Johan Verbeke

Diplomatic Skills

PRACTICAL SKILLS
FOR EVERYONE

OWL PRESS

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About this book

In this splendidly short book, an experienced Belgian former ambassador sets out the skills and aptitudes necessary for modern diplomacy, covering such topics as communication, negotiation, writing, speaking and deal-making. He finishes with a neat summary of the model diplomat in an increasingly challenging world. An excellent introduction for all aspiring foreign ministry officials - and their political masters.
John Peet, Political editor, The Economist

Sharing in the wisdom gained by an ambassador during a long career is not only useful to other current and aspiring diplomats. It is relevant for anyone of us, for diplomatic skills are a major factor in the success of anyone's life. The striking insights collected in the section on the advantages of negotiating in a language that is not one's mother tongue offer a superb illustration. *Diplomatic Skills* makes for great reading, both instructive and fun.
Philippe Van Parijs, Professor of political philosophy at the University of Louvain and Robert Shuman Fellow at the European University Institute

This is a great book! I wish I had it when I began my career in Washington. Johan Verbeke writes not just for the diplomat, but for anyone who needs to know how to get along with people and be successful without breaking the china. His spirited and enthusiastic writing style

quickly captures the reader who will emerge from the experience not just with tools to use, but with a good idea how the game is played - and from an author who has spent a lifetime duelling with the very best diplomacy has to offer and always coming out on top!
Jim Townsend, Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for European and NATO policy, Pentagon

This book, written by one of Belgium's most seasoned and gifted diplomats, is a must-have for all people interested in diplomatic skills. The book's practical wisdom on analytical, communication and negotiation skills goes way beyond diplomacy and makes it compelling reading for a wide audience, from businesspeople to civil servants, practitioners and administrators.
Jan Wouters, Jean Monnet Chair, Professor of International Law, Director of the Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies, KU Leuven

Preface

Skillful diplomacy. When we think of diplomacy, we tend to think of ministries of foreign affairs, embassies, consulates, and the people who work in them: diplomats. And when we think of diplomats, we see professionals that have a keen interest in international relations, international trade and finance, international security, geopolitics and geo-economics. In short, people who *know what* international politics is *about*. But that is just part of what diplomats need to know, and perhaps not even the most important part. There is also a *know-how* side to their job: the skills part. Diplomacy is first and foremost *a practice, a craft, an art* (as when we speak about the 'art of negotiation'). What the diplomat brings to the job is the sum of their skills. That is what makes for skillful diplomacy.

There is another way of stating the same point: It is often said that a diplomat is a generalist. A diplomat's distinguishing feature is not some specialist expert knowledge on a specific subject or in a specific field. For that there are many others who know better than they do. A diplomat's knowledge is domain-independent. Not the field, subject matter or geographic area that they are working on defines a diplomat (whether this be climate change, human rights, security issues, the Sahel region, Caucasus) but the *way* they approach and manage these different subjects, the techniques they employ, the strategies and tactics they deploy, their debating or negotiating style.

That is why their agenda can be extremely diverse: politics in the morning, economics in the afternoon, and culture in the evening.

Whose skills. In this book we will look at diplomatic skills, those on which a diplomat relies in their daily practice: being a fluent conversationalist, a tough debater, an effective negotiator, an engaging public speaker; these and many other skills are at the core of the job.

Calling them 'diplomatic' skills, however, is something of an usurpation of the term 'skills'. There is indeed nothing intrinsically diplomatic about these skills. Diplomacy has no monopoly on them. Other people have them, too. Think of politicians, lawyers, journalists, lobbyists, and businesspeople, among others. And these 'others' are indeed many, if not all, of us: we negotiate with our partner to determine whether to go out for dinner or to the cinema, and with our children about when their lights are turned off for the night. We all use skills, and most of us aspire to develop and improve on them so that next time we must give a little speech (at a friend's birthday party, say) or negotiate some matter (a salary increase) we feel a little more confident and, as a result, are more successful.

Making it explicit. There is probably nothing in this book that the reader does not already know at some level through their own experience. When writing this book, I was struck by how much seemed to be just plain common sense. Still, it helps with elaborating on these skills. When you ask a friend what it is that makes somebody a good debater, they may well tell you that they don't know until they see one. *Making the implicit explicit* is what this book is about. The book may not overwhelm you with striking revelations, but it will have achieved its goal if it makes you say from time to time: "Aha, now I know what I have been doing all the time" (an 'Aha! moment', as it is called). Like Molière's Monsieur Jourdain, who was delighted to learn that he had been speaking prose all his life, the reader may discover that they have been using skills even when they did not think of themselves as doing so.

Method. How should we approach the study of skills? One may be tempted to immediately jump to establishing a list of rules and prescriptions that should be followed in the performance of a particular skill. Such an approach would result in providing a kind of rulebook for each of the skills that we will study: do this and not that, avoid this, be on your guard for that… This is the standard approach of self-help books, and there is nothing intrinsically wrong with it. After all, establishing rules is what even Descartes was concerned with in his *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, providing procedural directions on *how to* acquire knowledge and avoid error. And that is what we will also do (albeit not in the field of knowledge). But, like Descartes, we will do something more.

This book aims to make the reader *understand* what it means to be skillful. Prescriptions alone will not make you a truly skilled person. To become one, you need to *understand* the 'why' of these rules: Why these rules and not others, where do they come from, what is their rationale? To answer these questions, you need to go one level down and look at the underlying structure of the skill involved. Only then do the surface prescriptions, the dos and don'ts, make sense. And only then will your performances as a debater or negotiator be successful. This dual-track approach is one that we will follow particularly through the first part of this book, which covers the cluster conversation-debate-negotiation.

Ideas do not come out of thin air. As far as this book is concerned, they obviously grew out of my own experience but certainly no less the practice of many colleagues whom I have seen at work. The general ideas in this book rely on different disciplines that have always fascinated me: game theory, behavioral economics, social psychology, argumentation theory and formal pragmatics. The selected bibliography at the end of the book will give you a hint as to the primary influences in this regard.

To 'know what' and to 'know how'
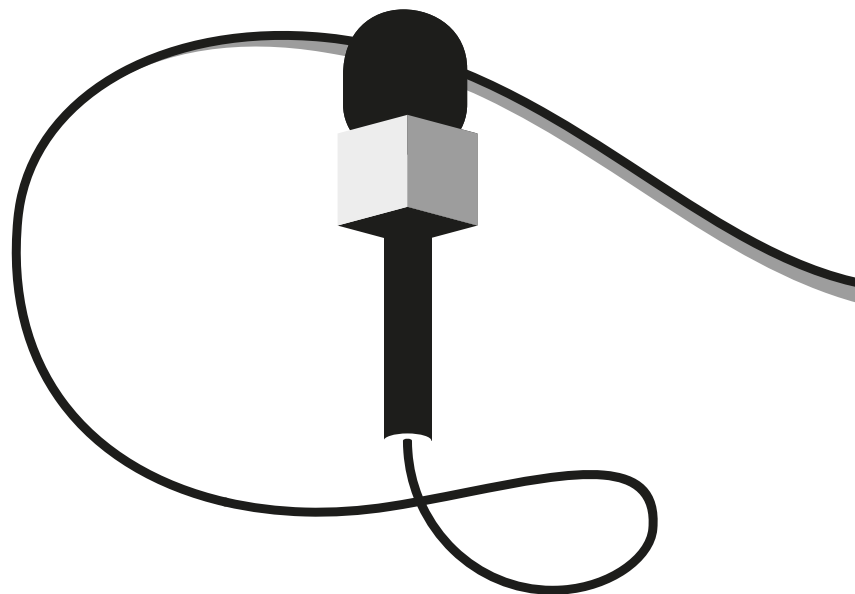
Diplomacy is not a science. Like law, medicine and engineering, it is a practice. *Diplomacy is what diplomats do*. Most books on diplomacy address 'what' questions; they look at the history of international relations, they study the geo-politics and geo-economics of the current era, they analyze the foreign policies of small and medium-sized countries and the 'grand strategies' of the great powers. These studies are of utmost interest to the diplomat, they help them **understand** the world around us. But for the diplomat, that is only the beginning, their first course. Once the diplomat grasps the situation and understands 'what' is going on, they are expected to *come out* and **act on it**. They then leave their office and enter the arena in which the real diplomatic action takes place: debating, negotiating, mediating, public speaking etc. And that is their main course. For this, they will have to rely on their *diplomatic skills*.

Gilbert Ryle, a British philosopher, became well known for making the distinction between 'knowing that' and 'knowing how' (see Ryle, 1974, pp.27-31). **'Knowing that'** concerns *propositional knowledge*, the stock of truths that you and I have accumulated over our lifetimes, including those that we, diplomats, have acquired in our professional lives by considering problems of international politics. In practical life, however, we are no less interested in 'knowing how' to go about such problems. **'Knowing how'** concerns *procedural knowledge*. What is known here is not some mere truth (such as

that "Article 51 of the UN Charter is about the right to use force in self-defense") but a way, a method to go about some question (how to argue convincingly that the Second Gulf War (2003) was not a legitimate case of reactive self-defence). 'Knowing how' is the knowledge that inheres in skills and competences. In French (and many other languages), a distinction is made between '*connaître*' (I know that "Paris is the capital of France") and 'savoir' (I know how to drive a car); similarly in diplomacy: I know that "Chisinau is the capital of Moldova", and I also know how to "effectively defend human rights in Russia". In Ancient Greece, the word '*technè*' was used to refer to what we now would call a 'skill' or an 'art'. The recurrent example was that of the '*kybernètes*', the steersman (captain) of a ship: his is not the knowledge of a ship or of the seas, but of the way a ship is steered through sometimes rough waters.

In diplomacy too, there are all kinds of 'arts': foremost among them is the 'art of negotiation', but there is also the art of conversation, of debating, of mediating, of public speaking, of writing and drafting, among others. While 'knowing that' purports to find out whether something is the case or not, true or false, with 'knowing how' one aims to ensure that the operations (of the negotiator, public speaker, drafter, etc.) have been performed well, i.e. correctly, efficiently, **successfully**. Success is a *pragmatic* category, not an epistemic one. It tells whether you reached your goal, your objective. For the performer to

legitimately claim to 'know how', their **performances** will have to meet certain standards or satisfy certain criteria. In what follows we will be looking at these *standards and criteria* as they apply to a diplomat's practical skills. We will call them the '*rules of the game*'.

The study of diplomacy has generally tended to privilege 'know what' over 'know how' questions. In stressing that the diplomat's practical skills involve a specific, indeed sophisticated, form of 'applied knowledge' we hope to revalue the practice side of diplomacy. Good diplomats are not just smart analysts ("What is the problem?"), they are also – and perhaps primarily – skillful performers ("What is to be done about it?").

So, here is what this book is about: After some preliminary remarks on *effective communication* (Chapter 1), we start with looking at *conversation* (Chapter 2). We identify the often-implicit rules that govern the 'art' of conversation, such as informativeness, truthfulness and reciprocity. We then move on to *debating* (Chapter 3) and do the same: identifying the underlying rules of the game. In doing this, we see that the rules of conversation carry over to debating. But we also note that at this stage new concepts need to be introduced, those of controversy and argument, which were absent at the level of conversation. Conversation is a cooperative practice; debate is a competitive one. Building on what we learned from both, we come to *negotiation* and, in a first stage, look

at how it is structured by the rules we came across earlier in conversation and debate (Chapter 4). Negotiation thus happens to be simultaneously a cooperative and competitive undertaking: while cooperating in a *common* search for an agreement, we also compete: *each* of us fighting to defend their *own* interests. Having thus looked at the static structure of negotiation, we move on to the dynamics of negotiation (Chapter 5) and study the flow of a negotiation and what it is expected to result in: the compromise. Along the road we give some advice, stating the 'golden rules' of the effective negotiator. Following in the tracks of negotiation comes *mediation* (Chapter 6), which can best be approached as a third- party-assisted negotiation.

At this point, we will leave the cluster conversation-debate-negotiation to look at a whole series of practical skills that diplomats (and many others) use in their daily work: *public speaking* (both speech writing and speech delivery, Chapter 7), *press interviews* (the dos and don'ts, Chapter 8), *writing and drafting* (reports and resolutions respectively, Chapter 9), conducting *effective meetings* (Chapter 10), *leading a team* (Chapter 11), *learning foreign languages* (Chapter 12) and *being tactful* (protocol and politeness, Chapter 13). In the final and most challenging chapter (Chapter 14) we tackle a very special kind of skills, often overlooked in both diplomatic practice and our daily lives generally; we call them '*negative skills*', skills that make you positively and willingly *not do* things, abstain from them (e.g. not to speak, not to

react). We close the book with a tentative sketch of *the model diplomat*, the one I have not managed to be but have always aspired to.

In this second edition we have attempted to make the book even more accessible by clarifying thought and simplifying language whenever possible. We have left out paragraphs that did not directly contribute to the argument. Occasionally we have changed the structure of a chapter (or part of a chapter). Finally, we have indicated with the sign * a few paragraphs that are slightly more technical and which can be skipped by the reader without loss of understanding the overall argument.

References

RYLE, Gilbert (1974), The Concept of Mind, Penguin, London

Effective communication
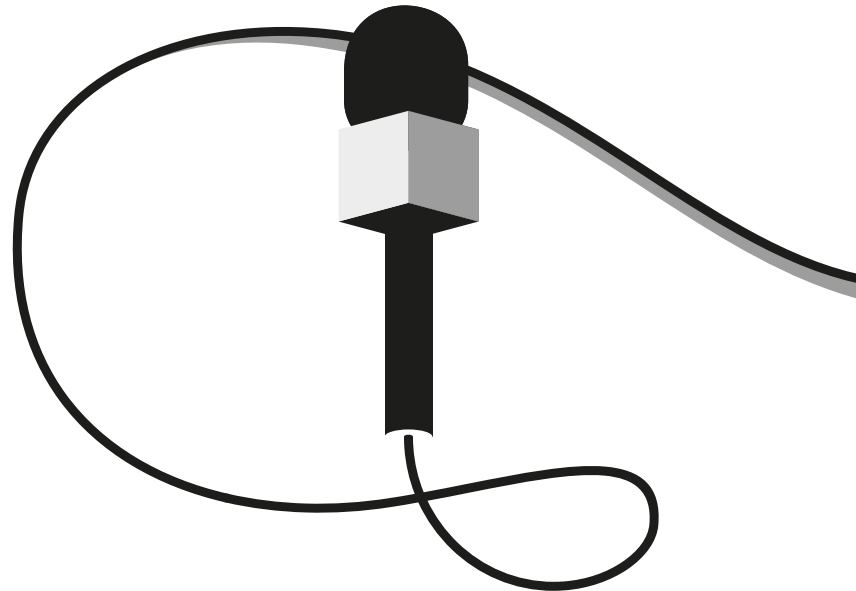
Ambassadors have no battleships at their disposal, or heavy infantry, or fortresses; their weapons are words and opportunities to speak.
- Demosthenes

Diplomacy is about *influencing the behaviour of others*. That is why, as a prerequisite to the study of diplomatic skills, we need to say something about communication in general, and effective communication in particular. Effective communication is, literally, communication with effects: communication that *affects* the behavior of others and acts upon the course of events.

Communication

Asked what language is for, many people used to say "to communicate" ; some might have added, "to communicate about the world". In the mid-20th century, communication used to be defined in terms of **transfer of information**. This communication model has been with us for many decades and formed the basis of the ICT revolution of which we continue to be the beneficiaries. According to that model, communication is about transferring information from sender to receiver, with the challenge to make that process of transmission as smooth as possible. Its *static* and rather technical vocabulary consisted of *message, sender and receiver*, *channel*, *redundancy* and *noise*. That model, rooted in technology, is definitely no longer with us today.

Today, we have come to a dynamic understanding of communication that is almost the opposite of the old paradigm. The focus now is on the **use of language**. "Usually, it is much more interesting to try and find out *why* people say something than whether *what* they say is true or false" (Meyer, 1993, p.14). The questions we ask are: Why do people say a particular thing on a particular occasion? What are people trying *to do* with their language? Communication is no longer primarily seen as being about sharing information with or transferring knowledge to others, it is about *influencing and getting* something *done* by others. Hence the importance of this new paradigm for diplomacy. Diplomacy is not about knowing; it is about doing. Diplomacy is an action-oriented undertaking.

The new insight is that words and sentences are not just the passive carriers of meaning and sense, but that 'mere' words can change the world. We have come to an active understanding of language, *language as an instrument for action*. Hence the new concept of **speech acts**, as introduced by the British philosopher John Austin in his book with the telling title: *How to do things with words* and further elaborated by his colleague John Searle. It pays to have a closer look at his analysis of language, as it sheds much light on the use of language in diplomacy. Austin introduces a category of sentences that he calls **performatives**. They aim *not* at *describing* (anything in) the world (that is what *constatives* do), but at *prescribing*

and acting on the world. That is why performatives are neither true nor false; they do not say anything about the world, they just act on it, for the better or for the worse, as talk of 'post truth' and 'alternative facts' illustrates (see Box: On Truth and Post-Truth). Performatives aim at getting things done, at influencing the behavior of others. And this is precisely a diplomat's business. When negotiating the terms of a cease-fire, when speaking in public in favor of open and free elections, when drafting a press statement on a terrorist attack, the diplomat is not in the business of sharing knowledge or stating truths, but in that of influencing, urging, inviting, requesting, redirecting what others should think or do. And in doing so, they follow a set of often *implicit rules* that define the kind of conventional *practices* that go by the names of negotiation, public speaking, drafting etc. It is these practices and the skills that go with them that we will study in the following chapters.

On Truth and Post-Truth: We are puzzled by the copious amounts of fake news that we must digest every day in this post-truth era. What is puzzling about fake news is that while we are upset by it, we also feel we should not take it seriously. While the author of fake news is definitely not in the business of saying the truth, neither is he in the business of lying (for that, his statements are much too blatantly false). Faking is pretending. Faking is worse than

lying. When you lie, you have your reasons for doing so. So, from the liar's perspective, lying is rational. Lying is knowingly and intentionally not saying the truth. Faking is not even that. Faking is just not caring about truth or falsehood anymore. It is utter indifference. That is why we are not expected to take fake statements literally, as statements that are either true or false, as statements that can be held up against the world, like pictures. We should see them as speech acts, neither true nor false, just something meant to get us somewhere, or nowhere (Brexit, for example: remember Boris Johnson's repeated 'lies' on the United Kingdom's EU membership fee). Fake speech, according to Harry Frankfurt in his book *On Bullshit*, is – and I quote – "speech that, distinct from lying, is a kind of *performance* in which the speaker isn't even concerned about the truth of what he says" (my emphasis).

We should not be misled by the fact that performatives very often take the grammatical form of declarative sentences. Although declarative in form, the statement that "all peoples are equal" is not a statement of fact (as such, it would be false) but an invitation or indeed prescription for us to act in such a way that it may one day become true. It is a normative fiction. When, on 16 March 2020, in the context of the emerging Corona-crisis, the French president, Emmanuel Macron, repeatedly said that "we

are at war", he did not make a statement of fact, but uttered a performative with which he *did* something: *urging* the French people faced with the healthcare crisis to behave responsibly; put bluntly: to stay home. 'War' is a common metaphor employed by governments to encourage their citizens to 'close ranks' and make exceptional 'sacrifices' in situations that bear no resemblance to real warfare. One of the key points we wish to convey in this book is that only a minority of the statements we make in life are "propositional" – i.e., assertions that purport to be true. A recent study at Stanford University looked at over 1,000 five-minute conversations between strangers and found that just 36% of utterances even purported to be statements of fact. (*The Economist*, February16th, 2019).

Framing and nudging

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean, neither more, nor less." "The question is", said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things." "The question is", said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be the master, that's all."

In the context of effective communication, two closely related topics need to be addressed: framing and nudging. Much of what goes on in diplomatic strategic and tactical communication is concerned with framing and

nudging, with defining, designing, and then inducing a powerful, silent, and invisible *background set of beliefs and preferences* into the minds of others.

Frames are the mental structures that shape the way in which we see the world, and hence the goals we seek, the plans we make, the way we act. Put simply: frames shape what we are. Frames are invisible. They are silent. They are the set of implicit assumptions and prejudices that we all carry with us. We are seldom aware of them. Frames constitute the *unquestioned background* of most of what we think, believe and value. Frames are our *default positions*.

Frames are closely related to *language*. Language, one could say, encodes our frames. And since language carries our ideas, it is our *ideas* that, through language, are framed. The same people that we call guerrillas may be called freedom fighters, rebels, or terrorists by others. In the recent Gaza conflict, Israel called Hamas a "terrorist organization", while Turkey called it a 'liberation group'; Putin's "special military operation" in Spring 2022 against Ukraine is what most EU members states considered to be an outright "war". Frames will constrain what we recognize as facts. If the facts do not fit the frame, the frame stays, and the facts bounce off. Frames rely on a cognitive trap known as the '*confirmation bias*', to which we are all prone; it is the tendency to filter out any new information that contradicts or sits uneasily with our existing views.

And as these views have been shaped by frames, this shows the power of frames. Frames are very powerful structures.

Frames are also operative deep within our conceptual system. Many people think that the *concepts and principles* that govern our thoughts are just matters of intellect. But that is not true. Concepts also govern our everyday functioning. *Our concepts structure what we perceive* and tell us how to get around in the world and how to relate to other people. Our *concepts do things*, and they do things because our conceptual system is fundamentally metaphorical in nature, and it is metaphors that frame our perceiving, thinking and doing.

We already met the 'war' metaphor in the Macron example. Another example, closer to diplomatic practice, concerns argumentation (see Lakoff and Johnson, 2003, pp.61-65). Argumentation is central in debate and negotiation. How do we speak about 'argument'? How does the concept of argument function in our diplomatic discourse?

We say:
- Your claim is *indefensible*.
- They *attacked* every point in my argument. I *demolished* their argument.
- My counterargument was right *on target*. They *won* the argument.

What appeared to be a neutral concept is in fact wrapped in an active *metaphor*: '*argumentation is warfare*'. It is important to see that we do not just *talk* about arguments in terms of war. We can actually *win or lose* arguments. We view the person with whom we are arguing as an *opponent*. We *attack* their positions and *defend* our own. Many of the things we *do* in arguing are framed by the concept of war.

Framing and Reframing. Frames are not just things we unconsciously carry through language. Frames are also things that we consciously fabricate (see Box: Frames and Narratives). *Framing* is actively shaping a mindset, a worldview, not for its own sake, but with a view to action. George Bush's 'War on Terror' after the Twin Tower and Pentagon attacks promptly set the scene and the agenda for US foreign (and in part domestic) policy for the years following '*9/11*'; 9 and 11 are two mere numbers that together constituted a 'super-loaded' concept, evocative of revenge and retaliation (as was Bush's former metaphor: '*the axis of evil*'). Framing is also at work in shaping identities. Identities tell you who you are. By telling you who you are, they strongly imply a particular set of interests and preferences that sets you apart from others. Identity politics thus rely on the 'us and them' frame and easily lead to the false dilemma that 'if you are not with us, you are against us'.

Reframing is changing the way others frame the world. It is changing what others see as common sense. Because language activates frames, reframing sometimes requires new language ('sludging through', 'bitcoin') or new uses of existing language ('hybrid wars', 'information highways', 'gene silencing'). An example of reframing occurred in early 2020, when NATO considered '*rebadging*' military trainers from the global coalition against ISIS/Daesh to serve under the *NATO banner*. The plan was a calculated diplomatic maneuver essentially designed to remind President Trump about the usefulness of the alliance, without extra large-scale troop deployments.

Frames and Narratives. Clearly, both frames and narratives are connected. Building a narrative is a way of framing. However, framing has a derogatory connotation that narrating has not. The idea behind narratives is that conscious living people view their beliefs and actions in light of stories with emotions and ideas attached. *Stories allow people to make sense of an uncertain world*. They allow people to comprehend experience; they give order to their lives. It is often said that the EU is lacking a compelling political narrative. Joseph Borrell, the EU's foreign policy High Representative, spoke about 'winning the battle of narratives' in a world where 'alternative facts' and 'post-truths' reign untrammeled (note how Borrell is himself *framing* narratives,

that is framing frames, in terms of a 'battle' that should be 'won'). Weaving compelling narratives is not an easy task (think of the unfortunate trope of a 'Europe that protects' launched as the first Von der Leyen Commission was installed). But that is a subject in its own right.

Framing and reframing are very much at the core of a diplomat's job. The way a diplomat presents their case and shapes their arguments is crucial in effective negotiation, persuasive speaking, and smart drafting. The way a diplomat reshapes their interlocutor's approach to an issue, the way they paraphrase their statements, turning them into a 'straw man argument', or else the way they rephrase a (nasty) question of a journalist into a query that allows them to make their point; all of this is part-and- parcel of a diplomat's daily life.

Moreover, there are lessons to be learned from this (re)framing business. Just one example: when arguing against another party or when confronted with a question we dislike (for instance, in a press interview) how often do we not repeat what the other said, thus unwillingly reinforcing what we disliked in their statement in the first place. **Negating a frame is evoking it**. The title of George Lakoff's book on framing is: *Don't think of an elephant!* No sooner have you read this title, than one is conjured up in your mind – an elephant (Lakoff, 2004).

Such was the perverse predicament in which Putin found himself trapped in late 2020, in his campaign against opposition leader Alexei Navalny: "*Forget about Navalny*". The harsher Putin's campaign became, the more he betrayed his nervousness about Navalny, and the more he boosted the latter's image and following. The Kremlin's propaganda machinery was acting so outrageously against Navalny that it began to backfire.

Nudging is very similar to framing, but nudging more directly targets action. When you are in the business of (re)framing, you aim to change ideas first (opinions, beliefs, and attitudes), with a view to affect behavior later. When you are in the business of nudging, you target specific actions more directly. A well-known example concerns energy consumption (see Hanscomb, 2017, p.161): adding information that showed household consumption in comparison to their neighbors to the electricity bills of residents of a particular street had an effect on electricity usage referred to as a 'rush to the middle'; those with a higher- than-average bill consumed less, and those with lower consumed more. Since the overall objective of the nudging operation was to persuade *all* people to use *less* energy, an additional signal was put on the bills: a smiley face for lower-than-average consumption and a sad face for above average.

In the words of its conceptual father "nudges are choice-preserving interventions, informed by behavioral science, that can greatly affect people's choices" (see Sunstein, 1919, p.xi). Nudging is about thoughtfully *designing rules and procedures* for action (sometimes just about how to *label* the action) in a way that makes people *voluntarily* comply with them. Nudging relies on some very simple basic recipes. Two prominent techniques used within nudging are '***default options***' and '***information design***':

- if you want people *to do* something, make it *easy* (you are put on the organ donation register by *default*, but of course have the possibility to *opt out*; you are automatically part of the pension scheme or the mandatory savings plan, unless you explicitly *opt out*).
- if you want people *not to do* something, make it *difficult* (you are only part of the pension scheme if you *opt in*).
- if you want people to do the *right thing*, make them ask the *right question* (energy efficiency labels for cars in the US should list 'gallons per 100 miles' (instead of miles per gallon), which by a mathematical quirk turns out to be far more informative than 'miles per gallon').

As you can see, nudging creates or changes a ground-level *default plane of expectations*. What nudging mechanisms try to achieve is to put a 'required choice' before people, making them *think twice* about the alternatives. By defining what Thaler and Sunstein term a '*choice architecture*', people can be *encouraged* to do things that are good for them and for society at large, *without* governments *compelling* them to do anything. This is

the basis for the philosophy of governance whimsically called *libertarian paternalism* (see Thaler and Sunstein, 2008). Nudges leave the nudged free to choose otherwise. Nudging is what can give a boost to what Abraham Lincoln called "the better angels of our nature".

Nudging is based on three simple principles about how people think:
- *Thinking automatically*. Much of our thinking is automatic and based on what comes to mind first and effortlessly (Kahneman's 'Thinking Fast'). *Deliberative thinking*, in which we weigh the value of available choices, is less common (it is Kahneman's 'Thinking Slow'). By making the available choices explicit through the '*choice architecture'*, nudging prompts deliberative thinking and makes us see alternatives that at first, we did not see.
- *Thinking socially*. Human beings are deeply social. People tend to copy others and generally prefer to cooperate – as long as others are doing their share – rather than compete. Through nudging, policies can be designed that support and perhaps increase cooperative behavior.
- *Thinking with models*. When thinking, we use mental models drawn from our society and shared history. There are many of them, often conflicting. The one invoked depends on contingent contextual cues. Nudging aims to activate favorable mental models that make people better off.

Governments became convinced about the utility of nudging. In 2010 the UK government set up a *Behavioral Insights Team* which was billed by Prime Minister Cameron as being the first of its kind in the world. David Halpern, the team's first head, said that its mission was to point out the 'small details' of policy that can have big consequences. It persuaded, for instance, the British tax collection agency (HM Revenue and Customs) to tweak the words of a routine letter to say that most people in the recipient's local area had already paid their taxes. As a result, payment rates increased by five percentage points. A few years later, Barack Obama too set up a '*nudge unit'* in the White House (comprising some 100 people). The concept of nudging has now also become an integral part of thinking in development policy. The 2015 *World Development Report*, the flagship publication of the *World Bank*, was entirely dedicated to lessons we can learn from behavioral economics.

What is true of people individually is true of *societies and states* as well. States too can be nudged through a 'choice architecture' and be encouraged to go for the option that serves their own interests best while not disserving that of others. Some basic **diplomatic nudge techniques** are:
- the **use of *soft power*** as an alternative to the use of hard power, which is said to be more effective (and less costly for the parties involved) in managing international relations; soft power, which Joseph