op die weg na sukses. Indien die regering nie sy regeeruitsette en -uitkomste in hierdie areas beduidend na die 2009-verkieising verbeter nie, sal gemeenskapsonrus die demokratiese vordering wat tot dusver gemaak is, destabiliseer.
KAKARETŠŌ

Mmušo o swanetsše go šireletša badudi ba wona, o laole phedišano ya bona, o tšwetšepele setšhaba sa wona le go hlokomela bahloki le bao ba sa kgonego go itirela. Ditirelo le ditšabelwa tša setšhaba di amana le magoro a a mane. Melao ye e bego e le gona ya muušo wa kgethologanyo e hlotše gore go be le go se lekašekane kabong ya ditirelo le ditšabelwa tša muušo mo mafelong a batho ba merafe ya go fapana. Ditšabelwa, ditirelo, bahlankedi, maemo le dipelo ditšabeng tša 'bathobašweu' e be e le tša maemo a go bapetšwa le a dinaga tše de hlabogilego, mola e le gore ditšabelwa le ditirelo tšeo mo mafelong a bathobaso ba go ithokela di be di se gona goba e le tša maemo a tlase kudu. Go na le ditlhohlo tše kgolo tše di lebanego le muušo wa Afrika-Borwa wa ka morago ga kgethologanyo ka morago ga 1994 tšeo di lebanego le go kaonafatša khwalithi ya ditšabelwa le ditirelo ditšabeng tša bathobaso mola ka go le lengue muušo o swanetsše go tšwela pele go abela ditšhaba tša bathobašweu ditirelo tšeo go swana le ka moo muušo wa peleng o bego o di a gona.

Dikholofelo tša godimo tša malebana le kaonafalo, ditšabelwa tše di sego tša lekana le taolo ye mpe ke ditlhohlokogolo tše di thetatšašo philelelo ya dinepo tšeo. Leanotokišo la bjale, mananeothlahlo ao o hlaelago le Molaokakanywa wa Tirelottee ya Setšhaba (Single Public Service Bill) ke mapheko a magolo a go fokotsa go fihlelela ga katlego. Ge e le gore muušo ga o dire go tlala seatla ka morago ga dikgetho tša 2009 go kaonafatša ditšweletšwa le dipelo tša wona tša pušo malebana le ditirelo tše go bolelwago ka tšona, dikhudüego tše di bonwago mo setšhabeng di tlo bušetša nthago kgatelopele ya temokrasi ye e šetšego e dirilwe go fihla gabjale.

IQOQA


Amathemba aphezu entuthuko, izinsiza ezintulekile, nokuphatha okubi yizinselele ezinkulu ezenza kube nzima ukufinyelela ekufeseni lezi zinhloso.

Isu lesenzo sokusimamisa/qinisa samanje, izinhlelo zokuqeqesha ezingenele neBhili Yezinsizakalo Zomphakathi Eyodwa ecatshangwayo ngezinye izikhubeke zemphumelulo. Mangabe uhulumeni ungaphuculi indlela yawo yokuphatha nemiphumela kulezi ndawo ngokubalulekile ngenwa kokhetho luka-2009, udlame lwabantu lungaphazamisa inqqubekela eseyenziwe.
Implications of improved public services delivery in South Africa: the 2009 election challenge

A government has to undertake four different types of functions in modern democratic society. These functions are the general protection of all its citizens, regulation of the interaction among those citizens to maintain an orderly society, the development and growth of its society to enable its citizens to live their lives to the fullest potential in the long term, and caring for those weak or less empowered members and sectors of society that cannot take care of themselves and might be subject to potential exploitation by stronger or more empowered members of society. Public services and facilities can cut across these four categories. Governments that are more free market-orientated tend to emphasise competitive growth and development while governments that are more redistributive-orientated tend to emphasise regulatory functions and caring for the poor. These services and facilities do not only include for example the provision of sectoral education, housing or health services, but also efficient and effective general administrative support services by governmental agencies, like the quantity, quality and user-friendliness of services in those agencies (e.g. the so-called Batho Pele principles of good services delivery in South Africa).

The provision of appropriate, efficient and effective public services and facilities also differ dramatically from lesser developed countries to more developed countries. In more developed countries, basic infrastructure and facilities have been developed over a long period and now just need to be maintained and upgraded. This is in principle much cheaper than the initial provision of such infrastructure. In lesser developed countries, however, the main focus of the state is on the provision of expensive public infrastructure like water, electricity, transport and telecommunications systems as well as expensive facilities like schools, clinics, police stations etc, to allow for basic developmental opportunities. State and individual incomes are also much higher in more developed countries than in lesser developed countries where literacy levels and skills are generally lower. Therefore, the quality of public services like education, health, identification documents, drivers licences, etc are also at much lower standards than in better developed states which have better skilled and experienced officials to develop more appropriate policies and strategies to provide these services, and manage and coordinate them better to achieve better results.

South Africa suffers from the same developmental problems as other developing countries, although our resource constraints are not as severe as most of those countries. The discriminatory apartheid developmental legacy, however, resulted in extremely skewed developmental progress in the respective racial communities. The state of infrastructural facilities, services, officials, standards and results in traditional more affluent ‘white’ communities were in many cases on par with similar situations in more developed countries, while the state of these facilities and services in traditional poor black communities were either non-existent or very rudimentary. There are major challenges for the post-apartheid government in South Africa after 1994 to upgrade the quantity and quality of facilities and services in poor black communities while simultaneously maintaining the quality of these facilities in the more affluent white communities at previous levels.

The first challenge is that it is practically and technically impossible to improve the Apartheid-distorted developmental and services delivery legacy of 300 years in just ten or twenty years. A second problem is a resource problem, including a shortage of both knowledge and experience as well as financial resources to do this in the short term. The third problem is the high political expectations created in poor communities in the euphoria immediately after the accession of the new post-apartheid government to power, that this can and will be done. The combined effect of these complications is that it has been impossible for the post-apartheid government to make significant headway in improving public services in poor areas since 1994, after 14 years in power. Simultaneously, the state of existing services and facilities in wealthier communities has been steadily eroding over that period. This was inevitable,
and could have been predicted on the basis of experiences in other decolonisation situations, especially in Africa.

Two additional complications paralyse government’s intentions to improve the quality and quantity of public services and facilities by weakening an already weakened policy implementation capacity further. The first is an increasing brain-drain from South Africa towards other Anglo-Saxon countries, to a large extent due to perceptions of unacceptably high crime levels and a resulting fear by professionals for the safety of their families, linked to more attractive remuneration packages abroad. The quality of policing services has consistently deteriorated after 1994 to the extent where the SAPS has now openly admitted that they cannot effectively counter crime anymore, as a result of a combined lack of knowledge, skills, commitment and resources. The second complicating factor is an ideologically driven policy of affirmative action in the Public Service. In 1994, a total of 98% of senior managers in the South African Public Service were white Afrikaner males. According to the Department of Public Service and Administration only 16% of senior management positions in the South African Public Service were occupied by white males in September 2007, resulting in an 82% change after 14 years. This number is still totally out of proportion to the general racial composition of the South African population and has to be reduced even further. The practical consequence of this development, however, is that many senior managerial positions that were vacated have not been filled or have been filled with new appointees who do not have the required skills to replace the technical and managerial knowledge, skills and experience of their predecessors. This has resulted in a dramatic turnover of senior management in the Public Service that impacted negatively on the ability of government to provide better services and facilities.

There is no easy solution to turn around this dismal state of affairs. These conditions are prevalent in many developing countries. South Africa is in a better position than most developing countries, because it has the strongest and most stable economy on the African continent, with a consolidated democratic regime that has so far overcome serious challenges to its recent democratic culture very well. However, if a significant improvement to services delivery in especially poor areas is not achieved soon, this democratic stability and high levels of economic growth that we have enjoyed over the last few years might be endangered by populist demands for more visible improvements in poor living conditions in the short term. Perceptions of too slow developmental trends and too little improvement to bad services and facilities have in the recent past resulted in community instability, mass demonstrations and protest action, violent conflict with police and damage to property. The policy strategies that the South African government will have to deploy in order to avoid or minimise the risk of an increase in these destabilising conditions, are the following:

- Acceptance of the fact that Apartheid-era facility and services standards are in some cases too high to maintain because they were artificially high standards for a developing country in Africa (e.g. state of the art heart transplant, rocket science and nuclear power skills that consume large slices of the budget while the impact of those technologies on the everyday lives of the people in the streets were minimal).

- A clear and visible swing in state expenditure to even more pro-poor spending patterns than have been achieved over the last few years, especially the implementation of mega infrastructural development programmes that are also simultaneously work creation programmes. In this way a choice need not be exercised between stimulation of economic growth and infrastructure creation.

- Success with such bigger public works programmes necessitates a dramatic improvement in the capacity of the public service to implement and manage these programmes better than had been the case up to now. This implies better training and more outsourcing of projects or joint partnerships between government, business and community organisations in order to access resources that government does not fully control.

- A dramatic improvement in the efficiency of resource utilisation in government, including better management, more pragmatic affirmative action policy programmes and more effective remedies against waste and corruption.
These remedial strategies necessitate better political decision-making and governance at all levels of government. It also necessitates a more productive organisational culture in government, and the willingness to delegate powers together with resources to implement those powers, to lower levels of government, which has so far not happened.

A comprehensive policy and legal framework exist in South Africa for the demarcation, functioning, staffing and financing of an autonomous local government sphere in South Africa, where more than 70% of all public services and facilities are in practice provided to citizens. These provisions are, however, not fully and appropriately implemented, resulting in an inability of local government institutions to execute their constitutional obligations. For example, revenues nationally collected are not shared equitably with local government and the phenomenon of 'unfunded mandates' to local government abound. This happens because national and provincial government departments find it, for various reasons, impossible to fulfill their own mandates and then use the easy option to delegate or devolve these functions that they cannot execute, to local government, without the accompanying staff and finances to implement these new mandates effectively. This phenomenon can only be the result of a lack of knowledge about the requirements for successful governance, or a cynical bureaucratic strategy at higher governmental levels to maximize their own bureaucratic interests, ignoring the overall national interest.

A contributing factor to bad services delivery is the weak quality of municipal councillors and general political leadership and management at local governmental levels as well as party-political turf battles that frequently result in incompetent municipal councils, especially in rural areas, and too frequent regime changes as political parties compete to take over control of municipal councils. This combination of too frequent regime changes and bad leadership and management in municipal councils has a devastating negative impact on good governance outputs and outcomes in those councils. There is sufficient evidence that the current lack of appropriate services delivery at all governmental levels can be attributed to inadequate implementation of the current constitutional structure rather than to the inadequacy of the contents of these Constitutional provisions and the current structure itself.

Whatever the core reason for this situation, the consequence is that local government in South Africa is set up to fail through the actions of higher spheres of government and by inappropriate selection of municipal councillors by the dominant political parties, resulting in bad decisions by municipal management, bad staff appointments, a lack of resources and the inability to do what they are supposed to do in terms of the legislative framework for local government services delivery. Past interventions by higher spheres of government to improve this situation by assisting local government in the better execution of its responsibilities, providing additional resources, training staff and developing in general the capacities of local government institutions to perform their mandates better, have been half-hearted and largely unsuccessful, leading to an increasing number of municipalities that are mismanaged and find themselves technically bankrupt. This outcome is not the consequence of a bad constitutional system, but rather the bad implementation of an appropriate existing system.

Recently, the Public Administration Management Bill (the so-called Single Public Service Bill) was introduced into Parliament, with the purpose of creating a new, expanded Public Service, by adding the current 230,000 South African local government employees for the first time in the country's history by default into the existing South African Public Service of approximately 1.4 million employees. The size of the Public Service will therefore be increased overnight by approximately 14%. Given the serious managerial problems in the current Public Service that have resulted in unfunded mandates placed on local government to provide services that the national and provincial governments cannot provide, it is difficult to imagine how the new expanded Public Service will after its expansion be more efficient and effective. The Minister of Public Service and Administration is mandated by the Bill to establish one-stop-shop service centres across government spheres to provide integrated services of a better quality than is currently the
situation. This provision is useful, and could achieve this important aim if implemented appropriately. The Bill, however, also contains provisions to enable secondments and transfers of staff linked to a transfer of functions. Transfers may be made without the consent of the employee concerned provided that the transfer satisfies an operational requirement of the recipient department and is fair to the employee. In the case of transfers or secondments to or from a provincial department or municipality, the sending and recipient provincial and municipal institutions must consent to transfer or secondment of staff.

These developments will negate the autonomy of the existing municipal sphere of government in South Africa. More dedicated and effective implementation of the current provincial and local government intervention clauses in the Constitution and supplementary legislation and more equitable revenue sharing between the three governmental levels as envisaged in the Constitution will result in improved provincial and local government outcomes that would be much cheaper than a radical restructuring of inter-governmental cooperation in South Africa.

As motivated above, the biggest problem with the current situation is bad management and implementation rather than a bad constitutional structure and bad policy content. It is difficult to see how the envisaged legislative, structural and functional changes that the Single Public Service Bill will bring about, will create improved capacity for policy implementation that does not currently exist. The current public sector financial and human resources capacity is insufficient to be distributed even wider across public sector levels and agencies without lowering that capacity below a critical minimum level. The impact of the envisaged Single Public Service Bill is therefore potentially going to be a redistribution of existing incapacity, because the capacity to improve municipal services delivery does not exist now. Additional capacity for successful policy implementation needs to be created through smarter and more pragmatic policy implementation and more effective and efficient training of staff. This can and should be achieved by other measures than a radical restructuring of the governance system is South Africa. This Bill has now been withdrawn until after the 2009 elections.

Conclusion

The envisaged restructuring of the public sector seems to have more potential to aggravate existing bad governance and delivery outcomes further as a result of spending more resources on inefficient, ineffective and badly managed implementation strategies that are largely politically motivated, than to improve good governance outcomes. Experience has proved that better quality municipal decision-making and management practices, equitable sharing of national resources, and alternative service delivery strategies like outsourcing, joint ventures, public-public-community-private partnerships aimed at providing small scale services delivery results have better potential for improving public services delivery in South Africa, compared to a radical restructuring of the current composition and operations of the central public service. A greater emphasis on more effective implementation of political and managerial recruitment strategies, training, accountability and affirmative action strategies are potentially highly successful alternative or supplementary strategies for this purpose. These are the most optimal strategies to improve not only the delivery of better public services and facilities, but also good governance outcomes at all levels in South Africa.
South Africa's international relations after Polokwane: More continuity than change?
South Africa's international relations after

ABSTRACT

While it has become popular in the post-Polokwane era to suggest that everything the Mbeki-government stood for and resembled for nine years has resulted in failure, a more nuanced perspective suggest that this is in fact a prejudiced view. In international affairs the Mbeki government has laid a strong foundation for future consolidation of the Republic's external affairs. Both in terms of the domestic-foreign policy interface, and in terms of relations with the West, the post-Polokwane leaders will discover a high degree of policy clarity and institutionalisation of the countries foreign policy and international relations. Even the industrialised powers were not spared Mbeki’s ambitious efforts to transform the country’s external forays, and post-Polokwane leaders will discover that, with his North-South dialogue strategies, Mbeki sought to bring about changes in the international economic system. The post-Polokwane leaders will discover that they have a ready-made global reach, thanks to Mbeki’s ambitious “global governance” strategies. The post-Polokwane leaders will discover that they have a ready-made global reach, thanks to Mbeki’s ambitious “global governance” strategies. So, notwithstanding many threats of change for change sake by many in the post-Polokwane environment, one can predict with a degree of certainty that, as far as relations with the continent is concerned, there will be more continuity than change.

OPSMOMMING

Hoewel dit in die post-Polokwane-era mode geword het om alles wat die Mbeki-regering vir nege jaar lank voorgestaan en verteenwoordig het, ‘n mislukking te noem, sal ‘n meer onderskeidende benadering toon dat dit ‘n bevooroordeelde beskouing is. Met betreking tot internasionale aangeleenthede het die Mbeki-regering ‘n stewige grondslag vir die toekomstige konsolidasie van die Republiek se buitelandse sake gevestig. Met betreking tot beide die skeidinge vlak tussen binnelandse en buitelandse beleid sowel as verhoudinge met die Weste, sal die post-Polokwane-leiers ‘n groot mate van beleidsekerheid en institusionalisering van die land se buitelandse beleid en internasionale betrekkinge vind. Selfs die nywerheidsmoondhede is nie Mbeki se ambisieuse pogings gespaar om buitelandse uitbreiding te herskep nie, en post-Polokwane-leiers sal ontdek dat Mbeki deur middel van sy strategie van die Noord-Suid-diaalooq gepoog het om verandering in die internasionale ekonomie teeweg te bring. Dié nuwe leiers sal ook ontdek dat die wêreld-arena reeds binne hul bereik is, danksy Mbeki se ambisieuse “wêreldwyre regering”-strategieë. Nieteenstaande talle dreigemente van verandering bloot ter wille van verandering in die post-Polokwane-omgewing, kan ‘n mens met redelike sekerheid voorspel dat, sover dit betrekkinge met Afrika betref, daar meer kontinuïteit as verandering sal wees.
Polokwane: More continuity than change?

KAKARETŠO

Le ge e le gore ke setlwaedi gore mo pakeng ya ka morago ga Polokwanemotho a gopole gore se sengwe le se sengwe se mmušo wa go etwa pele ke Mbeki o bego o le seswantšho sa sona mo mengwageng ye senyane ya go feta se feditše se sa atlega, kgonthe ke gore tebelelo ye e tseneletšego e bontšha go sekamela lehlakoreng le tee ga dikgopolo tšeo. Mererong ya boditšhabatšhaba mmušo wa go etwa pele ke Mbeki o hloemile motheo wo boholokwa wa malebana le tšhomišano ya ka moso gore ga Repablikile le mafase a mangwe. Bobedi malebana le tshwaragano gare ga dipholisi tša merero ya gae le ya ntle, le go ya ka tšhomišano le mafase a Bodikela, baetapele ba paka ya ka morago ga Polokwane ba tlo lemoga gore go na le kwešišo ye e tseneletšego ya dipholisi tšeo le gore dipholisi tša naga tša merero ya tšhomišano le mafase a ntle di tloga di agetšwe legora. Le mafase a maatla ao a tšwetšego pele ga se nke a tlabha ke magato a Mbeki a go fetoša ka moo naga ye e šomišanango le dinaga tša ntle ka gona, ka gona baetapele ba paka ya ka morago ga Polokwane ba tlo bona gore, ka maana a gagwe a ditherišano le dinaga tša Borwa-Leboa, Mbeki o hlotše gore go be le diphetogo malebana le merero ya ekonomi ya boditšhabatšhaba.

Baetapele ba paka ya ka morago ga Polokowane ba tlo lemoga gore ba šetše ba direktše manamelelo a go fihlelela mafase a ka ntle, ditebogoe le lebišwa go maanotšhomo a mmušo wa Mbeki a pušo ya go thwua godimo ga kgopo ya "pušo ya boditšhabatšhaba". Ka go realo, le ge e le gore go bile le ditšhošetšo tša go ba gona ga diphetogo ka maikemišetšo a go no tliša tšona diphetogo ka bontši ba bao ba lego legorong la paka ya morago ga Polokwane, motho o kgona ga akanya gore kgonthe ge go lebelelewa tšhomišano ya naga le kontinenta ye go ba molaleng gore go tšwelwa pele ka tšeo di šetšego di dirilwe go ena le gore go be le diphetogo.

IQOQA


Ngakhoke, nakuba kukhona ubungozi obukhulu bokushintsha ngenhlosyo yokushintsha nje ngabaningi esimweni sangemva kwePolokwane, umuntu angasho ngokuqiniseka ukuthi, ingqobo nje makuthinta ubudlelwano nezwakazi kuzoba khona ukuphubeke okungaphezu koshintsho.
Introduction

It is becoming fashionable in South Africa to suggest that everything the Mbeki-government stood for and resembled for nine years was an unfathomable disaster – that nothing good came out of the Mbeki Presidency. The popular refrain goes that we have to change policies, institutions and personnel radically and move speedily away from the 'dreadful' Mbeki era. This prejudiced view has infiltrated all sectors of society during the course of the past three years, in many quarters in government – the media, academe, civil society and the like. Observers of many ilk find themselves under pressure to buy into this dangerous assumption. We are all expected to embrace the change for change sake paradigm. Everything put in place over the past nine years must be radically altered, and replaced by something else – anything!

It needs hardly be stated here that such a blinkered view is scarcely sustainable. Thus, a more nuanced approach will find that, in terms of the Republic’s external relations, policies, structures and institutions have been put in place that will turn the dangerous assumption on its head. In reality new leaders will find it difficult to unscramble the egg cooked for the past nine years, and there is likely to be more continuity than change.

For example, by the time South Africa’s political transition started in earnest twenty years ago, South Africa was one of the most isolated states in the world, able to display diplomatic relations with only 26 states, including the abominable Bantustans. Twenty years later, South Africa’s diplomatic relations is a far cry from those dark days of ostracism, and by the time President Thabo Mbeki was forced from office in September 2008, South Africa had diplomatic relations more than 7 times than the 26 the apartheid state could two decades earlier, a sign that diplomatic ties had been almost completely overhauled in the space of 14 years. The fact that the Mbeki government could boast formal ties with 180 countries was a direct result of the country’s doctrine of “universality” – pursuing the right to have relations with as many states as possible, irrespective of political, ideological or economic leanings.

But there was much more to Mbeki’s foreign policy than mere diplomatic ties. Mbeki set out to modernise South African foreign policy, a process which started when he was still deputy president from 1994 to 1999.

When Thabo Mbeki replaced Nelson Mandela as president in June 1999, he set out to overhaul the country’s foreign policy and to make it more strategic by ensuring that it serves domestic and continental African interests. By the start of his second term as president the foreign policy agenda was promoted under the rubric of the Republic being an "active agent of progressive change". Mbeki’s Republic was determined to set itself goals of becoming a pivotal state in Africa, determined to become a reliable global player by pursuing a "predictable" foreign policy in pursuit of a progressive agenda, and relies heavily on negotiations, diplomacy and soft power to achieve its goals.

Home-grown international relations

There is a view by many observers, including many delegates who attended the ANC’s historic Polokwane congress, who believe that the international strategies of the Mbeki government did not do justice to serving the country’s pressing domestic needs. While it is true that the domestic dimensions of policy received little attention by academic and media observers, it is not true that at the policy level this did not exist. To be sure, this aspect of foreign policy in particular, and international relations in general have been poorly communicated. But at the level of policy, serious efforts have been made to close the domestic-foreign policy gap. So, the Mbeki government sought to transform this dimension of foreign policy by seeking to address the dichotomy between the country’s domestic and internationalist roles.

In efforts to anchor its foreign relations on domestic goals, the Mbeki government has placed a strong emphasis on domestic economic objectives in foreign policy as his government made a link between domestic interests on the one hand, and regional, continental and international objectives on the other. This was not surprising given that the apartheid state left in its wake large scale social violence and poverty levels to the tune of 48%.
So far from finding that there is a gaping hole to be filled, the victors of Polokwane will walk into the Union Buildings and find well-articulated strategic domestic goals that have informed policy. These include: alleviating poverty, unemployment and inequality, and growing the economy. Such new leaders will discover that the Mbeki administration articulated a national interest doctrine as that of "overcoming the challenges of the second economy", namely:

» eradicating poverty;
» reducing unemployment and creating jobs;
» fighting crime; and
» building the capacity of state;

So, contrary to conventional wisdom out there, the new leaders will discover that a strong basis has been established for foreign policy to serve vital domestic needs. Instead of throwing out the baby with the bath water, there may be need for modification at times, but the main thrust should be consolidation, not wholesale change for change sake.

Championing Africa’s course

It is not just in the realm of the domestic-foreign policy interface that the post-Polokwane leaders will discover a high degree of policy clarity and institutions. In terms of relations with the rest of the African continent, too, will it emerge that South Africa has emerged as one of the most pivotal states that have come to play a real decisive role in Africa. One can predict with a degree of certainty that, as far as relations with the continent is concerned, there will be more continuity than change. For nine years, the Mbeki government was the chief champion of a rules-based continental order, and by the time Mbeki was forced from office in September 2008 South Africa had diplomatic relations with 47 of the continent’s states. No other country in the world, not even the well-resourced and powerful United States of America, can claim that diplomatic network. This places South Africa in an indispensible position to continue to influence the continent in the direction of democracy, sound governance, economic growth and prosperity. Here too, the post-Polokwane leaders will have access to a continental set of connections to influence continental matters. Again, those leaders who have become so angry with Mbeki’s style should learn to temper their anger and not to throw out the baby with the bath water.

Post-Polokwane leaders will soon learn that South Africa is regarded by most African states not as a ruffian or a destabiliser, but as a "strategic partner". They will discover that the potential for economic, cultural and social intercourse between the Republic and fellow African states are great, and that the basis has been firmly put in place over the past nine years. They will discover that, while we are just scratching the surface, the basis has been laid for market access in North Africa, West Africa, East Africa and the Horn, Central Africa, and southern Africa. South Africans in the main will discover that the rest of the continent represents South Africa with new opportunities, especially in the fields of infrastructure development, communications and transport, and the energy sector.

Throughout the continent, South Africa has established Bilateral Commissions with states in all regions, and this incorporated agreements in such fields as transport, trade, minerals and energy, science and technology, arts and culture, defence and other related areas. These agreements provide an opportunity to consolidate the progress made as well as to initiate specific projects envisaged in the strategic sectors.

The past decade saw South Africa emerge as one of the most influential countries in Africa. It and its partners have helped to nudge the African Union in the direction of democracy, the defence of collective security, peace and stability, preventive diplomacy, and a new interventionism in defence of rooting out genocide, gross violations of human rights, and unconstitutional changes of government.

A voice from the South

Again, the past decade saw influence going beyond just the African continent, and the victors of Polokwane will discover that Pretoria’s influence went beyond the African continent, and revealed butterfly-like wings touching South American and Asian countries. The new rulers will soon learn that the Mbeki government had introduced innovative ways of reaching
out to these regions under the auspices of South-South cooperation. The Mbeki government set out to reinvigorate political and economic linkages between Asia, South America and Africa and emphasised goals which link development to the expansion of trade, and poverty reduction through growth. A key goal here was to engage leaders of the three continents so that they could organise themselves better, to be better able to speak with one voice, so as to extract greater political and development commitments from the North.

South Africa has played a role in re-defining forums like the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), as well as being pivotal in the creation of new platforms such as the G20+, the India-Brazil-South Africa Tri-lateral Forum (IBSA), the New Africa-Asia Strategic Partnership (NAASP), which was established during the 2005 Asia-Africa Sub-regional Organisations Conference (AASROC), and the African-Caribbean-Pacific (ACP) bloc within the context of EU-ACP relations. Instead of throwing out the South-South baby with the bath water, the post-Polokwane leaders should build on this sound foundation and ensure that the dividends to be had from these initiatives benefit the home front and the broader African community. They could do so by placing greater emphasis on the need for economic diplomacy skills enhancement.

In 2009, South Africa will host the NAASP summit, given credence to its South-South commitments.

**The West needs partnership**

The industrialised powers were not spared Mbeki’s ambitious efforts to transform the country’s external forays. It will be worth the while of the post-Polokwane leaders to take heed of the fact that, with his North-South dialogue strategies, Mbeki sought to bring about changes in the international economic system. So, the new leaders will be well-advised to continue with efforts to extract significant financial resource commitments from the North. Indeed, the Mbeki government took it upon itself to bargain for more favourable concessions from North to South, in the areas of political governance, the global financial architecture, financing for development, and a voice for the South in global forums. Thus, there is no need for leaders in future to move away from policies to try and bring about strategic partnerships with countries from the North so as to affect peace, security and development in Africa and the broader South. Nor would it be necessary to try and re-invent the wheel. Instead, future policy should build on the five strategic priority areas as identified by the Mbeki government, notably (1) accelerated, more predictable and unconditional levels of aid; (2) debt relief and cancellation; (3) market access for the trading goods of Africa and the South to the markets of the North; (4) a more equitable global trade regime and conclusion of the Doha round of trade negotiations; and (5) massive resource transfers that would enable Africa to tackle its peace and security challenges. So, just as the Mbeki administration sought to focus on a North-South paradigm aimed at bringing about international redress between North and South, so the post-Polokwane leaders should focus on consolidating North-South strategies as opposed to playing the dangerous poker game of rejecting policies just because they are associated with the persona of President Thabo Mbeki.

**Transforming global power politics**

The post-Polokwane leaders will discover that they have a ready-made global reach, thanks to Mbeki’s ambitious “global governance” strategies. So confident was South Africa during the past nine years that government believed that it could influence the global balance-of-power in a western dominated world. On the political front, policies campaigned for the reform of the global political architecture, notably the United Nations and its Security Council, while on the socio-economic front, South Africa was concerned with the transformation of the global financial architecture, and in particular for the World Trade Organisation, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund to be transformed and for Africa and the South to be given greater voice. So, politically policy stressed the need to restore the centrality of the United Nations in global affairs, and stressed the need for a strong disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation global regime. In the socio-economic realm meanwhile, policy pushed for international financial institutions to become more in tune with the needs and priorities of developing countries.
Concluding reflections

The past nine years of the Thabo Mbeki government has seen foreign policy completely overhauled and totally unrecognisable from what it used to be two during the apartheid decades. Even the outcomes of Polokwane recognise that the Mbeki administration has set a strong foundation in foreign policy and international relations. It is now up to Mbeki’s successors to capitalise on this foundation and ensure that the ambitious foreign policy serves South Africa, Africa and the developing world better. The worst mistake that South Africa’s future leaders could make would be to proceed on the basis of the warped assumption that everything the Mandela government did and stood for was good, and conversely that everything Mbeki stood for and did was bad, and that the Mbeki ‘tar’ baby should be thrown out with the tarred bath water. The sooner the new ANC and its alliance partners get over their anger and kneejerk anti-Mbeki-ism, and build on the strong foundation laid, the better the chances for South Africa to enter the future with confidence. But even if they don’t get over the anger speedily, the new crop of leaders are likely to find that changing the international strategies of the Mbeki administration would be more difficult to affect because they have been seriously thought through and strategically institutionalised. So, brace yourselves for more continuity than change in South Africa’s international relations during the next decade.
A Post-Polokwane South African foreign policy
By all accounts, the ANC’s Polokwane conference was a watershed event in South African political history. Although the directions of change that are to follow are still unclear, there is no doubt that major policy shifts await South Africans. Purportedly the biggest legacy of outgoing president Thabo Mbeki was his foreign policy, but after Polokwane it is not so sure whether this legacy will survive. Indeed, it may be argued that Mbeki’s obsession and preoccupation with foreign affairs cost him the presidency: he did not give the leadership at home where it was mostly needed and in the process he neglected South Africa’s national interests. Moreover, Mbeki was a man for grand ideas and big opening moves, but after effectively 14 years in command of foreign policy, not much has come to fruition. The obvious truth and reality for the new leadership to accept is that foreign policy starts at home and that foreign policy coupled with astute diplomacy are potentially powerful tools which could help rectify South Africa’s domestic problems, particularly unemployment and poverty relief and a safer and more prosperous regional neighbourhood.

Die ANC se Polokwane-konferensie word allerweë as ’n waterskeiding in die Suid-Afrikaanse politieke geskiedenis beskou. Alhoewel die rigting van die veranderings wat gaan volg nog onduidelik is, is daar geen twyfel dat groot politieke verskuiwings op Suid-Afrikaners wag nie. Na bewering was die grootste nalatenskap van uitgaande president Thabo Mbeki sy buitelandse beleid, maar na Polokwane is dit nie te sê dat dié nalatenskap sal oorleef nie. Daar kan inderdaad geargumenteer word dat Mbeki se obsessie en preokkupasie met buitelandse aangeleenthede hom die presidentskap gekos het: hy het nie leiding tuis gegee waar dit die nodigste was nie en in die proses het hy Suid-Afrika se nasionale belange afgeskeep. Voorts was Mbeki ’n man vir grootse idees en indrukwekkende aanvangskuiwe, maar na effektief 14 jaar se beheer oor Suid-Afrika se buitelandse aangeleenthede, is daar nie veel om te wys nie. Die voor die hand liggende waarheid en realiteit vir die nuwe leierskap is om te aanvaar dat buitelandse beleid tuis begin en dat buitelandse beleid gekoppel aan slim diplomasiie potensieel kragtige instrumente is wat kan help met die regstelling van Suid-Afrika se plaaslike probleme, veral werkloosheid en armoedeverligting en ’n veiliger en meer welvarende streeksomgewing.
KAKARETŠO

Go molaleng gore khonferense ya ANC ya Polokwane e fetošitše tše ntši mo historing ya dipolitiki tša Afrika-Borwa. Le ge e le gore ga go ešo go hlake gore diphetogo tše di tlogo ba gona ke tša mohuta mang. go tloga go le molaleng gore Maafrīka-Borwa a tlo itemogela diphetogo tše ntši malebana le dipholisi tša naga. Go gopolwa gore phihlelelo ye kgolo ye mopresitente yo a fologilego setulong. Thabo Mbeki, a e fihleletšego e be e le pholisi ya gagwe ya tšhomisšano le dinaga tša ntle, eupsa ka morago ga Polokwane ga go tsebege ge e le gore pholisi yeo e tlo tšwela pele. Ka kgonthe, go ka gatelelwa gore nako ye ntši ye Mbeki a e feditšego a swaragane le merero ya dinaga tša ntle ke yona e dirilego gore a fološwe setulong; ga se a tšomiša boetapele bja gagwe ka mo nageng moo bo bego bo nyakega kudu gomme nakong yona yeo o ikahlogantše le dikgahlego tša boksetšhaba tša Afrika-Borwa. Go tšwela pele, Mbeki e be e le mothe wa dikgopolo tše botse le maano a mabotse, eupsa morago ga mengwaga ye 14 a swaragane le pholisi ya tšhomisšano le dinaga tša ntle, go sa na le tše ntši tše di sego tša phethagatšwa. Kgonthe ye e lego molaleng ye e swanetšego go amogelwa ke boetapele bho bofsa ke gore pholisi ya tšhomisšano le dinaga tša ntle e thoma ka gae le gore pholisi ya tšhomisšano le dinaga tša ntle ye e sepetšanago tšela e tee le diploması ke ditlabelwahlokwa tše di ka thušago tharollong ya mathata a selegae a Afrika-Borwa, kudukudu tlhokego ya mešomo le go fokotša tlala le go hlola tikologo ye e bolokegilego ya go tšwela pele ka katlego.

IQOQA

Ngayonyne indlela yokubeka indaba umhlangano we-ANC ePolokwane waba yisehlakalo esiinyinqophamlando emlandweni wezepolotiki waseNingizimu Afrika. Nakuba izinkoba zoshintsho ezizolandelwa zingacaci akunakungabaza ukuthi ukugudluka okuhulu emithethweni kubalindile abantu baseNingizimu Afrika.

Purportedly Umthetho omkuluwana kamongameli ophumayo uThabo Mbeki bekuwumthetho wezangaphandle kodwa emva kwase Polokwane akusenasiqiniseko lokhu kuzoqhubeka, Empeleni, kungashiwo ukuthi ukuthathoza kanye nokubambeka kukaMbeki’s ezindabeni zangaphandle kumehlukanise nobengameli: ubenganikezeli/ngabonisi ngobuholi lapha ekhaya lapho bebeidingeka khona kakhu kwase kuthi ekugubeka, wanganaka izinhloso zesizwe saseNingizimu Afrika. Futhi, uMbeki bekuyindoda yemibono emihle kanye nesinyakazo emikhulu evulayo. kodwa emvakweminyaka e-14 elawula umthetho wezangaphandle, akukuningi okuphumelele. Iqiniso elisobala kanye nento ekothi impela ukuthi abaholi abasha kumele bemukele ukuthi umthetho wezangaphandle uqala ekhaya kanye nokuthi umthetho wezangaphandle okhashwa ubungcweti ekwenzeni izivemelwano phakathi kwezizwe okukhaliphile kungaba amathuluzi anamandla angasiza ekulungiseni izikinga zangaphakathi eNingizimu Afrika, ikakhulu ukwentuleka kwemisebenzi nokudamjiswa kobuphofo. kanye nendawo ezungezile ephephile necebile.
Thabo Mbeki’s main forte and agenda during the ANC’s years of struggle and his twelve plus years as vice-president of South Africa. As president he focussed on big issues globally and regionally. Africa’s revival and development, North-South and South-South issues and challenges, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), articulating and promoting Africa’s case in the Group of Eight (G8), the India, Brazil, South African axis (IBSA) and reform of the United Nations crowded his foreign policy agenda.

To all these activities South Africa’s own national interests played second fiddle. The old dictum that ‘foreign policy starts at home’ did not seem to rub off on Mbeki. He became president in the best of times: South Africa was the darling of the world, a country all nations of the world admired and wanted to welcome as a friend, a partner and a collaborator; its international image was as positive and bright as any nation could hope for. All South Africa had to do was to formulate and execute a foreign policy to capitalise on this favourable environment to the benefit of its people and the security and welfare of the nation.

It was here where Mbeki fell short so desperately. Instead of building on the Madiba legacy, he sought to become his own man with his own ideology and trade mark foreign policy imprinted on his presidency. His global and Africa agenda projected him as a man with a singular vision and a purpose: a reformer and 'saviour' of Africa, the champion of the South and the developing world and a countervailing voice against American unilateralism and Eurocentrism. But in the real world of Darwinian competition, vested self-interests, power play, and civilisation clashes, his was a mission impossible. He overreached and created unrealistic expectations. He was listened to and even liked by leaders in all the hemispheres, in the G8 he was regarded as ‘one of us’ and some of the best and most influential international minds sat at his table. But the one thing that escaped him, something he resented, was that he was not in the same league as Mandela, having to move in the shadow of his great predecessor. Yes, he enjoyed regular and easy access to world leaders, but in the end he lacked the grit and the gravitas to shift the boundaries of international politics. Even in Africa, his home turf, his clout as leader of Sub-Saharan strongest state was remarkably feeble, sometimes even inconsequential in spite of all the energy and resources he put into it. With the notable exception of facilitating some peace-keeping operations in Africa and engineering the creation of the African Union to replace the dysfunctional Organisation of African Unity, his legacy is mostly unfinished business.

Unfortunately his self-imposed mission to play the role of Africa’s 'saviour' and the developing world’s uberdiplomat overshadowed the domestic agenda. Success at home would have assured his legacy, and probably his presidency, but he missed the opportunity. While he regularly shone at the meetings of the Group of Eight (G8), at the Economic Forum in Davos and umpteen conferences on global issues, he never deigned to play the role as South Africa’s salesman. Instead of leading South Africa to becoming a winning nation, the country went into steady decline on his watch: the HIV/AIDS pandemic devoured the country, rampant crime blighted the lives of law abiding citizens, incompetence, corruption and looting the wealth of the nation became routinely associated with the national administration, from a food exporter South Africa declined into becoming a net food importer, the country was flooded by illegal immigrants from Zimbabwe and other SADC countries, highly skilled people left the country in droves, electric power failures became a daily routine crippling the economy, while poverty and unemployment remained at staggering heights. Although diplomacy was regarded as Mbeki’s forte, his failure to foresee early on the disastrous consequences of Zimbabwe’s President Robert Mugabe’s mad policies for South Africa and the SADC region was a costly and catastrophic mistake. The moral authority the democratic transformation and the Madiba legacy gave the country were simply squandered, superseded by an obsession with ideology: South Africa sided with North Korea, Myanmar, Russia and China in the United Nations on controversial issues ignoring the universal moral imperatives Mandela defended so boldly; Mugabe, on the grounds of being a comrade-of-the-struggle, was rendered untouchable, gross human rights abuses in Africa
and elsewhere were given the blind eye and made way for ideological expediency while the country cuddled up to the ilk of Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, Ahmedinejad’s Iran, Hugo Chavez’s Venezuela and Kim Jong Il’s North Korea.

A major problem with the Mbeki administration was that he surrounded himself mostly with incompetent insiders, sycophants and yes-people. Although a person of high intelligence and excellent diplomatic skills, he apparently never realised that the task at hand was too vast and too complicated for a one-man think tank. But encouraging and listening to alternative viewpoints, if only to clarify the issues and to improve the quality and efficacy of decision-making, was not his preferred method or style.

His foreign policy making and diplomacy was by-and-large a one-man affair, although it must be quickly added that there were very few people of substance below him he could rely on. Hence the quality of South African diplomacy paid the price. Jules Cambon, a former French diplomat, wrote in 1925: "Diplomacy will always have ambassadors and ministers; the question is whether it will have diplomats?" By-and-large, with the notable exception of Mbeki himself, South Africa pursued diplomacy without diplomats. He had little back-up from his mostly out-of-depth Minister of Foreign Affairs and her department. In fact he set up his own mini department of foreign affairs in the presidency. The result: a shortfall in execution and delivery. In spite of his umpteen high level opening moves, the professional diplomats in the line function failed to round off and deliver the results and our national interests paid the price. In their daily routine, they were engaged in a bewildering variety of activities which, judging from the outside, seemed remote, even unaligned to the country’s core national interests. National security and welfare are universally the core objectives of foreign policy, but these are terms one rarely finds in the lexicon of South African diplomats. They seem to be pre-occupied with blue sky stuff like South Africa’s role in esoteric configurations like North-South, South-South, G7, G24, BICSA, Alec Irwin’s ‘butterfly scenario’, reform of the United Nations and so on and so forth. 'South Africa speaks for Africa', 'South Africa speaks for the South' or 'South Africa speaks for the underdeveloped world', they proclaimed with a sense of pride and achievement.

Understandably, prestige, leadership and showing the flag are important, especially after the isolation under apartheid. But already 14 years down the line we do not yet exactly know what happens on the output side of all these efforts: what the country has gained, what were the success stories, whether all these costly efforts added to welfare, security and wealth creation, helped to alleviate poverty and unemployment at home, improved the security and welfare of the Southern African region, put Africa on the road towards sustainable development.

On Mbeki’s watch, therefore, South Africa’s foreign policy metamorphosed into a kind of a supermarket characterised by its broad sweep: lots of action, global and regional reach, complex agendas, a bit of everything, but no real thrust and achievement, no cutting edge, and very little lasting legacy. It left everybody outside government, including foreign states, in some confusion; not really knowing exactly what South Africa wanted, what its principles were, where exactly it was headed, and what to expect. Action for the sake of action seemed to have become the lode star of the country’s frenetic international activities, leaving behind a lot of unfinished business and a country and subcontinent craving for leadership.

The message from Polokwane is clearly that we need, first and foremost, a foreign policy that speaks for South Africa and its people; that foreign policy starts at home, a foreign policy that enhances the nation’s welfare and security. In a nutshell, the way we engage the rest of the world should principally be related to our domestic needs and priorities. The creation of welfare and prosperity at home should be the overbearing objective: job-creation, poverty reduction, combating underdevelopment cannot be achieved without engaging the outside world and proving that we are a reliable and predictable partner. Our role models should be countries like Japan, Denmark, Switzerland and Sweden; in other words countries that put domestic economic interests before ideological interests, trading nations which attract direct foreign investment, not betting everything, banana republic like, on a one-off event like a soccer world cup. Economic diplomacy should become our forte, replacing
the debilitating ideological obsessions of the past eight years in our dealing with the outside world.

South Africa’s position in Africa has become tenuous to say the least. In Southern Africa we punch far below our weight, unable to influence events in our favour and not being taken seriously. This At the United Nations we muddle through from one faux pas (after) to another, alienating respect and goodwill and ending up by not being taken seriously. It is good and well to fight for a better, more equitable global agenda, but not in a way that does not promote our own national interests in the first place.

The post-Polokwane mood will necessitate that South African foreign policy makers go back to the drawing board. Most importantly they must rediscover and redefine South Africa’s national interests, interests that serve the people of this country, enhancing the security and welfare of the state and the nation. Of course, some of the Mbeki initiatives, particularly in Africa, should be given a chance. South Africa cannot survive in a sea of poverty, instability and uncertainty. At the same time, however, his Zimbabwe policy should be consigned to the dustbin urgently and immediately. Handling the Zimbabwe crisis as badly as Mbeki did, exacted a hefty price for the country and the entire SADC region. The tragic mistakes Mbeki made vis-à-vis Zimbabwe should never be repeated at any cost. Of paramount importance is that a regional foreign policy doctrine should be put in place, dictating rules of behaviour in our neighbourhood, being the first circle of South Africa’s foreign policy and immediate sphere of influence.

As far as our general foreign policy is concerned, decision-makers in the post-Mbeki era should look for consolidation, rationalisation, prioritisation and predictability. The quality and impact of South Africa’s foreign policy should be heightened, going deeper instead of wider. The country should not waste scarce resources in areas that really do not concern our national interests, for instance, we do not need to maintain a diplomatic mission in every insignificant capital of the world as we are currently doing and participate in every single trivial international forum. Following a more prudent and perhaps frugal path will leave us with more clout and resources to make a difference where it is absolutely necessary or where it matters most.

Such action will bring back new respect from our regional partners in Southern Africa, something we lost in the last eight years, and help the country to play its rightful role in the continent and in multilateral fora. It will reassure our trading partners, investors and the international diplomatic community of the country’s maturity and dependability as a partner and international role player. What this country can ill-afford is to be regarded as a loose cannon on the international scene— an impression we unfortunately gave as non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. Therefore, much of the Mbeki foreign policy needs rethinking and fine-tuning of programmes with merit and consolidation of those that are sustainable, in order to serve South Africa’s national interests optimally in the years to come. The person that succeeds him as president should spend much more time at home (than Mbeki did), attending the needs of his people and his country and give leadership at home in the first place. To allow the president to do this, the country needs a foreign minister with the necessary expertise, experience and gravitas to do the job more properly than the present incumbent, while at the same time, our professional diplomats should sharpen their pencils, improve the quality of their diplomacy and start with the delivery of what our country and people really need.
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