

SOUTH AFRICA'S EMERGING PARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY AND SOFT POWER

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Abstract

This analysis considers the emergence of South Africa's parliamentary diplomacy, or the role of Parliament on the international stage, since 1994. The early discourse both within Parliament and in academic analysis, reflects an emphasis on the role of oversight and the role of Parliament in the foreign policy decision-making process. Recognition of the role of parliamentary diplomacy has been slow to develop, although Parliament is increasingly acknowledging its role as an international actor. This has seen the development of structures and policy to support this. The value of parliamentary diplomacy as part of a country's international relations, however, remains an area in need of further deliberation. This analysis begins by unpacking the concept of parliamentary diplomacy before addressing the emerging role and value of parliamentary diplomacy for South Africa, particularly through the linkages between parliamentary diplomacy and soft power in promoting foreign policy.

1. Introduction

With respect to international relations, parliaments are engaged at two levels: first domestically, through input in decision-making and through oversight of foreign policy by the executive; and second globally, as actors or agents of foreign policy in international forums. It is in this latter area where there is a growing recognition by parliaments of their

potential role. This is a position reflected in a report by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) presented to the Second World Conference of Speakers of Parliament in 2005, which emphasises this development and "called for greater involvement of parliaments in international affairs" (IPU 2005).

In post-*apartheid* South Africa the national Parliament has been a participant in the definition and oversight of foreign policy (to a greater and lesser degree), mainly through its Portfolio Committee on International Relations and Cooperation. Parliament, however, has an ever increasing role in South Africa's international relations through its own diplomacy in bilateral and multilateral relations. The article begins by considering the concept of parliamentary diplomacy in general before addressing developments in South Africa. The analysis argues that post-*apartheid* South Africa's parliamentary diplomacy has been slow to develop as a result of the limited recognition given to the role of Parliament as an actor in international relations, the *ad hoc* approach to international engagement, and a shortfall in institutional memory such as the monitoring, reporting and evaluation of parliamentary diplomacy. In an effort to unpack the potential value of South Africa's parliamentary diplomacy, as part of the country's foreign policy, the final section of the article considers the opportunities in linking parliamentary diplomacy to soft power, where the legislature plays a role in promoting South Africa's international interests.

2. Parliamentary diplomacy: As process and as method

The blurring of the lines between domestic and international relations has given more scope to the role of parliaments as actors in international affairs. As noted by the IPU 2005 report, *Parliamentary Involvement in International Relations*,

Whether they wanted to or not, legislatures everywhere were under mounting pressure to debate an ever more transnational agenda. Parliaments simply had no choice but to engage in multilateral negotiations, if only because the responsibility fell squarely on their shoulders when it came to enacting the results into domestic law (IPU 2005: 2).

Although there is as yet no agreed definition of what parliamentary diplomacy is, Götz (2005) argues that parliamentary diplomacy can be understood as both procedure and method. As procedure, parliamentary diplomacy is the manner or the process by which discussion and decision-making take place. This was initially linked to the United Nations (UN) and the processes of the General Assembly with the use of the "formal one-state/one vote rule for purposes of representation and to a lesser extent for decision" (Friedheim 1976: 1). Parliamentary diplomacy as process has a number of characteristics including that it takes place within an organisation with a broad agenda, that there is public debate shaped by formal rules and procedures, and that participants have sovereign equality and decisions are made by vote (Friedheim 1976: 3-5). As a process, or the manner in which negotiations are carried out within multilateral settings, parliamentary diplomacy would mean that the work of diplomats within multilateral organisations would constitute 'parliamentary diplomacy' (Kleiner 2008: 333). In this context, diplomats representing their respective states in multilateral forum are considered to be conducting parliamentary diplomacy.

The second approach to the concept of parliamentary diplomacy considers parliaments (parliamentarians) as actors, or agents, in international relations. This means that the legislatures themselves conduct their own diplomatic engagements (Götz 2005: 264). De Boer and Weisglas (2007: 93-94) consider this approach towards parliamentary diplomacy to be a more recent phenomenon and one which refers to "the full range of international activities undertaken by parliamentarians in order to increase mutual understanding between countries, to assist each other in improving the control of governments and the representation of a people and to increase the democratic legitimacy of inter-governmental institutions". Nolous (2011) too adopts this approach in his understanding of parliamentary diplomacy, which he describes as "the activities carried out by parliament in international relations".

It is this understanding of parliamentary diplomacy that is gaining traction as parliaments around the world take an active interest in playing a role in the international milieu. With the growing number and variety of parliamentary actors internationally, following the "Huntingtonian third wave of democratization" and the "flourishing of parliamentary activism in East, Central Europe and Africa" (Banjo 2009: 61), there have been calls for greater engagement between parliamentarians. The result has been the move towards more structured and organised cooperation

through the IPU as well as through regional organisations such as the Pan-African Parliament (PAP), aimed at addressing the expanding international agenda and its domestic ramifications (Squarcialupi 2000).

Parliaments are, therefore, no longer merely engaged in the processes of foreign policy, but are directly active as participants in international relations. This includes Members of Parliament (MPs) as part of national delegations to international negotiations, parliamentary delegations to intergovernmental meetings, parliamentary study groups and research trips, and even the establishment of parliamentary liaison offices abroad (IPU 2005). The IPU (2005) highlights a number of further activities as constituting parliamentary diplomacy including: bilateral cooperation between parliaments, the establishment of friendship groups, engagement between parliaments within sub-regions, the receiving and sending of parliamentary delegations, participation in *ad hoc* engagements such as election monitoring or conflict resolution, meeting ambassadors, and technical cooperation between parliaments.

Bilaterally, there is an argument that activities such as the establishment of the more informal links, such as strengthening people-to-people relations and the creation of friendship groups, deals predominantly with the 'atmospherics' of international relations (Stravridis 2006: 6). This, however, has its own soft power relevance when tensions arise between states. At the multilateral level, parliaments may engage in parliamentary assemblies of international organisations such as the Council of Europe, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) or the PAP, multilateral parliamentary organisations such as the IPU, or at the regional level, for example through the Southern African Development Community Parliamentary Forum (SADC-PF) (Noulas 2011). The value of engagement in these international assemblies is that it allows for interaction between parliamentarians on addressing problems common to the same region. It also provides a structured basis for parliamentarians to meet regularly.

Historically, there have been differing views on the role of parliaments in international relations. John Locke, for instance, states that the nature of international relations itself calls for the bypassing of the legislature, a point supported by Joseph Frankel who argues that "as large clumsy bodies parliaments cannot effectively exercise initiative and their participation upsets diplomacy" (Geldenhuys 1984: 46). Despite these more negative views, today's parliaments have a firm position in international politics.

When it comes to the analysis of parliamentary diplomacy, Götz (2005: 264) argues that neither understanding of parliamentary diplomacy, as process or as method, should be neglected. Nevertheless in an effort to build an understanding of the role of the South African Parliament in international relations, this analysis gives particular attention to South Africa's parliamentary diplomacy as agency (method), as an area which is in need of further assessment if its value is to be further deliberated.

3. South Africa's parliamentary diplomacy: Developments, opportunities and constraints

Noulas (2011) argues that the "wider role of Parliaments in the system of a country's foreign policy varies depending on the *historical* origins of the country, its *political system* and the overall position in the *international arena*". This taxonomy of the history, political system and position of the country in the international milieu, can also be used in unpacking the conditions that support or constrain developments of parliamentary diplomacy. Historically, *apartheid* South Africa was internationally isolated and under sanctions. This resulted in little opportunity for international parliamentary engagement. There were also limited relations with multilateral organisations as membership of bodies such as the IPU were frozen with the result that South Africa had little exposure to the dynamics within this organisation. In addition Parliament played a marginal role as an actor in international relations given the dominance of the executive and a lack of a parliamentary standing committee on international relations (Geldenhuys 1984). This was a period where Parliament was dominated by the ruling party of the day, which meant support for government policy was guaranteed, and during its long annual periods of recess its "influence over foreign affairs [was] effectively nil" (Geldenhuys 1984: 47).

Although during the period of *apartheid* South Africa's own Parliament had little influence in international affairs, the pressure of international parliamentary diplomacy was felt through initiatives from the Association of Western European Parliamentarians Against *Apartheid* (AWEPA) and other parliaments, parliamentarians and parliamentary organisations around the world. Founded in 1984, the aim of AWEPA

was, "to mobilize politicians in democratically elected European parliaments to end apartheid" where "Parliamentarians passed laws that facilitated effective sanction policies, monitored the implementation of these laws by enforcing accountability" (European Parliaments with Africa). Isolated internationally and paralysed by a dominant ruling party domestically, there was very little historical precedence in South Africa for the role of Parliament as an international actor. This did not change dramatically in the first years after 1994 with the focus of the new legislature given to questions of governance and national transformation rather than international relations.

Meanwhile, transformation of the political context in South Africa has had implications for the functioning of Parliament and its role in international relations. Analysis points out that while South Africa's political system provides for an active parliament on paper (through the constitution), this has not always translated into practice. The dominance of the African National Congress (ANC), and the growing centralisation of decision-making within the presidency, has had implications for Parliament's engagement on foreign policy decision-making and pursuit of an active parliamentary diplomacy (Masters 2012). As Bridgeman (2002) highlights in her analysis, there is effectively no separation of power between the executive and legislative with committee chairs usually from the same party as the president. In addition, with strict party discipline still evident within the ANC, Bridgeman argues that parliamentarians do not often differ in their position from the president. Debates that have come up in parliament on international relations have been primarily questions of procedure, or have been in retrospect to a decision taken (Bridgeman 2002). This is a point supported in Van Wyk's (1999/2000) analysis of Parliament and the foreign policy process where she notes the perception among MPs that foreign policy is an executive function. Banjo (2009: 67) too concludes that "as much as the parliament desires to be involved in foreign affairs the South African and Namibian experiences have shown that 'presidential diplomacy' often supersedes 'parliamentary diplomacy'".

A number of other factors condition the role of Parliament in international relations. In addition to the central role assumed by the president in South Africa's international relations, there are a number of challenges to parliamentary diplomacy resulting from the very nature and structure of Parliament itself. These include the domestic focus and priorities that occupy Parliament's agenda. Although international issues

such as climate change or trade also have a domestic context, there is no specific foreign policy constituency for international relations to pursue these interests internationally. There is also the challenge, as Nel (*et al* 2004: 48) point out, in that "[a]ll 490 members of the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces are up for re-election every four years. Interest and attention to foreign policy issues by Members of Parliament (MP) tend to be short-lived". Diplomacy calls for continuous relations and sustaining links through regular international visits, something that is not always possible for parliamentarians looking to be re-elected (Prammer 2009).

Noulas (2011) further argues that a parliament's positioning within a country's political landscape means that it is particularly prone to influence from domestic politics, public opinion, and the media, particularly on questions of transparency. This is a challenge to diplomatic engagement, despite the move towards the idea of 'new diplomacy' and its focus on greater transparency. The continued focus on the need for secrecy in international negotiations has had the consequence that parliaments are seen as hindering diplomacy and should be confined to approving agreements and maintaining oversight of the executive. Moving beyond the perception of South Africa's Parliament as a 'rubber stamp' for international agreements has been slow, particularly in overcoming the identified division between the role of oversight of treaties and engagement in negotiations. Nevertheless, in a review of the activities of the 4th Parliament there is an indication that more attention is being given to the early involvement of the legislature in the treaty making processes (Parliamentary Committee on International Relations and Cooperation 2014).

The structure of Parliament itself is not conducive to a focused approach towards parliamentary diplomacy. This includes the division of issues across a number of committees such as international relations, trade and industry, defence and communications among others. In addition, instances arise where "a large number of MPs serve on more than one portfolio committee, which contributes to the fact that an MP cannot really specialize in the issue the committee has to deal with" (Nel, *et al* 2004: 48). The fragmentation of focus is further complicated by the challenges of limited staff available to support and provide information to MPs on key issues unfolding in the international milieu (Sukma 2008). This is particularly true in the South African context where it has already been noted that there is a "[l]ack of capa-

city in the IR Section to deal with structured relations" (Ahmed 2005).

This has implications for the preservation and analysis of diplomatic practice and institutional memory when it comes to South Africa's evolving parliamentary diplomacy. Problems include the limited sharing of information around international relations with other Members or with the executive (Parliament 2010). As the 2005 discussion document on international relations states, "[t]here is unfortunately a lack of documented practice and the documentation dealing with international relations consists primarily of reports, submitted by Members or staff, who have attended a particular conference" (Parliament 2005). Even here, the impact of these reports on building diplomatic relations, or supporting South Africa's foreign policy, is opaque. Banjo's (2009) analysis questions the impact that the reports from various fact-finding missions have had on executive decisions. Scandals linked to parliamentary travel have also served to undermine Parliament's credibility (Donnelly 2011). At the same time the legislature faces similar constraints as other parliaments in its ability to engage in international relations due to limited financial and institutional resources available for international engagement (Fiott 2011).

In the case of the third element, or the position of the state in the international arena, Noulas (2011) argues that countries with a prominent role in the international community will place an emphasis on traditional diplomacy as well as on the role of parliamentary committees. In the South African case, there is something of a disjuncture between the country's position in the world and its focus on parliamentary diplomacy. While South Africa's diplomacy has seen the country "punching above its weight" in bilateral and multilateral relations since 1994, there has been comparatively limited engagement by Parliament internationally. Although the ANC (2012: 25) international relations discussion document and the Parliamentary Policy Perspectives and Operational Guidelines (2006) note that "members of Parliament (MPs) and presiding officers have had the opportunity to exchange views on a range of international challenges", in terms of the scale of post-*apartheid* South Africa's international engagements, parliamentary diplomacy has been marginal. There were early requests by foreign parliaments to formalise relations with South Africa's Parliament following the democratic transition, yet a more structured approach was not initially formalised. Parliament's (2005) international relations discussion paper stated that "[d]espite continuous pressure to establish formal relations, Parliament

of South Africa argued that it would not be compelled into establishing such relations since its approach to interactions with foreign parliaments had to be re-evaluated".

Over a decade into South Africa's democratic transformation the decision was taken by Parliament's Joint Rules Committee (JRC) "to develop a set of core values that would inform Parliament's approach to diplomacy and international relations" as a result of the acknowledgment that a more structured approach was needed (Parliament 2005). This followed the growing awareness that Parliament was indeed "without a body or vehicle to drive the formulation of an international relations policy" (Parliament 2005). From 1994 on, it has been the International Relations Sub-Committee which is responsible for guiding Parliament's approach in international matters. However, following concerns that the Sub-Committee was "too concerned with the logistical aspects of international visits as opposed to providing policy guidance to Parliament" a review was undertaken (Parliament 2005). The outcome was a decision to draft the 2005 discussion document on Parliament's international relations aimed at highlighting the core values shaping engagement at both a multilateral and bilateral level.

As South Africa's own international participation on the world stage matures, Parliament itself has begun to move towards building an understanding of parliamentary diplomacy. This includes a focus on facilitating international participation along with its other core objectives of passing laws, oversight of the executive, and facilitating cooperative government (Parliament 2005). By the 3rd Parliament, the focus on agency was increasingly evident in the description of the functions of Parliament. This evolved from an understanding of Parliament's role as merely oversight, to including "Function 5: To engage and participate in international relations" (Parliament 2008: 31). This position is supported in the more recent Annual Reports where the enhancement of Parliament's role in international relations remains a strategic programme and objective including, "[t]o improve and widen the role of Parliament in international co-operation and participation by developing and implementing an international relations strategy" (Parliament 2012: 25). Parliamentary diplomacy has thus developed to a point where it is now increasingly seen as a means by which to build on South Africa's strategic partnerships in the implementation of foreign policy (Ngese 2012: 1).

4. South Africa's parliamentary diplomacy and soft power capability

With parliaments across the world assessing their international relations, attention is increasingly turning to their impact on states' international engagements. This has been particularly evident when it comes to trade negotiations, which are receiving attention from parliaments in both developing and developed countries for their visible impact on domestic constituencies (IPU 2005). For South Africa, the drafting of a parliamentary international relations strategy positions Parliament from being purely focused on oversight, to one of being an actor in international affairs (Parliament 2012).

While the agency of Parliament is evident on paper, in practice, parliamentary diplomacy and its impact on South Africa's international relations has not been the focus of significant assessment. This has left a gap in the discussions on the strategic value of parliamentary diplomacy, not only for Parliament, but for South Africa in general, in the pursuit of foreign policy objectives. As is argued here, the linkages between parliamentary diplomacy and soft power provide a means by which to advance Parliament's, and South Africa's, foreign policy agenda.

The idea of soft power came to the fore through the work of Joseph Nye. Although there is still much debate on the concept itself, it is broadly understood as "the ability to affect others through co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes" (Nye 2011: 20-21). It is, at its core, "about mobilizing cooperation from others without threats or payments" (Nye 2006: 27). That soft power has become a significant element in understanding international relations is evident in the number of subsequent studies. It has even become the subject of discussions within committees in parliament, for example the United Kingdom's (UK) House of Lords debate on soft power notes that "the UK will need to leverage its national and diplomatic strengths more proactively and challenge the status quo more frequently if it is to be influential in promoting its values and interests" (Niblett 2014: 736). In discussions around South Africa's own soft power capabilities Sidiropoulos (2014: 197) argues that on "the continent, setting aside external actors, South Africa is probably the country with the best claim to the exercise of soft power, as defined by Nye: through its culture, its polit-

ical values, and the legitimacy of its foreign policy".

Considering soft power as a "tool through which to refer to sources of influence other than military force and economic payoffs", (Hall 2010: 189) is useful in assessing the role of parliaments in international relations as it is legislatures that provide a visible indication of a country's approach to soft power elements such as the promotion of values including democracy, political culture and questions of governance. The link between parliaments and soft power can be understood in two ways.

First, a parliament may be used to showcase a country's values, political culture and achievements alongside other sources of soft power. Much of South Africa's soft power credentials lie in its relatively peaceful political transformation to democracy. As Sidiropoulos (2014: 198) notes, "South Africa's approach to international relations has been characterized largely by a desire to use the legitimacy and credibility developed through its peaceful transformation into a democratic state as a means of influencing others and the shape of the international order". In other words for South Africa, the functioning of Parliament may be used in demonstrating its democratic credentials and credibility in the pursuit of the foreign policy principles of democracy and participation in global governance. Despite challenges in practice, South Africa's legislature remains an integral part of the country's internationally celebrated democratic transition.

Second, parliaments, in their parliamentary diplomacy, may use soft power in their interactions with other legislatures across bilateral and multilateral platforms. This may be through expressing shared values and parliamentary culture in promoting a state's attractiveness. Although there has not as yet been an explicit link made to parliaments' soft power capabilities in the discourse, there is a growing international awareness of its potential. For instance, former French Senate President, Christian Poncelet, saw the role for parliamentary diplomacy as 'exploratory' in reaching out to people that official channels could not, and in terms of 'influence' noting that parliamentarians could subtly promote the national interest (Stravridis 2006: 8). Another example is that of former Canadian parliamentarian, Bryon Wilfert (2012: 1), who argues that in "an increasingly global world, Canadian parliamentarians and parliamentary associations will play an important role in articulating Canadian values concerning democratic principles and institutions, an important dimension in the field of diplomacy" and that parliamentary

diplomacy "is critical to advancing key public policy issues — from free trade agreements to human rights".

South Africa's Parliament already has a number of multilateral and bilateral relations through which it can promote the interests and values set out in its foreign policy. Following the end of *apartheid* and South Africa's re-integration into the international fold, Parliament re-joined the IPU in 2007 and, in 2008, chaired the 118th Assembly under the theme: "Pushing back the frontiers of Poverty". Within the IPU, South Africa's Parliament is a participant in the Committee on Peace and International Security, the Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade, and the Committee on Democracy and Human Rights (Ngese 2012). Parliament is also active in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) where, during the 3rd Parliament, it assumed the role of President of the CPA Africa Region (2007-2008) and participated in aligning a Regional Strategic Plan with that of the CPA International Strategic Plan (Ngese 2012). Other multilateral relations include participation in the PAP, the SADC-PF and the African, Caribbean, Pacific-European Union Forum (ACP-EU).

Bilaterally, an agreement has also been reached between South Africa's Parliament and the European Union (EU) Parliament supporting parliament-to-parliament engagement as part of the Trade, Development and Cooperation Agreement (TDCA) that frames South African-EU relations (Ahmed 2005). There is, furthermore, a formal bilateral agreement between the South African National Assembly and the People's Assembly of the People's Republic of China with discussions taking place regarding the establishment of friendship groups, although it has been pointed out that Parliament's conventional approach to international relations focuses mainly on parliament-to-parliament relations (Ahmed 2005).

Given these existing multilateral and bilateral relations, in a presentation to Parliament, Ahmed (2005) raised the question of the usefulness to Parliament of "(1) expand[ing] its scope of international diplomacy through a structured process and if so, (2) develop[ing] a parliamentary diplomacy model to facilitate expansion". Parliament's (2012: 4) own International Relations Strategy has gone as far as setting out that the "purpose of parliamentary international relations is to complement, strengthen and positively influence traditional government diplomacy and enhance it". Yet just how this may be achieved is a little more opaque.

Although there is no direct reference to the concept of soft power in Parliament's international relations, there is an alignment between its approach and the idea of soft power. For instance, the 2006 document, *Policy Perspectives and Operational Guidelines for Parliament's Engagement and Involvement in International Relations*, reflects a focus on persuasion by attraction. This includes engagement and communication with other parliaments to promote a better understanding of South Africa and its culture, and improve Parliament's international profile to ultimately increase the international profile of the country (Parliament, 2006). Parliament's (2012: 10) *International Relations Strategy* also reflects the idea of soft power when it notes that the "main objective [of the bilateral relations section] is to strengthen and initiate bilateral relations in Africa, Asia, the America's and Europe in order to promote Parliament's values and interests". This includes lobbying support for Parliament and in promoting democracy, good governance and human rights.

When it comes to opportunities for soft power in the practice of South Africa's parliamentary diplomacy there has been something of a mixed approach in 1) shoring up Parliament's own democratic credibility through public participation, 2) in balancing foreign policy principles with practice and 3) assuming an active role in capacity building and parliament-to-parliament engagement.

Firstly, given the country's celebrated transition to democracy, Parliament has credibility in pursuing democratic values internationally. This includes promoting democratic participation, good governance and human rights. In order to maintain this credibility and the attractiveness of these values, Parliament has sought to build on public engagement. As the Speaker of Parliament, Baleka Mbete, has pointed out, there is a link between parliament in providing a voice for the people and supporting the interests of the people internationally (Ahmed 2009). The challenge is that, so far, it has been argued that engagement remains at the level of the elites, with citizens only invited to road-shows as passive recipients of information on Parliament's international affairs (Ben-Zeev and Waterhouse 2013).

The scuffles between MPs and security at the opening of the 5th Parliament in February 2015, which saw members of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) forcefully escorted from the joint sitting of Parliament, has tarnished the image of the legislature both within the country and internationally (Reuters 2015). Ongoing disruptions and

disagreements within the chambers throughout the course of 2015, between the majority ANC Members and opposition parties, continue to challenge the day-to-day functioning of the legislature. Questions are increasingly being asked regarding the credibility of the Speaker, the impact of the decision to push through regulations for the physical removal of unruly Members from the chambers, and the decision to adopt the Parliamentary *Ad Hoc* Committee on the Police Minister's report on Nkandla, which is at odds with the report by the Public Protector (Davies 2015). While engagement within Parliament remains an essential component of democracy, the manner in which discussions disintegrate into name-calling and *impasse* is impacting on the credibility of Parliament as it pursues its soft power opportunities.

Secondly, despite the challenges facing Parliament, it has sought to promote the value of democracy internationally through its parliamentary diplomacy. This is reflected in the vision of the 3rd Parliament for the establishment of a "people's Parliament working with continental and international bodies to create a new democratic and participatory world order" (Parliament 2008: 4). However, Parliament too faces the challenge of reconciling principles with practice, particularly when it comes to how best to engage visiting delegations to South Africa on questions of democracy and human rights. When Parliament hosts states such as Saudi Arabia, for example within the framework of exchange visits between the two parliaments (Parliament 2011), or interacts through the formal bilateral ties with the People's Assembly of China, questions arise on how Parliament could use its soft power in promoting the foreign policy principles of democracy and human rights, an area where official diplomatic channels may be less successful.

Thirdly, Parliament could use its soft power capabilities to share experiences in post-conflict reconstruction and capacity building. As argued, "[w]hen utilising informal approaches to dialogue, parliamentarians and political parties can use political camaraderie and affiliations to reach-out to interlocutors when traditional channels are strained. ... " (Fiott 2011: 4). This was true during the Cold War when the IPU conferences provided a platform for representatives from the different blocs to maintain discussions (Squarcialupi 2000). When it comes to post-conflict reconstruction, parliaments are well positioned to provide capacity building on questions of governance across the continent. This is already an exercise that the Canadian parliamentarians have engaged in, highlighting the value of "peer teaching and providing practical

answers to individuals who are struggling to establish parliamentary oversight as well as respond to basic needs of constituents" (Wilfert 2012: 2).

These examples of parliaments engaging with states on human rights, democracy and facilitating capacity building, highlight lost opportunities for South Africa's own parliamentary diplomacy, particularly when it comes to the immediate region of Southern Africa. Although priority has been given to engagement with the PAP and SADC-PF, it has been argued that there is a need to go beyond merely logistical support to providing "substantive research and follow-up on decisions taken at these events" (Parliament 2005). In addition, while there has been engagement by Parliament on the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and in the setting up of the PAP, there has been little significant involvement by Parliament on the Zimbabwean crisis or debate on questions of democracy in Swaziland (Ahmed 2009).

Parliamentary diplomacy can complement South Africa's existing international relations. This includes building more substantial relations between countries through people-to-people contact, a key element in supporting soft power engagement. As Barbara Prammer (2009), President of the Austrian National Council pointed out, "[s]uch encounters not only result in a better understanding of the host country and its institutional structure, but also to an intensification of relations between parliaments, the establishment or activation of parliamentarian groups and the transfer of information useful to the government or the business community". This is a point reflected in the strategic planning of Parliament, where the emphasis is on consolidating the development and reflection of Parliament's people-to-people programme, although there remains some distance to go in building on parliamentary diplomacy in practice.

5. Conclusion

Parliamentary diplomacy, understood as agency, is gaining in prominence as legislatures around the world conduct their own international relations. In complementing traditional diplomatic engagements, parliamentary diplomacy offers a means of building on people-to-people relations and in providing opportunities to resolve differences, where inter-parliamentary groups may be able to broach contentious issues outside of formal state negotiations. As Sukma (2008: 10) argues, in "a

less formal setting, which encourages frankness and candid discussion, mutual understanding is easier to come by, and brilliant solutions to problems are [sic] often emerged".

For South Africa, domestic constraints and challenges facing Parliament aside, parliamentary diplomacy has a value in international relations. This is particularly so as Parliament itself has indicated that in "the last three years the demand on members of Parliament to engage in oversight activities and participate in international organisations, events and forums increased" (Parliament 2007: 8). Despite calls for international engagement with South Africa's Parliament the move towards identifying Parliament as an external actor has been slow to gather pace. There is, however, an indication that this is gaining in momentum within Parliament and the governing party (the ANC), both highlighting that it is "dialogue among legislatures at [sic] international level that has been brought about by significant changes in the world" (ANC 2012). This has seen a move towards adopting a more structured approach towards engagement and capacity building, resulting in the adoption of an International Relations policy for Parliament and the establishment of the Parliamentary Group on International Relations (PGIR) aimed at guiding interaction with the rest of the world (Parliament, 2008).

Although there has been an evolution in thinking when it comes to South Africa's parliamentary diplomacy, the strategic value of Parliament in international relations is in need of further discussion. As a review of Parliament's participation in bilateral, regional and multilateral parliamentary forums noted, international engagement "was active but in a very uncoordinated and ineffective manner" (Parliament 2010). Linking parliamentary diplomacy with soft power in South Africa's international relations reveals a number of opportunities for Government as well as for Parliament's own international agenda. Here, two roles emerge. First, Parliament as a source of soft power, where the legislature promotes South Africa's democratic credentials and its political values. Here Parliament, along with the Chapter 9 institutions,²⁾ remains central in support of South Africa's constitutional democracy. Second, Parliament as an actor, utilising its own soft power credentials as it engages across international forums.

With bilateral and multilateral relations established and growing, Parliament will remain active in international affairs. The challenge is the implementation of parliamentary diplomacy when it comes to bal-

ancing principles and practice in enhancing soft power capabilities and South Africa's 'attractiveness' qualities. If South Africa's Parliament does not demonstrate its own commitment to the values that it sets out to attain internationally (democracy, human rights, good governance), the credibility and soft power persuasiveness of parliamentary diplomacy will fall short.

Endnotes

1. Dr Lesley Masters is the Senior Researcher and Senior Lecturer based at the SARChI Chair in African Diplomacy and Foreign Policy, University of Johannesburg. Appreciation is expressed to reviewers who took the time to read an earlier draft of the paper.
2. These include the Public Protector, Commission on Gender Equality, the South African Human rights Commission, the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities and the Auditor-General and Electoral Commission.

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