

Marikana: The rage will come again

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by Graeme Hosken

The Marikana tragedy has shown, say some analysts, that many citizens feel that the only way in which they can voice their dissatisfaction - and be heard by the government - is through violence.

The massacre of 34 Marikana miners - along with the murder of two policemen, two security guards and seven miners - in a wave of unprecedented industrial violence last year brought the deep-seated anger in South Africa to the fore.

A year on from Marikana, anarchy is the new normal A year on from Marikana, anarchy is the new normal The deaths, which made international headlines, shamed the country, its leaders, the police and the mining industry.

The rand depreciated and investors sold gold and platinum shares as the unrest spread and international ratings agencies downgraded South Africa's credit rating.

The Marikana tragedy forced the government to rethink some of its laws .

Only last month in a bid to curb violence President Zuma signed into law the Dangerous Weapons Bill, which prohibits the carrying of weapons such as knobkerries and bricks.

Some analysts believe that the violence at Marikana showed that South Africa was at war with itself.

"This country is facing a critical danger - a danger that has the potential of being unstoppable," said Institute for Security Studies policing researcher Johan Burger.

"The impact that the Marikana incident has had on South Africa, [and on] facets such as policing, is huge and potentially deadly.

"The trust is gone. The police, often seen as the face of the government, are blamed because they are the ones deployed to quell these violent protests."

But Aubrey Mashiqi, a political analyst, said the effects were not "obvious".

"You can argue there was further destabilisation in the platinum sector, and that that destabilisation was caused by Marikana, or that Marikana was a moment in the process of destabilisation."

Mashiqi believes Marikana forced the the "nation's collective mind to focus on the position of mining historically and currently in the South African economy". Of particular concern was the wealth gap between the mines and the miners.

Ratings agencies Moody's, and Standard & Poor's, both downgraded this country's credit rating, making it more expensive for the government to borrow.

Both cited uncertainty over government policy, and the tough labour relations environment, as reasons for their revised rankings.

Fitch waited until after the ANC's elective conference in Mangaung before reviewing South Africa's rating last year.

But, less than a month after the conference, Fitch also downgraded South Africa's long-term foreign currency credit rating.

Mashiqi said: "This week should be a week of reflection on the violence in our society.

"The level of violence and what makes people engage in such violence suggests that there is something sick about our soul. Violence is not only in the form of a bullet or spear, it is also the social and economic conditions in which people live.

"One can argue that the social and economic conditions of communities such as Marikana are a form of violence against the poor," Mashiqi said.

Security analysts fear that, a year later, the country remains balanced on a knife edge .

They say the police are unable to restore law and order, and the government seems incapable of quelling increasing public violence over jobs and wages.

Wits University political studies head Daryl Glaser said Marikana was symptomatic of a discontent that has existed for years.

"The dissatisfaction did not begin with Marikana," he said.

"It came as a surprise because it showed the extent to which people were, and still are, prepared to go- to risk everything in their continued demands for improvements to their rights and dignity.

"It showed that people were prepared to risk everything, including their job and their life."

Since the massacre, there have been up to 30 violent protests a day across South Africa.

Burger said there was widespread fear of another Marikana.

"The effect on the psyche of the country is felt not just by the average citizen but also by the police and the way they now approach public protests.

"Crippling restructuring policies, deadly xenophobic violence causing the deployment of the military to restore law and order, the killing of Free State community leader Andries Tatane, and continuous violent civil unrest, topped off by the Marikana massacre, has left the police reeling and their relations with communities in tatters," he said.

Attempts by police management to rework public policing policies to deal with deficiencies, according to Burger, were dealt a severe blow by the Marikana killings.

"Everything that could go wrong, in terms of police management trying to turn the tide ... by adopting new training policies, went wrong."

Service-delivery protests increased by 111% between 2011 and 2012.

"The pressure is mounting. No one wants another Marikana, or to face another commission [of inquiry].

"The potential for another Marikana has been created - and both the police and the government are worried - especially as there seems to be little they can do to stop it," said Burger.

The Marikana massacre has laid bare the country's political landscape.

Said Glaser: "Marikana showed the intensity of people's feelings and anger.

"The political impact of Marikana is clear - it shows that people are searching for an alternative to the ANC and its alliance partners, though the extent to which civil and industrial unrest will translate into political opposition to the government remains unknown.

"Though there is no risk of an apocalyptic uprising as there was in Egypt... South Africa, which is a very violent country, is at risk from increasing dissatisfaction.

"People see violence more and more as the only way in which to make themselves heard - as they saw with Marikana."

Glaser said the big question was now not whether the government could regain the trust of communities but whether it could contain the dissatisfaction.

"The question now is will people continue to voice their discontent from within the alliance or, as in Marikana, go outside, where they cannot be controlled, and voice their concerns.

"The limitations of the ANC in government are so great that it simply cannot catch up to address the problems.

"It is something that needs to be addressed urgently."

But ANC spokesman Jackson Mthembu said it would be premature to speak about the impact of Marikana before the Farlam Commission of Inquiry into the events that transpired there had finished its work.

"One must be careful not to jump the gun on something as sensitive as this, especially when the verdict is still out," he said.

Timeline:

April 22: First attacks reported. Six miners assaulted on their way to the Karee mine to work. A miner dies from his injuries the following day.

August 10: Lonmin mineworkers begin a strike over wages.

August 12: Clashes break out between supporters of the National Union of Mineworkers and the breakaway Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union over the strike.

August 14: Police respond to inter-union clashes after 10 people are killed, including two police officers who were beaten to death by workers.

August 16: Thirty-four miners are killed and 78 injured when police open fire on striking miners. Police arrest 270 workers.

August 23: The deaths of the 44 people killed at the Lonmin mine as a result of the strike are mourned and former ANC Youth League leader Julius Malema calls for a "mining revolution". President Jacob Zuma appoints a commission of inquiry into the events at Marikana.

August 30: The 270 arrested miners are charged with the murder of their colleagues who died on August 16.

September 3: Charges against the 270 miners are withdrawn and the first batch of workers is released from custody.

September 11: The Marikana death toll rises to 45 after the body of a man who was hacked to death is found.

September 12: Workers at Anglo American Platinum start striking in Rustenburg.

September 15: Police and soldiers move into Marikana. Several people are injured, including a woman who later died.

September 18: Miners at Marikana agree to end the strike after they secure pay increases of between 11% and 22%. Strikes and unrest, however, persist at other South African mines.

September 20: Unrest at Amplats mines continues as Marikana miners return to work. Amplats workers demand similar salary increases to those received by Lonmin miners.

October 1: The official inquiry into the August 16 killings begins in Rustenburg.

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