

How Zuma's nuclear deal triggered the Eskom crisis

In the midst of the rolling blackouts last week, former President Jacob Zuma went on record as saying that his pet project nuclear deal with Russia would have averted the crisis at Eskom.



Former President Jacob Zuma. [123rf.com](https://www.123rf.com)

“The fact of the matter is nuclear could solve our problems, once and for all. Now we are in deep [trouble]. We are therefore increasing the debt of the country with no hope to bring it down. That’s a problem,” he told [Times Select](#).

However, the Southern African Faith Communities’ Environment Institute (Safcei) believes quite the opposite is true, and that Zuma’s obsession with the deal played a definitive role in the country’s intensifying energy crisis.

The proposal for Russia's Rosatom to boost South Africa's energy capacity with a R1trn nuclear plant was quickly dismantled when Cyril Ramaphosa took over the presidency in 2018.



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Andre van Wyk 5 Jun 2018



It is evident that Zuma still believes himself to be above the law, particularly since the Russian nuclear deal – which was shrouded in secrecy and suspicious dealings – was ruled unlawful and unconstitutional in the Western Cape High Court, says Safcei's Energy Justice Coordinator, Vainola Makan.



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15 May 2017



“A major problem with the nuclear deal was that the government deliberately excluded public input in these enormous decisions, and in some instances even bypassed Parliament. This is a trend that still continues today. We still find that the Department of Energy (DoE) makes decisions on behalf of the nation without proper public consultation. Why are we being

kept in the dark about the intentions of the ministry?”

She adds that Zuma’s comments are problematic for a number of other reasons. “Firstly, the nuclear deal was too expensive and would have required the country’s entire annual budget – which should be spent on public services such as healthcare and education, as well as building the economy, and more. And, it was the very threat of a nuclear deal that led to South Africa’s downgrade to junk status, for its potential to bankrupt the country.

“Secondly, a new nuclear plant would have taken too long to build, to have had any impact on the current energy crisis. It would take more than 10 years for a plant to be ready to produce energy and that is only if there are no delays, which are expected and common occurrences for such large-scale projects. And on top of this, the deal completely indemnified Russia in case of a nuclear accident, placing all liability on South Africa’s budget.

“Eskom’s problems became apparent more than a decade ago, under his watch, and the situation has only deteriorated further. We are seeing the impact of what happens when the country’s energy decisions become a political arena serving the only interests of a few people, superseding the interests of the whole. It is therefore urgent that the DoE finalises the Integrated Resource Plan (IRP).

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