THIS WEEK

EDITORIALS

CANCER Report fires prostate screening battle in United States **p.286**

WORLD VIEW How the genomics revolution failed the poor **p.287**

HIV Antibody–binding viral sugars offer vaccine target **p.289**

Uncharted territory

Political maps that seek to advance disputed territorial claims have no place in scientific papers. Researchers should keep relationships cordial by depoliticizing their work.

Muhammad Ali observed that the wars of nations are fought to change maps — and he was a man who knew how to fight. Yet there are more subtle ways to change maps. Take the South China Sea: Chinese officials insist that much of its waters belong to China, and Chinese maps tend to include a dotted line that makes the same point. Yet there is no international agreement that China should have possession, and other countries have overlapping claims.

What has this to do with science and *Nature*? Nothing — except that territorial disputes, including that over the South China Sea, are leaking into the pages of scientific journals such as this one. In a disturbing trend, an increasing number of maps included in scientific articles by Chinese researchers feature a dotted line that envelops almost the entire South China Sea, to indicate Chinese possession (see page 293). Scientists and citizens of surrounding countries are understandably peeved by the maps, which in most cases are completely unrelated to the subjects of the papers in which they are published. The inclusion of the line is not a scientific statement — it is a political one, apparently ordered by the Chinese government. It's a territorial claim, and it's being made in the wrong place.

Where research and politics mix, science should be a tool of diplomacy, not territorial aggression. Even politically hostile environments can prove fertile ground for scientific collaborations. An increasing number of researchers from Taiwan are teaming up with colleagues in mainland China, even as Beijing and Taipei continue to fundamentally disagree over their relationship. According to data provided by Lou-Chuang Lee, the head of Taiwan's National Science Council, the number of research papers resulting from cross-strait collaborations rose from 521 in 2005 to 1,207 last year.

Such collaborations set the stage for the realization of common interests and, one might hope, resolution of political differences. At the least, they could help to restrain aggression.

Still, politics does often find a way to intrude. In August, for example, Ann-Shyn Chiang, director of the Brain Research Center at the National Tsing Hua University in Hsinchu, Taiwan, was surprised by a request from Yi Rao, a neuroscientist at Peking University in Beijing, with whom he was writing a paper. Rao wanted to put down Chiang's affiliation as 'Taiwan, China', the appellation preferred by Beijing. Chiang told Rao either to use Taiwan or Taiwan ROC (Republic of China), or to drop his name from the author list.

Eventually the two found a compromise, agreeing that they would use Taiwan, Republic of China. The dispute over the South China Sea, with its resources and geopolitical significance, won't be so easily ironed out.

"Where research and politics mix, science should be a tool of diplomacy, not territorial aggression."

With regard to this and other international disputes, *Nature* takes the position that scientists should stick to the science. Authors should try to depoliticize their articles as much as possible by avoiding inflammatory remarks, contentious statements and controversial map designations. If such things can't be avoided, for example if a study of a country's resources requires taking account of whether a certain island belongs to it, the map should be marked as 'under dispute' or something to that effect. In papers in *Nature*, editors reserve the right to insert such a label if authors fail to do so. By avoiding controversy, researchers who keep politics from contaminating their science will keep the doors of collaboration open, and their studies will benefit. Researchers could also, as a by-product, help to defuse political tensions, show the way to mutual benefit and perform a diplomatic service.

Researchers on all sides have much in common, as many scientists in parts of the world made unstable by conflict can appreciate. It makes no sense to undermine this solidarity through irrelevant political and territorial posturing. ■

Positive spin

Science lobbyists must boost the appeal of research to policy-makers.

Pity the science lobbyist. As we report on page 299 of this issue, the combination of the economic downturn, concerns over the budget deficit and anti-science rhetoric from the Tea Party have created a difficult environment for those paid to persuade US lawmakers to find funds for research. And money available to lobbyists to make the case is in short supply too, as sponsor organizations watch their own budgets in the struggling economy.

The good news, at least, is that lobbyists are aware of the problems and have a pitch that takes some account of them. Their arguments now routinely stress the importance of research to US economic growth, health, welfare and competitiveness — and point out that research institutions are major employers in districts that include those represented by Tea Party members. A change in terminology, from 'science funding' to 'science investment', is particularly smart.

Yet there are many types of investment — roads, primary education and crime reduction, to name but a few — that must compete for an ever-decreasing pot of funds, and science advocates could do more to respond to the shifting mood in Washington.

First, lobbyists should argue that scientists spend US taxpayers' money efficiently. Campaigners can point to changes that the scientific