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Zuma Corruption Charges Revived

By [MICHAEL WINES](#)

JOHANNESBURG — A South African anticorruption strike force revived and expanded criminal charges on Friday against [Jacob G. Zuma](#), the new leader of [South Africa](#)'s dominant political party and the front-runner to become the nation's next president.

The charges, confirmed in an e-mail message by Mr. Zuma's lawyer, threaten to catapult the country into a political and legal crisis that could last well through 2009, when the next national elections are scheduled to be held.

The lawyer, Michael Hulley, said in the e-mail message that prosecutors delivered a summons to Mr. Zuma's Johannesburg home on Friday ordering him to stand trial for "various counts of racketeering, money laundering, corruption and fraud."

He did not elaborate, and a spokesman for the prosecutors did not return telephone calls. But the charges appear to stem from a lengthy investigation into bribes paid to secure a major military contract for a French arms maker in 2001. A court in Durban convicted Mr. Zuma's business adviser last year of funneling roughly \$170,000 to Mr. Zuma in exchange for help in winning contracts.

The corruption strike force, nicknamed the Scorpions, sought last year to prosecute Mr. Zuma on charges related to that case, but a judge rejected that effort on procedural grounds. With Friday's summons, that effort appears to have been revived.

Mr. Zuma, reached at a ceremony on his home turf of KwaZulu-Natal Province where he handed out Christmas presents to children, refused to comment on the charges, according to news reports.

South Africa's National Prosecuting Authority, which is taking up the charges, has long indicated that the corruption investigation of Mr. Zuma would eventually lead to a trial. But the timing of Friday's summons raised tensions in an already heated political struggle.

Last week Mr. Zuma, 65, wrested the leadership of the [African National Congress](#) from South Africa's president, [Thabo Mbeki](#), in a bitter showdown at a party conference. The victory capped a political comeback for Mr. Zuma, who had been deputy president and Mr. Mbeki's heir apparent until he was ensnared in the arms scandal in 2005, and Mr. Mbeki fired him.

Since then, the charismatic Mr. Zuma has cast himself as the victim of a government-led vendetta, while a party rebellion against Mr. Mbeki's more distant leadership has sent Mr. Mbeki's fortunes into decline.

Mr. Zuma's ascension to the presidency of the African National Congress effectively splits the leadership of the nation in half, with Mr. Mbeki heading the presidency and Mr. Zuma in charge of the machinery that has elected most of the nation's municipal officials and 7 in 10 members of Parliament.

Right or wrong, said Karima Brown, the political editor of the South African newspaper Business Day, many will see Friday's announcement of revived charges as an attempt to sabotage Mr. Zuma's career before he can absorb what is left of Mr. Mbeki's domain. "It's going to be a very testy time politically," she said. "It feeds into the notion that Zuma is being tried in the court of public opinion."

Mr. Zuma's lawyer, Mr. Hulley, seized on that notion in his e-mail message. The rush to indict Mr. Zuma during a Christmas holiday and after his election as the party president, he said, "is calculated to quickly redress the popular support and call to leadership of the A.N.C. which Mr. Zuma's election so obviously demonstrates."

"This lends credence to the long-held view that the Scorpions are influenced and their prosecution informed by political considerations," Mr. Hulley added.

Sipho Seepe, a longtime critic of Mr. Mbeki who leads the South African Institute of Race Relations, said he believed that the summons signaled the start of a political endgame between the forces supporting Mr. Mbeki and Mr. Zuma. "What you have here," he said, "is a declaration of war."

Other political analysts have been reluctant to endorse Mr. Zuma's suggestion that he is the target of a vendetta. The evidence that Mr. Zuma was bribed, outlined in an exhaustive trial of his business adviser, is compelling, they have said, especially since his business adviser has already been convicted of bribing him.

Mr. Zuma's trial, should it occur, promises to be a signal event in South Africa's 13-year-old democracy. The Constitution bars convicted felons from holding national office, so the trial could determine Mr. Zuma's political future. Mr. Zuma has also hinted that he will compel testimony from other senior officials of the African National Congress, bolstering speculation that corruption in the party's senior ranks was hardly limited.

Government inquiries into the arms deal in which Mr. Zuma has been swept up have proceeded glacially since 2000, when a gadfly legislator, Patricia De Lille, publicly called the \$4.5 billion contract corrupt to its core. A parliamentary inquiry largely dismissed her complaints, but the subsequent years-long Scorpions inquiry pointed to

Mr. Zuma, his adviser Schabir Shaik and a French contractor, Thomson-CSF, in a corrupt arrangement to sell ships to South Africa's navy.

Other reports, from journalists and officials in South Africa, Britain and Germany, have indicated that other senior African National Congress officials were involved in the deals. Mr. Mbeki has denied any improper role in the arms purchases.

Sharon LaFraniere contributed reporting.

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