

Zuma for almost two months in the Presidency.

There had been so many complexities during my time under Mbeki and Motlanthe. These were indeed controversial, to say the least. But, for now, one has to say that, like Ghana's great leader Kwame Nkrumah, he sometimes walked where angels feared to tread. Many have forgotten that, aside from his personal positions on HIV/Aids, Mbeki also challenged the pharmaceutical industry in terms of its pricing and monopolies that made antiretrovirals and other medicines for developing countries more expensive.

He also challenged the use of certain medicines that was different from the way in which they were used in developed countries. Key among the debates was the matter of nevirapine. Taking on the international pharmaceutical industry was like taking on the Mafia.

And, when I look back on tough times like those, I feel that, like Nkrumah, it was probably Mbeki's intellectual prowess which sank him. It sucked him further and further into dangerous territory.

Honesty, perhaps, was his – and Nkrumah's – downfall. They could not look at anything that bothered them and keep quiet, however risky speaking up may have been.

Our 2002 presidential visit to the US was soon turned into a tour to drive us towards a particular position on HIV and Aids. And what I heard throughout our meetings was that Mbeki's life was at great risk.

To the pharmaceutical industry, every statement he made that questioned the strategies and marketing of medicines to developing countries was dangerous. He was concerned. But if we said no, this would mean a dramatic reduction in the revenues and profits of those pharmaceutical companies internationally.

I returned from the US that year afraid for the president. I realised that the risk to his life would clearly be from external forces rather than from his own people. But that is another story.