



WHAT MIGHT AWAIT US AFTER MAGASHULE'S DEADLINE EXPIRES

By Stef Terblanche, independent political risk analyst and member of the FW de Klerk Foundation Panel of Contributors

By the end of this week the ANC's wayward secretary-general, Ace Magashule, either has to step aside from his official top-6 position or face immediate suspension. But already there are signs of soft-peddalling should the ANC not follow through, with Treasurer-General Paul Mashatile saying last week that the ANC does not regard the deadline as being D-Day.

That immediately opened up new space for a chorus of dubious voices going up in the ANC for Magashule to be given more time or for the ANC's step-aside rule to be put on hold until the National Conference next year. These voices ranged from convicted fraudster Tony Yengeni to controversial ANC chair in Ekurhuleni Mzwandile Masina, and the suspended former North West leader, Supra Mahumapelo.

Others in the ANC, however, are adamant that the deadline should be enforced. Magashule himself and his close supporters have said he is going nowhere. As has become the norm, these contradictory opinions are attributed respectively to the two main factions tearing the ANC apart.

What could happen?

Either way, this deadline - delayed or enforced - holds serious implications for the governing ANC and for the country as a whole. If Magashule does not step aside or is not suspended, the following could happen, among others:

- President Cyril Ramaphosa's authority and the anti-corruption drive are challenged and face a serious knock, while it will strengthen the position of those associated with corruption and other crimes in the ANC;
- It will bolster the so-called 'radical economic transformation' or RET faction and others who follow/support Magashule and former president Jacob Zuma;
- The recent significant shift in the balance of power inside the ANC in Ramaphosa's favour could slip back to the previous stalemate / lame duck situation between two equally balanced factions;
- The factional battles will be further drawn out and continue to adversely impact good governance, sensible policies and effective service delivery while the power struggle will take precedence over all else;
- It will bolster the populist drive for implementation of 'radical economic transformation' policies and resolutions;
- The factional power struggles will intensify, leading to critical threats to Ramaphosa at the ANC's forthcoming National General Council (NGC) and its elective National Conference next year; and
- The continuing factional battles and public perceptions around corruption could impact the ANC negatively in the October municipal elections, which would be bad news, in the internal ANC power-balance context, for Ramaphosa and those who support him.

If Magashule fails to step aside but is suspended, the following is possible:

- His supporters may still carry out their earlier unfulfilled threat of widespread protests and disruptions, while there may be legal challenges;
- It could finally drive the anti-Ramaphosa elements like Magashule and Zuma out of the ANC, and they may launch a new political party;



- After some initial instability or disruptions, the ANC may finally be rid of its factionalism scourge and get on with the job of governing;
- The anti-corruption drive can be confidently stepped up with more arrests and prosecutions to follow;
- The anti-Ramaphosa faction may still try to move against him at the NGC and next year at the National Conference, but their position may have been fatally weakened;
- The ANC could focus on preparing for the October elections in the hope of recovering support it lost due to more than a decade of corruption, state-capture and mismanagement; or
- If Magashule changes his mind and leaves quietly, much of the aggression, confrontation, divisions and potential instability could simply go away.

The background perspective

Whatever the outcome by the end of this week might be, the background perspective that built up over the last few months, is undeniably that the odds of survival have steadily been stacking up against Magashule and Zuma. There was a very decisive shift in the balance of forces in Ramaphosa's favour. It is now clear that Magashule and Zuma are fighting a last, desperate battle while rapidly losing ground.

Last year Ramaphosa's 'strategic patience' to reunite the factions ran out. He opted for delivering on his 2018 promise of rooting out corruption instead. Which has brought us to the current situation.

Even so, it is unlikely that the fight will soon be over. ANC branches are starting to prepare for their branch general meetings (BGMs) that will precede the usually hotly contested regional and provincial conferences. The outcomes are critical for Ramaphosa as from these lower structures voting delegates are selected to attend the later elective national conference. For Magashule and company to influence this however, it would be crucial for them to hold onto the office of secretary-general.

Magashule & Zuma's last desperate battle

The odds have steadily and overwhelmingly been stacking up against Magashule and Zuma. Firstly, at the time of writing, the Constitutional Court still had not ruled on Zuma's contempt-of-court charge. If found guilty and sentenced, it could be an additional blow to the Zuma/Magashule-led RET faction. Meanwhile, other recent setbacks for the faction included:

- Ramaphosa's NEC triumph and the 30-day ultimatum to Magashule.
- A Supreme Court of Appeal decision ending state funding for Zuma's legal battles and leaving him with a R25 million bill.
- An NEC decision effectively barring ANC members from being involved with the Zuma/Magashule-supporting 'RET faction'.
- Absa cutting ties with Iqbal Survé's Sekunjalo Investment Holdings, which controls Independent Media, a major mouthpiece for the RET faction.
- The NEC expressing its explicit support for the Zondo Commission as well as for the ANC's parliamentary caucus which ignored Magashule's instructions and voted for an impeachment inquiry against the Public Protector.
- The NEC proposing possible disciplinary steps against alleged RET faction kingpin Carl Niehaus.
- A call gaining traction in the NEC for the merging of two currently competing ANC military veterans' groups into one, which could disband the Zuma/Magashule supporting MKMVA.



- A court decision disbanding the Magashule-supporting Free State ANC leadership structure and the ANC leadership now imposing a “political solution”.
- It’s unlikely Magashule’s ‘consultations’ with ANC leaders will stop the process against him.
- Of the threatened mass disruptions by the RET faction nothing has come so far.
- And the most recent efforts by Magashule and his allies to mobilise a revolt against the party leadership, have been thwarted by the NEC’s smaller but powerful National Working Committee (NWC).

What comes next?

If the Zuma/Magashule faction could somehow hold on to the powerful SG’s office, they could arguably use it to influence the composition of branch- and regional-level delegations to the NGC and the National Conference, or to mobilise a grassroots movement against Ramaphosa at these two events. However, their hold on this office seems to be slipping fast.

It is possible but unlikely that Magashule and Zuma may finally admit defeat and the whole thing fizzles out. More likely is that they will continue agitating for Ramaphosa’s fall - and their evasion of justice - even if ousted from the ANC, with attempts to use branch structures and events like the NGC to achieve Ramaphosa’s recall or an early elective conference. Or they could break away and form a new radical populist party - perhaps even merging with the EFF to become the new official opposition.

Time will tell. But for now, we are seeing the last desperate final struggle of a disruptive force, with Magashule, Zuma and the RET faction rapidly losing ground. But it could still get messy.