Kalonzo’s thinning options to remain relevant

SATURDAY FEBRUARY 4 2017

In Summary

- The claim of Kalonzo’s inability to deliver puts Kalonzo in a hard political position and makes him desperate to be a presidential candidate in order to remain relevant.

- But he needs to be more convincing nationally than he has been and escape the impression that he is an indecisive watermelon that is beholden to peculiar forces.

Stephen Kalonzo Musyoka is a good man, a Kenyan of great undisguised ambition to be president of Kenya. He smiles a lot but the smile undoes him because it appears to be plastic.

Kalonzo Musyoka, leader of the Wiper Democratic Movement, at his office in Nairobi on January 20, 2017. PHOTO | JEFF ANGOTE | NATION MEDIA GROUP
Failure to change the image and to be in the final ballot box is likely to relegate his dream of being a kingpin into a perpetual dream that only he would share. He has lived close to, and has exercised limited, power as extended to him by particular political “sponsors”. The perceived sponsors include Mulu Mutisya, Daniel arap Moi and Johnstone Muthama. In between are such near sponsors as Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga. Kalonzo believes that Kibaki and Raila owe him political endorsements for presidency that did not come through.

He has an image problem, partly derived from the perception of dependency on political sponsors, that interferes with his desire to be recognised as the Ukambani kingpin, the way Paul Ngei and Mulu Mutisya did. He compares badly with Jaramogi and Raila among the Luo or Masinde Muliro and Kijana Wamalwa among the Luhya when it comes to exercising authority on his people. If only they could accept him, he might use that acceptance as a stepping stone to the presidency.

Being Mulu Mutisya’s protégé, he had entry into Moi’s inner sanctum as both Kanu organising secretary and Cabinet minister holding such critical portfolios as Education and Foreign Affairs. As organising secretary he wanted little to do with political reforms as he championed Moi’s policies including the Mlolongo fiasco.

In the midst of growing agitation for political pluralism, however, Charity Kaluki Ngilu entered the political scene and undercut his clams to influence by running for presidency in 1997 and performed extremely well. He became one of those Kanu stalwarts with dreams of leading Kanu once Moi was constitutionally out of office, along with Raila and Saitoti, only for Moi to thwart those dreams by endorsing Uhuru Kenyatta. These dreamers became political desperados and bolted into a partnership with NAK led by Mwai Kibaki, Kijana Wamalwa, and Charity Ngilu as an honourable way of the humiliation. Kibaki rewarded the new Kanu renegades, under Raila’s leadership, with critical ministerial positions in 2003.

CONSTANT PREOCCUPATION
How to advance his political ambition balloon, once Kanu was dismantled became a constant preoccupation, but the balloon kept being pricked by several realities. With time he developed a theology of Kalonzo political “sacrifices” to preach to Kenyans repeatedly the only problem being that voters could not understand it. He should have been the third president of Kenya, he preaches, except that he sacrificed for Kibaki who should therefore have anointed him. He sacrificed for his new “brother” Agwambo and it was time for Raila to return the favour.

Besides preaching the theology of Kalonzo “sacrifice” to other political individuals, he had trouble projecting a national image as the Ukambani kingpin. Apart from Ngilu, other challengers to his leadership include Machakos Governor Alfred Mutua and Senator Muthama with whom Kalonzo has been having public feud on whether or not to support Raila or force Kamba political aspirants into the Wiper Democratic Movement. The growing Muthama rebellion is surprising given the earlier impression that Muthama was not only Kalonzo-damu but also one of Wiper’s leading financial sponsors. The Kalonzo-Muthama public feud is an internal Wiper snug that is compounded by several elected officials defecting partly because of loss of faith in his leadership.

**NOT CAPABLE**

In part, this loss of faith is because Kalonzo appears parochial and not capable of giving a visible vision for either Ukambani or Kenya. His infamous 2014 remark to a journalist, who asked him questions, that his name betrayed the journalist actually betrayed Kalonzo’s anti-nationalist inclinations. He displayed the same proclivities in Narok, last week, when he appeared to gloat over the fact that Kenya’s candidate for the AU Commission chair, Amina Mohammed, was defeated. Defectors resent Kalonzo’s purported attempt to control every political player in Ukambani and claim he has little to show for the over three decades of holding top positions in government as minister and VP.

The claim of Kalonzo’s inability to deliver puts him in a hard political position and makes him desperate to be a presidential candidate in order to remain relevant.
But he needs to be more convincing nationally than he has been and escape the impression that he is an indecisive watermelon that is beholden to peculiar forces. Failure to change the image and to be in the final ballot box is likely to relegate his dream of being a kingpin into a perpetual dream that only he would share.

*Prof Macharia Munene teaches history and international relations at United States International University - Africa.*