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HOW DOES THE SCORECARD FOR OUR HARD-PRESSED COUNTRY'S TURNAROUND LOOK?

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It's already old news that former President Zuma appeared before the Zondo Commission last week. He seemed to be suffering from severe amnesia, or have no opinion about most matters.

But in addition to this news, there is another question that most right-thinking and concerned South Africans are wrestling with, and which commentators reflect upon daily. Is President Ramaphosa winning the battle to turn the country around? Is he winning his battle to reform the country, and especially the State, to save it from the clutches of the Zuptas, to help the economy recover, and to set the country on a steady course?

It is not easy to answer this question with a yes or no, because it is complex and depends on many factors. And because it is often said that Ramaphosa plays a long and strategic chess game, the situation is not always clear to ordinary South Africans. Max du Preez recently noted that what worries him, is that while Ramaphosa plays chess, Ace Magashule climbs in with a baseball bat ...

Currently, the Ramaphosa scorecard is based on three groups of factors: negatives, mainly caused by the Zupta faction in the ANC; positives driven by Ramaphosa and his side; and a number of factors that could be described as "own goals" - caused by the actions (and sometimes lack of action) by the Ramaphosa side itself.

The factors opposed to Ramaphosa's plans are well known. Magashule's victories in influencing the size and composition of the Cabinet, as well as the appointment of chairmen of portfolio committees in Parliament may be the clearest. The link between the Public Protector's (PP) witch-hunt against Pravin Gordhan and President Ramaphosa and the Zupta group is not broadcast. However, there are signs that the Zuptas fully and openly support the PP. Another strategy is to force Ramaphosa to reluctantly enforce the sometimes irrational ANC Nasrec conference resolutions of December 2017. These include the nationalisation of the Reserve Bank and expropriation without compensation. Magashule recently stated at a public meeting that he regarded it as his legacy to make sure that the Nasrec resolutions are implemented. And, that same weekend, Zuma, at a meeting of the ANC Youth League, stated that if the president of an organisation refuses to implement the decisions of its highest governing body, he should be replaced. You can hardly imagine a stronger threat and declaration of war by the Zuptas towards Ramaphosa.

There are a few positives on the Ramaphosa side. The most important of these are the appointments already made by Ramaphosa. The Director of the National Prosecuting Authority, Shamila Batohi, appears to already be hard at work, along with the head of her special investigative unit, Hermione Cronje. There are even rumours that the first high-profile prosecution could begin before the end of 2019. A number of law firms have already received files with information to instruct advocates for prosecution cases. The regulation that Ramaphosa recently signed, which gives the Special Investigating Unit power



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to investigate the controversial 2015 Free State government asbestos contract, is also significant. This contract was signed during Magashule's term as Premier, and there were allegations that he personally benefited. If the investigation does point out irregularities and benefits to politicians or business people, and prosecutions are instituted, it can greatly boost reform efforts. It may even (but perhaps one should not hold one's breath) mean the beginning of the end for Magashule's political career. The President's "fight-back" in the Gordhan case also shows signs of more proactive action.

Most South Africans believe that Ramaphosa really wants to turn the country around. But this is not always visible. A senior Ramaphosa adviser recently asked why people are "so negative about Ramaphosa". It reveals that there is not enough understanding in Ramaphosa's own smaller circle of advisers about what is going on and how ordinary South Africans experience the situation and the numerous negative media reports.

The third group of factors described as "own goals" confirms this. There are those who think that Ramaphosa's profile is too low and that he is not visible enough. Especially in the minority communities, there is the feeling that he is out of touch and, for example, does not openly talk enough about issues such as gang violence, farm murders, economic growth and the importance of property rights. It is encouraging that last week he did condemn farm murders on a public platform. His office's view that these issues should be dealt with by the relevant Ministers may be technically correct, but it reinforces the perception that he does not provide strong leadership. In his State of the Nation Address he attempted to provide visionary leadership (which was horribly misunderstood even by journalists), but unfortunately South Africans now need more concrete guidance on specific issues.

Then there are some Ramaphosa remarks apparently aimed at appeasing interest groups within his own ranks. The most recent of these is the strange comment on the US and China about HUAWEI. Even though Trump is not everyone's favourite person, it makes no sense to make the US an enemy of South Africa. In this regard, one wonders who advises Ramaphosa? Making an ill-considered comment in order to appease an interest group whose support you will not get anyway, by alienating an interest group that is on your side, is irrational.

The scorecard is therefore a mixture of negatives, positives and own goals. The outcome of the struggle is far from certain. And, as previously stated, the battle will be long. What will give the Ramaphosa side more points (and even eventual victory) are his appointment powers as President of the country. Management experts always advise one to get the right people on the wagon and to get the wrong people off. Then the wagon can get through the drift. And Ramaphosa is busy with that. His NPA appointments could start bearing fruit for the country within months. His internal political battles in the ANC can shift in his favour if he speaks with even more authority, and shows that although he favours consensus and compromise, there comes a point when he will put his foot down and make a decision. He should also show his hand and authority more in public. It will help greatly to reassure troubled South Africans that their President understands their doubts but that things are slowly but surely starting to improve.



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On the one hand, most of us know that Cyril Ramaphosa is the only person standing between us and Zupta anarchy - and that is why he deserves everyone's support in his fight. On the other hand, President Ramaphosa should also know that he personally can (and should) determine the result of the fight. The hard-pressed country of which he is the elected leader is waiting for him ...

***First published on Maroela Media in Afrikaans**