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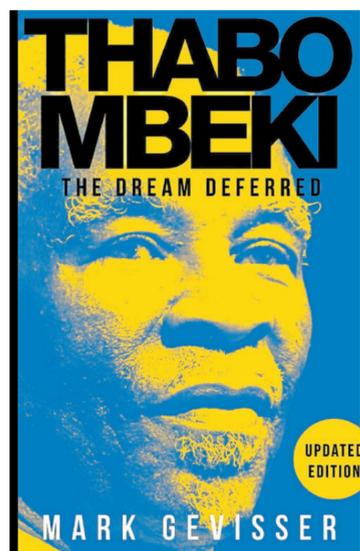
InSight

DID THABO MBEKI LAY THE TABLE FOR STATE CAPTURE?



After a decade of silence, former president Thabo Mbeki recently began to weigh in on the ANC. Picture: Thapelo Morebudi

Mark Gevisser, author of 'Thabo Mbeki, The Dream Deferred', a revised edition of which has been published, argues that even if Mbeki wasn't corrupt, his loyalty to his ANC comrades predisposed official institutions for Jacob Zuma's capture of the state



'Thabo Mbeki: The Dream Deferred — Updated Edition' is published by Jonathan Ball.

After nearly a decade of silence, Thabo Mbeki came out publicly as a fierce critic of the Jacob Zuma government during the ANC leadership battle of 2017. "The ANC has been captured by a dominant faction which in fact is not ANC," he said at a crisis meeting of veterans. "You wake up in the morning and you see a report — money that should have gone into the ANC has been stolen. That can't be the ANC."

But it was the ANC government, of course, that had plunged SA into its decade of darkness. In his recent statements, Mbeki has habitually split the party into good and bad. On one hand, there are loyal cadres who are legitimate members of the ANC; on the other, corrupt "counter-revolutionaries" who are impostors.

This is idealistic, in its insistence that the party's only redemption is through a return to the values on which Mbeki had been suckled. It is also revisionist, in the way it invokes an idealised struggle history uncontaminated by abusive practices and waged by people with only noble intentions. And it writes a script for Mbeki's own downfall in 2007.

The people who dispatched him were "not ANC": they were counter-revolutionaries, careerists, criminals. Mbeki's crusade for a clean ANC is certainly welcome. But was his party "captured" by corrupt outsiders who ejected him from power and destroyed his legacy? Or is the former president himself — despite his manifest achievements — an author of the misfortune that befell SA after his dismissal?

In my updated edition of *The Dream Deferred*, I argue that even if Mbeki was not corrupt himself, he helped set the table for state capture. He did this by promoting Zuma to be his deputy president, despite early evidence of incompetence and moral laxity; by implementing affirmative action policies ripe for abuse; by failing to stem corrupt practices, particularly where it related to funding the ANC; and by imposing "democratic centralist" control of the state through policies such as cadre deployment.

This meant valuing party loyalty over technocratic efficiency.

Mbeki embarked on their "political capture" of the state — as Ivor Chipkin and his team call it in their book *Shadow State* — and this opened the doors for the "institutional capture" that followed. Both projects professed lofty intentions: Mbeki's to steer the state's power towards the black majority; Zuma's to repurpose state institutions in the name of "radical economic transformation". But the system of patronage and party control entrenched in the Mbeki era morphed into the Zuma kleptocracy.

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Zuma and his henchmen flaunted their power with brazen impunity. Mbeki, on the other hand, was concerned with form and propriety. But he would shape this to his own needs, or what he believed was in the interests of the party, or the people of SA.

When, for example, Mbeki wanted to overrule parliament on the appointment of the crusading anti-corruption judge Willem Heath to the arms deal investigation in 2001, he did so by citing a legal opinion — even though the advice he cited had actually stated the opposite.

This helped achieve his end: a sweetheart investigation that cleared the government of all wrongdoing in the arms deal, and a rubber-stamp parliament.

It was a short step from here to parliament's acceptance of the nonsense that Zuma's swimming pool at Nkandla was actually a fire security measure.

The ANC's toothless parliamentary caucus is the direct legacy of Mbeki's presidency. Other watchdog institutions, such as the public protector, were filled with yes-men; it was only with the post-Mbeki appointment of Thuli Madonsela, by Kgalema Motlanthe in 2009, that this key statutory body began to do its job with any vigour.

FUNDING FOR THE ANC

At the core of Thabo Mbeki's political project was "BEE": using government resources and policies to leverage a new black middle class.

"The minute you have a system where people make money just by the connections they have, rather than the work that they do, the system is ripe for abuse," Moeletsi

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