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Most South Africans sense that something had shifted in the last year or two. People are more anxious about what the future holds in store. Our rock-solid stability doesn't seem so rock-solid any longer. And the political temperature seems to have increased quite a few degrees.

The middle classes and the minority groups ask with great concern: so is South Africa becoming Zimbabwe after all? Are we facing our own Arab Spring? Should we take our money overseas – in fact, should we start packing for Perth?

My answer to these four questions is no, no, no and no. It doesn't mean we should ignore the red lights we see flashing, but we also shouldn't over-react to some negative indicators and not see the positive ones.

We are a bit like the old farmer standing on his stoep watching the rain that had been falling for a week, worrying that his lands would be under water. And when it suddenly stopped and the sun broke through, he sighed: And there the damn drought starts.

We should always base our analysis on a proper understanding of what makes our nation and our government tick. We should understand what can go wrong and what is highly unlikely to go wrong. If we do this, we'll sleep much easier at night and smile more often.

We should also understand our own fears and prejudices better. We have been a stable, open democracy for almost twenty years now. Almost all of us in this country are better off than twenty years ago, many of us substantially so. And yet many of us fear the same things and ask the same questions we did when the negotiations between the ANC and the National Party government started in 1990.

We should stop thinking South Africa is unique and our problems only occur here. Take time to investigate what is happening with crime, corruption, democracy and personal freedom in a wealthy, powerful state such as Russia, which became a democracy just three years before us.

Investigate the crumbling economies and financial instability of countries like Greece, Spain and Portugal. Look at the divisions and lack of social cohesion in the United States. Look at the instability in Pakistan, the Middle East, much of South America. Look at the recent coup in Egypt, and the bloody civil war in Syria. And while you're studying the world,

get an understanding of how incredibly boring it would be to live in Canada or New Zealand. And then appreciate sunny South Africa a little more.

So here are my proposed strategies for business people to survive and prosper in South Africa:

- Understand the nuances and undercurrents of our politics. Know when you're listening to populist rhetoric and when you should take utterances seriously;
- Understand history and how it has influenced attitudes, before and after 1994;
- Accept that this is not Europe or America, that we do things differently and things work differently in South Africa. Make peace with that;
- Be more strategic and less emotional; less ideological and more pragmatic;
- Remember what you say and do are not as important as how it is perceived;
- Accept that the government is ineffectual and rudderless and stop expecting them to do everything to fix the country;

The key word here is stability, a rare commodity in the world today.

Stability is more than just the absence of mayhem and violence. Stability means predictability: the knowledge that a state will maintain the rule of law; that the constitution and the laws of the land will be applied; that the legal system is fair, credible and operational.

Our stability is rooted in our constitution, in our strong institutions, in our judicial system, in our vibrant civil society, in our free and independent media, in our credible elections systems, in our strong economy and vibrant business community, and in our growing black middle class.

We know for certain that we will only have a change in government if the majority of voters voted that way. We do not have a tradition of military interference in politics, like Egypt has. We know for certain that if the state, a company or an individual violate your basic rights, you will get a fair hearing from the courts and they will remedy the wrongs.

The fact that we have service delivery protests, often violent ones, virtually every week of the year does not undermine the basis of our stability. Neither does the fact that our labour disputes and strike actions

are more boisterous than elsewhere. The recent mass protests and violence in Brazil and Turkey did not undermine those countries' stability.

There is much that other democratic countries can learn from us, but there is one thing we can learn from other countries. And that is that the president and the government of the day do not define us as a country and as a people.

My personal view is that the Zuma administration is directionless, visionless and often more focused on self-enrichment and power struggles inside the ANC than on successful and effective governance.

But just like George W Bush did not define America, so Zuma and his government do not define South Africa. The US is still the US, but Barack Obama is now the president and he has brought a whole new vision and style.

We might have a weak and ineffectual government right now, but our country and our people are still as strong as they were when we reached a peaceful settlement in 1994, when we won the Rugby World Cup twice, when we hosted the most spectacular Soccer World Cup.

South Africa is an example to Europe and North America on how the fiscus, national debt and financial institutions should be managed. We are part of BRICS, a powerful interest group of the giants Brazil, Russia, India and China. We are among the top sports countries in the world. We are one of the very top tourist destinations in the world. Eight of our universities are among the top ten in Africa. And despite our past and our divisions, we are one of the most open societies in the world.

It has become fashionable among analysts and commentators to refer to Marikana as the beginning of South Africa's Arab Spring – the events that had led to regime changes in Egypt and Libya and a civil war in Syria.

This is not a legitimate comparison. South Africa had its Arab Spring in the mid and late 1980s when we faced a bloody revolution. Fortunately we had leaders like Mandela and De Klerk who defused the conflict and brought us a settlement that resulted in a democracy.

Marikana was a significant event, perhaps even a turning point, not because it was a violent uprising, but because it presented the symptom of

a growing feeling among the working class and the black community in general that the ANC was selling them out and was becoming an arrogant, corrupt and nepotistic elite.

The emphasis in South Africa is slowly shifting from a racial conflict to a class conflict.

The ANC is strongly denying this. The campaign for next year's election has started and we know already that they will use the race card as their main weapon, because they cannot use service delivery or effective government as arguments to sway voters.

This is one of the brightest red lights that I do see flashing. There has, especially since Marikana, been a huge groundswell of black anger at the continued inequality, unemployment and poverty.

Do not underestimate this. It's as if the anger had been smoldering for a long time, but Marikana was the catalyst that brought it to the surface. Robert Mugabe's election victory in Zimbabwe has turned him into a new hero with Thabo Mbeki and several cabinet ministers hailing him as a true African hero. He has given Africa back to the Africans, they say, but here at home the whites are still the top dog.

Instead of owning up and taking responsibility for bad policies, wrong decisions, self-enrichment, corruption and weak governance, ANC politicians are doing their best to channel this anger against their political opponents and often the white minority. This is dangerous, but hopefully it will calm down significantly after next year's election.

But the deteriorating world economic climate and the fact that the structure of our economy had remained essentially the same the last four, five decades also have to take some blame for our slow progress.

Perhaps it was all inevitable.

In the late 1980s the two mass movements, the UDF and the ANC, were essentially socialist movements with Marxist leanings.

We have to remember that when FW de Klerk unbanned the ANC in 1990, the ANC had been in exile in the former Soviet Bloc or Africa for 30 years; some had been on Robben Island for decades; and most UDF and Cosatu leaders had spent time in jail.

This enthusiasm for an economic revolution disappeared quickly after De Klerk unbanned the ANC in 1990. The ANC had little choice but to abandon their plans after they were warned by the captains of industry and commerce here and in the West as well as senior functionaries in the World Bank and the IMF that a socialist economy and nationalization would kill the economy and they would have won an empty shell.

If you stay with the free market, they were told, you will get vast foreign investment. Embrace capitalism, relax your financial regulations and you will generate internal confidence and grow the economy quickly enough for your constituency to also benefit.

Thabo Mbeki, the de facto prime minister under Mandela and his successor as president, and his advisers on economic policy like Trevor Manuel and Tito Mboweni listened to this advice and bravely implemented an economic system that even Mbeki himself at one point described as Thatcherism.

But foreign investment never came, not nearly in the way promised, and the aggressive growth never materialized. The growth we did experience didn't create jobs. Instead, the world economy went into a downturn and later into a severe recession.

Mbeki's economic policies would have worked a lot better if Mbeki and his inner circle were not hell-bent on replacing as many skilled people in the previous administration by loyal cadres in the shortest possible time, many of them with no experience or skills, contributing to the crumbling of the state machinery.

Crucially, education and skills training was also part of that collapse. The criminal neglect of the education system is the worst mistake the ANC has made in its 100 years of existence and is the single most negative aspect of our national life and our prospects of growth and stability.

The ANC's allies in Cosatu and the SA Communist Party were deeply unhappy with the Mbeki administration's conservative economic policies – but it didn't matter that much at the time, because Mbeki had masterfully removed them from the engine room and marginalized them to the point that he didn't have a single meeting with the Cosatu or SACP leadership for years.

But the feeling grew that the revolution had been compromised and that what was supposed to be the great liberation of the black majority

actually just meant the white men in power had been replaced by black men in power.

In December 2007 this all came tumbling down at the ANC's Polokwane conference. Cosatu, the SACP and other dissidents used Jacob Zuma as a battering ram to push Mbeki off his throne and take over the party and the government.

The highly irregular way in which criminal charges of corruption and fraud against Zuma were dropped and the shameful way he came to power opened the flood gates to more corruption and started an era of cheap populism like South Africa had never seen.

This gave birth to the phenomenon Julius Malema. I don't have to remind you what that was like .

Malema and his populist comrades let a genie out of a bottle that we will probably never get back again.

Malema styled himself as the champion of the anger and frustration of young people who have no hope and of the poor, unemployed and under-employed.

His angry talk and radicalism stirred many an unhappy citizen into feeling that it was time to stand up and demand the better life that was promised.

He came with quick and easy solutions that appealed to many who had very little hope for the future: nationalize the mines and the banks, kick white farmers off the land and give it to the poor.

The Zuma camp shamelessly used Malema and other populists to do their dirty work and to divert attention away from the government's failures and scandals. But then he became too arrogant and turned against Zuma – and Zuma had him for breakfast.

Now Malema is the commander-in-chief of the Economic Freedom Fighters and will take part in next year's election. He is modeling himself on Robert Mugabe and is hoping his populist radicalism will make him as popular as Mugabe. Let's hope he's not too successful in that.

Not that the government hadn't done anything. 2,4 million RDP homes were built since 1994, and that is a remarkable feat. Millions received

access to fresh water and flush toilets. More than 17 million people survive on social grants from the state. You can criticize that, but alleviating the worst poverty through social grants has contributed to our stability.

Perhaps, in this sense, the ANC is a victim of its own success. Expectations have been raised and now people want more.

Inequality is actually a bigger problem in South Africa than poverty itself – the concept of relative deprivation applies.

The ANC has lost much support from the black middle class, professional and business people, the media and the intelligentsia since Polokwane.

The harshest criticism of the ANC today come from the likes of Ndjabulo Ndebele, Justus Malala, Mondli Makhanya, Barney Mthombathi and Prince Mashele.

We also saw the rise of Helen Zille and her Democratic Alliance with a brand new approach that was very different from that of Tony Leon.

The DA secured the support of the vast majority of the minority groups plus a growing group of black supporters – in 2011 almost 800 000 black people voted DA in the last local elections.

The DA is undergoing a new metamorphosis. Dynamic young black leaders like Lindiwe Mazibuko and Mmusi Maimane are bringing a new culture to the party and the more black figures rise in the ranks of the DA, the more the party will fine-tune its message to be more acceptable to the black majority.

And now we two new black-led parties aiming at taking votes away from the ANC: Mamphele Ramphela's Agang party and the Economic Freedom Fighters.

The ANC has taken notice of these developments. They're running scared. They know they will win next year's general election. It is scared that it is going to dip under the 60 percent for the first time.

Because if that trend continues to the election of 2019, it could mean the combined opposition parties could possibly get more than 50 percent of the vote and remove the ANC from power.

It isn't only the black middle classes that threaten to abandon the ANC. Marikana has shown how many workers are sick of Cosatu and the ANC and they will most likely vote against the ANC if they can find an acceptable alternative or not vote at all, as will many angry people in neglected townships squatter camps.

With all this in mind the ANC leadership prepared for the conference in Mangaung in December last year. The ANC knew a change of tack was essential.

Zuma and his closest allies, notably secretary general Gwede Mantashe, was challenged by a faction led by deputy president Kgalema Motlanthe. The ANC operates with slates: you vote for or against a list of candidates, not individuals. If Zuma had stood on his own against Motlanthe, he might have lost.

Zuma and Mantashe came with a stroke of genius: propose Cyril Ramaphosa as deputy president of the ANC; the man with the clean hands, the hero of the UDF and Cosatu of the 1980s, the man that negotiated for a settlement with the apartheid government and brought us our new constitution, the man that has shown his business skills.

Zuma, Ramaphosa and the others on their list got 70 percent of the delegates' votes at Mangaung. That is a very powerful mandate, but a mandate Zuma should thank Ramaphosa and Mantashe for.

Two other trends at Mangaung were important. The first was the final emasculation of the ANC Youth League – where they were the kingmakers at Polokwane, at Mangaung they were nowhere to be seen. A few months later the Youth League leadership was finally disbanded.

The second trend was the final nail in the coffin of the talk about nationalizing mines and banks that was the main topic of debate for more than a year beforehand.

The third was the acceptance of the National Development Plan as the ANC and the government's blueprint. President Zuma has repeated several times since Mangaung that the NDP was the government's only long-term vision, but elements in the Communist Party and Cosatu are now saying it is merely a discussion document. Still, it will remain government policy until the next policy conference.

There is a great appetite among ordinary South Africans as well as the business sector for Ramaphosa as president of South Africa.

Ramaphosa is in my view the most exceptional politician in the ANC today. He cannot be tempted to be corrupt, partly because of his inherent integrity, partly because he has so much money already, he can't even spend it in his lifetime.

But most of all, Cyril Ramaphosa is a man concerned about his legacy. He did not wait 19 years to get back into politics just to be dragged into the mess of corruption, nepotism and bad administration that the Zuma presidency has become.

It seems likely at this point that Ramaphosa will become the deputy president of the country after next year's election and will act as a de facto prime minister, much like Mbeki did during Mandela's presidency.

My personal view is that it is unlikely that Jacob Zuma will be allowed to serve his full five year term after 2014, which means we might just have Ramaphosa as president earlier than we thought.

On the other hand, Ramaphosa is not Zulu-speaking. The ANC in KZN that had initially proposed Ramaphosa as deputy president is now turning around and saying they only used him to save Zuma's bacon and that they will drop him after next year's election. They want the centre of power of the ANC to remain in KZN and want to push Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma as deputy president after next year's election. She's a formidable woman... The other candidate is Zweli Mkhize. Both good.

I think these people are making the same mistake FW de Klerk and Roelf Meyer made when they first engaged in negotiations in 1990: they underestimated Cyril Ramaphosa.

We are about a year away from our next general election. That means we're in for a year of electioneering and grandstanding, promises and threats.

We as citizens will have to learn to distinguish between electioneering and policy, posturing and substance, or we will just get depressed and make the wrong decisions based on the posturing of politicians.

As things stand now, I think the DA could reach the 25 - 30 percent mark in the election. Their party machinery is well oiled.

I think Cope, the UDM, the ACDP and the Freedom Front Plus together could possibly muster up to 8 percent or so of the vote.

Mamphela Ramphele's Agang party only had a year to prepare for the elections in May next year and it is unlikely that she would be able to make significant inroads in the working class, the rural areas and the townships in such a short time. But perhaps she is capable of attracting 5% or so of the vote.

Whatever happens, I have little doubt that Mamphela will promote cooperation between the opposition parties after the election, even eventually seek a coalition with the DA, Cope and the UDM. Such a coalition would be a formidable opponent to the ANC in 2019.

What are Julius Malema and his Economic Freedom Fighters' chances next year? On the one hand there is the brooding black anger and the fact that Malema is saying so effectively what so many people are thinking. On the other hand it is clear that their organization is bad and the fact that he will face corruption and racketeering charges in court before the election.

If it is true that the disaffected youth are Malema's primary constituency, then the bad news for him is that most of these youngsters don't actually go to the polling station on election day, and many don't have ID books.

Still, we could have a nasty surprise and as things appear now, it isn't impossible that Malema would get 5 percent or even a bit more of the vote, which would place him and a few of his fellow leaders in parliament.

□ The ANC knows all this; Cyril Ramaphosa and Gwede Mantashe know this and it is focusing their minds.

I think it has finally dawned on the ANC that the glue of liberation nostalgia and black solidarity is weakening.

I think the ANC is beginning to realize that South Africans have a lower tolerance for state corruption than most other African states. Sadly, this realization doesn't seem to have dawned on president Zuma.

I think the ANC are beginning to realize that the only way they are going to hold on to power beyond 2019 would be to run a more efficient state.

Expect Public Service minister Lindiwe Sisulu to get very hardcore with civil servants and teachers in the months ahead.

The euphoria of Mangaung didn't last long before the power struggles broke out once again. The assault on Zwelenzima Vavi as secretary general of Cosatu because he is not seen as a Zuma sycophant is the clearest but not only evidence of this. The National Union of Metalworkers NUMSA has now declared war on the Cosatu leadership and on the ANC.

The problem as I see it is that we will not see a speedy and energetic execution of the NDP as long as Jacob Zuma is president.

The problem is that the National Development Plan is a long-term solution and Zuma is a leader who only cares about the short term.

The other problem is that an awful lot of energy is spent by Zuma and those closest to him to keep him out of jail and to prevent him from being further embarrassed. It seems as if the Arms deal commission has been so compromised that he doesn't have to worry about that. The legal battle is still on to keep the audio tapes secret that could prove that the withdrawal of the corruption charges against him was a purely political decision. And now the government is trying to prevent the Public Protector from investigating who paid for what at Nkandla.

If I've talked you into a depression, let me give you some uplifting news.

Our economy is about 65 percent bigger now than in 1990 and per capita incomes 27 percent higher than in 1993. The nominal value of tax revenue grew by 491 percent from R114 billion to R674 billion between 1994/1995 and 2010/2011.

South Africa ranked seventh out of 45 countries in the Big Mac Index 2012. The price of a McDonalds Big Mac is 42 percent less in South Africa than in the US, while in Switzerland and Norway it is 62 percent more.

The World Economic Forum's 2012/2013 Global Competitive Index makes for interesting reading – South Africa's overall ranking is 52 out of 144 countries. We're the best or among the best with the first nine criteria, but among the worst when it comes to education, labour regulations and productivity: These are our Achilles Heel.

There is a widely held view that black South Africans as a group are as poor today as they were in 1990 and little is being done for them. The facts contradict this. The proportion of South Africans living on less than \$2 a day has declined from 12 percent in 1994 and a peak of 17 percent in 2002 to just 5 percent in 2012. This is the opposite of the general worldwide trend.

In 2004, 1,6 million black people were part of the middle class comprising five million people. In 2012 this had skyrocketed to 4,2 million, a 240 percent growth in the middle class segment.

The black middle class's disposable household income grew by 35 percent since 2004, with white disposable income growing by 10 percent. The black middle class have a spending power of R400 billion compared to the white middle class's R380 billion – still hugely unequal, but good progress.

This is what will prevent our constitution being thrown out of the window: there are too many people with too much to lose if we were going to go the way of Zimbabwe. We should not get hysterical with the radical statements made by some hotheads.

It is highly unlikely, at least for a decade or two, that any political party would get more than two thirds of the votes in a general election and thus be in a position to change the South African constitution that guarantees private property ownership and the rule of law.

A few words on land reform.

We should all acknowledge that we're not dealing with a rational debate when we're talking about land. There is the need for genuine agrarian reform on the one hand, but then there is the emotional demand from many in the black communities to see a visible reversal of the colonial dispossession of black land over centuries.

We simply have to manage both these realities. We should start with communicating very clearly to all communities that the 87/13 percent division of land ownership is complete nonsense, even though it is still widely used. Only 65 percent of the land was farmland anyway, and the informed guess is that more than 15 percent of this is now in black hands through land redistribution and private sales.

ANC politicians will undoubtedly use the land issue in an opportunistic way during their election campaigns or to hide their own weaknesses. But when it comes down to the wire, the government will resist all attempts to grab land. I can tell you from personal experience that there are enough ministers in the cabinet who have a proper understanding of what that would do to the economy, food security, employment, the country's prestige in the world and to stability.

Perhaps it is time for organized agriculture to employ bold and competent reputation managers to change the image of especially white farmers from that of "land thieves" and "slave drivers" to that of food providers and employers.

Organised agriculture must know by now that the Department of Land Affairs is incompetent and some officials even corrupt. The redistribution of land cannot simply be left to them.

Here is the astonishing truth about land redistribution, the willing buyer, willing seller principle and the target of 30 percent: according to respected academics and Agri SA's figures, the amount of money spent on land reform since 1994 could have purchased 37 percent of all farm land at market value.

This is worth repeating. Even if the state had been forced to use the willing buyer, willing seller guideline and never expropriated any land, we would have been well beyond the target for land redistribution by now if the money spent had been used properly. The only conclusion: billions must have been lost through bureaucratic bungling, bad management and corruption.

In my view organized agriculture should take the initiative with the National Development Plan's proposal for each district municipality to form district lands committees of farmers, banks, agribusiness, government and provincial departments and agencies such as the Land Bank. The proposal is for these committees to identify the most appropriate 20 percent of the agricultural land for transfer to black farmers and that commercial farmers should take a leading role in the establishment of new farmers

"In exchange, commercial farmers are protected from losing their land in future and they gain black economic empowerment status. This should remove the uncertainty and mistrust that surrounds land reform and the related loss of investor confidence."

If you don't think this formula can work, engage with the National Planning Commission and propose changes, but don't just do nothing.

We can't wait for the government or the ruling party. We are the architects of our own future.

We can make it work. This is still the land of opportunity.