

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **Why science is yet another casualty of war: scientific cooperation in a geopolitic era**

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Bachelor's thesis  
International Relations

As a student of International Relations and Energy Engineering, I find international scientific cooperation to be a super interesting topic. The premise that science can help build peace by creating positive cooperation patterns among states is fascinating. I certainly wanted to study a phenomenon around science diplomacy for my Bachelor's thesis.

Dr. Costa suggested back in September that I look into the case of Chinese scientists who had been kicked out from American universities due to espionage concerns. It was a striking event, because it suggested there was an anomaly. Science is widely established as a field where cooperation is likely to happen for many reasons, and there is broad literature on science diplomacy as a form of soft power and track-two diplomacy (Schweitzer, 2004, vi). Yet, in practice, Chinese scientists and engineers were the casualty of national security concerns taking a preference before cooperation for the US (Armstrong et al., 2020).

Why hadn't scientific cooperation survived political tension between the US and China? What new challenges have emerged? During the first semester my research revolved around these questions. The tension between the US and China was increasing, with developments like Biden inviting Taipei to the 2021 Summit for Democracy and not Beijing. Back then it seemed that this would be the conflict to look at for the months and years to come.

Initially, my research pointed at the particular characteristics of the relations between the US and China as the reasons why science diplomacy didn't quite comply with our expectations. Sources indicated factors like economic competition, the recent change in historical dynamics and the sensitivity of technology to be the causes of this anomaly (Jin, 2020). It seemed that China was the exception to the rule, not the norm.

This explanation based solely on empirical evidence didn't sit quite right with me. Surely, there must be something beyond the case's specifics, something about how we see cooperation and conflict in a society that has evolved a lot since the Cold War.

By January, I had most of the work done: realization of a problem, an objective, research questions, hypothesis; I had thoroughly researched and built a framework that could resolve my problem. There was this last piece of the puzzle, but I felt I had plenty of time to figure it out.

Alas, Putin had different plans in mind.

When the Russian army set foot in Ukraine, scientific cooperation fell apart fast and swiftly, and I was honestly overwhelmed. It didn't make sense to look at China anymore, and the case of Russia broke with all of my research and expectations, as it ticked none of the boxes for factors said to restrict scientific cooperation. The framework I had developed around China could not explain at any level what happened with Russia. After overcoming my despair (because I thought that I had to start over), I realized that this was in fact the missing piece of my puzzle.

There has been an important normative evolution since the last century: nowadays there is a social obligation to speak up and act against injustice, and it is seen as immoral to keep cooperating with those seen as 'evil'. The idea is that actors which wouldn't traditionally meddle in politics (like scientific research institutions, but also universities, cultural organizations and even sports leagues) are today norm entrepreneurs who are willing to not only condemn but also sanction those who oppose them or their ideals. Sanctions aren't only unfolding in a top-down pattern, imposed by the state as they were in the case of China, but they are emerging as a bottom-up response.

It may sound very theoretical but in fact the phenomenon is very easy to see: Ukraine didn't win the Eurovision because their song was the best. Far from it. They won because countries thought it was a good way to show their support. Excluding Russia from the contest was not enough: Ukraine's win was yet another sanction and yet another opportunity for Europe to show where it stands.

The fact that we are willing to publicly stand up against injustice is a great development for society, but there isn't a line drawn as to how far is too far and which issues should be beyond sanctions, if any. In the name of ethics, other norms like science as a global good and the value of cooperation are deteriorated. This poses a moral dilemma.

On the one hand, in an era where many global threats require international scientific cooperation (like climate change or pandemics), perhaps science should be above politics to a certain extent. On the other hand, perhaps fully opposing and isolating the opponent is not the best strategy to achieve the desired result. I personally argue that a certain level of cooperation and humanization of the aggressor should be maintained through war in order to build peace.

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## References

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