

Science in times of conflict

Global scientific collaboration should endure despite the humanitarian crisis in Europe.

The war in Ukraine due to the Russian invasion has led to the largest humanitarian crisis in Europe since World War II and to a global political conflict. While diplomatic efforts to end this war continue, its political ramifications already affect the scientific community worldwide.

We have all been heartened by the support from the international scientific community to Ukrainian scientists. Multiple researchers, laboratories and institutions have spontaneously, rapidly and unconditionally offered shelter and support to Ukrainian students and scientists from all career stages who have fled their country. This initiative should continue as more refugees seek to be relocated across the European continent, as well as overseas. However, one question has stirred a heated debate within the scientific community: should researchers in Russia be sanctioned with isolation as an additional measure to coerce their government to end this war? Or should scientific communication and collaboration prevail even in times of conflict? The Ukrainian scientific community has overtly requested a boycott of Russian researchers by halting collaborations with Russian scientific institutions and banning Russian researchers from publishing in international peer-reviewed journals. The expectation is that, in the long run, these strategies would contribute to isolation of Russia at all levels, including in terms of research and

technological development. While financial suffocation and international isolation might sound like an attractive plan to force the Russian state to stop this war, it comes at a price.

The immediate effects of ostracizing researchers in Russia are obvious: they would no longer benefit from reviews by their international peers, whose comments validate and strengthen the robustness of their work. What's more, by preventing Russian researchers from communicating their findings to the international community, a boycott would decrease interaction and collaboration with scientists from other countries, which places Russian scientists at a clear disadvantage. In fact, as the international community is already demanding to end funding for research and development projects in Russia, Springer Nature and other academic publishers will stop the marketing and selling of new services to research institutions in Russia and Belarus.

In our view, exclusion of Russian researchers from international projects would be a double-edged sword. Not only does the scientific international community itself benefit from collaborations and discussions with researchers in Russia, but also, importantly, many Russian scientists have spoken out against the war despite the personal risk this entails, raising questions on whether their exclusion from the international scientific community is morally justified. Furthermore, international

scientific exchange has historically endured, serving as a diplomatic and cultural bridge, even in times of trouble. For example, in the Cold War era, scientists from the Soviet Union continued to collaborate with the rest of the world, including the USA. In this sense, engagement, rather than isolation, can help establish solid foundations for the cultural and societal bridges to pave the way towards peace.

In our mission to stand for science and scientific collaboration, and as declared in our [Editorial Values Statement](#), we firmly believe in the power of science to drive positive change in our global community. As editors, we also believe that editorial decisions to publish should not be affected by the origins of a manuscript or influenced by governmental policies. Therefore, we believe that scientific exchange should continue, despite the current challenges.

Regardless of one's stance on how best to approach scientific collaboration in times of war, the suffering of the Ukrainian people is not to be disregarded, and so we all must help in whichever way we can. Ukraine and its people need our support now and in the years to come to help rebuild their communities. To this end, we must rise above political conflict, even in the most challenging times, and stand as one international scientific community working together for the benefit of mankind. □

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