**Science diplomacy**

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The seemingly inherent incongruences between science and diplomacy can lend an element of incoherence to initiatives that see science and diplomacy working together for mutual benefit.

Interestingly, notwithstanding these disjunctions, in the present-day world of global politics there are many instances where science and diplomacy have cohered effectively under a variety of widely beneficial policies. These policies are sometimes labeled science diplomacy.

The incongruences between science and diplomacy can be seen in some of the basic tenets of these two spheres of activities. Science can generally be taken to mean a body of knowledge of facts about the natural world that are learned through the application of rationality, observation and experiments. The methods most suited to creating this kind of knowledge are steeped in objectivity and universality. Diplomacy, on the other hand, is quite a different sphere of activity from scientific endeavors.

Diplomacy can simply be understood here as the skillful handling of negotiation and other affairs between nations. The wit and insight of Winston Churchill sheds light on diplomacy by describing it as “the art of telling people to go to hell in such a way that they ask for directions.” The art and skill of diplomacy is not as focused on objectively uncovering or depicting facts as are the scientific pursuits.

Another significant divergence between science and diplomacy is the search for the nomothetic and the desire for universality. Diplomacy finds roots in the Westphalia peace treaty in the middle of seventeenth century Europe. The Treaty of Westphalia helped shape the modern nation-state. The state is focused on its sovereign interest. Borders are important in diplomacy and borders, in addition to being juridical markers of state, also are demarcations that define the area and people whose interest matters in the exercise of diplomacy.

The fundamental incongruities of objectivity and subjectivity, on the one hand, and the basic incongruence of the universal and national, on the other hand, are hard to ignore completely. History also points to a relationship between science and national governments that has directly contributed to international conflict and destruction. The Manhattan Project and the building of atomic weapons by the US during the Second World War is a good example.

After the Second World War, there was a continuation of the use of science by governments to promote division and conflict throughout the cold war. For almost four decades, the US and its Nato allies, and the USSR and its Warsaw Pact allies, each used science to support divergent ideologies. The race for space and the quest to land on the moon were instances where science and space research was very much a pursuit that supported achieving national objectives in a divided global bipolar world.

Where is it then that we can see science and diplomacy sidestep differences and manage to come together? More importantly, what factors can drive a need for science and diplomacy to come together in a mutually beneficial relationship. If we look at the beneficiaries of this coming together, they can be both science and the universal community of scientists, and diplomacy and the pursuit of national advantage and interest.

In the case of diplomacy benefitting science, we see countries promoting their scientific communities in other countries. Countries can promote cooperation between their own scientists and scientists in other countries. Many such initiatives are supported by the embassies of particular countries.

In the case of science benefitting diplomacy, we can have science and the scientific community of a country provide a channel for maintaining linkages between countries that have severely strained or even officially severed diplomatic ties.

In modern times, two factors have greatly contributed to promoting science diplomacy. One is that with globalisation and interdependence there is a need for using soft power rather than hard power. Joseph Nye, who came up with the concept of soft power in the late 1980s, talked about the difference between the hard power of coercion and the soft power of attracting countries to want what you want for them.

Also, there is growing multilateralism as the post-cold war era has seen a shift from a bipolar world with the US and the USSR, to a brief period of the US as the unipolar world leader, to the present, where we see a more multi-polar world that along with the US, France, Germany, and the UK has the emerging power of China and Russia.

The second factor contributing to science diplomacy is the global nature of issues that are confronting states. Primary among these are climate change, sustainable development, terrorism and pandemics. Environmental degradation is a borderless concept and similarly environmental protection is a pursuit that extends beyond borders and national interests. Here we also see how science entwines in diplomacy when faced by complex issues, such as climate change and global pandemics, which require supranational strategies.

Let us briefly look at the successful application of science diplomacy in a few selected instances that show how certain initiatives can utilise diplomacy in the service of science and also show how science can support diplomacy.

The US and the developed countries of the West will attract highly qualified scientific human resources from developing countries through government-funded programmes of advanced education and research. These programmes are promoted and supported though embassies and facilitate the movements of highly educated human resources from developing countries to developed countries. These government-supported exchange programmes help directly enrich scientific activity in the developed countries and are an example of diplomacy in the service of science.

The interaction of foreign scholars with the highly developed research and educational structures in the developed countries can help establish linkages and extend the international networks of scientists and become important contributors to the development and strengthening of bilateral relations and future cooperation. This is an example of science working to assist diplomacy.

The concept of science diplomacy takes science and diplomacy, two concepts that are not entirely congruent, and then combines them in ways that are mutually beneficial. These ways can include initiatives that see science in the service of diplomacy and also initiatives that see diplomacy in the service of science.

A policy of science diplomacy makes a lot of sense in present-day international politics. In the multipolar international system of the new millennium, multilateralism and soft power are effective approaches to global politics. These approaches are also better suited to address cross-national global issues of environment, sustainable development and global pandemics.

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