

# South Africa is at another crossroads

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**South Africa is yet again at a crossroads. This means South Africans must make a major decision regarding their future.**

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At the last crossroads in 1994, South Africans had hoped for a bright future that democracy would bring about. Large numbers flocked to the polls and 62.65% of them voted for the African National Congress (ANC). Ten years later an even larger number, 69.7%, voted for the ANC to bring about the promised land South Africans had fought for during 300 years of struggle.

South Africans have now reached another crossroads – brought about by the failure of the ANC government that South Africans had placed so much faith in to deliver on its promise of a better life for all.

## ANC government failure and the cost to South Africa

Twenty years ago, South Africa was the largest economy in Africa by far. It had the most developed and diversified manufacturing sector; it had the largest railway network on the continent and one of the largest in the world; it was the largest producer of electricity in Africa; it had the largest port in Africa, Durban.

By 2019, a year before the Covid-19 virus struck, South Africa under ANC government had gone into steep decline. Misguided economic policies led to employment collapse; for example, in the footwear sector, where employment fell from 27882 in 1995 to a mere 12035 in 2002.

Today, South Africa has the highest unemployment rate in the world and not surprisingly 27% of children under five are stunted as a result of extensive malnutrition.

South Africa was overtaken by Nigeria in 2013 as the leading economy in Africa. It was later also overtaken by Egypt in 2020.

Its manufacturing sector had shrunk from 20% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 1994 to 13% of GDP in 2021; South Africa's railway network was ravaged by mismanagement and lack of maintenance so that most of the country's freight moved on road; the state-owned electricity company became a byword for incompetence.

The Port of Durban and other South African ports, according to a 2021 study by the World Bank, were among the least efficient ports in Africa and the world. South African ports were ranked as follows: Ngqura 363, Durban 364 and Cape Town 365 out of 370 ports worldwide. The highest

ranked African port was Djibouti, which is ranked number 19.

The failure of the ANC government was not restricted to economic failures; it extended to the critical area of human security. In 1990 South Africa had one of the most developed militaries. It could field a well-trained and well-equipped army of half a million soldiers. It had highly developed military industries that had grown notwithstanding international sanctions.

Today the South African army has been described as a welfare agency rather than a warfare agency.

Its army of 81 500 (66 500 active, 15 000 reserve) is ill-equipped, unhealthy, aged, and unfit. Most of its active service personnel are above the age of 40, and so are their fighting vehicles. The defence budget has collapsed from 2.6% of GDP in 1994 to 0.93% of GDP in 2019/2020.

The equipment procured for the air force and navy in the early 2000s is all but inoperative due to lack of spare parts and lack of qualified personnel to maintain and operate it, according to Lindy Heineken, author of *South Africa's Post-Apartheid Military: Lost in Transition and Transformation*. Less than a third of the 37 Oryx helicopters are operational; only five of the 26 Gripen fighter jets are operational; and only five Hawk trainers out of 24 are operational. Only one of the four navy frigates is in service.

Anyone can walk across South Africa's borders and do practically as they wish once inside the country. Foreign poachers kill hundreds of rhinos every year. Importers of heroin and other drug merchants have a free run of the country.

When the orgy of looting, violence, and destruction of commercial property and infrastructure in July 2021 erupted in the provinces of Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, the ANC government was paralysed and did not know what to do.

It issued an order to the police in Durban and Pietermaritzburg to do nothing. The police and the army made cameo appearances at riot scenes.

In a period of eight days when the two provinces were engulfed in riots more than 340 people were killed in the mayhem, many trampled to death during the looting, others killed by vigilante groups and private security companies, some burnt in the fires that destroyed malls and distribution centres. According to insurance company Allianz Global Corporate & Speciality, property worth US\$1.7 billion was destroyed.

The July 2021 riots that followed the arrest of former president Jacob Zuma confirmed what many people had suspected for a while – that South Africa is ruled by a failed government that is not capable of providing security to life and limb of citizens, is not capable of protecting the country's assets, and has lost control of the country's borders.

Allianz estimates that social upheavals are here to stay.

In the increasingly unstable world that South Africa is also part of, a failed government adds to the dangers the country faces.

"Incidents of social unrest are unlikely to abate any time soon given the aftershocks of Covid-19, the cost-of-living crisis and the ideological shifts that continue to divide societies around the world," writes Allianz. "Business needs to be alert to any suspicious indicators and designate clear pathways for de-escalation and response which anticipate and avert the potential for personnel to be injured, and or, damage to business and personal property."

This is very good advice, but business on its own cannot provide the security that is the responsibility of government to provide. The message should therefore be clear to the country: a government that is not capable of providing security to the nation must be replaced democratically by one that can.

Key indicators of ANC government failure are in the areas of security, international relations, and economic policy. These three are a crucial measure for government performance because they cannot be outsourced.

We have seen above how the government has failed to provide security; it has fared no better in international relations.

### **ANC government's floundering foreign policy**

In 1990 South Africa was a giant in Africa. It had one of the largest armies on the continent, with a sophisticated industrial military complex. In 1994, after years of apartheid, it emerged as a credible democracy with a leader, Nelson Mandela, who after many decades of prosecution by the apartheid regime, was preaching reconciliation and nation building.

For several years, Africa and the world adored South Africa and looked forward to it becoming Africa's lodestar. As we have seen, since Mandela, South Africa has fretted away whatever strengths it had. Today South Africa has been described as Africa's lost leader.

According to James Hamill, in his book *Africa's Lost Leader; South Africa's Continental Role Since Apartheid*, South Africa has failed to meet the conditions of a leader in Africa.

Hamill says the following were the conditions that South Africa needed to meet to become a leader in Africa: "The country would have had to view itself as a hegemon and be prepared to assert a strong claim to African leadership; acquire sufficient material power to make its hegemonic aspirations credible, as well as the ability to translate that power into concrete policy outcomes; and convince other African states to accept its leadership as beneficial for the entire region.

"The country would also have to demonstrate strong ideational appeal within the region, allowing it to build coalitions that promote core norms and values; and help stabilise the continent through the provision of public goods, particularly economic development, and mechanisms to maintain security and order."

Under the ANC government South Africa has failed miserably to meet any of the above conditions of leadership.

It is largely because of the strengths and sophistication of the country's private sector and academia that the world still invites the South African government to sit in its high councils.

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**MOELETSI MBEKI**

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**P.S.**

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