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# When Diplomats Become Leaders

## *Conceptualising Diplomatic Leadership in Crisis from a Psychological Angle*

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### Abstract

Challenging assumptions about diplomacy as a self-effacing practice of collective governance, this article searches for leadership in a system that conventionally leaves no room for it.

Drawing on interviews and a Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA), it advances an original conceptual framework for identifying and analysing diplomatic leadership in crisis. The cases of Ukraine's current Ambassador to Germany and his predecessor illustrate the empirical application. The study finds that, under conditions of disrupted routine and increasing public visibility, not only political figures, but also diplomats posted abroad are able to practice a type of leadership. It concludes that eventually personality traits decide whether or not leadership is exercised. Expanding the sparse knowledge about psychological variables in diplomacy, my work finally calls for a more thorough exploration of the synthesis between research on leadership and diplomacy.

### Keywords

diplomacy – leadership – crisis management – psychology – foreign policy-making – trait analysis

After all, there are more than 200 ambassadors in Berlin. But only one that everyone knows<sup>1</sup>

Translated from German

## Introduction

On 5 September 2022, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock gave a speech on the occasion of the 20th Conference of the German Heads of Missions, calling upon the assembled ambassadors not to refrain from speaking out loud “out of fear of headwind”.<sup>2</sup> This request is new. Traditionally, diplomats prevent confrontation through good-faith, behind-closed-doors negotiations. They are expected to tactfully adhere to the clear line separating their job from that of their political leaders. When an ambassador oversteps boundaries by disregarding conventions or interfering too keenly in the host country’s affairs, this usually does not end well. One might think of former US Ambassador Grenell who, from 2018, found himself isolated in a Berlin that was reluctant to deal with his controversies.

Notable individuals who alter the course of history have fascinated observers since the time of Plato and Aristotle.<sup>3</sup> But since these early beginnings of the engagement with leadership, the skills necessary have usually been attributed to those in formal positions of power, such as monarchs or presidents. Members of the diplomatic corps instead are supposed to represent and implement standard codes of action as custodians of the international system.<sup>4</sup>

On rare occasions, however, we observe instances of extraordinary diplomatic leadership<sup>5</sup> that do not follow this expected pattern, neither in style nor in substance. The Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg, who saved thousands of Jews by issuing protective passports during the Holocaust in Hungary in 1944, would be one of those examples. More recently, Tom Fletcher, a British Ambassador to Lebanon, became known as a pioneer of innovative diplomacy and social media use.

In this article, I aim to draw attention to these ‘outliers’ in diplomacy, seeking to develop a lens which allows us to better understand the nature and

1 Gerster, ‘Der Ungewöhnlichste Botschafter Aller Zeiten’.

2 Baerbock, ‘Eröffnungsrede’.

3 Bass and Stogdill, *Bass & Stogdill's Handbook Of Leadership*, p. 3.

4 Adler-Nissen, ‘Just Greasing the Wheels?’, p. 27.

5 As ‘diplomatic leadership’ I define here not a certain leadership style, but the leadership exerted by diplomatic actors.

origins of those ‘undiplomatic’ occurrences of diplomacy. What can they tell us about leadership in a profession that is not meant to produce leaders? On a theoretical level, research has so far surprisingly neglected the impact that regular diplomats and their particular character traits have on foreign policy decisions of their hosts countries,<sup>6</sup> especially in times of crisis. Yet, we have much to gain from applying approaches from the realm of political psychology to diplomatic scholarship. The central question is: how do frontline diplomats<sup>7</sup> become leaders in situations of crisis and which role does their personality play?

I argue that not only political figures, but also diplomats<sup>8</sup> posted abroad can exert a type of leadership and that their character acts as a necessary, but not sufficient, enabling condition. To test these assumptions, I will comparatively look at the cases of the former and current Ukrainian Ambassador to Germany, Andrii Melnyk and Oleksii Makeiev.

The first step will consist in embedding my approach into existing accounts of leadership and diplomatic agency. My methodology will then be followed by a three-step analysis. Central is first the development of criteria that allow the recognition of diplomatic leadership before I will apply these to the cases of Melnyk and Makeiev in the context of the current Russian war of aggression on Ukraine. For the next step, the personality profiles of both individuals will serve to explain the differences in diplomatic style and therefore the emergence of leadership. The article ends with a brief discussion of the results, their relevance, and limitations.

### Leading & Being Led

For most of their existence, mainstream International Relations (IR) theories did not make much of an effort to set aside their structural angle to incorporate the individual in their attempts to understand the world. One of the main contributions that their colleagues in Foreign Policy Analysis have brought in this regard is undoubtedly the idea that leaders matter.<sup>9</sup> Although still

6 Some rare studies apply psychological approaches to diplomacy, but mostly stay focused, as is the case for Keys and Yorke, on well-known high-level figures like Henry Kissinger instead of on ‘regular’ career diplomats. Keys and Yorke, ‘Personal and Political Emotions in the Mind of the Diplomat’. For a good overview of the role of the individual in IR Theory see also Holmes, ‘Assessing the Renaissance of Individuals in IR Theory’.

7 I borrow this term from Cooper and Cornut, ‘The Changing Practices of Frontline Diplomacy. New Directions for Inquiry’. I refer in this study exclusively to diplomats posted abroad, leaving considerations of leadership in diplomatic headquarters for future research.

8 I will in the following speak of diplomats or diplomatic actors, implying that the likelihood for leadership is greatest for high-level positions, such as ambassadors.

9 Hudson, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, pp. 7f.

contested to what extent, today we can safely agree that stateswomen and statesmen have an impact on their country's foreign policy.<sup>10</sup> This research has been considerably deepened by scholars such as Margaret Hermann and Jerrold M. Post<sup>11</sup> who played a crucial role in directing the view towards the personality traits and perceptions of political leaders and in developing tools for their systematic understanding.

Today, despite growing interest, leadership research remains a highly fragmented and ambiguous field.<sup>12</sup> In everyday journalism, 'leadership' is a popular term, but at a closer theoretical level, "the concept [...] taunts us with its slipperiness and complexity".<sup>13</sup> In spite of its multidimensionality, I deem it possible to identify some definitional elements. Modern accounts of leadership agree in their view of it as a mutual act of influence between leaders and followers,<sup>14</sup> progressing therefore from asymmetrical conceptualisations that were still commonsense at the time of Stogdill and Bass.<sup>15</sup> Nye's account of leadership as "power to orient and mobilise others for a purpose"<sup>16</sup> has left a lasting mark and is still frequently referred to. It was later complemented by Smircich's insights into the conveyance of shared meaning through leadership<sup>17</sup> and the achievement of common goals.<sup>18</sup>

My main criticism of contemporary research is twofold. First, despite the diversification of actors on the international stage, scholarship remains focused mostly on high-level executive leaders, disregarding emerging forms of unconventional agency. Second, leadership is primarily conceptualised as an automatic accompanying factor of a certain professional position. This implies that every president or prime minister is a leader *per definitionem*, it is merely their styles that vary. My article aims to question these simplifications by firstly drawing attention to individuals who do not typically assume a leading role and by secondly comprehending leadership as a situative occurrence in need of pro-active exercise: "Leadership requires more than simply holding a particular office".<sup>19</sup>

10 Kaarbo, 'New Directions for Leader Personality Research', p. 423.

11 Hermann and Milburn, *Psychological Examination of Political Leaders*; Post, *When Illness Strikes the Leader*.

12 Forkmann and Schlieben, 'Politische Führung und Parteivorsitzende', p. 13.

13 Bennis, 'Leadership Theory and Administrative Behaviour', p. 260.

14 Gast, *Der Bundeskanzler als Politischer Führer*, p. 23; Kellermann, *Bad Leadership*, p. xiv.

15 Stogdill and Bass, *Stogdill's Handbook Of Leadership*, p. 16; Blondel, *Comparative Government*, p. 278.

16 Nye, *The Powers to Lead*, p. 19.

17 Smircich and Morgan, 'Leadership', p. 258.

18 Gast, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

19 Hartley, 'Political Leadership and its Development', p. 99.

### On the Lookout for the Diplomatic Individual

Diplomacy as an institution and as a practice usually leaves little room for agency, let alone leadership. Generations of scholars have searched widely for the essence of diplomacy and have found it in the mediation of estranged entities,<sup>20</sup> of separate state units,<sup>21</sup> or universalism and particularism.<sup>22</sup> The focus on representation places the diplomat into a tightly-scripted system of conventions<sup>23</sup> where diplomacy becomes a rule-following process of pragmatic care-taking. Cornut adds to this image of a “politically empty” practice through his portrayal of the diplomat as a knowledge-producer and bureaucrat.<sup>24</sup> Where diplomacy is seen as an infinitely reproducing codification of self-restraint, as a constant negotiation on behalf of others,<sup>25</sup> Bourdieu’s ‘habitus’ – as a matrix for perception based on past experiences – is not far off either.<sup>26</sup> However, in my understanding, the typical mode of self-effacement<sup>27</sup> has not only rendered the diplomat a replaceable facilitator, but has also eroded the diplomatic individual from research agendas. What most accounts of diplomacy have in common is their omission of psychological approaches.

Admittedly, the recent ‘practice turn’ in IR has contributed in a significant way to a new emphasis on ‘making’ and ‘building’ in diplomacy.<sup>28</sup> Shifting the focus to how everyday codes and behaviour are constitutive of world politics, has brought agency back to the fore. However, neither this move towards governance, described by Mitzen as joint intentionality,<sup>29</sup> nor other conceptualisations of reflexivity in diplomacy<sup>30</sup> look beyond the collective level. On the contrary, they might even contribute to the risk of losing the individual in a system of common goal pursuit.

The current diplomatic world does not fully seem to fit with this view. We observe the growing transparency and personalisation of the profession,<sup>31</sup> not least driven by increasing social media use by diplomats.<sup>32</sup> These changes

20 Der Derian, *On Diplomacy*.

21 Sending, ‘Diplomats and Humanitarians in Crisis Governance’.

22 Jönsson and Hall, *Essence of Diplomacy*.

23 Bjola, ‘Diplomatic Leadership in Times of International Crisis’, p. 4.

24 Cornut, ‘To Be a Diplomat Abroad’, p. 385.

25 Jönsson and Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

26 Bourdieu, *Outline of A Theory of Practice*, pp. 82ff.

27 Neumann, ‘To Be A Diplomat’, p. 88.

28 Pouliot and Cornut, ‘Practice Theory and the Study of Diplomacy’, p. 309.

29 Mitzen, ‘From Representation to Governing’, p. 112.

30 Pouliot, ‘The Logic of Practicality’, p. 262.

31 Manor, ‘The Rise of Personalised Diplomacy’.

32 Seib, *Real-Time Diplomacy*, pp. 105ff.

make me wonder how far the influence of a single diplomat can go. What if the individual even decides to cross the boundaries of quiet mediation to assume a role that resembles more the one of a political leader? In my view, the endeavour of a cross-fertilisation of the scholarship on diplomacy and leadership comes at an apposite time to show that diplomatic leadership does not have to be the oxymoron that a review of the current literature would suggest. It opens a heavy yet indispensable door for a closer look at how leadership develops in an environment that is not per se made for it.

### When Crises Call for Leadership and Disturb Diplomatic Routine

Crisis situations in particular are interesting cases for the analysis of diplomacy and leadership. Despite definitional intricacies, crises are most often described as “low probability, high-impact event[s] [...] characterised by ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution”.<sup>33</sup> Combining the three elements of threat, uncertainty and urgency,<sup>34</sup> crises tend to question societies’ strongest values and cause systemic disorder.<sup>35</sup> Above all, situations of extraordinary destabilisation create a need for leadership. With “little patience for imperfection”<sup>36</sup> and heightened expectations,<sup>37</sup> the insecure glances of followers are directed at their leaders, looking for someone to soothe their helplessness and anger.<sup>38</sup> Usually, this function is fulfilled by state leaders who inherit this responsibility through their official role. However, it is also the world of diplomats which is shaken by time pressure, turbulence and the need for quick solutions when crisis occurs.<sup>39</sup> The problem is solely that diplomats, as agents of routine and ceremonial decorum, are not traditionally positioned to handle statecraft.<sup>40</sup> Bjola describes the mismatch between internalised diplomatic processes and the reflexive mobilisation of purpose required in a crisis.<sup>41</sup> He even sees code-based reactions to threat as a likely “recipe for policy failure”.<sup>42</sup> What does this mean for diplomacy today? Is there still no space for leadership? Or do we underestimate the capacity of the diplomat to become

33 Pearson and Clair, ‘Reframing Crisis Management’, p. 60.

34 Pillai, ‘Crisis and the Emergence of Charismatic Leadership in Groups’, pp. 545f.

35 Constantinou, ‘In Pursuit of Crisis Diplomacy’, pp. 30ff.

36 Boin *et al.*, *The Politics of Crisis Management*, p. 14.

37 Kets de Vries, ‘Prisoners of Leadership’, p. 271.

38 Probert and Turnbull, ‘Leadership Development’, pp. 137f.

39 Acuto, ‘Diplomats in Crisis’, pp. 527ff.

40 Ish-Shalom, ‘King Diplomacy for Perpetual Crisis’, pp. 10f.

41 Bjola, ‘Diplomacy as World Disclosure’, p. 336.

42 *Ibid.*

a leader in exceptional circumstances? If so, what are the factors that enable this phenomenon?

### The Paradox of Diplomatic Leadership

I wish to tell a story of leadership in a place where it does not necessarily belong. A survey of the literature reveals that despite advances in the study of diplomatic behaviour during crises,<sup>43</sup> the discussion about the impact of psychological factors in diplomacy has not yet been sufficiently explored. Paired with the conventional division between the duties of political leaders and those of diplomats,<sup>44</sup> this shortcoming leads to an understanding of diplomacy that seldom goes beyond reflexive modes of knowledge-production.<sup>45</sup> And reflexivity is not the same as leadership.

By asking how frontline diplomats come to exert leadership in situations of crisis, I therefore want to address this blind spot in the literature, while at the same time challenge the assumption that the boundary between the political leader and the bureaucratic agent is an impermeable one. I argue that even in their usual leadership-averse environment of collective governance, diplomats are able to practice leadership. I contend that disruptive crisis situations as well as increased visibility through media use are two fundamental enabling aspects. However, we observe that not all diplomats step out of the shadows of traditional rule-following when crises occur. My central hypothesis therefore is that psychological factors must eventually be decisive for whether or not a diplomat exercises leadership.

This paper primarily pursues four goals. (1) Firstly, I aim to contribute to psychological approaches in IR dedicated to the impact of personality on foreign policy. (2) In addition, the fragmented field of leadership research benefits from further corroboration and specification. I suggest that our common understanding of leadership needs to be reformulated in light of the diversification of its arenas and performers. (3) My objective is therefore also to contribute, if only at the margins, to a conceptualisation of diplomatic leadership that can be used in future research. (4) Lastly, I see this work as an opportunity to call, at a theoretical level, for a greater inclusion of the individual

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43 Adler-Nissen, 'Conclusion. Relationalism or Why Diplomats Find International Relations Theory Strange'.

44 Ish-Shalom, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

45 Cf. e.g. Hofius, 'Diplomats on the Frontlines', pp. 10ff.

in diplomatic studies, and methodologically for less hesitation to incorporate quantitative trait analysis into qualitative-oriented diplomacy research.

It is nevertheless important to stay aware of the exploratory nature of this study. My objective is not and cannot be to provide a one-size-fits-all recipe for diplomatic leadership, nor to satisfactorily exclude other intervening variables. Rather, I aim to show innovative ways to rethink the epistemological and ontological bases of two fields whose chemistry has so far passed unrecognised.

### Methodological Considerations

Several methodological challenges arise in the examination of these arguments. Not only are we advancing toward a concept that is still unfamiliar both in the world of leadership research as in the scholarship on diplomacy, but we are also facing a common difficulty experienced by examiners of leaders' psychological attributes. Since the research subjects are hardly likely to undergo in-depth personality tests, the scholar usually remains reliant on an 'at-a-distance' assessment method.<sup>46</sup> Particular diligence must therefore be exercised in the selection and analysis of materials.

Especially in leadership research, where results are expected to be found on a micro-level, it appears useful to work with interpretive methods.<sup>47</sup> They allow to focus on change and ambiguity more than on static proportions and to uncover concepts that are hardly quantifiable. A small number of interviews, aimed at revealing themes and meanings, will thus be at the core of this study.

However, in one aspect, a supplemental quantitative component will be conducive to my research goal. In order to obtain comparable personality profiles of both research subjects, I conducted an automatic text analysis.<sup>48</sup> The resulting mixed-method design permits the study of complexity in leadership from different angles, to address the need for additional description and provides the option to triangulate findings.<sup>49</sup> It therefore becomes obvious that rather than a linear chain of isolated steps, this study is designed to allow for a more flexible, almost circular embedding of contextual factors and maximum openness to unexpected results.<sup>50</sup> This is also reflected in the partly inductive, partly deductive thought process, combining an open-ended development of the diplomatic leadership idea with subsequent testing of

46 Schafer, 'At-A-Distance Analysis', p. 296; Gast, 'Politische Führung', p. 166.

47 Bryman, 'Qualitative Research on Leadership', p. 751.

48 Hermann, *Assessing Leadership Style*.

49 Morse and Niehaus, *Mixed Method Design*, p. 15.

50 Brinkmann and Kvale, *InterViews*, pp. 21ff.



assumptions through the concept's empirical application. It is important to note that this research design is not intended to represent anything close to a strictly-to-be-followed list of instructions on how to analyse the individual of the diplomat. The goal is much rather to show one possible way of combining qualitative enquiry with quantitative insights in leadership research and to tap into future options of closing theoretical and methodological gaps.

To fit the exploratory aspect of the overall design, I have therefore chosen a comparative study of two most similar cases of which I expect one to be unique and one to be typical.<sup>51</sup> More specifically, I will be looking at Andrii Melnyk, former Ukrainian Ambassador to Germany from 2015 to 2022 and his successor Oleksii Makeiev. Due to their similarities, the two individuals offer particularly suitable ground for the analysis of leadership potential. Both Melnyk and Makeiev were born in 1975, are career diplomats<sup>52</sup> and have headed the Embassy in Berlin during the Russian war in Ukraine. The goal of their analysis will subsequently be to carefully transfer findings to a broader universe of frontline diplomats in crisis situations.

To compensate for the lack of scholarly work on diplomatic leadership and the two ambassadors, I decided to conduct three types of interviews. From 07 – 28 July 2023, I interviewed three journalists, five diplomats and former Ukrainian Ambassador Andrii Melnyk.

Participants were chosen on the basis of their knowledge about the two ambassadors or their high-level diplomatic position. Five of the interviews were conducted online or over telephone and four were held in-person at the participants' respective workplaces. Prior to the conversations, interviewees received a detailed information sheet as well as an informed consent form to indicate their preferences regarding anonymisation.<sup>53</sup> The interviews were all audio-recorded and later transcribed and coded, focusing on themes and sub-themes.<sup>54</sup>

The next step consisted in the empirical assessment of both ambassadors' personality traits. The most widely used at-a-distance tool for this profiling

51 Emmel, *Sampling and Choosing Cases in Qualitative Research*, p. 109.

52 Before being appointed as Ukrainian Ambassador to Berlin, Melnyk served as second and first secretary at the Ukrainian Embassy in Austria, as advisor to President Viktor Yushchenko and as Consul of Ukraine in Hamburg, Germany. FU Berlin, 'H.E. Dr. Andrii Melnyk'.

Makeiev worked before at the Ukrainian Embassy in Germany and Switzerland and became political director of the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2014 before being appointed special representative for sanctions policy. Berlin Global, 'The Ambassador'.

53 Edwards and Holland, *What is Qualitative Interviewing*, p. 67.

54 Oliver *et al.*, 'Constraints and Opportunities With Interview Transcription', p. 1277.; King and Horrocks, *Interviews in Qualitative Research*, p. 149.

task is Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA).<sup>55</sup> Since the 1980s, LTA has provided a conceptual framework for the quantitative analysis of leaders' verbal output.<sup>56</sup>

As a multi-factor tool, today computer-assisted, one of its main advantages lies in the painting of a more nuanced picture of leadership differences than single-trait approaches would be able to.<sup>57</sup> These benefits make LTA particularly suitable for my comparable analysis of Melnyk and Makeiev's leadership potential in crisis situations.

The first part consisted in a systematic collection of openly accessible verbal material from both diplomats, including newspaper articles, interviews and Microsoft Stream generated transcripts of talk show appearances. In order to account for the fact that output from high-level individuals is frequently co-authored,<sup>58</sup> I mainly focused on spontaneous interview responses<sup>59</sup> and manually complemented the material by a large number of posts on X (formerly known as Twitter) that both ambassadors demonstrably compose without assistance.<sup>60</sup> As their main tool of public communication, X has the additional advantage of constituting a useful repository of emotions and world views. In addition to the 36 verbal utterances for Melnyk and 20 for Makeiev, this amounted to 866 posts by Melnyk (from the start of the Russian aggression on 24 February 2022 until the time of writing)<sup>61</sup> and 581 posts by Makeiev (from his first day in office on 15 October 2022 until the time of writing). This strategy allowed the compilation of 65,186 words for Melnyk and 27,880 for Makeiev in total (5,000 words counting commonly as a minimum for an LTA).<sup>62</sup> The collected material was subsequently analysed making use of the platform ProfilerPlus whose output consists of percentage values for seven distinct personality traits.<sup>63</sup>

55 Kesgin, 'Duelling Personalities and Leadership Styles', p. 171.

56 Kutlu *et al.*, 'Understanding the Role of Leadership Styles of Erdogan and Merkel in Sustainability of Turkey-European Union Relations', p. 3, pp. 7ff.

57 Kaarbo, 'Personality and International Politics', p. 25.

58 Uminska-Woroniecka, 'We Were Taken on the Ride', p. 224.

59 Hermann, 'Assessing Leadership Style. Trait Analysis', pp. 178f.

60 Melnyk, 'Ich Habe Meinem Mann Oft Gesagt, Er Muss Noch Lauter Werden'; ZDF, 'Neuer Ukrainischer Botschafter. Wie Tickt Melnyk – Nachfolger Makeiev?'

61 Even after the end of his official posting to Berlin, Melnyk has stayed actively involved in German debates.

62 Brummer, 'Leadership Trait Analysis', p. 242.

63 Levine and Young, 'Leadership Trait Analysis and Threat Assessment with ProfilerPlus', pp. 1ff.

### Identifying and Explaining the Diplomat-Leader in Crisis

The qualities of the ideal diplomatist are “truthfulness, precision, calm, impassivity, patience, modesty and loyalty. [...] The occasions on which diplomatists have lost their tempers are remembered with horror by generations of their successors.”<sup>64</sup>

Drawing on leadership literature and the results from the interviews conducted with high-level diplomats, the first step of analysis consisted in the development of five criteria that, as I suggest, should permit identification of leadership behaviour of diplomats in crisis. It is important to specify that none of the features alone can claim to be a sufficient condition nor is it necessary to fulfil all to be a diplomat-leader. The more the list of criteria, however, overlaps with the ways in which an actor practices diplomacy, the more we assume the existence of leadership.

#### *Towards the Concept of Diplomatic Leadership*

I suggest that diplomatic leadership can only emerge when two basic conditions are fulfilled. The modern understanding of leadership relies on the fundamental principle that it cannot exist without followership.<sup>65</sup> But traditionally, diplomats, even ambassadors, do not dispose of vast audiences, operating mostly behind closed doors.<sup>66</sup> The profound changes experienced in recent years through the rise of social media,<sup>67</sup> such as X,<sup>68</sup> consequently led to a considerable increase in diplomats’ leadership potential. Only those who are listened to and become visible can engage their community of followers for a common purpose.<sup>69</sup>

On the other side, my interview partner Natalia Royo, Panamanian Ambassador to the UK, confirmed that the urgency and immediate threat of crisis situations generally increases the freedom diplomats are able to exercise.<sup>70</sup> I do not want to rule out completely the possibility that diplomatic leadership emerges in routine situations, but it seems like the actual need for leadership and room for manoeuvrability only grow through high alert and pressure.<sup>71</sup>

64 Nicolson, *Diplomacy*, p. 104, p. 117.

65 Uhl-Bien *et al.*, ‘Followership Theory’, p. 83.

66 Diplomat 1, Interview; Manor, *The Digitalization of Public Diplomacy*, p. 131.

67 Bjola, ‘Digital Diplomacy’, p. 297.

68 Diplomat 2, Interview.

69 Hollander, ‘Organisational Leadership and Followership’, p. 69.

70 Ambassador Royo, Interview; Ambassador 1, Interview.

71 Ambassador 2, Interview.

Beyond these basic conditions, how can we piece together diplomatic leadership? A five-part framework provides information about its main features.

In contemporary understanding, a leadership figure is characterised by contriving (1) *innovative solutions and leaving the beaten track*. The ability to improvise, use creativity and unconventional approaches,<sup>72</sup> even in the face of volatile situations,<sup>73</sup> creates resilience against unpredictability. In order to exert leadership, diplomats therefore need to be willing to abandon, at least partially, the predefined path and offer solutions that do not correspond to a one-size-fits-all model.

Secondly, diplomatic leadership should be accompanied by a high degree of commitment, involving (2) *putting aside one's own interests and assuming responsibility*. The usual perception of diplomacy as a representative task would attribute both commendable deeds and faults to the foreign ministry rather than the person themselves. Diplomats can, however, reveal considerable degrees of leadership by putting higher objectives first and drawing lessons from their own mistakes.<sup>74</sup>

This leads us to (3) *agenda-setting through influencing discourses*. Unlike political figures, diplomats are limited in their decision-making capabilities and bound at all times by guidelines.<sup>75</sup> Lacking the formal executive authority that many still regard as central to leadership,<sup>76</sup> diplomats need to find other ways to advance foreign-policy objectives within their host countries. I therefore understand leading here as making one's voice heard inside political circles or guiding public discourse in a way that indirectly exerts pressure on actual decision-makers.<sup>77</sup> Communication with the media to create a certain sentiment can play an important role in this type of influence.<sup>78</sup> Viewing diplomacy from this angle draws attention to another aspect of leader-follower interaction, the (4) *showing and evoking of emotions*. While controlling emotions is frequently mentioned as a key skill of a diplomat,<sup>79</sup> the effect of feelings displayed by leaders on the attitudes of followers, especially in crisis, has been known for a long time.<sup>80</sup> If the diplomat succeeds in using their own

72 Masciulli *et al.*, 'Political Leadership in Context', p. 3.

73 Ambassador 2, Interview.

74 Feldmann and Zmerli, 'Politische Psychologie', p. 17.

75 Diplomat 1, Interview.

76 Boin and t'Hart, *op. cit.*, pp. 179ff.

77 Chu and Recchia, 'Does Public Opinion Affect the Preferences of Foreign Policy Leaders', p. 1877.

78 Osang, 'Der Undiplomat'.

79 Ambassador 2, Interview.

80 Sullivan and Masters, 'Happy Warriors. Leaders' facial Displays, Viewers' Emotions and political Support', pp. 345f.

emotions and those of others to generate attention and gain consent, then this can considerably contribute to the uniting behind shared goals.<sup>81</sup> The last factor constituting diplomatic leadership is the display of (5) *strategic thinking and long-term vision*. While diplomacy inherently operates at a long-term, measured pace,<sup>82</sup> the impassioned expression of bold, visionary ideas is rather alien to its nature. However, what is crucial for leadership is a compelling idea, supported by personal dedication and a strategic assessment of the surrounding actors with regard to one's goals.<sup>83</sup>

Undeniably, these descriptions are quite removed from everyday diplomatic practice. The system of collective governance appears adversarial if not hostile to leadership. Can we, nevertheless, identify instances of diplomacy which go beyond traditional boundaries according to the criteria above?

*Of the 'Woodpecker' and the 'Teddy Bear' – Andrii Melnyk and  
Oleksii Makeiev*

After almost eight years at the Ukrainian Embassy in Berlin, Andrii Melnyk packed his bags on the morning of 15 October 2022 and set off to Kyiv.<sup>84</sup> His last official post on X to his “German friends”<sup>85</sup> sounded much more conciliatory than many of his previous ones. He was known for tirelessly and often provocatively calling for greater German support of Ukraine's defence in the Russian war of aggression.<sup>86</sup> Melnyk, who appeared in the list of top ten most invited talk show guests in Germany in 2022,<sup>87</sup> will be remembered by most for his ‘undiplomatic’ manners and his regular verbal affronts to German politicians,<sup>88</sup> including calling Chancellor Olaf Scholz an “offended liver sausage”.<sup>89</sup> While some praised his talent for holding up a mirror to the German government, others lamented the direct approach with which he would frequently overstep the mark.<sup>90</sup> SPIEGEL correspondent Severin Weiland confirmed in my interview that in his over 30 years of experience he has never seen an ambassador as pro-active and independent as Melnyk.<sup>91</sup>

81 Martella and Bracciale, ‘Populism and Emotions’, pp. 67f.

82 Diplomat 2, Interview.

83 Wiatr, *Political Leadership between Democracy and Authoritarianism*, p. 15.

84 Rivkin, ‘Controversial Ukrainian Envoy Leaves Germany for Kyiv’.

85 Melnyk, X, 15.10.2022.

86 WDR, ‘Ukrainischer Botschafter’.

87 Statista, ‘Ranking der Gäste mit den Meisten Einladungen in den Talkshows von ARD und ZDF im Jahr 2022’.

88 Burkhardt, ‘Warum Melnyk keine Diplomatischen Töne Spuckt’.

89 Kinkartz, ‘Olaf Scholz – An Offended Liver Sausage?’. A German expression meaning someone is easily offended or childish.

90 Küstner, ‘Der Scharfzüngige Geht’.

91 Weiland, Interview.

When his successor Oleksii Makeiev took over the reins in October 2022, some parts of the federal government seemed to breathe a sigh of relief.<sup>92</sup> Following a traditional diplomatic approach, Makeiev commended Germany for its substantial support, maintaining a calm and polite tone.<sup>93</sup> The new ambassador is of the opinion that “[w]hen you get a weapon system that saves hundreds of lives every day, it would be wrong to talk about sausages again”.<sup>94</sup>

Despite comparable backgrounds, Melnyk and Makeiev appear to take fundamentally different diplomatic approaches. While Melnyk criticises his successor for merely going with the flow instead of steering the debate,<sup>95</sup> Makeiev responds by accusing Melnyk of unprofessionalism.<sup>96</sup> Are the two ambassadors emblematic for the current state of diplomacy, torn between traditional self-effacement and modern demonstrations of leadership? If my assumption about Melnyk as a diplomat-leader in Germany during the Russian war of aggression is correct, he should meet a significant part of the criteria developed above.

### *Criterion 1 – Innovative Solutions and Leaving the Beaten Track*

Andrii Melnyk’s approach to problem-solving is indeed unusual in many respects. Aware of the classic image of the polite diplomat working behind the scenes,<sup>97</sup> Melnyk thinks that ambassadors can no longer afford to stay in the background.<sup>98</sup> Part of this ‘loud’ diplomacy is certainly his public provocations, but much more than this, Melnyk leaves the beaten track by constantly redefining his role. Weiland mentions that Melnyk told him he would have not expected to one day become a kind of weapons dealer.<sup>99</sup> His approach to the media is equally unconventional. The journalist Alexander Osang for example was allowed to accompany Melnyk for an entire week, even witnessing confidential talks.<sup>100</sup> By constantly naming the horror in Ukraine and establishing himself as an expert on weapon systems,<sup>101</sup> Melnyk gives the crisis a narrative.<sup>102</sup> During the interview, it became clear that he trusts

92 Von Salzen, ‘Neuer Ukrainischer Botschafter’.

93 Dometeit, ‘Der Anti-Melnyk’.

94 Makeiev cited by Schult and Weiland, ‘Mit Meinem Vorgänger Habe Ich Schon Lange Nicht Mehr Gesprochen’. Direct quotes from Melnyk, Makeiev and the three interviewed journalists were translated from German into English by the author.

95 Die Welt, ‘Melnyk über Nachfolger’.

96 Schult and Weiland, *op. cit.*

97 ‘Melnyk, Interview’ will refer to the interview conducted by the author in July.

98 *Ibid.*; Melnyk, ‘Andrej Melnyk: Viele Deutsche Politiker Sind Gute Märchenerzähler’.

99 Weiland, Interview.

100 Osang, Interview.

101 Melnyk, X, 05.08.2022.

102 Ansell *et al.*, ‘Political Leadership in Times of Crisis’, pp. 421f.

his own instinct for situations more than copy-paste methods. As long as he enjoys the trust of his government, he wants to take the title as Ambassador Plenipotentiary literally and set his own limits of his responsibilities.<sup>103</sup>

Makeiev, on the other hand, seems to be content with the typical diplomatic toolbox: “He informs, he applauds, no criticism”.<sup>104</sup> While he has undoubtedly acquired a certain visibility through the crisis, Makeiev favours confidential discussions over the use of X, and silence as opposed to the public expression of his personal opinion.<sup>105</sup> In contrast to Melnyk, his focus is on explaining rather than pressuring.<sup>106</sup>

### *Criterion 2 – Putting Aside One’s Own Interests and Assuming Responsibility*

Especially for a diplomat, putting personal interests aside means not being afraid to lose love and sympathy. While the desire for harmony and a unification of all possible interests is deeply engrained in the DNA of the profession, practicing leadership as a diplomat means enduring the incensement or disappointment of others if it serves the common purpose. Here may be the biggest difference between the two. For the current ambassador Makeiev, the aim clearly is to please: “One mistake and you go back home [...]. The words must always be appropriate”.<sup>107</sup> A manual analysis of his posts on X used for the LTA reveals that his statements towards Germany hardly ever deviate from an appreciative tone. For Melnyk, at the opposite end of this spectrum, what his successor does is “teddy bear diplomacy”.<sup>108</sup> Melnyk is equally aware of the fact that missteps can cost a career (“You act at your own risk”).<sup>109</sup> But unlike Makeiev, this does not stop him from leaving the comfort of anonymity (“I have always enjoyed the shadows, [...] but I saw the necessity”)<sup>110</sup> and assuming responsibility: “There are people who say this is crazy. But this is in my view the price you have to pay”.<sup>111</sup> What is striking in this regard is his willingness, almost a desire, to openly talk about his past mistakes. These are his regrets about some of his harsh statements<sup>112</sup> and the times where he should have

103 Melnyk, Interview.

104 Weiland, Interview.

105 Makeiev, ‘Phoenix Persönlich mit Oleksii Makeiev’.

106 Makeiev, ‘Die Panzer Rollen und Rollen von Berlin nach Kiew’.

107 Makeiev, *ibid.*

108 Melnyk, Interview.

109 *Ibid.*

110 *Ibid.*

111 *Ibid.*

112 Melnyk, ‘Andrej Melnyk: Viele Deutsche Politiker Sind Gute Märchenerzähler’.

been even more vociferous.<sup>113</sup> The latter, in particular, is a lesson for him: “I will continue to knock like a woodpecker as long as it is necessary”.<sup>114</sup>

### *Criterion 3 – Agenda-Setting through the Influence of Discourses*

After initial hesitation, the German government agreed, in April 2022, to supply Gepard anti-aircraft tanks to Ukraine, followed, under rising pressure, by the effective Iris-T air defence system and heavy battle tanks. The question about Melnyk and Makeiev’s actual impact on these decisions can certainly not be answered conclusively. But we observe how Melnyk took particular advantage of the public’s attention and increasingly managed to shape discourses: “By insisting again and again on the deliveries of weapons, he has kept the issue alive”.<sup>115</sup> Although he was seen by many within the federal government as a disruptive factor, he consistently highlighted critical issues and played a considerable role in initiating internal party debates:<sup>116</sup> “I would like to call on the German people, please help us to convince the German Chancellor”.<sup>117</sup> His unusually high X following (193.5k at the time of writing), the polarised reactions, and the perception by some as Germany’s true opposition leader<sup>118</sup> are a testimony to his influence.

Makeiev’s feedback is much quieter, less contentious. He regularly seeks contact with German citizens, but his emphasis is on gathering opinions<sup>119</sup> rather than on deliberately shaping sentiments to build up pressure. His calmer approach seems to open more political doors for him. Unlike Melnyk, he held direct talks with the Chancellor and Foreign Minister.<sup>120</sup> It is difficult to determine, however, to what degree the promises made to him translate into actual outcomes. For now, it seems like Melnyk’s ability to read the German political landscape and meet its lethargy with evocative words has contributed quite successfully to recent policy changes.

### *Criterion 4 – Showing and Evoking Emotions*

Not hiding one’s emotions is not automatically leadership. But it becomes so when feelings are used to engage followers.<sup>121</sup> Looking at the two ambassadors

113 Melnyk, Interview.

114 Melnyk, ‘Ukraine-Krieg. WELT-Reporter beim Jogging mit Ex-Botschafter Andrij Melnyk’.

115 Journalist 1, Interview.

116 Osang, Interview.

117 Melnyk, ‘Andrij Melnyk: Was Wir Heute Brauchen, Sind Schwere Waffen’.

118 Journalist 1, Interview.

119 Makeiev, ‘Botschafter der Ukraine in Deutschland im Gespräch zu Panzerlieferungen’.

120 Schult and Weiland, *op. cit.*

121 For an overview of the role of emotions in diplomacy see e.g. Wong, ‘Mapping the Repertoire of Emotions and Their Communicative Functions in Face-to-Face Diplomacy’.



Melnyk and Makeiev, it becomes quite obvious that the former shares his emotions with the public much more often. Predominantly, they revolve around anger, sadness and frustration: “We will soon send those Russian bastards back to hell!”,<sup>122</sup> “February 24th was the worst day in our lives”,<sup>123</sup> “Wrong! Wrong! Wrong!”.<sup>124</sup> According to him, these posts follow spontaneous emotional outbursts:<sup>125</sup> “I am a human being, not a Melnyk-o-mat”.<sup>126</sup> By regularly posting videos that show the devastation in Ukraine<sup>127</sup> or by admitting how he had to cry after a conversation with Germany’s Finance Minister,<sup>128</sup> the diplomat successfully reaches people’s hearts more than their heads:<sup>129</sup> “I just wanted everyone here to understand how much suffering is being inflicted upon my compatriots”.<sup>130</sup> Feelings do not play a big role in Makeiev’s communication. Except for some expression of joy and relief,<sup>131</sup> he builds on inner and outer calm as well as on factual information designed to reach people’s heads.<sup>132</sup>

### *Criterion 5 – Strategic Thinking and Long-Term Visions*

Lastly, we have characterised the diplomat-leader by high dedication and strategic thinking. Undoubtedly, both diplomats work for the same vision of peace in a strong and independent Ukraine. And certainly, both are searching for long-term as well as immediate solutions to reach this goal. A few indicators point, however, to particularly strategic and reflective thinking on the part of Melnyk. He was able to adapt his style to the particular requirements of the timid debates about arms deliveries in Germany: “I had to shout in Germany to save Ukraine”.<sup>133</sup> Equally he made use of the ‘zero hour’ in foreign policy discourses that he saw developing on the first day of the war and provided the voice that experts in need of new guidance were looking for.<sup>134</sup> That

122 Melnyk, X, 03.06.2022.

123 Melnyk, ‘Vize-Außenminister Andrij Melnyk. Krieg Hätte Verhindert Werden Können’.

124 Melnyk, X, 06.10.2022.

125 Adler, ‘Melnyk Fordert den Westen zu Rüstungs-Partnerschaften Auf’.

126 Melnyk cited by Gerster, *op. cit.*

127 E.g. Melnyk X, 15.07.2023.

128 Osang, *op. cit.*

129 Melnyk, Interview.

130 Melnyk, ‘Botschafter Melnyk: Wir Brauchen Schnell Panzer, um Russland Paroli zu Bieten’.

131 E.g. Melnyk, X, 16.07.2023; *ibid.*, 20.09.2022.

132 sz, ‘Was Sagen Sie Jenen, Die Friedensverhandlungen Fordern, Oleksii Makeiev?’.

133 Melnyk, ‘Botschafter Andrij Melnyk: Ich Musste Schreien, weil Wir Gerettet Werden Mussten’.

134 Feld, ‘Auf der Suche nach der Führungsrolle’.

behind these efforts lies a deeper motivation becomes clear when considering the relentless pursuit of his approach despite the strong resistance he partly experienced from Kyiv.<sup>135</sup> The other distinct sign is his choice of words: “I’m not here to shake hands, I’m here to make politics. For you, it may be about investments, for us, it’s about our existence”.<sup>136</sup> For Makeiev on the other hand, it seems that his approach is less strategic and context-specific,<sup>137</sup> based more on general protocol than on convictions.<sup>138</sup>

The application of criteria has allowed us to identify how diplomatic actors become leaders in crisis situations. It also reaffirms why the second part of the question is essential. Despite working under similar circumstances and using the same means of communication, it is evident that only Andrii Melnyk exhibits clear signs of leadership, not only in style, but also in substance. With his extraordinary visibility and accountability, it almost seems like his role is more political than purely diplomatic:<sup>139</sup> “I believe that sometimes an ambassador has no other choice than to cross that line”.<sup>140</sup>

Although Makeiev seems to have remarkable access to political actors and pursues the same overarching goals with persistence and professionalism, he does not go nearly as far beyond the traditional limits of his role and does not dare to be as ‘undiplomatic’ as Melnyk did. If it was right that the crisis was solely responsible for the enablement of leadership, then the two should exhibit similar approaches. Since this is clearly not the case, I suggest instead that Melnyk and Makeiev’s differences are to a large extent determined by psychological factors.

To exert leadership as an ambassador, you need courage and self-sacrifice after all.

ANDRII MELNYK

Per WhatsApp

mid-July 2023

135 Melnyk, ‘Andrij Melnyk: 18 Leoparden Geliefert, Abgehakt, Finito’.

136 Melnyk cited by Osang, *op. cit.*

137 Die Zeit, ‘Makeiev: Deutschland Sollte Wiederaufbau-Führung Übernehmen’.

138 Makeiev, ‘Die Panzer Rollen und Rollen von Berlin nach Kiew’.

139 For a study examining the relationship between politicians and professional diplomats, see Wiseman, ‘Expertise and Politics in Ministries of Foreign Affairs’. For a more structural lens see Lequesne, ‘Populist Governments and Career Diplomats’.

140 Melnyk, Interview.

### Personality Traits as an Explanatory Factor

Not only the consulted leadership literature emphasises the individual as decisive for policy outcomes, but my interview partner Natalia Royo also highlighted the importance of an approachable character and the ability to build meaningful human connections as crucial for exerting influence in diplomacy.<sup>141</sup>

When asked specifically about the Ukrainian ambassadors, my interview partners agreed on the importance of their character traits. According to Osang and Weiland, Melnyk combines reflectiveness and self-criticism with bluntness and decisiveness.<sup>142</sup> Makeiev on the other hand radiates calm, respectfulness, and ambitiousness. He is frequently described by observers as conciliatory,<sup>143</sup> emphasising the common over the divisive.<sup>144</sup>

The Leadership Trait Analysis that I conducted helps to provide more depth to these initial observations. Its aim is to explore which impact respective traits might have on leadership potential. Since the results of both individuals alone (Figure 1) would hardly be interpretable, I used a reference dataset of political leaders to create boxplots showing average values and scattering for each trait (Figure 2).<sup>145</sup> The following visualisation embeds the scores for Melnyk (red) and Makeiev (blue) into this graph for easy comparison.

In my view, there are three findings in particular that help to explain Andrii Melnyk's leadership behaviour as compared to his successor. The BACE score measures the level of control that individuals believe they have over the situations they confront.<sup>146</sup> Makeiev's higher value suggests that he is rather content with the degree of influence and room for manoeuvre that existing diplomatic tools provide (Figure 1). Melnyk's frustration about the German government's hesitancy despite his efforts is, however, clearly reflected in his lower BACE score (Figure 1). He does not seem to overestimate the level of his impact, but rather repeats continuously the necessity for him to do more: "I

	BACE	CC	DIS	IGB	PWR	SC	TASK
Andrii Melnyk	0.3014	0.5947	0.2164	0.1849	0.2895	0.3399	0.4414
Oleksii Makeiev	0.3459	0.5143	0.1651	0.2946	0.3653	0.3172	0.4382

FIGURE 1 LTA Results for Andrii Melnyk and Oleksii Makeiev

141 Ambassador Royo, Interview.

142 Osang, Interview; Weiland, Interview.

143 Marsh, 'Ukraine Envoy Says Germany Showing More Leadership on Arms Deliveries'.

144 Musch-Borowska, 'Ruhiger und Diplomatischer'.

145 Contact the author for more information.

146 Uminska-Woroniecka, op. cit., p. 220.

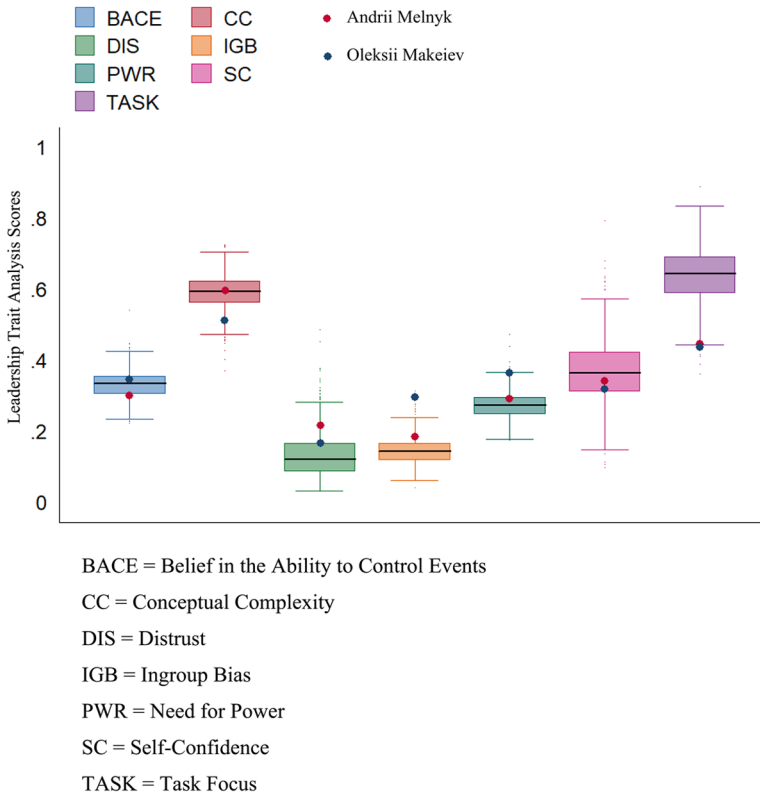


FIGURE 2 LTA Results for Andrii Melnyk and Oleksii Makeiev. Compared to reference dataset

would have liked to continue [in Berlin] because I had the feeling that much more could have been achieved”.<sup>147</sup> The results for this trait therefore speak to the *first* and *third leadership criterion* that emphasises innovation and agenda-setting. Since Melnyk did not believe he had sufficient influence on events, he had to invent new ways to bring issues on the agenda and regain some control by redefining his own boundaries. Melnyk himself refers to an additional explanation for his creativity and endurance: “I am said to have inherited the joy of experimenting from my parents [both chemistry teachers]”.<sup>148</sup>

A very clear result shows the score for conceptual complexity (Figure 1). *CC* describes an individual’s ability to look at the world from multiple perspectives, rather than seeing it in black-and-white terms.<sup>149</sup> More than Makeiev, whose

147 Melnyk, ‘Andij Melnyk: 18 Leoparden Geliefert, Abgehakt, Finito’.

148 Melnyk, *X*, 17.10.2022.

149 Kutlu *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

score is more than one standard deviation below the average of the reference group,<sup>150</sup> (Figure 2) Melnyk appears to perceive the people around him with high differentiation and sensitivity. Unlike Makeiev who usually thanks the entirety of 'Germany' for its help,<sup>151</sup> he does not apply the same communication style for different situations, but chooses his reactions depending on his interlocutors' level of support for the Ukrainian cause. Melnyk's systematic processing of information and subsequent adaptation of his leadership style are a clear sign of his long-term acting and strategic thinking (*criterion 5*).

That the 'Need for Power' (PWR) value, describing an individual's concern for creating or maintaining one's power,<sup>152</sup> is more pronounced for Makeiev (Figure 1; Figure 2) is less contradictory than it first seems. In the diplomatic field, a high PWR score can essentially be read as worry about one's reputation. The conformist behaviour of Makeiev outlined in the section above therefore becomes explainable. His low levels of leadership are largely driven by his attachment to his role and the preservation of his status: "In the credentials that I presented to the Bundespräsident, there is only one name: mine".<sup>153</sup>

Melnyk shared with me during our interview that most of the current Ukrainian ambassadors would not want to give live interviews due to the risk of making mistakes.<sup>154</sup> His low PWR score, however, enables him to take this risk. His own experience is certainly a major influence here. In 2013 and 2014 during the Maidan Revolution, he chose not to join the protests out of fear for his job and later regretted his decision: "I promised myself afterwards that, if something like this came up again, I will speak up".<sup>155</sup> During the interview, Melnyk made the impression on me of not doing things by halves. His commitment and willingness to help explain why his leadership is to a large extent based on subordinating his self-interest to the higher goal (*criterion 2*).

The remaining results from the analysis seem to be less intuitive and connected to Melnyk's and Makeiev's leadership potential. Especially the low task-focus and self-confidence values of both (Figure 2) likely result from the structural conditions of the diplomatic profession. The comparably high DIS and IGB scores (Figure 2) are a clear side effect of the war context, indicating suspicion and rejection towards subjects of different ideologies.<sup>156</sup> However,

150 A rule of thumb indicating a low expression of a value.

151 E.g. Makeiev, X, 16.07.2023.

152 Uminska-Woroniecka, *op. cit.*, pp. 220f.

153 Makeiev, 'Die Panzer Rollen und Rollen von Berlin nach Kiew'.

154 Melnyk, Interview.

155 *Ibid.*

156 Hermann, *op. cit.*, pp. 30f.

Melnyk has the courage to transform his distrust and frustration into open emotions with the aim of shouting even louder (*criterion 4*).

I am in favour of measuring an ambassador's achievement by whether their name is known in the society they are operating in. There will be a realisation that there is simply no other choice and then the old school will have to adapt to this new world.<sup>157</sup>

### Discussion, Implications and Concluding Remarks

Returning to the original questions and assumptions of the article, what have we now learned? The main focus of this work was to find out how frontline diplomats become leaders in crisis contexts and which influence personality factors have on the enablement of this role. In response, my study first of all highlights that not only political figures, but even 'regular' diplomats can exhibit leadership. This phenomenon is characterised by its departure from pure decision-making, its hybrid approach that addresses both domestic and international audiences and its inherent 'undiplomaticness' in style and substance which blurs the line between the diplomat and the politician: "This line is very, very narrow, if present at all".<sup>158</sup>

Secondly, my study shows, using the cases of Andrii Melnyk and Oleksii Makeiev, that the more an individual fulfils the developed criteria, the more we can speak of a diplomat-leader. While both ambassadors resemble each other in their pursued goals and their tenacity, Melnyk opts for unconventional approaches, breaking away from rule-based traditions, assumes more responsibility than Makeiev for his actions, and approaches his diplomatic role with a clear strategic vision in mind.

Lastly, I conclude that the personality of diplomats constitutes a necessary, though not sufficient, factor in enabling leadership, and can be especially decisive in times of crisis. Melnyk's low need for power, his doubt about being able to control events with standard instruments, and his high conceptual complexity appear as a likely responsible factor for his remarkable diplomatic approach.

How generalisable are these results? Undoubtedly, the conclusions we can draw from a single comparison are limited. My study does not tell us anything about how frequently diplomatic leadership generally occurs, or about how

<sup>157</sup> Melnyk, Interview.

<sup>158</sup> Melnyk, Interview.

the change of one variable such as the type of crisis impacts on its exercise. In Andrii Melnyk's case, we observe the confluence of a multiplicity of factors, such as a particular context, the trust of his home government, and the accumulation of diverse experiences throughout his career. This also means that there is more than one approach toward diplomatic leadership and that its actual requirements and chance of success depend on the home and host country, their political cultures, and the diplomat's audiences.

I, therefore, highly recommend that future research not only test my created criteria against different empirical contexts, but that in addition it does not shy away from approaching the phenomenon from a more quantitative angle using larger samples.

On a theoretical level, the results confirm initial assumptions about the existence and emergence of diplomatic leadership. They also resonate well with current accounts of crisis diplomacy.<sup>159</sup> A disruptive situation that agitates deeply entrenched bureaucratic practices<sup>160</sup> has been identified as one of the basic conditions for the demonstration of diplomatic leadership: "You are on your own. You simply have to act in 24-hour mode and don't have time to send a dispatch to Kyiv first".<sup>161</sup> These findings undergird once more Greenstein's well-known thesis that individual character traits come to the fore particularly in uncertain and demanding contexts.<sup>162</sup> My aim was to expand leadership scholarship to more unconventional research objects and to offer a criteria-based framework for the recognition and analysis of diplomatic leadership as a rare phenomenon. Immediately responding to recent works on the policy-producing nature of diplomacy,<sup>163</sup> I join in with their efforts to challenge conventional wisdoms reducing diplomacy to passivity and mediation. At the same time, I need to critique, based on my results, the way in which these practice-theoretical understandings of governance brush over the individual's significance in favour of the diplomatic 'We'.<sup>164</sup> A focus on collective intentionalities does not capture the extraordinary independence and personalisation that we observe in the case of Andrii Melnyk.

What does this mean for the discipline of IR? Dedicating more time to the analysis of diplomatic leadership can renew its views on how structures

159 E.g. Acuto, *op. cit.*; Constantinou, *op. cit.*

160 Bjola, 'Diplomatic Leadership in Times of International Crisis. The Maverick, the Congregator and the Pragmatist', p. 5.

161 Melnyk, Interview.

162 Greenstein, 'The Impact of Personality on Politics', p. 637.

163 Adler-Nissen, 'Just greasing the Wheels? Mediating Difference or the Evasion of Power and Responsibility in Diplomacy', p. 26; Hofius, *op. cit.*, pp. 23f.

164 Mitzen, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

are produced and become porous under the continuous vicissitude of human activity. IR should not grow tired of pushing into the sometimes-unsettling differences that individuals make in the production of world politics, without losing sight of the bigger picture. If this amalgamation of micro and macro perspectives helps to increasingly uncover leadership in places where it is not suspected, some narratives of influence and role delineation would indeed have to be rewritten.

At the same time, this paper is a call to address more often the irregular and extraordinary in a system whose regularities we usually try to decipher. For IR, this means to meet these appeals with greater flexibility and openness to interdisciplinary exchanges. How else would it be possible to keep pace with the rapid self-redefinition of diplomacy as an institution, a practice, and a relationship?

Maybe it is indeed time to see the peculiar mix of change and continuity that diplomacy is experiencing today with fresh eyes. Compared to traditional political stewardship, diplomatic leaders benefit from deep immersion in cultural contexts, the ability to combine shadows with spotlight and an astounding sensitivity for different audiences. We are only beginning to understand how these unique advantages can be transformed into a catalyst for positive change. But perhaps diplomatic leadership is exactly what we need to sustainably confront challenges in today's crisis-ridden world.

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## Interviews

Melnyk, Andrii

Former Ambassador of Ukraine to Germany 2015–2022

Former Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine 2022–2023

Current Ambassador of Ukraine to Brazil

10.07.2023

Osang, Alexander

Journalist, DER SPIEGEL

28.07.2023

Royo, Natalia

Ambassador of the Republic of Panama to the United Kingdom

14.07.2023

Weiland, Severin

Journalist, DER SPIEGEL

07.07.2023

Ambassador 1

London-based

20.07.2023

Ambassador 2

London-based

27.07.2023

Diplomat 1

London-based

12.07.2023

Diplomat 2

London-based

25.07.2023

Journalist 1

Journalist, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ)

11.07.2023