



THE PARLIAMENTARY HANDBOOK ON FOREIGN POLICY LAUNCH

Strengthening Parliamentary Oversight in Foreign Policy

Proceedings Report

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associated with
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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATION

DIRCO	Department of International Relations and Cooperation
EU	European Union
FES	Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
ICC	International Criminal Court
IGD	Institute for Global Dialogue
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PAP	Pan-African Parliament
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADPA	South African Development Partnership Agency
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
TTIP	Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership
UK	United Kingdom
UNISA	University of South Africa
USA	United States of America
WTO	World Trade Organisation

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INTRODUCTION

The launch of the Parliamentary Handbook on South Africa's foreign policy, in Cape Town South Africa, took place on the 4th November 2015, and was the result of a research partnership between the Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD) and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES). While work has been undertaken around the world to understand the functions and influences of parliaments on foreign policy and global engagements, this handbook speaks directly to South African parliamentarians in a simple and easy to absorb language in order to increase their ability to engage with global issues whether political, economic or cultural.

Furthermore Ms. Sanusha Naidu noted that this handbook is a summary of the major thematic areas of South Africa's foreign policy and global engagement, and serves two major functions:

To provide assistance to South African parliamentarians in understanding international interactions, foreign policy concepts and diplomacy.

To assist in 'nuancing' and disseminating the discussions around parliamentary diplomacy within foreign policy and the role of parliament and its engagements with international relations.

We therefore welcome and recognise the beginning of a partnership with the Portfolio Committee on International Relations to initiate a process of learning and cooperation that would culminate in a more informed and in tune understanding of South Africa's foreign policy, and the uses of parliamentary diplomacy.

CHAIRMANS ADDRESS

By Honourable Siphosizwe Masango

On behalf of my colleagues we must congratulate the IGD associated with the University of South Africa (UNISA) and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) for publishing the Parliamentary Handbook on South African Foreign policy (1994-2014). This handbook was identified as a “useful, easy to read and quick reference” for understanding South African foreign policy, in that it provides assistance to parliamentary members when dealing with foreign policy language and concepts.

In the contemporary world, few subjects escape the realm of International Relations. This has resulted in the paradigm shift, away from traditional perspectives on foreign policy focusing on security, defence, diplomacy and the state in the global system of “high politics”. This shift is occurring due to an increasing focus being placed on economic and development policies, international trade, environment policies and home affairs policies, which has resulted in the expansion of actors involved in international relations including governments, non-state actors, financial corporations, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), civil society, multinational companies etc. Additionally, the peoples’ involvement in parliamentary diplomacy appears to have a dominant and significant factor within foreign policy decision-making

The role of parliament in international relations is not to operate in isolation from other government departments, and domestic groupings and people, and it also functions to complement government and stimulate and enrich policies. One of these functions is parliamentary control that assesses whether decisions and actions are appropriate. Furthermore parliamentary control is political by nature.

The four main instruments of Parliamentary oversight are:

- Special Commissions of Inquiry
- Confirmation of appointments
- Questions (written/oral) and interpellation
- Public debates in plenary or committees.

Some of the other tools that parliament uses in its oversight role, are:

- The motions of debate
- Resolutions
- Recommendation and reports
- Committee hearings
- Financial and Budgetary control (BRRR process).

The committee deals with bilateral relations, and finds its functions and roles in relation to “Soft” foreign policy, referring to the parliaments role in adopting budgets for the implementation of foreign policy processes, and also its role in ratifying international agreements (embedding within domestic laws).

Lastly, Honorable Masango noted that the parliamentary committee would like to visit the 126 missions abroad in their oversight function in order to get to grips with the logistical and technical workings of missions abroad, and also wishes to extend handbooks to all parliamentary members.

PANEL DISCUSSION

Address by Dr. Lesley Masters

The creation of this handbook was driven by the experiences of interaction with parliamentary officials on foreign policy in particular and international relations in general, and having access to their thoughts on what the challenges were that they have experienced.

Firstly, there is a vast amount of material available on South African foreign policy, and its niche areas. Therefore, the objective was to lessen the reading work for Members of Parliament (MPs), leading to the idea of a handbook that would provide synthesised and condensed knowledge of the basic components of South African foreign policy to the parliamentarians. The idea was to bring all of the academic literature into one zone that is not too exhaustive or too intricate and complex. Secondly, the focus was also placed on making a reference list for the multiple international relations acronyms that would assist in keeping MPs aware of various acronyms that may not be within their areas of intrigue.

Thirdly, this handbook was designed to support and build engagement with parliament, particularly due to the forays in understanding the role of parliament in foreign policy. There are examples where parliaments all over the world are engaged in arguments and discussions, and in South Africa we have democracy although the best means of engaging with each other is not always used. This leads to the questions, what is the value of parliament and if parliament is an asset what are we going to do with it?

Admittedly, parliament is a huge asset in the South African engagement in international relations as it functions by monitoring international relations. There is also a growing role for parliamentarians in engaging with other parliaments from around the world, and we have five or six groupings including the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Pan-African Parliament (PAP).

Most parliaments around the world face challenges, particularly in managing its resources for optimum performance, which concerns its oversight functions. In the case of South Africa, oversight of 126 missions is a very complex task to address. One way to do so, however, is to undertake regional tours as a solution of overcoming this mammoth task. This function of external monitoring is another reason why parliament needs assistance in engaging with matters of international relations.

This handbook is not and has not been created to be a stationary product and it will have to be continuously updated in a rapidly changing global landscape. Thus we have to consider two questions as we advance the discussion on Parliamentary oversight and diplomacy. First, what would make the handbook more valuable and how it can be improved? Second, how can cities and other actors who are involved in South Africa international relations, be assisted?

Address by Dr. Philani Mthembu

There is an expanding group of actors in international relations, and this has challenged the traditional approach to foreign policy-making, which has traditionally been the preserve of the executive. The monitoring of international relations has thus become a contested terrain that has sparked tensions, especially where the executive may view challengers or new actors as infringing on their functions.

For example, in Germany recently we witnessed the largest gathering of demonstrations, in over a decade, in response to the mega-regional trading agreement: the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). TTIP is potentially the largest deal that seeks to harmonise the USA and European Union (EU) trade relations. The demonstrations were a reaction to how such agreements will affect domestic issues if implemented. These include the displacement of cottage industries; marginalisation of local producers and notwithstanding the snowballing effects of unemployment. But these demonstrations were also indicative of a broader global trend where people are beginning to draw the nexus between global trade negotiations and local implications. From this context, then, it is important for foreign policy practitioners to understand how international affairs affect domestic policy. And this is partly what this handbook seeks to do.

As a society we often get stuck within the analysis of domestic events. Yet in the current international milieu, state and non-state actors need to cast an eye to global events that have the potential to affect domestic situations more so than just domestic politics. On the one hand, governments do need to have a sense of confidentiality in order to achieve their desired outcomes in bilateral and multilateral negotiations. But, on the other hand, there has to also be more transparency when it comes to negotiations, e.g. the German protests about the TTIP. In this regard, think tanks like the IGD, who engage with government on various issues, provide a platform that enables for an easier and more robust engagement with stakeholders, while at the same time disseminating these views to the public.

Often there are calls for consensus in foreign policy interests. In the South African context there seems to be some shift towards in this regard, although it does appear to becoming more difficult to separate the domestic from the international. The case in point is the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) process. In order to create some consensus, South African ambassadors in the EU met to discuss South African foreign policy but this was done mainly at the executive level with various parliamentary committees not in attendance. What is clear from this example, is that there needs to be consultation with parliament, especially since it serves as the oversight mechanism to ensure that South Africa is not only meeting its obligations to international frameworks but also ensuring that such commitments are being reinforced in domestic policy making and roll out of programmes

In conclusion, Foreign Policy as a complex set of concepts, mechanisms and processes needs to be discussed as a continuous dialogue that considers the interests, economic growth and survival of states, groups, frameworks and individuals. As long as people are involved, states are able to better navigate the uncertainties of global politics, and the handbook assists in broadening engagement and communication between people and the government.

Address by Prof . Scarlett Cornelissen

The world is complex, states are complex and relations are complex. This results in various guises of diplomacy, e.g. summit diplomacy, paradiplomacy, and economic diplomacy among others. These forms of diplomacies are prioritised within foreign policy strategies. However the important question that remains is, in whose interest is foreign policy made: for the national or the public interest?

If we have to reflect on the nature of SA Foreign Policy over the past 21 years, the following elements will stand out. One, there has been a strong feature of executive engagement with foreign policy. This can be seen in the three presidencies of Mandela, Mbeki and Zuma which demonstrate the excessively influential role of leaders within the foreign policy making arena (or what some may refer to as the casting of shadows by leaders). In the case of Mandela the issue of a principled approach was notable. For Mbeki the vision of Pan-Africanism was a significant characteristic. In the current Presidency of the Zuma administration the focus on economic diplomacy, South-South Cooperation and emerging powers, notwithstanding statements on national interests are some key features of our foreign policy posture.

The second, element that is evident is that there seems to be a democratic deficit. This refers to the strong role of the executive and the relative marginalisation of the other constituencies involved in foreign policy decision-making processes.

These elements together give rise to the question: How do we ensure the role and proper functioning of parliament within foreign policy and the context of representative democracy? Within the context of a Representative Democracy, representation is necessary coupled with participation and dialogue to ensure that there is a smooth and functioning democratic feedback loop for foreign policy.

There are four aspects of fundamental importance to South Africa's Foreign Policy for the post-2015 period, and this relates to the expected shifts that will occur in the international order and what are some of the corresponding issues that will affect the architecture of our foreign policy making:

1. Despite South Africa's positioning in relation to both the concept and physical entities related to emerging powers, has it been successful, however in engaging strategically in a manner that serves the interest of South Africa?
2. The central pivot of South Africa's foreign policy objective is the African Agenda. Yet, the current 'Africa Rising' discourse implies the occurrence of certain structural changes the issue is therefore whether the South African government needs to ask if they need to rethink their current conceptualisation of the African Agenda.
3. The Post-2015 Development Landscape and governance needs to be kept in mind together with the increasing need for cooperation in relation to climate change and development agendas, as these are important areas of interaction where South Africa can establish its position within. And
4. Lastly, a change in development thinking and practice has occurred that has seen the emergence of South Africa as an aspiring donor or development partner, which implies that the function of South Africa's global engagements needs to be scrutinised.

DISCUSSION

The discussion themes that were generated during this session were:

- The understanding of the concept of National Interest;
- Challenges facing the Portfolio Committee on International Relations and Cooperation; and
- Questions of Strategy;

National Interest

The significant questions in this regard was what is South Africa's national interest, and how trade features into the strategic thinking behind identifying national interests.

The responses were that the concept of South Africa's national interests is contested and unclear. This is partly due to the need of having participation from various sectors, that have different perspectives on what must be pursued as important objectives, and what must guide our foreign policy. In addition, it is important to understand whose interests are being pursued and why they are being pursued. There are many interests; however there is not really a framework that speaks to the process of how government prioritises these interests. What is clear is that the state is still at the centre of global politics, and therefore state and party interests tend to dominate foreign policy strategies and decision-making.

Additionally, it was noted that if South Africa's 'national interest' is to be defined, it would occur within the contexts of development (trade and regionalism), peace operations and historical experiences. Part of South Africa's foreign policy is the creation of spaces to define development related matters for themselves, and what remains clear is that the definition of 'National Interest' needs to be done through a continuous dialogue process and platforms that are open to a variety of groups.

Challenges facing the Portfolio Committee on International Relations and Cooperation

Furthermore, the work of the parliamentary committee needs to be redefined as frustrations exist about the functioning of the committee and the general lack of engagements and communication lines that have been afforded to it. Other concerns that were raised related to the desire to see increased communication with the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), and increasing the availability of channels of engagement among DIRCO, the committee and the non-governmental sector.

Questions of Strategy

Some of the concerns that were raised have wider implications for South Africa's strategic engagement with global processes, actors and institutions and reaction to events in real time. These concerns include: assisting a peaceful process towards an independent Western Sahara and its people; the influence of donors and power politics in shaping actions and attitudes; the influence of other States on South Africa; the International Criminal Court (ICC) and Al-Bashir; and growing mega-regionalism and implications for the Doha Round of the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

With regard to the on-going difference in perspectives between the ICC and South Africa, it has been a case where continental interests and effects gained prominence over values and obligation to the ICC, in respect of South Africa's stance on the arrest of Al-Bashir.

Lastly, South Africa's international strategy was described as having a three pronged approach defined by its engagements with the world, while it also speaks to varying diplomacies and strategies, and perceptions of how South Africa wants to be seen or how it sees itself.

APPENDICES : ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR GLOBAL DIALOGUE



The IGD is an independent foreign policy and diplomacy think tank dedicated to the analysis of and dialogue on global dynamics that have a bearing on South Africa in Africa. It advances a balanced, relevant and policy-oriented analysis, debate and documentation of South Africa's role in international relations and diplomacy.

The IGD's research agenda has three broad programmatic focus areas: foreign policy analysis with special reference to the making and management of foreign policy and diplomatic tools like economic, developmental, and public diplomacy; African studies focusing on the role of regional and continental integration in African politics and development as well as the study of peace diplomacy; and international diplomacy, analysing dynamics in international diplomacy that have a bearing on African peace and prosperity.

In 2010, following a strategic review the institute entered into its strategic partnership with the University of South Africa, the biggest university in the southern hemisphere to pursue through research, publications and community engagement the shared vision of a prosperous and peaceful Africa in a progressive global order through.

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