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Zondo Commission – Zuma claims conspiracies and smear campaigns against him

The commission of inquiry into state capture, like many other structures before it, is the product of intelligence forces within and outside the ANC who are conducting a campaign to discredit former president Jacob Zuma. The spies have long had a campaign to discredit Zuma and remove him from any position of leadership.

This was the gist of his opening remarks before the commission on Monday, which marked his first day of testimony. Zuma was invited by the commission to respond to claims made by several witnesses who placed him at the centre of state capture.

"I've been vilified, alleged to be king of corrupt people and the most corrupt. I have been given many other names and never responded to those issues."

Without naming names, Zuma called out those who were advancing the wishes of their handlers by appearing before the commission to smear him. One such witness, former minister of minerals Ngoako Ramatlhodi, was said by Zuma to have been a spy placed in the ANC during his student days.

In this, Zuma was responding to allegations Ramatlhodi made against him in his testimony last year that he led a deeply factioned ANC, and refused to take accountability for auctioning off the country. "What an exaggeration from a lawyer," Zuma retorted on Monday, to chuckles from a group of supporters in the public gallery of the hearings. "He can't even substantiate [what I auctioned]. Did I auction Table Mountain or Johannesburg?"

"What made comrade Ngoako to behave in the way he did here saying that I auctioned the country? He was carrying out an instruction. Ramatlhodi was recruited when he was a student in Lesotho to be a spy," he said.

There were several others, besides Ramatlhodi, who within the party carried out instructions of intelligence structures. This became evident to Zuma as early in the 1990s; he received reports of spies having infiltrated the party in an effort to weaken its structures. Because he was the party's chief of intelligence, he was privy to developments that occurred, that involved these individuals.

The first salvo of these forces was to remove him from his intelligence chief position following the ANC's first elective conference in 1991. The idea behind the move, said Zuma, was to remove him from any decision-making positions. From then on a pattern started forming where all his attempts to move up the political ladder were met with blocks from the unnamed forces.

The attempts by the National Prosecuting Authority to charge him ahead of the ANC's Polokwane conference in 2007 were the machinery meant to disempower him. Zuma told the commission of a failed plan by former minister Penuell Maduna and Bulelani Ngquka to get funding from another ANC veteran Mzi Khumalo to enable them to get him arrested and charged so that he could miss Polokwane.

“The critical point is that the plan made years ago has been working and our enemy has recruited more than it was during the struggle...It is some of them who influence that there should be this commission, to bury Zuma.

“I want peace, I want harmony. That is why even those who have done things to me I don’t feel bitter about them.”

Until such manoeuvrings were carefully explored, there would be no fairly constituted structure to prosecute him, Zuma argued.

Zuma’s long speech followed a brief address by his lawyer Muzi Sikhakhane to commission chairperson Deputy Chief Justice Raymond Zondo. Sikhakhane’s main concern was the narrative that the commission seemed to want to portray of Zuma not being open to co-operating with the commission in its work.

He also called commission legal team head Paul Pretorius “condescending”, when the latter argued that all attempts made by the commission to get Zuma to co-operate had been unsuccessful.

Zuma, who continues to testify on Tuesday, said the campaign against him intensifies whenever a platform has been created for him to set the record straight and carry out his political fight. Even the very commission and how it is premised, as unearthing state capture, did not escape his attack.

“It was always a plan to deal with Zuma, and Zuma has been dealt with all the time,” he told the inquiry.

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