



# API Research Note

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## ANALYSIS:

### KENYA-SOUTH AFRICA RELATIONS

#### *Zuma visit opens new chapter in Kenya's ties with South Africa*

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President Jacob Zuma's visit to Kenya marks a significant turning point in the relations between two of Africa's pivotal powers.

To be sure, this is not the first visit by a South African leader to the country. Former President Nelson Mandela visited Kenya as one of the few African Countries he visited upon his release and election as South Africa's first black leader.

During his visit, he justified his trip as a tribute to the role Kenyan nationalists played in inspiring South Africa, particularly the ANC during its struggle.

He particularly singled out Dedan Kimathi, the Mau Mau general who led Kenya armed struggle against the British.

While acknowledging that Kimathi's military exploits had greatly inspired the armed wing of the ANC, the *Umkhonto We Sizwe*, during his public address at the Chinese built Kasarani International Sports Center, Mandela expressed frustration that Kenya had not accorded him and other freedom fighters the honor they deserved.

At the time, this raised serious protocol issues and Daniel arap Moi was quite unhappy.

Mandela had started stepping on the sensitive toes of tyrants of the time. I would say this was the start of the lukewarm relations with Kenya.

Under Mbeki, South Africa took a high-pitched ideological stance on Kenya. After the 2002 election, its Ambassador in Nairobi took a rogue stance, leaning heavily on the side

of what they considered the “pan-African” pro-nationalist wing of President Mwai Kibaki.

Although President Kibaki made desperate effort to make a state visit and to hold party-to-party consultations with the ANC, despite his ill-health at the time, Mbeki poured cold water on these efforts and covertly sided with and supported Kibaki’s rival Raila Odinga whose father, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, Kenya’s first vice-president, was said to have supported the ANC’s struggle. Indeed, one of Odinga’s (cousin) relative was (and is still) married to the Walter Sizulus! Between 2004 and 2008, South Africa’s foreign policy towards Kenya operated on this false dichotomy of the Kenyan elite as “pro-nationalist” and “pro-apartheid.”

It did not help matters that the ruling elite frustrated the efforts of South African companies such as the castle breweries and banks to penetrate and gain roots in the Kenyan market.

Kenya invoked nationalism: “Tusker: one nation, one beer” – and Castle lost the fight and relocated to Tanzania and Uganda. Local banks such as the Kenya Commercial Banks and the National Bank rejected overtures to sell stakes to South African investors.

What started as a misguided ideological war took on a serious and legitimate economic angle. And in 2008, when Kenya was in the throes of a life-threatening post-election violence, the Kenya-South Africa relations took on a new political dimension.

Sections of the Kenyan political class allied to Kibaki’s Party on national Unity (PNU) suspected that personalities close to the ANC government were not only bankrolling Odings but also giving him diplomatic support.

Expected, Kenya flatly rejected efforts by notable South African – Desmond Tutu and Cyril Ramaphosa –to play a role in the mediation of the crisis. Instead, the distant Ghanaians – John Kufuor and Kofi Annan –were preferred. Although Mandela’s wife Grace Marcel joined the team of the Panel of Eminent Africans who finally brokered the National Accord and Reconciliation Act, which restored peace in the Country.

A cold war has prevailed. South Africa leaned more to Tanzania as a former "front line state" during the liberation era a factor blamed by Kenya for Dar-es- salaam's cavalier attitude towards the East Africa Community (EACC).

Kenya fought back and steered a new coalition of the willing with Rwanda and Uganda with clear message that future of pro-South Africa Tanzania in the union was uncertain.

The warming of diplomatic relations between Pretoria and Nairobi is a product of Zuma government decision to avoid the earlier mistakes of the Mbeki era. In 2013 South Africa avoided any rhetoric on Kenya during the country's titanic battle with the West over the ICC cases involving President Kenyatta and his deputy.

It even voted with the rest in support of Kenya at the African Union-led offensive against the Hague- based court. Even Mbeki co-authored with the Ugandan scholar Mohamoud Mamdani a powerful ideological piece

"Courts can end civil wars" in the New York Times that effectively sealed the fate of ICC in Africa. I am almost certain that had South Africa played the same hawkish card over the ICC saga as it did during 2004-2008 intra-elite power tussles Zuma would not be visiting Kenya today.

Kenya has also played its role to mend fences with Africa's most advanced economy. It has not missed any major event involving South Africa including Mandela's funeral, World Economic Forum among others.

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