
Issues, Problems, and Prospects in Managing the Diplomatic Services in Small States

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INTRODUCTION

While there now exists a substantial literature on the foreign policy of small- and medium-sized states, there has not been much written on the management of their foreign service—a trend that applies to the management of Kenya’s foreign service. This is surprising, given Kenya’s pretensions to be a diplomatic heavyweight in the region and an important actor in international diplomacy. Kenya’s foreign policy reached a crossroads in 2002, with the election of the current National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) government. The NARC government rode to power on the back of an overwhelming vote of confidence; but this electoral victory also raised expectations among Kenyans that it would bring a new style and new policies, and that it would go quickly about the business of “making Kenya somebody” once again.

The business of “making Kenya somebody” again applies as much to general governance and economic matters as to the thrust and conduct of its foreign policy, especially in the nearby East African and Horn of Africa regions. For a long time Kenya was considered to be the preeminent actor in the diplomacy of these regions. This perception was shaped in part by Kenya’s relative political stability in these chaotic regions, and in part because, particularly from the 1980s, Kenya consciously sought to shape its diplomacy to encourage this perception. However, the post-Cold War

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emergence of the “new leaders” of Africa—Museveni in Uganda, Meles Zenawi in Ethiopia, and Aferwoki in Eritrea—helped to derail Kenya’s diplomatic preeminence. Hence, with the new Kenyan leadership that emerged in 2002, there was the clear challenge to return to the diplomatic drawing board with the aim of re-inventing Kenyan diplomacy.

It is common wisdom, which has become almost a *cliché*, that an army marches on its stomach. This is true also of diplomacy—indeed, particularly so for diplomacy. Armies and war are controlled by diplomacy, since, as Clausewitz noted, wars are intended to serve political ends. In many ways, security policy, defense policy, and even military strategy serve eventually the interests of foreign policy. Given this reasoning, it follows that more attention needs to be given to the analysis of foreign policy in all its dimensions in Kenya, as elsewhere.

This paper is concerned with the “stomach matters” of diplomacy and foreign policy. In particular, the paper will discuss issues concerning the management of the foreign service in Kenya. In doing so, the paper seeks to make a pioneering contribution to the literature of foreign service management in Kenya; it also puts the foreign service of Kenya in a more administrative perspective. Specifically, the paper examines the following issues: a strategic plan for the ministry of foreign affairs; a written foreign policy for Kenya; the establishment and retention of missions abroad; staff qualifications and posting policy; and the establishment of a professional foreign service in Kenya.

FOREIGN POLICY STRATEGIC PLAN

In recent years, a fresh wave has crashed across the management of Kenyan public service. Part of this wave has concerned general governance issues, such as transparency, the fight against corruption, and the delivery of services to the people of Kenya, as opposed to a few elite. The other part of the wave has concerned the professional management of the public service. Managers of the public services, such as permanent secretaries and heads of parastatal organizations, have been required to draw up strategic plans, on the basis of which budgets are allocated, and on the strength of which the public service is managed and judged. In both these respects the foreign affairs ministry has not been spared.

In drawing up a strategic plan for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it should be realized that this ministry, unlike others, delivers intangible ben-

efits for the country. Because the benefits accruing from this ministry are not quantitative, but qualitative, some wrongly believe that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not require significant amounts of money to function. This is not correct. While the current strategic plan and its accompanying budget show clear resource gaps, these should be seen in the context of Kenya's financial capacity as a whole. And given that Kenya is a poor country, the national cake must be distributed rationally. Not every ministry can get all the resources it requires, and there needs to be better management in order to make the most of what few resources are available.

While the resource gaps in the current strategic plan (2005–2010) are noticeable and raise the question of whether the Ministry of Foreign Affairs can deliver effectively the foreign policy and diplomatic goods for Kenya, the implementation matrix accompanying the plan shows a clear intent to change the direction, and give a better focus to, the management of Kenya's diplomacy. The challenge for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as for others, is thus to ensure that the management of Kenya's diplomacy does not remain a dream, as have many other good policies since Kenya's independence.

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In this context, there are various management policies that will need to be implemented if the management of Kenya's diplomacy is to succeed. While some of these have been expressly noted in the current strategic plan of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, others are adjustments to current policy that need to be made in order to give life and meaning to that strategic plan. Besides, some of the policies and recommendations carried here, such as performance contracts, have been captured within the new general framework of the management of public institutions in Kenya. These include achieving savings in certain areas such as the ownership of properties abroad and a more rational utilization of user charges such as visa fees. The latter can lead to significant savings if it is agreed at the same time as a matter of policy that such fees do not need to be repatriated, but can be used to maintain diplomatic missions, not just in the country where they are collected, but for other missions abroad.

A move to make diplomatic missions more self-sustaining is a clear challenge for the managers of the diplomatic service. In this respect, diplomatic missions (as many of them as possible) need to be challenged to generate

income through more aggressive creation of trade opportunities, in attracting tourists to Kenya, and the like. The only way in which self-sustainability can be realized is through performance contracts, to challenge heads of missions to

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deliver or quit. Additionally, the question of multiple accreditation of diplomatic missions needs to be revisited. In this context, Kenya needs to move away from quantity to quality of representation. Thus, where possible—and this is in many cases—multiple representation should be the preferred choice of diplomatic repre-

sentation. This creates a more rational utilization of resources and manpower. In addition, staffing policy should be reviewed; in reality it is rarely necessary to have a diplomatic mission in which every diplomatic rank is filled. Indeed, some countries such as South Korea have rationalized their staffing policies effectively, where many missions are manned by just two or three officers, who are therefore challenged to deliver optimally.

A RECOGNIZABLE, WRITTEN FOREIGN POLICY

There has been an enduring debate in Kenya about whether it is necessary for the country to have its foreign policy stated in a specific written document, or whether it can still have a functional foreign policy in the absence of such a document. This kind of debate has existed in other domains, for example in constitutional law. In the latter case, most states have chosen to have a written constitution. In the foreign policy arena, the debate is inconclusive. In the East African region, Tanzania led the way by having its foreign policy stated in a specific document.¹

Kenya has followed the Tanzanian example by producing a written document containing the foreign policy of Kenya, or at least, the principles that will guide foreign policy and the directions that it will take. This is a very significant development for Kenya's foreign policy. It is the first time ever that Kenya has a written guideline about what its foreign policy approach will be. Its greatest service to the foreign policy of Kenya is that it will remove, or reduce, the problem of an *ad hoc* foreign policy of "wait and see" that has characterized the conduct of Kenya's foreign policy in the past. It will also encourage a more strategic approach to the management and implementation of foreign policy.

The crafting of a document on the foreign policy of any country encourages the development of a clear vision and a specific mission for foreign policy. In particular, it reminds those in charge of executing foreign policy that this must be done in the interests of the citizens, rather than the elites. It centers debates about foreign policy not only on the resources required to deliver it, but also the directions and roles that a country should play regionally and internationally. The foreign policy document must, however, be debated widely in order for it to attract non-partisan support. It is envisaged that Kenya's draft foreign policy will be put through these public debates and discussion.

The notion of a written foreign policy for Kenya is also important from an historical standpoint. Both practitioners and critics have described the conduct of foreign policy since independence as being one of "wait and see."² This encapsulated the *ad hoc* manner in which foreign policy was done. It was, in essence, a foreign policy of continuity that reacted to events regionally and internationally as they unfolded,³ rather than one that tried to shape the operational environment. During the 1960s and 1970s, this was the dominant thrust of the conduct of foreign policy. It lacked a strategic, long-term vision and was hence short-sighted.

The 1980s were different, however. During much of that decade, Kenya's foreign policy attempted to change the direction of events in Kenya's "near abroad."⁴ The foreign policy and diplomacy that were devised centered Kenya's foreign policy on issues of conflict management.⁵ The thinking behind this was that Kenya's interests in East and Central Africa, and in the Horn of Africa, could not be met in an environment in which the regions' defining characteristics were their multiple violent and protracted conflicts. Thus, in order to secure its interests, Kenya had to actively participate in the management of the conflicts disturbing these regions. Kenya's engagement in managing the conflicts in Sudan and Somalia, and in Uganda, stemmed from wishing to secure outcomes that would serve Kenya's contemporary and future interests better.

During the 1990s, the momentum for a foreign policy of conflict management for Kenya slowed down considerably, and its record of the 1980s was not matched again until toward the end of that decade, and later, in 2005, with the conclusion of the Somalia⁶ and Sudan⁷ peace processes in Kenya. In the 1990s, Kenya's diplomacy of conflict management ran aground and began to be transcended by similar diplomacies, particularly that of South Africa. The low point of Kenya's diplomacy of

conflict management during the 1990s was in the (then-) Zaire conflict in 1996–1997, when, despite Kenya's efforts to mediate, the process was eventually hijacked by South Africa. This signaled the end of the golden period of Kenya's diplomacy of conflict management.

From about 1995 for the Sudan conflict, and 2000 for the Somalia conflict, there was an attempt to resuscitate Kenya's foreign policy of conflict management. This was done, however, under the auspices of the

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Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), rather than being strictly a Kenyan affair. Nevertheless, Kenya took center stage in both the Somalia and Sudan mediations, by providing the chief mediators for both. The successful conclusions of the two peace processes in 2005 were hailed as a triumph for Kenya's diplomacy,

even though it was equally a triumph for IGAD and the neighboring states for the Somalia peace process, and for IGAD and the so-called friends of IGAD for the Sudan peace process.

All these engagements were, however, fairly *ad hoc* foreign policy arrangements, whose success depended more on the personalities involved than on a clear direction of a deliberate foreign policy. It is thus important to have a clear, documented statement of the direction that Kenya's foreign policy will take. The formulation of such a foreign policy document requires debates and discussions among different constituencies. Such debates play a vital role of helping reach consensus about the sectors that will form the fulcrum of foreign policy during a particular period. It helps decision makers to decide whether, for example, the foreign policy during a particular period will center on economic, political, conflict management, security, or other concerns.⁸ With such a declared foreign policy, the implementers can then get down to the business of implementing it, unencumbered by the uncertainties of an *ad hoc* foreign policy in an uncertain and often hostile environment.

ESTABLISHMENT AND RETENTION OF DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS ABROAD

Although many states may have diplomatic relations without exchanging diplomatic missions, the existence of diplomatic missions abroad is

nonetheless central to the conduct of an effective foreign policy. Hence, having diplomatic missions abroad is generally not just an option, but a mandatory requirement for a functional diplomacy to operate. Establishing diplomatic missions abroad raises many issues, not least the fact that they are extremely expensive to maintain. For small countries, the problem of expense means that there must be a clear and rational policy governing the establishment of diplomatic missions, their geographical location, how they will be staffed, and the outputs that will be expected of them in terms of delivering on the promises of the country's foreign policy. These matters of the management of foreign policy and of the diplomatic service require a clear and deliberate policy and its effective implementation. In the absence of that, it will be difficult to have an effective foreign policy.

Traditionally, there are several factors that are taken into account before diplomatic relations—and missions—are established. While the specific issues taken into account may differ from one country to another, some general considerations exist. Such issues include the existence and level of trade between the two countries, as well as their political relations. Where there are important political relations that need to be maintained or nurtured, then the case for establishing diplomatic relations is stronger. An exception to this could exist where states in a region enjoy alternative frameworks (for example multilateral ones) in which to conduct their relations. For example, in the 1970s, during the lifespan of the first East African Community member states, as a matter of policy, did not exchange diplomatic missions among themselves, because it was argued that in the East African Community, they had a forum for conducting their diplomatic relations and hence they did not require to establish separate bilateral diplomatic relations with each other. A third factor that is taken into consideration in deciding whether to establish diplomatic relations and missions is whether there are significant numbers of nationals living and doing business in that country. If there are, then this weighs in heavily on the decision to establish diplomatic relations, and is a major consideration in deciding to open a diplomatic mission.

Following a positive decision, the major challenge especially for small states is whether the representation should be at a full ambassadorial level, or whether relations can be conducted at lower levels such as that of *charge d'affaires*. That also raises the further question of whether the diplomatic mission should be resident or whether relations can be represented from elsewhere, i.e., using multiple accreditation. Some states view multiple

accreditation as a downgrading of their relations and do not take to that decision kindly. However, this is one of the difficult decisions that has to be made by managers of foreign policy and of the foreign service in small states, and it should be guided by the contents of an existing strategic plan for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

For small states, ultimately, the fundamental question is whether the diplomatic service is, in practice, delivering the goods. In an ever-changing and dynamic world, and especially one that has become globalized, the continuing existence of diplomatic missions and their location must be reviewed constantly (at least during each strategic plan period). Such periodic reviews should be guided by certain fundamental questions: whether each diplomatic mission is delivering the goods in accordance with its changing foreign policy; whether each diplomatic mission is sufficiently staffed, i.e. whether members of the diplomatic mission are fully utilized; whether each diplomatic mission is optimally located; and whether, if this is not the case, a single mission can represent the country in several countries within the same region.

Reviewing representation policy in this way has important consequences, and as such, should be guided by a clear stand on the principle and vision of the representation policy. For Kenya and other small states, it would seem that the direction for the future should be one overwhelmingly of multiple accreditation. Even though it has some political problems, such as being seen to downgrade relations with states, its benefits far outweigh its disadvantages. For one thing, multiple representation means that the country is able to be represented, and hence have visibility, in more countries. Individual representation is extremely expensive, and small states cannot afford to be represented in all capitals of the world, or even in all capitals where objectively they have serious interests. Also, multiple representation means that the country can make significant savings in terms of the costs of maintaining and running diplomatic missions abroad. The costs saved in this way can be put to better use in improving the quality of delivery of the fewer diplomatic missions, which can, for example, make more extensive use of IT facilities, thus making diplomacy more efficient. Thirdly, multiple accreditation makes more optimal use of diplomatic personnel abroad; instead of having extensive pockets of "glorified unemployment," the fewer personnel can be better utilized.

STAFF QUALIFICATIONS, TRAINING, AND POSTING POLICY

A new and fresh foreign policy for Kenya requires the most highly qualified personnel that can be found. This, indeed, is the one basis on which the new foreign policy for Kenya, once it emerges, can be delivered. In this context, qualifications and training mean both academic and professional qualifications and training. At present the sole qualification for joining the foreign service is a degree, generally in fields of the social sciences. After joining the foreign ministry, staff are trained in professional aspects of diplomacy at postgraduate level. Although some members of staff have qualifications at the masters degree level, most go through their professional careers with only a basic degree and a postgraduate diploma in international relations.

This education policy should be reviewed, because although it may have served Kenya well in the past, it is unlikely to do so in the contemporary, competitive world. At a minimum, personnel working in the diplomatic arena should be qualified in a professionally calibrated manner. They should all possess a basic qualification in an area relevant to foreign policy, such as economics, law, international relations, or the like. In addition to these sectoral qualifications, staff should also have a postgraduate qualification (preferably at masters level) in the relevant areas; and certainly all personnel should have a professional qualification in diplomacy, regardless of their areas of specialization. Lastly, staff should have specialized qualifications in various areas of diplomacy, for example in negotiation. And staff with all these qualifications should undertake continuing education at every stage of their professional careers. The purpose of continuing education is to appraise them of emerging knowledge and developments in their areas of specialization, and in diplomacy and its practice. Where possible, staff should also be encouraged to acquire higher qualifications than these during their professional careers, and this should be reflected in the posting policy that is adopted. It should be possible, for example, for a foreign service officer to take three years to undertake doctoral studies in a relevant area, and this should be considered equivalent to a posting to a diplomatic mission.

This kind of training program can deliver a lean, mean, and well-qualified foreign service cadre. In the challenges that Kenya will continue to face in an often difficult environment, this should be considered to be a major component of the strategic plan of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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Apart from these academic and professional training requirements, there also needs to exist a rational posting policy.⁹ That a posting policy meeting contemporary requirements of a vigorous diplomacy is required should not be in question. The new foreign policy needs to be accompanied by a posting policy that achieves certain things.

The most important requirement for a posting policy is that it must be predictable, so that from the time they join the foreign service, officials know their career paths and patterns, including where, and at what time of their careers, they will be posted to diplomatic missions abroad. Also, in order to facilitate the drawing up of a rational posting policy, members of the diplomatic staff should be encouraged to begin their area specialization early, and to continue developing it throughout their careers. This is very

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much of the essence, because one of the reasons for doing a new policy for diplomatic management is to emphasize the point that the era of the generalist foreign service officer is over.

In addition to this, postings abroad should be for defined periods of time: they should not be so short that staff members cannot develop some in-depth knowledge of the countries to which they are posted, or so long that they forget about developments in their country, or of the changing aspirations of Kenyans. For this same reason, the practice of mission-to-mission postings, where members of the diplomatic service move directly from one foreign mission to another, should cease, because in the long run it is self-defeating. In order for all this to function rationally, diplomatic staff should develop area specializations (e.g. Africa, Americas, Europe, etc.), and should consequently be posted to those areas where they are knowledgeable and have in the course of time developed expertise.

Diplomatic postings are, however, not about diplomatic officials alone. They also affect the families of the diplomatic officials, and if these are not equally taken care of, it will be difficult for diplomatic officials to deliver. Hence, the needs of families should also be factored in as an inte-

gral part of the posting policy. Postings should take into account needs such as those of schooling for children, such that officials are posted to those countries where their children's education is not disrupted. Similarly, the spouses' needs should be taken into account. These include the career development of spouses, so that those who wish may continue developing their professional careers.

ESTABLISHMENT OF A PROFESSIONAL FOREIGN SERVICE

All these expectations of a foreign and diplomatic policy that is not *ad hoc*, and of posting and other policies of the management of the diplomatic service, cannot be implemented unless there exists a professional foreign service in Kenya. The formal intimations of such a service have been in the making in recent times. However, these have addressed the formal aspects of a professional diplomatic service, such as the titles officials carry both at home and abroad, rather than embracing the real meaning of such a service.

Historically in Kenya, as in other African foreign services such as in the Kingdom of Lesotho, there was no professional diplomatic service. Those officials who worked in the diplomatic service were employed by the general public (civil) service and were therefore liable to be transferred from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to any other ministry, and vice versa. While it was noted that in practice, most officials in the Foreign Ministry spent their careers there, no officer could be certain that this would be the case. This militated against full commitment to the foreign service, and this in turn prevented the psychological conditions necessary for a professional foreign service. In the conditions of a new foreign policy, and of a more professional management of the diplomatic service, it is clearly necessary also to create a truly professional cadre of foreign service officers whose lifetime working commitment will be towards excellence in the implementation of the foreign policy of Kenya. However, for this to be realized, some fundamental requirements for a professional foreign service must be met.

If the foreign service is to be seen as a profession, then it must develop the requisites of a profession. These include clear entry requirements, so that the foreign service does not become a dumping ground for politically correct but professionally inept people. The professional requirements for the new diplomacy of Kenya were discussed earlier. What needs to be done

is to define the minimum entry requirement. This ideally should be a post-graduate degree, plus a professional qualification in diplomacy. These should be earned before entry into the profession. Hence it should be up to the intending entrants, having attained the academic requirements, to sit for professional examinations before applying for consideration for employment. Such professional examinations should be set and examined by a professional body approved by the ministry of foreign affairs.

There also needs to exist a professional structure of service. This has to some extent been achieved in Kenya. However, it needs to be structured in such a way that entrants can know at the beginning what their career prospects will be, provided that they meet all the other requirements of a

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demanding foreign service. In addition, there should also be a clear system of seniority in the profession, so that new entrants are effectively socialized into the profession. In order for this to happen, however, the practice of lateral entry into the diplomatic service, particularly at the middle level, needs to be

discontinued. While for ambassadors some lateral entry is unavoidable, and may even be good for the delivery of the stated foreign policy, ambassadors of the republic should not overwhelmingly be outsiders to the profession. To achieve this, a clear policy about the percentage of ambassadors who are not career officers should be formulated (for example, 30 percent). While non-career ambassadors might bring in a fresh breath to the service, too many of them may lead to the dissolving of values of the profession, and could also affect the morale of career officers who aspire to go right to the top of the profession.

A professional foreign service also means that those in the profession must understand it: the guiding policies and regulations, the values of the profession and so on. These are things that are achieved through proper socialization, but also through growing up in the profession, and through entering the profession on the basis of solid credentials. In addition to this, there should be, within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the diplomatic missions, a clear language of discourse with which every member is familiar and comfortable. Such a language of discourse is to be found within the disciplines that support the practice of diplomacy, such as international relations, international law, international political economy, African international

relations and organizations, and the like. A member to whom the operative language of discourse has to be translated will not be effective in delivering the implementation of Kenya's foreign policy.

A professional foreign service also requires a sound base from which to operate. It must be supported by a long-term, strategic foreign policy that is imaginative and challenging, and that cries out to be practiced as a science. Such a strategic foreign policy for Kenya is now in the making, 40 years late, but it comes at a useful crossroads for Kenya as a country. Among other things, such a strategic foreign policy must define its major themes of concern and its conceptual and strategic thrust. It should take into account the vicissitudes of a volatile, and hence unpredictable, world. It should have a vision about where Kenya wants to be at different moments in its growth. For such a strategic foreign policy to emerge and to endure, however, its paradigms of operation must constantly be made clear, such that those it adopted earlier, but which do not deliver the interests of Kenya, are overthrown in a paradigmatic revolution, and new ones fashioned. Hence, such a strategic foreign policy must be based on the clear understanding that the era of "anything goes" is gone forever.

CONCLUSION

The whole business of the management of foreign policy, and of the diplomatic (or foreign) service have in the past been approached in a rather casual way. While the management of foreign policy is essentially a political matter, it should nevertheless be founded on a clear vision about where the country is, and where it wants to be at specified periods in the future. Such a vision should have a strategic thrust and should be geared toward being competitive in an uncertain and volatile world.

For Kenya, that strategic vision, while not ignoring the rest of the globalized and globalizing world, should focus sharply on Kenya's "near abroad." It is in that strategic sphere that Kenya's fortunes eventually will be made or lost. The "near abroad" presents for Kenya an arena for doing foreign policy that is rich in all its dimensions: economic, political, strategic, environmental, and the like. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, Kenya, with its relatively strong economy and relative stability, is well-placed to seize the opportunities for regional leadership, especially in the diplomacy of East Africa and the Horn of Africa regions. As this paper has

suggested, however, the beginning point must be from the national management of its diplomatic service. Ultimately, this will be the engine that will drive the country from the ordinary to regional diplomatic preeminence.

It is imperative to have a diplomatic service that works and that can deliver the goods by implementing foreign policy effectively and creatively. This is the ultimate challenge for the management of the foreign service. For if Kenya is to be able to make gentle the life of this region, the process must be spearheaded by a foreign service that stands second to none. At 42 years of age, Kenya's diplomacy cannot face a more interesting challenge. ■

ENDNOTES

- 1 United Republic of Tanzania, *New Foreign Policy* (Dar-es-Salaam: Government Printer, 2001).
- 2 See K. Orwa, "Foreign Policy, 1963–1986," in W.R. Ochieng, ed., *A Modern History of Kenya, 1895–1980* (Nairobi: Evans Brothers, 1989).
- 3 See K. Orwa, "Continuity and Change: Kenya's Foreign Policy from Kenyatta to Moi," in W.O. Oyugi, ed., *Politics and Administration in East Africa* (Nairobi: Konrad Adeneur Foundation, 1992), 359–394.
- 4 Makumi Mwangi, "The Elusive Quest: Conflict, Diplomacy and Foreign Policy in Kenya," in P. Godfrey Okoth and Bethwell A. Ogot, eds., *Conflict in Contemporary Africa* (Nairobi: Jomo Kenyatta Foundation, 2000), 177–189.
- 5 Makumi Mwangi, "Foreign Policy and the Diplomacy of Conflict Management in Kenya: A Review and Assessment," *African Review of Foreign Policy*, 1 (1) (1999): 44–64.
- 6 See Ochieng Kamudhayi, "The Somalia Peace Process," in Makumi Mwangi, ed., *African Regional Security in the Age of Globalisation* (Nairobi: Heinrich Boll Foundation, 2004), 107–123.
- 7 See Samson Kwaje, "The Sudan Peace Process: From Machakos to Naivasha" in Mwangi, *African Regional Security*, 95–105.
- 8 See Mwangi, *African Regional Security*.
- 9 See a preliminary discussion of this in Makumi Mwangi, *Diplomacy: Documents, Methods and Practice* (Nairobi: Institute of Diplomacy and International Studies, 2004), 147–148.