

SOUTH AFRICA: Ramaphosa ‘captures’ the ANC, may turn right and merge with DA
ANC’s internal governance erosion threatens structural stability

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As South Africa’s ruling African National Congress (ANC) party starts its 55th National Congress, it is increasingly apparent that the historic internal institutional checks and balances that in the past constrained any one ANC leader from wielding absolute power have significantly eroded. President Cyril Ramaphosa may yet emerge from the party conference with probably more raw political power than any modern leader of the ANC. Contrary to public expectations Ramaphosa is likely to aggressively re-orient the ‘captured party’ rightwards, rather than leftwards, in an attempt to squelch the strong challenge from the radical pro-black Economic Freedom Front (EFF).



Much like Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Ramaphosa may yet oversee the natural transformation of the once egalitarian leftist, socialist, revolutionary, non-racialized liberation party into a semi-authoritarian, quasi-democratic, anti-radical, anti-leftist entity that will seek to prolong the party’s 100+ year shelf life by sheer will of raw political force. Ramaphosa may merge the ANC and the center-right opposition Democratic Alliance (DA) party, much like how Former President Mbeki absorbed portions of the remnants of the National Party of Former President FW De Klerk into the ANC in 2005. In anticipation of

strong internal opposition to such a rightward move, Ramaphosa and his allies may turn to strong-man type tactics to squelch internal opponents.

A period of party expulsions, excommunications and outright trumped-up arrests of internal political opponents may be afoot. The recent statement by a strong Ramaphosa ally, the Mines and Energy Minister Gwede Mantashe that the CEO of the country's beleaguered power utility was 'attempting to overthrow the government' is a cause for alarm. And yet just as in China, Turkey or Russia, the much respected South African judiciary, fixated on the issues of 'state capture' from the President Jacob Zuma years are unlikely to stand in the way of Ramaphosa's transformation.

Despite an independent panel led by a respected unpolitical judge finding that the president had likely violated his oath of office in a pervasive and systematic attempt to skirt the country's currency regulations and criminal laws, nearly all but a handful of ANC members of parliament voted to shield Ramaphosa after the ruling party hastily shut down internal debate on the matter and declared the report null and void. So far the judiciary and state prosecutors remain silent.

Yet despite this increasing erosion of internal democracy within the ANC and institutional checks on its leaders, the top global ratings agencies still assign South Africa democratic 'governance ratings' which are increasingly wholly inflated and unrealistic in light of the ongoing metamorphosis of the ruling party.

While Zuma and his allies captured portions of the state to largely enrich themselves and fund their political and personal activities, Ramaphosa and his allies are in the process of capturing the party to reorient the party away from its radical socialist leftist roots. If Ramaphosa succeeds the ANC may come to resemble the AKP of Turkey or United Russia. However if Ramaphosa fails, the EFF is likely to grow in popularity among disgruntled ANC members and ultimately defeat the ANC - plunging the country towards a radical economic program of high taxes, land and mine nationalizations among many other anti-capitalist moves. The DA sensing this shift is likely to join forces with an even more authoritarian/antidemocratic Ramaphosa than risk the EFF coming to power.

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