

CYRIL RAMAPHOSA'S STRATEGIC PRESIDENCY

Klaus Kotzé

Abstract

Strategic communication has a significant and often overlooked domestic dimension. In states facing precarious power arrangements, strategic communication is critical to commanding the internal strategic environment. South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa is currently facing the task of reforming a government weakened by years of corruption under the leadership of former president Jacob Zuma—Zuma's rule is best characterised by the term 'state capture'. Ramaphosa's challenge is to balance and lead two seemingly opposing centres of power. His leadership requires compromise and consensus; it requires a creative approach. Ramaphosa embodies national values to inspire trust and to persuade the citizens of South Africa to adopt his vision as theirs, forging a collective will to achieve national goals. This article examines Ramaphosa's strategic approach to leadership, adding to the understanding of how strategic communication can be exercised domestically.

Keywords—*South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, domestic strategic communication, strategic communications, social compact, presidential style*

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‘Our 1994 Consensus risks unravelling precisely because we have failed to utilise the settlement for what it was—a vehicle of transition for far-reaching changes, not an end point in itself.’

Cyril Ramaphosa¹

When Cyril Ramaphosa became president of South Africa on 15 February 2018, not only did he take office at a time of national distress, he assumed the presidency at a time when strategic communication² plays a paramount role in shaping and commanding strategic environments.³ Today, purposeful and persuasive communication performs a significant role in the form and procedure of presidential strategy. Communication has always been a central tool of executive power, but in our increasingly interconnected world, the information environment has become more diffuse and human agency within it more widely distributed. This means that strategic communication, which is often seen as an exercise beyond national borders, is pertinent locally as well. ‘Strategic communication is as important to internal audiences as it is to external ones’;⁴ it is the means for ‘persuading the nation’s citizens to support the policies of their leaders so that a national will is forged to accomplish national objectives. In this context, strategic communication is an essential element of national leadership’.⁵ For an impressionable state such as South Africa, with its complex history and unconsolidated power base, enlisting the persuasive power of local beliefs and shaping the strategic environment is of primary importance. The state leadership must establish authority through prevailing in the battle of ideas and crafting the national interest. In the modern hypermediated era of diffused communications, citizens have greater access to power; power has taken on an increasingly distributed form. It is incumbent upon leaders to obtain trust and legitimacy through values and principles. Leadership gives strategic communication its internal form by crafting messages that serve this national purpose.

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1 Cyril Ramaphosa quoted in Mcebisi Jonas, *After Dawn: Hope After State Capture* (South Africa: Pan Macmillan, 2019).

2 Strategic communication is broadly defined as ‘the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfil its mission...It further implies that people will be engaged in deliberate communication practice on behalf of organizations, causes, and social movements’. Kirk Hallahan, et al., ‘Defining Strategic Communication’, *International Journal of Strategic Communication* Vol. 1, Issue 1 (2007): 3–35.

3 The strategic environment is the domain where leaderships interact and interests are advanced; ‘strategy is subordinate to the nature of the strategic environment’. Harry Yarger, *Strategic Theory for the 21st Century: The Little Book on Big Strategy* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, February 2006).

4 Steve Tatham, *Strategic Communication: A Primer* (Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, 2008).

5 Richard Halloran, ‘Strategic Communication’, US Army War College, *Parameters*, Autumn 2007.

The strategic potential of communication has not been lost on Ramaphosa. He has used communication purposefully, advancing his claims to transcend the unenviable situation he inherited from his predecessor, Jacob Zuma. Ramaphosa's approach to restoring the nation to health, and inspiring faith in the national project and advancing it, has been centred upon a strategy of vision and pragmatism. Following an initial period of *Ramaphoria*, a number of questions have emerged around his executive performance and methodology. Domestic and international observers have become frustrated by the slow pace of progress in dealing with Zuma-era misdemeanours, while noisy commentators with limited or adversarial agendas are confusing a complex narrative. This article examines Ramaphosa's strategic approach, revealing the complexity of the situation he is facing. It offers insight by surveying and detailing Ramaphosa's regime of persuasion, describing the ways, means, and ends of his strategic communication.⁶

Historical background to South Africa's current domestic strategic environment

A brief history will help readers appreciate the complex strategic environment in which Ramaphosa's administration is situated. The National Party (Apartheid) government (1948–94) was authoritarian, deeply ideological, and strictly hierarchical. The state was not a dictatorship but rather a parliamentary regime with regular elections. After 1994, the parliamentary state continued, changing to adopt non-racial, universal suffrage. The Apartheid government had waged potent information warfare through its counter-insurgent Total Strategy for almost two decades.⁷ Its campaigns were based on control; it employed force to achieve persuasive ends. It was, consequently, unable to co-opt the credible, conservative black elite, whose support was necessary for maintaining the Apartheid government's strategic position of 'normalcy'. Eventually, the government accepted that it could not use the military to force compliance under Apartheid.

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⁶ Strategy is understood as how (ways) power is applied (means or resources) to achieve desired objectives (ends). Values and norms underpin these ways, means, and ends. Strategy is not reaction or management, it is the application of power towards controlling the space or environment.' Harry Yarger, 'Toward a Theory of Strategy' in J. Boone Bartholomees Jr. (ed.) *Guide to National Security Policy and Strategy, 2nd Edition* (Pennsylvania: US Army War College, June 2006).

⁷ Total Strategy drew on French General André Beaufre's edict that liberation struggles were psychological battles where a wide array of techniques must be applied to persuade the opposition to accept the terms imposed on them and give up their fight. Klaus Kotzé, 'Strategies of White Resilience: From Apartheid to Installing Democracy', *African Yearbook of Rhetoric* Vol. 8 (2018).

In the late 1980s, under new leadership, the government's strategy changed. The boisterous securocrat PW Botha⁸ was replaced by the savvy, self-proclaimed 'practical idealist',⁹ FW de Klerk, who started breaking down the militarised Apartheid state after his election. De Klerk shifted the government's approach from repression to negotiation, from maintaining a divided country under Apartheid to installing democracy. In his speech at the opening of Parliament on 2 February 1990, De Klerk employed his strategic communication, using the *kairoitic*¹⁰ international moment to make the first move towards a just, new political order, setting the nation on the transition from Apartheid to constitutional democracy. His rhetorical performance achieved its strategic ends, removing constraints to negotiations and laying the foundation for sweeping reforms.

De Klerk knew that the African National Congress (ANC), the direct political rival of his own National Party, which held credibility among a broad majority of South Africans, could not turn to its former benefactor, the defunct Soviet Union, to support an armed uprising. The collapse of the Soviet Union compelled the ANC to revise its strategy and rescind its armed struggle; until then the ANC's position had been that 'the renunciation of violence [...] should not be a pre-condition to, but a result of, negotiation'.¹¹ They now recognised that the question of South Africa's future would not be determined by violent revolution, but by negotiation and political persuasion. The agreement de Klerk negotiated, to pursue a united, democratic future for South Africa, critically shaped its politics and the presidencies that followed. Nelson Mandela understood this reality. The former militant did not meekly become the saint he is now held to be. Instead, Mandela acutely perceived and employed strategic communication. The ANC leader was pragmatic. He adapted, coaxed agreement from his adversaries, and waged a comprehensive battle for the hearts and minds of the public. He disabled his opponents tactically, through persuasion. Mandela famously encouraged his followers, that it is 'precisely because Afrikaans is the language of the oppressor we should encourage our people to learn it, its

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8 Botha cared little for persuasion. In 1985, during a public address, his administration announced that he would steer South Africa onto a new path. Instead Botha shouted, waved his finger, and pledged that he would not cross the Rubicon, as had been suggested, but that he would hold down the Apartheid fort. Hereby he would commit the 'worst political communication by any country at any time'. Dave Steward, [From the Rubicon to February 2nd 1990](#), *politicsweb*, 11 February 2011.

9 Jacobus Marthinus Aucamp, 'Die Nasionale Party van Suid-Afrika se Laaste Dekade as Regerende Party, 1984–1994' (Bloemfontein: University of the Free State, Doctoral Dissertation, 2010).

10 *Kairos* is the Greek word that refers to the quality of time; an opportune time for action.

11 Nelson Mandela quoted in Mac Maharaj, *The ANC and South Africa's Negotiated Transition to Democracy and Peace* (Berlin: Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, 2008).

literature and history'.¹² Mandela built legitimacy, confidence, and gravitas into the South African presidency. He recognised all the country's diverse people as one; instead of advancing the idea of separateness, he endorsed national unity and therefore sovereign legitimacy and stability. The ANC's moral authority and popular support allowed the party to claim responsibility for forging democracy and ending Apartheid. This superior account captured the public imagination and won the confidence of the people. The ANC's political project successfully limited the potency of domestic opposition; it has since held an absolute majority in all national elections by presenting itself as synonymous with the ideals of the South African state. By generating a rich conceptual story, which blurred the lines between party and state, it secured the political trust of the nation.

With the ANC safe in its place as the national political force, the contest for power has shifted to take place within its ranks. While the state is constituted by ideals, the practice of politics hinges on political realities. In 2007, for the first time in more than 50 years, there was a radical contest for leadership of the ANC, initiating what has become the party's new normal of factional rivalry. As had been the case at the ANC's 38th National Conference in 1949, when Mandela, Walter Sisulu, and others challenged the moderate establishment, there was a bitter battle for the character of the ANC at the 52nd National Conference in Polokwane.¹³ Thabo Mbeki, Mandela's immediate successor, who reigned as a philosopher-king, was pitted against Jacob Zuma's leftist camp. Although Mbeki's grand narratives continued Mandela's appeal to ideals, his aloof intellectualism and detachment from the everyday lives of the poor was seen as neglect for their struggle, ripening the ground for Zuma's populist declamation and radical aspirations. Zuma sang and danced to anti-Apartheid songs, comprehensively defeating his opponent with a 60% share of the vote. His argument was direct: 'We have achieved political freedom and now we must achieve economic freedom.'¹⁴

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12 Nelson Mandela quoted in Mac Maharaj, *Reflections in Prison* (Johannesburg: Penguin Random House South Africa, 2010).

13 Academic and political commentator Susan Boyesen said of the contest that it was 'no-holds barred, a brutal and all-consuming disagreement between two major ANC groupings...it divided the whole organisation'. Susan Boyesen, *The African National Congress and the Regeneration of Political Power* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2011), p. 41.

14 South African Press Association (SAPA), 'Zuma Promises Economic Transformation', *The Citizen*, 20 February 2014. [Accessed 5 September 2019]

Jacob Zuma subjugates the state to the ANC

Jacob Zuma's convincing election presented a shift from leading by aspirational ideals to pursuing specific, tangible ends. His strategy was materially motivated, which attracted the ANC's influential partners in the tripartite alliance—the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). Zuma's ANC presidential acceptance speech made it clear that a National Democratic Revolution (NDR)¹⁵ would be the party's guiding philosophy and the foundation of his leadership. The goal of the NDR was nothing less than revolutionary, it was 'the deracialisation of ownership and control of wealth', the establishment of a National Democratic Society characterised by the resolution of 'antagonistic contradictions between the oppressed majority and their oppressors; as well as the resolution of the national grievance arising from the colonial relations'.¹⁶ The NDR's prescriptive measures, such as direct demographic representation, were at odds with the national Constitution. The often contradictory pursuits of the ANC vis-à-vis those of the state is the axis whereupon South Africa's strategic environment has tilted.¹⁷

Under Zuma, unlike Mbeki or Mandela, the national project would be subordinated to the leadership and goals of the ANC, not to the precepts of the national Constitution. Zuma explained: '[The ideal state] should not be confused with tactical positions that the liberation movement may adopt from time to time.'¹⁸ Zuma's election was charged by the perception that 'we are only at the beginning of a long journey to a truly united, democratic and prosperous South Africa'.¹⁹ At the ANC conference that re-elected Zuma in 2012, he urged: 'It is time to ask questions about the present and future [...] the last 18 years was

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15 From 1960 to 1991 the Soviet Union was the ANC's closest and most important ally. The ANC's concept of the National Democratic Revolution was adopted from a late-1950s Soviet theory about how newly-independent, former colonies were the natural allies of the USSR and would naturally develop into socialist states after a transition through a period of non-capitalist development. Revolution is 'fundamental change in society', and the National Democratic Revolution is 'a process of struggle that seeks to transfer power to the people and transform society...'. From ANC, *Strategy and Tactics: Building a National Democratic Society*, adopted by the ANC's 52nd National Congress, 16–20 December 2007, p. 21–22.

16 South African Communist Party, 'The Road to South African Freedom', 1962.

17 'Our political transition was never only about freedom from political bondage' in §19 and '[T]he NDR concept captured far-reaching social transformation, which went beyond the formal election of a democratic government' in §34 from ANC, 'The Second Transition?', ANC discussion document towards national policy conference, Version 6.0, 5 March 2012.

18 ANC, *Strategy and Tactics*, 2007.

19 ANC, 'The Second Transition?'.

the first transition. We are calling for a dramatic shift [...]'.²⁰ The first transition was from the Apartheid state to the enfranchisement of all races; the second transition was to be from a situation where economic power, which still largely lay in the hands of a white minority, would find a more equal distribution. This goal was to be achieved by whatever means appeared necessary, whether constitutional or not. When Zuma addressed the National Assembly in 2014, not as ANC President but as Head of State, and committed to the second transition wherein he said the country was entering 'a new radical phase',²¹ he effectively captured the state²² under his faction in the ANC that advanced a radical approach to transformation. Zuma's advance of radicalism determined that the policy of the ANC, not that of government, would function as the authoritative guiding hand of national political power.

Zuma understood that it was the ANC that had elected him to the office of President. It was the ANC that he served and that would keep him in power. Though Zuma faced widespread allegations of corruption and malfeasance, it was his obligation to the ANC that led to his eventual downfall.²³ The same document that guided Zuma's radical leadership, the ANC's *Strategy and Tactics*, adopted at the fateful 52nd National Conference in 2007, was revised in 2017 to take an unequivocal position consolidating power in the hands of the ANC: 'in giving leadership in the various centres of power [...]. [...] from the branch level to the national structures, the ANC should act as the strategic centre of power for its members [...]'.²⁴ The concentration of power in the party effectively gave its president preeminence over the national president. However, at that juncture, Zuma's corruption and misdeeds caught up with him. At the 54th National Conference of the ANC, on 18 December 2017, Cyril Ramaphosa narrowly defeated Zuma's ex-wife and supporter Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma and became president of the party. This sealed Zuma's fate: the party ordered him to resign from the presidency. Having stressed the party's role as the seat

20 Jacob Zuma quoted in 'ANC: Second Transition Concept Welcomed', *News24 Archives*, 28 June 2012. [Accessed 1 September 2019]

21 South African Press Association, 'Zuma Promises Economic Transformation', 20 February 2014.

22 *State capture* is defined as: 'the efforts of a small number of firms (or such groups as the military, ethnic groups and kleptocratic politicians) to shape the rules of the game to their advantage through illicit, non-transparent provision of private gains to public officials [...] This concept links the problem of corruption with vested economic, social and political interests, which in turn form key obstacles to economic reform.' World Bank, 'State Capture', n.p., n.d.

23 Before his victory in the 2007 ANC election Zuma contested Thabo Mbeki, saying: 'I don't think we need two centres of power, it's not good...the organisation is more important than individuals.' Moshoeshe Monare, 'Zuma Opposed to Two Centres of Power', *IOL*, 14 June 2007. [Accessed 4 September 2019]

24 §142 of ANC, *Strategy and Tactics of the African National Congress*, discussion document of the 5th National Policy Conference, 30 June –5 July 2017.

of power, Zuma was hoist with his own petard and reluctantly submitted his resignation as President of the country on 14 February 2018. The next day, Ramaphosa went on to be elected, unopposed, as interim President of South Africa by the National Assembly. His dual leadership role as president of the ANC and of South Africa is forged by the dynamic sensibilities of both national and party power. His choices and actions are contingent on the tension between the strategy of the ANC and that of the state; his position as state president is subject to his ability to preserve party unity. Any examination of Ramaphosa's presidency must recognise the circumstances of his claim on power.

Enter Ramaphosa: The challenge

Ramaphosa's presidential strategy is determined by the complex challenge of leading two centres of power. He must balance state and party interests. His task of aligning ANC policies to fortify solidarity in support of his leadership determines the strategic environment. His strategy is founded on compromise and consensus. An examination of Ramaphosa's path to power reveals these conditions to have shaped his character and his leadership.

Ramaphosa gained his political profile as the founder of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), an influential labour structure formed in 1982. The NUM was the first black union to achieve significant bargaining power. He was widely recognised for his negotiating skills when he played a pivotal role in South Africa's transition to democracy. In 1994 he was appointed Chairperson of the Constitutional Assembly, the body responsible for drafting South Africa's Constitution. When it appeared that, although Mandela touted him to be his successor, Mbeki was favoured by the ANC, Ramaphosa left politics for business. In 2012 Ramaphosa returned as Zuma's Deputy President, preparing to take power in 2017, as is the tradition of succession in the ANC. Ramaphosa would bide his time. As his previous track record had shown, he would act only once he was in charge.

The organisational decay and system of patronage in the ANC constrain Ramaphosa's political situation. The militant radicalisation of the party under Jacob Zuma and the doctrine of the second transition remain his greatest challenges. Striking a balance between party and state depends on Ramaphosa's ability to set the agenda and to persuade his party members to follow his lead. He must proclaim a set of ideals, without aggravating any vital constituency of

the ANC. He must claim and situate his power, maintaining order while avoiding factional volatility. He must rely on strategic communication to advance his leadership, coordinating all the resources at his disposal to shape perceptions and build influence. Strategic communication is assessed here as a holistic practice—both a process and an approach. Given that ‘everything communicates’, the ‘key to an effective strategy is therefore to understand actors and audiences, then integrate policies, actions and words across government in a coherent way to build national resilience and leverage strategic influence’.²⁵ Today’s hyper-mediated and mediatised strategic environment empowers and obliges national leaders to direct perception in order to persuade. A president has the executive authority to create meaning according to his personal ethos—to shape the national story. We now consider Ramaphosa’s strategic communication, drawing on Harry Yarger’s understanding of strategy as the ways, means, and ends of power.²⁶

Ramaphosa’s strategic ends

Pursuing South Africa’s aspirational Constitution

Ramaphosa’s statements and actions establish him as a Constitutionalist.²⁷ His strategic communication pursues a vision of a capable South Africa as depicted in the country’s aspirational Constitution. As set out in the Preamble to the Constitution, Ramaphosa’s government seeks to ‘heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights; lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law; improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person; and build a united and democratic South Africa able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations.’²⁸ As Chairperson of the Constitutional Assembly, Ramaphosa was one of the architects of

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25 *Hybrid Threats: A Strategic Communications Perspective*, (Riga, Latvia: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2018).

26 See Footnote 6.

27 ‘[Constitutionalists] build state capacity to deliver on the 1994 promise of equality and development by managing rents to promote investment and service delivery.... [They] operate within the confines of the Constitution and are invested in institutional building. That is, social and political transformation is deemed contingent on giving flesh to the socio-economic rights defined in the Constitution by building state administrations able to work programmatically to achieve progressive policy outcomes.’ Mark Swilling et al, *Betrayal of the Promise: How South Africa is Being Stolen*, (Centre for Complex Systems in Transition, May 2017). [Accessed 15 May 2019].

28 *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, as adopted on 8 May 1996 and amended on 11 October 1996 by the Constitutional Assembly.

what he has endearingly described as ‘the birth certificate of the nation’.²⁹ The Constitution ‘belongs to all of us [...]. We claim it as ours, it enshrines the rights that make us live as South Africans, and we will protect it because it belongs to us.’³⁰ ‘[I]t is the repository of everything, everything that I ever dreamt of, that I ever wanted in my life. It gives me strength, it gives me hope, it protects me. If anyone were ever to violate my rights, our Constitution is my shield.’³¹ Ramaphosa’s proclaimed allegiance to the Constitution gives clarity to his strategy of empowering the state while not alienating the ANC. This appears to be the inverse of Zuma’s approach; the former president’s legacy lives on through a contingent of senior party representatives who remain loyal to him. This reality prevents Ramaphosa from taking sides against factions within the party. Instead, he seeks to empower the state by encouraging confidence in his leadership of the ANC.

Ramaphosa’s strategic communication purposefully crafts a consolidated national identity to advance the national interest. Given the constraints placed on him by the political legacy of his predecessor, Ramaphosa wants to demonstrate that he is advancing the national interest above that of the party. He prioritises strategic command of the nation over leadership of the party; he leads the party through leading the nation. These circumstances demand that strategic communication be employed beyond the marketing of party politics. With the evolution of power in the 21st century, where strategic communications play a critical role in shaping the domestic strategic environment, this inward-looking consolidation of the national interest is extremely valuable. As the world is opening up and power becomes diffused and takes on new, often irregular forms, the primary safeguard against information campaigns attacking sovereign states is the clear articulation and consolidation of the domestic ethos. The expression of local beliefs and values is primary. A state cannot effectively exercise foreign policy when there is local disorientation and confusion about the national interest.

The State of the Nation

Ramaphosa’s strategy emerges from his public speeches and political gestures. The day after he was elected, on 16 February 2018, Ramaphosa gave his first

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²⁹ Janet Smith, ‘A Constitution That Put the Nation First’, *JOL*, 6 May 2016.

³⁰ Cyril Ramaphosa quoted in ‘Conversation on the Constitution’, Nelson Mandela Foundation, 9 March 2012.

³¹ Lauren Segal and Sharon Cort, *One Law, One Nation: The Making of the South African Constitution*, (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2012).

presidential address—the State of the Nation (SONA), South Africa’s version of America’s State of the Union address. There is no legislative requirement for this annual speech to be given at the opening of the new parliamentary session; it is a ritual introduced by Mandela. The address is a ceremonial reconstitution of the state’s values where, in ‘one gesture, in one voice, the nation finds itself being “stated”’.³² Parliament defines the SONA as ‘a political statement of the President that sets out a social contract that seeks to [...] constitute the fabric of our nation’.³³

The SONA is a pomp-and-circumstance celebration—guns salute, children wave the national flag, and, in a manner unique to South Africa, a praise-singer or *Imbongi* introduces the President to a joint sitting of Parliament, usually to singing and clapping. Ramaphosa’s SONA speech was the ideal platform from which to launch his presidential strategic communication, to present a ‘non-partisan address that maps a holistic pathway to the future’.³⁴ Ramaphosa clearly understood that he would be addressing a larger audience than those who had congregated in the House of Assembly to hear their newly elected president speak. The SONA is a national and international media event, and therefore an opportunity to claim national authority, embody the vision and the mission of the state, and thereby inspire in the public and in South Africa’s business partners a sense of confidence. Departing from Zuma’s strategy of reciting his government’s plan of action for the upcoming year, Ramaphosa used the occasion to rally his audience around an alluring story of what South Africa could become. He appealed to his constituents to form a consensus around the adoption of civic responsibility—to adopt and exhibit the Constitutional values as their own.

As Hans Kelsen pointed out in 1967, power does not follow from statements of fact, but from embodiments of norms.³⁵ Such embodiment ‘epitomizes the republican identification of politics and persuasion, for embodiment is a rhetorical accomplishment that in turn fuses speech and action, speaker and subject’.³⁶ Leadership, as an act of influence, does not simply subscribe to certain norms. It is through the embodiment of norms that leadership is claimed, and

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³² Philippe-Joseph Salazar, *An African Athens: Rhetoric and the Shaping of Democracy in South Africa* (London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), p. 22.

³³ ‘The Significance of the State of the Nation Address’, *In Session* The official magazine of the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (Pre-SONA edition, 2019) p. 6.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Hans Kelsen, *Pure Theory of Law* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

³⁶ Robert Hariman, *Political Style: The Artistry of Power* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 116.

norms are redefined. Ramaphosa's claim to power has been indirect; he does not assert himself personally as a great leader to be followed, but embodies the norms and values enshrined in the Constitution he believes in.

Ramaphosa's inaugural SONA set his agenda, it opened a new chapter by marking the political transition that had taken place. The new president commenced his first public speech act by cordially thanking the former president. Ramaphosa concludes and transcends the Zuma era by creating a bridge, over Zuma's leadership, to that of Mandela. His words did not simply close the door on Zuma but sought to expunge his command by invoking Mandela's moral authority: 'Guided by his example, we will use this year to reinforce our commitment to ethical behaviour and ethical leadership. In celebrating the centenary of Nelson Mandela, we are not merely honouring the past, we are building the future [...]. We should honour Madiba³⁷ by putting behind us the era of discord, disunity and disillusionment [...] because a new dawn is upon us. It is a new dawn that is inspired by our collective memory of Nelson Mandela.'³⁸

Claiming the New Dawn

Throughout his presidency, Ramaphosa has consistently promoted the idea of the New Dawn. This project represents his vision of South Africa overcoming the preceding dark episode, a period he later called the 'nine lost years',³⁹ and ushering in a new, revitalised era. Ramaphosa was elected to his first full term as President by the National Assembly on 22 May 2019. At his inauguration speech on 25 May, Ramaphosa claimed personal responsibility for the New Dawn by stating: 'Through the irrefutable power of the ballot on 8 May,⁴⁰ South Africans declared the dawn of a new era.'⁴¹ Ramaphosa's New Dawn rests on a number of pillars.

First, it is premised on sovereign accord; stability and order must first be secured. On many occasions, including at the SONA, Ramaphosa has emphasised the need for national unity: 'South Africa belongs to all who live in it, a diverse but united nation. Bound together by a common destiny [...] we are a nation at one.

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37 Madiba is Nelson Mandela's clan name.

38 Cyril Ramaphosa, 'State of the Nation Address by President of the Republic of South Africa', *The Presidency*, 16 February 2018.

39 Ferial Haffajee, 'Ramaphosa's "Nine Lost Years" Speech Impresses Old Mutual CEO at Davos', *fin24.com*, 24 January 2019.

40 The 2019 South African General Election was held on 8 May 2019. The African National Congress, led by Cyril Ramaphosa won 57.5% of the vote. Ramaphosa was elected by the National Assembly two weeks later.

41 Ramaphosa, 'Address by President Cyril Ramaphosa on the occasion of the Presidential Inauguration', *South African Government*, 25 May 2019.

We are one people [...] while there are many issues on which we may differ, on these fundamental matters, we are at one.⁴² By reigniting a feeling of national solidarity, Ramaphosa is seeking to counter the ongoing fraying of the political settlement achieved by Mandela to advance the imperative of any national political arrangement: the preservation of stability. To inspire the people in a unified and common purpose, he draws on Mandela's gravitas, reminding them of the covenant Madiba sought to build to advance a just and capable state. Ramaphosa affirms that the 'defining thing about the new dawn must be our ability to govern well, to create a capable state [...] a state where we will know that everybody who is in the state is there to advance the interests of our people.'⁴³

Second, the New Dawn is both the commencement and the realisation of renewal, both an end to the previous era and a forward-looking process. The new president claims that South Africa is 'emerging from a period of stagnation and strife'.⁴⁴ He seeks acceptance for reform from the same entities (the ANC and the ANC-led government) that caused the atrophy. The New Dawn promises to address the deficiencies of the previous regime, such as 'policy uncertainty, the weakening of public institutions and high-level corruption [that] undermined investor confidence and public trust'. 'We are now firmly on the path of renewal and rebuilding', says Ramaphosa.⁴⁵ Furthermore, by recognising the failures of both the ANC and the government, the New Dawn stimulates a deliberative approach to creating a better South Africa. In bringing the deficiencies of the past to light, Ramaphosa has initiated renewal, inspiring the nation to recreate itself: 'Fellow South Africans, our country has entered a period of change [...] Our task, as South Africans, is to seize this moment of hope and renewal, and to work together to ensure that it makes a meaningful difference in the lives of our people.'⁴⁶ Ultimately, Ramaphosa describes South Africa's renewal as the resolve to 'break with all that divides us, to embrace all that unites us'; to 'cure our country of the corrosive effects of corruption'; to 'restore the integrity of our institutions'; and 'to advance the values of our Constitution'.⁴⁷ Ramaphosa authoritatively communicates that he is capable of ensuring this longed-for renewal.

42 Ramaphosa, 'State of the Nation', 2018.

43 Cyril Ramaphosa speaking in a YouTube clip, 'Ramaphosa says his style of leadership is identical to Madiba's' published by *Eyewitness News*, 31 May 2018.

44 Jonisayi Maromo, 'Ramaphosa Says SA "Emerging From Period of Strife" As He Welcomes Diplomats', *Independent Online IOL*, 11 December 2018.

45 *Ibid.*

46 Ramaphosa, 'State of the Nation', 2018.

47 Cyril Ramaphosa, 'State of the Nation', Speeches of the South African Government, 7 February 2019

And finally, Ramaphosa's strategic narrative about the New Dawn advances his vision of South Africa as a fully transformed, democratic state, while simultaneously announcing that the journey toward democratic consolidation is yet to be completed. This path is presented as the natural continuation and maturation of the first transition. Herein, Ramaphosa presents an eloquent plan to neutralise the idea of the radical second transition; his vision counters the NDR's millenarianism. Instead of moving society towards a pre-configured outcome, the New Dawn returns the national focus to the approach and tools used in the earlier transition led by Mandela. His approach was based on ideals and process, on inclusion, compromise, and reconciliation. By recalling to mind that unprecedented democratic transition out of Apartheid, Ramaphosa employs sentimentality and a sense of achievement to inspire belief that the promises of the New Dawn can indeed be accomplished.⁴⁸ Apartheid was finally dismantled in 1994; in 2019 Ramaphosa used the 25th anniversary of this remarkable achievement as a kairotic moment when South Africans could recognise the intervening failures of government and renew their energy and direction.⁴⁹ With his promise of a New Dawn he hoped to inspire the people to adopt his resolve and make this national project their own. For his vision to be realised, the government must have the necessary institutional capacity; the slogan—*New Dawn*—must be translated into state practice through effective administration. However, it is the people, not the politicians, who must achieve renewal and democratic consolidation, and the people have not been uniformly inspired and mobilised. Moreover, the limited nature of the reforms Ramaphosa has enacted so far is causing public frustration; analysts and public commentators are further constraining his political momentum by labelling Ramaphosa slow and indecisive.⁵⁰ To achieve his goals he must have the people behind him.

Ramaphosa's strategic ways

'Politics is an art... By understanding how matters of style are crucial to the practice of politics, we discover not sham, but design, not decoration, but a world of meaning.'

Robert Hariman⁵¹

48 'Together we are going to make history. We have done it before and we will do it again, bonded by our common love for our country, resolute in our determination to overcome'. Cyril Ramaphosa, 'Together we will make history', *In Session* The official magazine of the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (Issue 1, 2018), p. 7.

49 'This year, as a diverse people and as a united nation, we will celebrate one of the greatest human achievements'. Ramaphosa, 'State of the Nation', 7 February 2019

50 Mpumelelo Mkhabela, 'Ramaphosa Viewed as Being Slow and Indecisive', interview with Mpumelelo Mkhabela on the 702 radio station programme *Breakfast with Bongani Bingwa*, 27 September 2019.

51 Robert Hariman, *Political Style: The Artistry of Power* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 195.

Cyril Ramaphosa's style

Ramaphosa's strategy is expressed through his style; the way he employs the tools at hand to pursue his goals. Style gives dynamism to values, showing how ideals are expressed. Communication must always suit its purpose, setting, and audience. Style is not incidental but critical to how an argument is constructed. Style is the way in which a strategic environment is claimed; how alternative ideas and truths are displaced.⁵² A leader's claim to authority will be styled in a specific manner: Ramaphosa embodies the values of the Constitution to demonstrate the South African President's belief in the sovereignty of those values.

Ramaphosa's use of the Constitution to mobilise a multi-faceted response to South Africa's unique political and social problems best illustrates what biographer Anthony Butler calls his 'visionary pragmatism'.⁵³ Unlike many in the ANC, Ramaphosa 'could not commit his imagination to Marxist revolutionary fantasies. He worked hard to create institutions of self-government [...] demonstrating an ingrained pragmatism'.⁵⁴ The roles Ramaphosa played in founding the National Union of Mineworkers, in negotiating the end of Apartheid, and in chairing the Constitutional Assembly all exemplify his conviction that properly-formed institutions can give momentum to the embodiment of ideals.

As president, Ramaphosa facilitated negotiations regarding the National Minimum Wage Act. The Act presents a mechanism for stabilising the South African labour market; it has been criticised as both insufficient and untenable, given the national labour-wage equation. However, this Act is categorically not about the introduction of a minimum wage; it is not intended as a simple fix. Instead, its value lies in the institutionalising purpose it serves. It provides a framework for addressing the complex and heady issues of labour relations and income inequality. The introduction of the minimum wage was preceded by four years of negotiations. 'In the end', said Business Unity's Tanya Cohen, 'we did manage to find a sweet spot, between what is socially acceptable and economically efficient'.⁵⁵ For the consensus-seeking Ramaphosa, 'the national minimum wage represents the triumph of cooperation over conflict, of negotiation over confrontation [...] it could only be resolved through negotiation

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52 Ibid., p. 3.

53 Anthony Butler, *Cyril Ramaphosa* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2007).

54 Ibid., p. 384.

55 Tanya Cohen quoted in Tehillah Niselow, 'Ramaphosa: "Historic" Minimum Wage to Come Into Effect on January 1 2019', *Mail&Guardian*, 7 December 2018.

[...]. This national minimum wage is a steppingstone towards having a living wage.⁵⁶

Ramaphosa's leadership style can be seen in the way he managed the negotiations that ultimately led to the implementation of the National Minimum Wage Act. As is the case with the other offices he has held, Ramaphosa acts from a position of authority, corralling the various stakeholders involved in an issue into negotiating a settlement wherein all parties are afforded a portion of their claim. By accommodating some elements of everyone's wishes, he binds them as members of a consensus decision. The collective process is superior to specific claims. The leader is bolstered by a united assembly. However, this increases the pressure on the President to act decisively, as expectations inevitably mount and, when they are not met with assiduousness and follow-through, can lead to increased public frustration.

Ramaphosa's strategic foundation is his ability to negotiate and achieve consensus. He maintains a dispassionate position regarding specific details; 'the benefits of the compromise were greater than the costs'.⁵⁷ He first listens to the various motions and only then decides which position to take; this allows him to frame a situation without overpowering it. It also affords the public a sense of agency and builds trust through broad inclusion. Ramaphosa is able to frame an issue so that others accept the way it is expressed, and then steer the resolution. Given South Africa's diversity, a unified outcome is preferable to a one-sided decision. He maintains his advantage through inclusivity, by speaking for all South Africans; this tactic also aids him in surmounting the arguments of those who present partisan views.⁵⁸ In Ramaphosa's words: 'the strength of doing this is to be able to bring together South Africans who have a contribution to make, who have views to put across so that we engage everyone and come out with best solutions ever. And this is what I will say defines my style of leadership, which was Madiba's style of leadership.'⁵⁹ Equating himself with Mandela is a tactical move on Ramaphosa's part. It remains to be seen whether he can imitate Mandela's executive decisiveness.

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56 Cyril Ramaphosa, 'President Ramaphosa National Minimum Wage event, Kliptown: 07 Dec 18', YouTube video, *SABC Digital News*.

57 Butler, *Cyril Ramaphosa*, p. 395.

58 In an appeal to national unity, Ramaphosa shut down the left-wing Economic Freedom Fighters' call to drop a part of the Apartheid era Anthem from the compounded Anthem of the new South Africa.

59 'Ramaphosa says his style of leadership is identical to Madiba's', YouTube video, *Eyewitness News*.

Identification

Engaging the diverse population in cooperation and consensus stimulates all parties to identify themselves as South Africans.⁶⁰ Drawing on Mandela's pathos, Ramaphosa uses symbolism and metaphor to shape his image in line with the story he wishes to tell; by being a leader who identifies with national ideals he evokes solidarity. The skilful employment of this identification can be a powerful tool for forging a feeling of unity. The persuaded are guided by the persuader who appears as one of them, not apart or superior, assuming their interests as his and instituting specific forward-looking attitudes. Ramaphosa wants to be a leader who achieves his end by persuading the people to identify with the goals and visions of the state, engaging with their sense of civic responsibility.

Slogans such as the 'Rainbow Nation' are programmatic injunctions that have been used to shape South Africa's national identity. Inviting the public to identify with him, Ramaphosa employed another slogan. At the conclusion of his inaugural SONA, Ramaphosa strategically appealed to both public endorsement of his leadership and to popular participation in his vision for the country, saying: *thuma mina* ['send me']. These words are taken from a song by late South African jazz great, Hugh Masekela. At the end of his speech Ramaphosa quoted the lyrics: 'I wanna be there when the people start to turn it around...I wanna lend a hand, send me.'⁶¹ Ramaphosa invoked one of South Africa's greats to appeal to the people, in their own language, to take ownership of the state of their nation and to claim the New Dawn. Ramaphosa implores the people to follow him, saying: 'now is the time to lend a hand...Now is the time for each of us to say "send me".'⁶² 'Thuma Mina' is an inspirational call to each South African to answer Masekela's charge to imagine and to build an inclusive, just, and equal society.

Towards a new social compact

Throughout his communications, Ramaphosa returns to the urgency of re-establishing a national social compact. A social compact is an active agreement

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⁶⁰ 'We are all called upon and enjoined to heal the divisions and the pain of the past. This is a collective task ... it is our task as a nation. It belongs to all of us ... I am confident that we can move with urgency and purpose to forge a new social compact to revive our economy, to create jobs, reduce inequality and effect fundamental social economic transformation'. Ramaphosa, [President Cyril Ramaphosa: Response to debate on State of the Nation Address 2019](#), *South African Government*, 26 June 2019.

⁶¹ Hugh Masekela, lyrics to the song [Send Me \(Thuma Mina\)](#) from the album *Time*, released 5 November 2002.
⁶² Ramaphosa, [State of the Nation](#), 2018.

that enjoins all citizens of a country, as participants in the practice of democracy, to engage in nation-building and the creation of national accord. Given the intractable political situation that Ramaphosa inherited upon assuming the presidency, he chose to set the social compact as a cornerstone of his strategic communication. He implores: ‘If we are to achieve the South Africa we want, we need a new social compact.’⁶³ A social compact is the glue that binds the members of a society to their leader and ensures their civic agency. It serves as a foundation for the process of forming a consensus among diverse players. The value of the social compact is that those involved are more willing to subordinate themselves to the public interest. Citizens are assured that they will not be weakened but empowered by the institutional capacity they are asked to help build from the bottom up. This approach brings the public into partnership with the government, which for its part reciprocates with a commitment to effective governance.⁶⁴ According to Ramaphosa: ‘Our task, as South Africans, is to seize this moment of hope and renewal, and to work together [...]. We will do this by getting social partners in our country to collaborate in building a social compact on which we will create drivers of economic recovery.’⁶⁵

Ramaphosa advances the validity of the social compact by submitting that it was Mandela who first argued for its value. Mandela is quoted as saying: ‘None of us acting alone can achieve success. We must therefore act together as a united people, for national reconciliation, for nation-building.’⁶⁶ The appeal of the new social compact draws on the success of the transition from Apartheid to democracy. It was the social compact, comprehensively entered into by the diversity of South Africans, when people recognised each other as equals, refusing to be forced apart, that broke down the walls of Apartheid. The government was forced to fundamentally change its strategy; it could not ‘centrally reform into one, a system which under Apartheid was distinctly two... [it could not] permanently include a majority it considered as other’.⁶⁷ To Ramaphosa the social compact is the path to renewal made possible by consensus: ‘The progress we have achieved over the last year—and the successes we need to register in the months and years ahead—ultimately depends on our ability to revitalise and

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⁶³ Ramaphosa, ‘*State of the Nation*’, 20 June 2019.

⁶⁴ ‘Let us forge a compact for an efficient, capable and ethical state, a state that is free from corruption, for companies that generate social value and propel human development, for elected officials and public servants who faithfully serve no other cause than that of the public’. Ramaphosa, ‘*Inauguration Address*’, 2019.

⁶⁵ Ramaphosa, ‘*State of the Nation*’, 2018.

⁶⁶ Ramaphosa, ‘*The Presidency Dept Budget Vote 2019/2020*’, *South African Government*, 17 July 2019

⁶⁷ Kotzé, ‘*Strategies of White Resilience*’, p. 56.

strengthen the social compact between government, business, labour and civil society.⁶⁸

By establishing a new social compact Ramaphosa seeks to generate greater public endorsement of the Constitution as a transformative framework; the Constitution comprises an authoritative compendium of compacts, where the 'body politic is formed by a voluntary association of individuals; it is a social compact by which the whole people covenants with each citizen and each citizen with the whole people'.⁶⁹ The social compact is a pragmatic expression of the democratic project. South Africa's aspirational Constitution fortifies Ramaphosa's compelling vision of the ideal state; the people are encouraged to recognise the superiority of this goal and are asked to employ their civic agency in its pursuit. The inclusive approach invites participation, shaping the situation to build common ground and to deny and displace the radicalism of the Zuma era.

The establishment of a social compact is also a remedial action taken in response to the increasing sentiment that Constitutionalism is under threat from civic atrophy and populism. This is the point of view held by former Deputy Finance Minister Mcebisi Jonas who was dismissed by Zuma after blowing the whistle on his corrupt activities. Jonas suggests that outright cynicism 'which views the 1994 consensus as a carve-up among the elites' has overtaken the nostalgic feeling of the 'rainbow nation, emblematic of a time when South Africans broke out of their narrow ideological straitjackets and placed the national interest above all else';⁷⁰ '[T]he 1994 consensus has reached its sell-by date', said Jonas. 'In fact, it is unravelling.'⁷¹ As opposed to transformation through the Constitution, there has been a rise of those who see the Constitutional settlement as an obstacle to radical transformation. The institutionally destructive state capture of the Zuma period facilitated by this very argument. It is not within the ambit of this paper to detail state capture in South Africa. It can, however, be described in brief as the improper and illegal restructuring of the state apparatus to pursue Zuma's 'radical transformation', subordinating national institutions through deliberate

68 Ramaphosa, 'Remarks by President Cyril Ramaphosa during the WEF Global Press Conference', The Presidency, Republic of South Africa, 23 January 2019.

69 'Constitution of Massachusetts, 1780', *National Humanities Institute*.

70 Mcebisi Jonas, 'Mcebisi Jonas: We Need a New Social Compact to Fight the Comeback by Looters and Rent-seekers', *Daily Maverick*, 13 August 2019.

71 'Mcebisi Jonas gives glimpse into his book "After Dawn: Hope After State Capture"', interview with Mcebisi Jonas on the 702 radio station programme *Breakfast with Refilwe Moloto*, 15 August 2019.

strategy.⁷² The legacy of state capture has left South Africa in a weakened condition, its confidence damaged and its national legitimacy crippled. Jonas supports using the social compact to repair the damaged state. The brokering of ‘a new consensus’, says Jonas, ‘will require new levels of leadership vigour across political formations as well as business, labour and civil society [...]. Without a new vision of where we are going [...] our new consensus will be stillborn.’⁷³

Visionary approach

Ramaphosa’s visionary approach is a central feature of his strategic communications; vision and the social compact are his ways of framing the national situation and are key to countering the enchantment of radicalism. Vision is the path through which Ramaphosa connects the troubled present to the renewed future. His re-introduction of vision into modern South Africa’s political strategy and discourse has caught the public and the political establishment off guard. He has been criticised for the impalpable proposals he made in his post-election SONA. He departed from what had become the tradition under Zuma of listing multicomponent short-term solutions to complex problems. Instead Ramaphosa has invoked a visionary achieved state, a ‘dream we can all share and participate in building’.⁷⁴ His ‘performance of nation’, a reimagining of the state,⁷⁵ is an appeal to the people of South Africa to embrace the New Dawn and a renewed social compact; ‘I would like to invite South Africans to begin imagining this prospect.’⁷⁶ Unlike the previous social compact, which reconciled the two sides of Apartheid’s divide, Ramaphosa commits to using his power to move the nation forward. Demonstrating belief in the future must be the first step towards overcoming the present political malaise. While empowering the people, it also makes room for criticism.

Ramaphosa directs the nation’s gaze towards a visionary goal, realigning the hearts of the people with the aspirations of the struggle against Apartheid, transporting the power of the Freedom Charter and the Constitution to the present day. Asking the nation to dream is a strategic gamble: ‘We share a common

72 ‘The pattern [of state capture] is a simple one: You remove management, and put in compliant management. You remove boards, and put in boards that are compliant.’ Mcebisi Jonas quoted in Patrick Cairns, ‘Jonas: All Institutions in SA are Under Threat’, *Moneyweb*, 12 October 2017.

73 Mcebisi Jonas, ‘State Needs Trust-based Model of Economic Recovery and Governance’, *BusinessLive*, 21 June 2018.

74 Ramaphosa, ‘State of the Nation’, 2019.

75 Ibid. ‘I dream of a South Africa where the first entirely new city built in the democratic era rises, with skyscrapers, schools, universities, hospitals and factories’.

76 Ibid.

future, and we need to forge a common path towards its realisation.⁷⁷ Given the constraints and national tensions with which they must contend, Ramaphosa's dream seeks to embolden the public with a vision all South Africans can share. If he is able to capture the imaginations of the people, inspiring a feeling of solidarity, Ramaphosa's dream has the chance to transcend party lines. Dreaming, as was the case with 'the American Dream', transcends policy or partisan lines. It liberates and empowers the individual to claim personal responsibility. The strategic use of vision not only shapes the aspirations of the nation, it is also a salve for desperation. By redirecting attention toward a positive future, he avoids being criticised when short term targets are not met. In a tactical move to motivate the people to open their hearts and minds to his vision, Ramaphosa concluded his response to the post-election SONA debate by quoting from Proverbs: 'Where there is no vision, the people perish.'⁷⁸

Strategically, the overture to vision stimulates both private and corporate initiative and responsibility to empower the framework and function of national institutions. Presently the public sector wage bill comprises an enormous 14% of national GDP.⁷⁹ South Africans are receiving some of the world's worst value-for-money services. The bloated administration and welfare state,⁸⁰ together with its failing state-owned companies, are in serious trouble, drowning the state in debt and are only being kept afloat for strategic reasons. This is taking place while the citizenry's political fealty to the ANC and the influence of the far left impede critical adjustment. The ANC is kept in power because, unlike under Apartheid, the majority of people have representation and the right to services. Regardless of its factionalism and poor service delivery, the ANC remains the only option for the majority of South Africans. This has once again been proven during the recent election when the ANC received 57.5% of the national vote. The troubled state of the nation, together with the delicate balance of power in the ANC, necessitate Ramaphosa's desperate strategic approach, to inspire belief and renew the economic viability of the state through support for entrepreneurial activity.⁸¹ Rather than turning to privatisation, a measure that may be blocked by the ruling alliance, Ramaphosa has entered into discussion with

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77 Ramaphosa, 'Response to debate on State of the Nation Address 2019'.

78 Ibid.

79 Tom Head, 'Revealed: Bloated Public Sector Wage Bill Tops R500 billion', *The South African*, 20 January 2019.
80 More than 17 million South Africans—almost one third of the population—were social grant beneficiaries in 2017 and that number is continuing to grow. Sabelo Mtantato and Thando Ngozo, 'SA's "Welfare State" is in Trouble', *Mail & Guardian*, 28 September 2018.

81 'There is another role we want the State to play, that is the entrepreneurial role. A role where a State is able to take some risks and enable the economy to grow'. 'State of the Nation', 2019.

powerful unions to get them on board to help strategically restructure the state-owned companies he calls ‘sewers of corruption’.⁸² By combining his strategy of cooperative consensus-building and inspiring civic responsibility with increasing support offered to private initiatives, especially small businesses, Ramaphosa has commenced a new programme aimed at entrepreneurial revitalisation of the state.

Ramaphosa’s strategic means

The state as a strategic resource

Ramaphosa seeks to advance his strategy for renewing South Africa as a capable state through the agency of the state itself. The primacy of the state as a symbolic tool of power is clear to Ramaphosa. Observing the display of military resources at Mandela’s 1994 inauguration, he reflected on the potency of the state to tell a definitive story and thereby act as a legitimate facilitator. He wrote that, under Apartheid, ‘to the majority of South Africans these displays of military might were a grand symbol of nothing more than white minority aggression and terror [...]. [O]vernight their function—and the symbolism that we attach to them—had fundamentally and irreversibly changed. No longer were the jets instruments of oppression. Now they were guardians of democracy.’⁸³

The power of the state rests on an undisputed claim to sovereignty. To be legitimate, the state must be perceived as such—the regime must tell a convincing story. In order to achieve justice, the government must express justice through its institutions. Having assumed leadership of a compromised state, Ramaphosa must employ that same state to re-establish authority and stability. Renewal functions as a process whereby a vision is achieved through the deployment of resources. One means of doing this is to continue the tradition of establishing commissions of inquiry initiated by previous presidents. Commissions such as the Nugent Commission of Inquiry into Tax Administration and Governance investigate institutional propriety to restore credibility and improve capacity. The commission is a useful mechanism for telling an authoritative story about justice, for exercising national command. The power of these internal mechanisms lies in the strategic narrative they convey, in the exhibition of procedure and not

82 Caiphus Kgosana, ‘State-owned enterprises are ‘sewers of corruption’: Ramaphosa’, *Times Live*, 31 May 2018.

83 Cyril Ramphosa, ‘Swords into Ploughshares: The Challenge of Effective Governance in a Democratic South Africa’, *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, Vol. 9, No 1 (1996): 17–24.

in their findings, which are rarely binding and often neglected. Instead, these are performances of governance. They are aspirational stories that recognise irregularities rather than correcting them, making suggestions for how to proceed into the future. Commissions of inquiry, routinely overseen by senior justices, present an increasingly legal approach to governance concerns. Their prominence and the reliance placed on them indicate a recognition of the failure of political procedure. On the other hand, commissions perform the revitalisation of institutional capacity;⁸⁴ transcending the past by composing a picture of amelioration.

To undo the state capture he inherited, a core concern of Ramaphosa's programme has been to reclaim state policy instruments. Initially hamstrung by ineffective departments, he has freed resources and consolidated authority by streamlining his Cabinet from 36 to 28 ministers. Credible, experienced candidates have been appointed to critical positions including the Head of the National Prosecuting Authority and the Commissioner of the South African Revenue Service. Ramaphosa has focused on a careful, and therefore slow, clean-up of government institutions, while restraining political opponents in his party. Instead of imposing his authority, Ramaphosa's strategy is to re-capacitate state institutions so they can both model and facilitate best practice and recover the goods lost as spoils to state capture.⁸⁵ To signal the end of the authoritarian overreach of the state capture period, he has charged panels comprised of experts with the task of selecting new heads of organisations. In so doing he is distancing himself from the selection process and redressing the patronage system associated with Zuma's appointments, targeting the populist cult of personality developed under Zuma. Ramaphosa has enacted a new, meritocratic precedent based on building consensus. This, among other actions, is directed at correcting the past by empowering institutions, instead of individuals, to lay the foundation for a capable state before implementing policies.

However, this process has proven to be time consuming, frustrating the public desire to see results. Ramaphosa is deliberate in his approach, instilling proper procedure from the top without allowing himself to be rushed or the process to become politicised. In order to set an example of best practice, he needs

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⁸⁴ 'The Commission is critical to ensuring that the extent and nature of state capture is established, that confidence in public institutions is restored and that those responsible for any wrongdoing are identified'. Ramaphosa, 'State of the Nation', 2018.

⁸⁵ Ramaphosa has established a Special Tribunal in the Special Investigating Unit that targets the recovery of misappropriated and looted state funds.

to follow the book. By depoliticising the power of the state bureaucracy, he is subverting interests ulterior to the power of the state. In so doing Ramaphosa discharges his responsibility—to both the party and to the electorate—to lead.

Tools for restructuring and renewal

While it is too early to determine its effectiveness, the attention given to structural considerations strategically builds influence and confidence. In a particularly insightful speech delivered to the World Economic Forum in 2019, Ramaphosa announced South Africa's plans to create an environment that is attractive for development: 'We therefore come to Davos with a single message, and this year the message is that South Africa is on a path of growth and renewal.'⁸⁶ To advance this charge, his government is leading investment into the state. The government has begun to reallocate public spending to strategic sectors such as agriculture and small business development and has launched a stimulus package and an infrastructure fund⁸⁷ to advance economic growth and investment. Ramaphosa's promotion of opportunities such as the recently established African Continental Free Trade Agreement, are means to bolster South Africa's strategic attractiveness. He has, furthermore, personally launched an ambitious investment drive, aiming to raise \$100 billion in new investments during his administration. For this he has appointed a team of business and finance experts that include Trevor Manuel, former Finance Minister and current senior advisor to investment bank and financial services company Rothschild & Co.

Ramaphosa has implemented targeted reforms to ensure that policies are enacted. These include new 'visa regulations to encourage more visitors, as well as making it easier for investors and business people to visit South Africa'; a Mining Charter 'that balances the need for transformation with the imperative for new investment', the allocation of a 'high-demand radio spectrum to accelerate broadband access and promote competition within the sector'; and the signing of 'long-outstanding agreements with independent power producers' to restart South Africa's successful renewable energy projects.⁸⁸ All these are corrective measures to redress corrupt Zuma-era policies and bureaucratic stagnation.

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86 Ramaphosa, 'Remarks by President Cyril Ramaphosa during the WEF Global Press Conference, Davos-Klosters, Switzerland', *The Presidency*, 23 January 2019.

87 'Government has committed to contribute R100 billion into the Infrastructure Fund over a 10-year period and use this to leverage financing from the private sector and development finance institutions.' *State of the Nation*, 7 February 2019.

88 Ramaphosa, 'Remarks, Davos-Klosters, Switzerland'.

All have commenced but have not been completed. They are also all measures intended to diminish the government's involvement, advancing South Africa's strategic attractiveness for investment and growth. These reforms to consolidate and streamline regulatory processes aim to improve the ease of doing business in South Africa, which currently ranks 82nd in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index. Ramaphosa has targeted this instrument as a barometer for success, indicating that his 'administration has set itself the ambitious goal of being in the top 50'.⁸⁹ In another move to improve the functioning of his government, Ramaphosa has established the Policy Analysis and Research Service to improve the development and coordination of policies across government; a similar policy unit that performed as a clearinghouse for policy processes under Mbeki was disbanded under Zuma.

A central means of Ramaphosa's strategic communication has been the hosting of summits. Summits bring together various stakeholders to engage in diverse matters of interest. They are places where opportunities are discussed and where consensus can emerge dynamically. These are platforms to gather participants to engage with specific issues, share resources, and form compacts. At the inaugural South Africa Investment Conference in October 2018, Ramaphosa secured the first \$20 billion tranche of his projected \$100 billion in new investments. He also hosted a Jobs Summit: 'to align the efforts of every sector and every stakeholder behind the imperative of job creation...[and] to come up with practical solutions and initiatives'.⁹⁰ In 2019 Ramaphosa hosted the 1st South African Digital Economy Summit, addressing the opportunities provided by advanced technologies and the challenges of digital disruption. Both there and at the Presidential Health Summit, Ramaphosa asserted the need for establishing both a digital compact⁹¹ and a health⁹² compact with the people of South Africa.

Ramaphosa's dynamic approach to renewal can be seen in his government's ongoing review of the National Development Plan—since it was adopted in 2012, not much of South Africa's detailed long-term guide to prosperity has been

89 Ramaphosa, 'Keynote address by President Cyril Ramaphosa during the Ease of Doing Business Seminar, WEF on Africa', *The Presidency*, 4 September 2019.

90 'State of the Nation', 2018.

91 'Our nation is forging a digital compact that is a critical contributor to our development as a nation'. Cyril Ramaphosa, 'Address by President Cyril Ramaphosa to the 1st South African Digital Economy Summit, Gallagher Convention Centre, Johannesburg', *The Presidency*, 7 May 2019.

92 'This Compact illustrates what we can achieve when we plan and work together to fix what is wrong with our country.' Ramaphosa, 'President Cyril Ramaphosa: Signing of Presidential Health Compact', *South African Government*, 25 July 2019.

implemented. The plan is currently being reviewed to offer clearer, more up-to-date policy guidelines. Here again Ramaphosa has appealed for cooperation: ‘We want to work with you, and for you to challenge us, to bring added rigour to the work of government [...] this is a government that is not afraid of new ideas, and of new ways of thinking.’⁹³ In showing that the government recognises its failures and by appealing to the public for participation, Ramaphosa uses the opportunity provided by the revision of the National Development Plan, not only as a signal of departure from the past, but also as a tactical approach to renewal. By restructuring the architecture of government, the new ANC is providing people and businesses with opportunities to take action. Some initial examples include the reduction of port and rail tariffs and the implementation of spatial interventions such as special economic zones. These ventures appeal to citizens’ ambitions and duties. These new policies represent the government’s first steps toward upholding its end of the promised social compact and an invitation to members of the public to engage in the business of renewing the state. Given the state’s level of depletion, these policy tools are structured to induce members of the public to employ their creativity and their assets in rebuilding the state. While it is too early to conclude whether it will be successful, the extent of Ramaphosa’s strategy demonstrates the desperation both he and his government feel.

Conclusion

Ramaphosa’s precarious leading of both a party in turmoil and a captured state requires communication that is clear and targeted. To avoid being drawn into political battles, he first aligns himself with the values of the state. By crafting his message in service of the national interest, he puts the building blocks of state into place. Ramaphosa uses strategic communication to transcend Zuma’s legacy. He claims his leadership in the name of advancing the national project. He builds his strategic narrative around the values of the state, personifying the ideals of consensus and compromise. Ramaphosa’s embodiment of the national Constitution is a strategic approach to advancing ideals conducive to restoring order and to building a stable and capable state while countering radicalism. This alignment to the highest standard of legitimacy is strategic. It confounds his opposition.

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⁹³ ANA reporter, ‘Structural Faults in Economy, Corruption Take Away From SA’s Successes—Ramaphosa’, *Business Report*, 23 July 2019.

Ramaphosa's focus on ethos is a clear return to the era of Nelson Mandela. He thereby transcends the troubles of the recent past to remind the public of the early years of democracy when civic responsibility was strong. He employs the image of Mandela as the symbol of a nation reconciled. Mandela conceived South Africa's national values by crafting the nation in word. Ramaphosa's use of slogans such as the New Dawn and Thuma Mina, harkens back to the moment South Africa changed its destiny, a time of overcoming hardship and of national purpose.

Ramaphosa's communication is a call to action. He uses all of the limited means at his disposal to construct a seductive, forward-looking story of a united and prosperous nation. His leadership is not simply laying down a plan of action. Instead, it is the embodiment of a vision that calls the people to action. It is a campaign to stimulate and persuade citizens to support his mission, to forge a collective will towards achieving the national ends.

It is too early to tell whether Ramaphosa's ethos-driven strategic communication, aimed at a long-term vision, has persuaded the nation. This vision is used as a means of restoring order and stimulating the public to endorse his pragmatic short-term efforts. Ramaphosa's active drive for securing investments and restoring the confidence of the people shows that his dream is not merely a pipe dream. Instead, he uses his visionary approach strategically to engage stakeholders and elicit tangible commitments. His hands-on approach, not as a philosopher-king but a *summit king*, shows a concerted effort to drive his vision through pragmatic action.

Ramaphosa's leadership provides insight into a theory of domestic strategic communication that is useful in our hyper-mediated world. The increasingly diffuse nature of power in the 21st century requires leaders to use communication holistically to shape national realities and to deter adversarial foreign information campaigns. Domestic strategic communication expresses a leader's national ideas and ideals; the national ethos is communicated through leadership style. Ramaphosa embodies national values and norms to persuade the nation, demonstrating his approach towards reaching his ends. His leadership does not impose but stimulates an ideal; the nation is constituted and territorialised in word. Ramaphosa uses domestic strategic communication to persuade his audience to trust his message and to identify with it. If he communicates successfully, the people will adopt their leader's version of affairs, and their

agency can be applied to realising the goals of the nation; the citizens are to be empowered and emboldened to adopt civic responsibility, and Ramaphosa will lead by doing.

To achieve its end, strategic communication is used to cohere and guide the nation, pursuing a set of values and goals that is organic to the state and its cause. This approach will be critical as citizens of states around the world increasingly adopt a variety of identities, while facing foreign information campaigns. Strategic communication inspires the people to adopt the nation's ends as their own. Ramaphosa's approach has been illustrative.

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