From Reaction to Anticipation: Science Diplomacy in a New World Order

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When Finnish President Alexander Stubb opened the 2026 Raisina Dialogue with the words — "The Global South will decide what the next world order will look like. And India, as a major power, will be a key force in shaping it" — he announced that the axis of global power is shifting. And the inaugural Raisina Science & Diplomacy Initiative (SDI), jointly launched on March 5th by the Observer Research Foundation and the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India, confirmed that science and technology sit at its very centre. It also marked a historic milestone: for the first time in its eleven editions, the Raisina Dialogue formally incorporated science diplomacy, signalling its entry into the mainstream geopolitical conversation.

GESDA came to New Delhi in early March 2026 carrying that conviction and a question that has animated our work for several years: is science diplomacy keeping pace with the acceleration of science itself? What follows are reflections drawn from the Raisina SDI discussions on what that means and what comes next.

Science Anticipation to Govern a Multipolar World

GESDA co-chaired the inaugural Raisina SDI with the message that science anticipation — the methodology at the heart of GESDA's work — belongs at the table where strategic decisions about the world's future are taken.

The discussions captured the tensions that will define the next decade of science diplomacy. How to navigate the growing friction between technological sovereignty and the inherently open, transnational nature of science? Are existing multilateral mechanisms fit to govern disruptive technologies, when these are advancing faster than our institutions can follow? The answer, heard repeatedly around the table, is that they are not — and that this gap is most acutely felt in the Global South.

Raisina Dialogue pushed us to collectively tackle the core dilemma of science diplomacy in the emerging world order: how do nations balance collaboration and competition in a fast-moving race for advantage in technologies — quantum, AI, synthetic biology, neurotechnology — that will reshape economies, militaries and societies in the next decades?

i *The Geneva Science and Diplomacy Anticipator (GESDA) is an independent foundation created by the Swiss Confederation, the Canton and City of Geneva, to connect science anticipation with global diplomacy. GESDA's mission is to anticipate emerging scientific breakthroughs and help translate them into inclusive, ethical, and cooperative solutions to global challenges.*



GESDA's answer: by shifting governance from reactive to anticipatory. Every one of the technologies currently dominating geopolitical and security discourses — AI, quantum computing, brain-computer interfaces, synthetic biology — is being discussed primarily in response to risks that are already appearing. Multilateral institutions cannot keep pace with the acceleration of science and are scrambling to catch up with deployments already embedded in markets and militaries. The result is that ethical frameworks, human rights considerations, equity implications, and dual-use risks are addressed too late, when options have already narrowed, and fractures have become evident.

Science anticipation offers a different logic. Rather than reacting to scientific developments once they are mature, it acts within the critical window between when transformative advances become conceivable and when they are deployed at scale. The intent is not primarily to prevent risk but to ensure that opportunities are not missed, that benefits are shared broadly, and that the governance conversations we need are seeded now, for the profit of future generations. This is why the GESDA Science Breakthrough Radar — which maps the research advances expected to transform society at 5-, 10- and 25-year horizons, based on the judgement of human experts rather than algorithmic prediction — is not simply a foresight tool. It is a diplomatic instrument.

Much of the debate focused on the growing role of non-state actors in science diplomacy — large technology corporations, deep-tech start-ups, venture capitalists that now fund innovation, control platforms, shape standards, and determine access to digital infrastructure. Here becomes essential the role of **honest brokers**: neutral and agile multilateral platforms that can convene research, diplomacy, industry, and citizens without advocacy for any particular outcome. In a geopolitical space where neutrality is often treated as passivity, GESDA practices what we describe as 'active neutrality' — a distinctly Swiss tradition. The honest broker is not neutral about the success and integrity of the process, but remains neutral about which policy choices stakeholders ultimately make. In a domain where facts intersect with values and sovereign interests, that distinction is what makes inclusive deliberation possible at all.

The Anticipatory Leadership Lab: Science Anticipation in Practice

To put science anticipation into practice, the Embassy of Switzerland in New Delhi and GESDA, together with the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India, convened an Anticipatory Leadership Lab attended by around 60 leaders from science, government, diplomacy, business, and civil society across India.

The GESDA Anticipatory Leadership Labs are structured multistakeholder dialogues grounded in the Science Breakthrough Radar, guiding participants through three steps: first, they see the future of science; then they use the future to build the present; and conclude by creating their action plan. Each table worked with frontier science domains — quantum, AI, neurotech, synthetic biology — and asked: what are the plausible implications for India at five-, ten- and twenty-five-year horizons? What opportunities risk being missed? What governance conversations need to begin today?

State Secretary Alexandre Fasel of Switzerland, speaking at the Lab, articulated the Swiss government's position: that understanding and anticipating scientific breakthroughs is no longer a diplomatic luxury but a necessity, and that science and technology have become a core currency of international affairs, influencing prosperity, sovereignty, and security. Prof. Ajay K. Sood, Principal Scientific Advisor to the Government of India, observed that the conventional reactive governance cycle — where institutions convene, deliberate, and respond only after disruption has arrived — served adequately in eras of slower, linear change. But it is no longer adequate in our era of science acceleration.



The Lab showcased not only the quality of analysis but also the depth of appetite. Senior Indian officials, scientists, and diplomats engaged with the Radar's horizons not as hypothetical scenarios but as strategic intelligence. The Lab in New Delhi was a first step toward a longer-term partnership, in which a full immersion in the GESDA methodology, co-designed with Indian institutions, will be anchored in India's own priorities and knowledge systems.



The Next Generation: ORF Fellows Travel to the Quantum Future in 2035

As part of the ORF's Raisina Young Fellows Programme 2026, GESDA hosted the Quantum Diplomacy Game: a multi-stakeholder simulation that places participants — government, industry, science, civil society — inside the governance dilemmas of quantum computing before they fully materialise. The game asks: how do you build frameworks before the technology is mature and power concentrates in too few hands? How do you ensure that a technology whose full implications are not yet known is nonetheless governed with equity, ethics, and global access in mind?

One of the Fellows noted that geopolitical shocks usually arrive without warning, leaving people feeling powerless. But sitting around a table with people from different disciplines, countries, and economic realities, deliberately thinking twenty-five years forward, reminded her that agency is possible — that starting a multistakeholder dialogue across countries, regions, and sectors early on is one of the most powerful tools available.



India's next generation of scientists and diplomats will inherit a world shaped by decisions being made right now on quantum governance, AI standards, synthetic biology frameworks, and neurotechnology ethics. Their role in making these decisions depends, in part, on whether they have been trained to think in anticipatory terms. GESDA's Anticipatory Science Diplomacy Games are an instrument for doing that.

What's Next?

GESDA returns from New Delhi with three convictions reinforced. The first is that India is very much aligned with Switzerland on shaping the emerging architecture of anticipatory science diplomacy as a priority. The Raisina SDI is the institutional expression of that commitment. The scale, democratic pluralism, pioneering Digital Public Infrastructure, ambitious National Quantum Mission, and tradition of multi-alignment give India a distinctive leadership role – recently illustrated with the AI Impact Summit, which has now passed the baton to International Geneva.

The second conviction is that the Global South cannot afford to wait for mature technologies to arrive before engaging in governance conversations. Anticipation is often framed as a luxury amid the urgencies of the present. But the challenges visible on the horizon today will become the crises of ten years from now. Countries that do not participate in shaping the trajectory of emerging technologies will find themselves on the receiving end of governance frameworks decided elsewhere. The Open Quantum Institute — GESDA's anticipatory governance initiative for quantum computing, incubated at CERN and active from Ghana to Uruguay, from Philippines to Costa Rica, with India as a founding Advisory Committee member — is proof that this approach is not utopian.

The third conviction is about the practice of science diplomacy itself. The field has matured enormously since its formal articulation in the early years of this century. The Raisina SDI represents something new: a multi-stakeholder, forward-looking, institutionally embedded platform that can become a reference point for how science diplomacy is practised in a multipolar world. GESDA, with its unique contribution to that landscape when it comes to science anticipation, is proud to be its co-chair. We take that responsibility seriously as active partners in building the kind of anticipatory architecture the world urgently needs - using the future to build the present.