

naturejobs

**THE CAREERS
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For scientists, political, social and religious differences tend to fall by the wayside in the pursuit of data. Scientific collaborations usually transcend such boundaries. A letter I received recently reminded me of these ideals — and emphasized how sorely they are being tested in the Middle East at the moment.

The letter was from Zachary Lippman, a biology postdoc based at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. When he accepted a fellowship to work in the laboratory of Dani Zamir, Lippman wasn't expecting politics to have any impact on his research. But it has. The plants for Lippman's genetics experiments are in fields in Acre, a few kilometres south of the Israeli-Lebanese border. Since the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah erupted, missiles have fallen within 500 metres of the field where Lippman and his labmates collect data with Arab helpers from a nearby village.

When the fighting first broke out, Lippman's first thoughts were about how the conflict might affect his research. Now, he is asking larger questions about science, politics and war, as members of his lab are being called up into Israel's army.

"It is startling that my graduate-student colleagues are forced to exchange their lab books for weapons with a single phone call, and that the very land on which my plants are growing is the source of suffering for both sides of the conflict," Lippman writes. As more reservists are called up, Lippman thinks of the graduate student who sat next to him, and who is currently in Lebanon. "A graduate student's first commitment is not, necessarily to his research," Lippman notes. "Rather, it is to the military, and this is often not by choice."

Lippman has vowed to stick with his research, even if it means repeating some of his experiments. He also aims to maintain collaboration with both Arabs and Israelis. "I hope to see my colleagues back in the lab soon, fighting the logical scientific battles in which they were previously immersed, instead of the illogical type they are fighting now," he writes.

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