Editorial

The year 2026 underscores a defining paradox for the global scientific community: deepening geopolitical fractures alongside an urgent need for collective action. Ongoing conflicts, notably the Russia–Ukraine War and the US/Israel-Iran War, have disrupted not only political and economic systems but also the fabric of international scientific collaboration. Research partnerships have slowed or stalled, mobility of scientists has been constrained, and emerging concerns such as energy insecurity and conflict-induced environmental degradation—ranging from pollution to ecosystem damage—have intensified. These developments highlight a critical reality: science can no longer be insulated from geopolitics.

In this evolving context, science diplomacy has moved from being a peripheral concept to a strategic necessity. Positioned at the intersection of science, policy, and international relations, it offers a mechanism to sustain dialogue when traditional diplomatic channels are strained. While it may not resolve conflicts, its value lies in preserving communication, fostering trust, and maintaining long-term collaborative bridges. In an era defined by transboundary challenges—climate change, public health crises, and the governance of emerging technologies—science diplomacy is not optional; it is indispensable.

Yet, the current global order also reveals the limitations of this approach. The assumption that science is inherently universal and apolitical is being tested in a multipolar world where national interests increasingly shape research agendas and partnerships. The fragmentation of global science ecosystems, as witnessed during recent conflicts, signals a shift from open collaboration towards more strategic, and at times guarded, engagement. This evolving reality calls for a more pragmatic and structured approach to science diplomacy—one that balances openness with strategic considerations.

These themes found clear resonance at the Raisina Dialogue 2026, India's flagship platform on geopolitics and geoeconomics. Over the years, the Dialogue has progressively integrated science and technology into its deliberations, reflecting their growing role in shaping global power dynamics. The launch of the Raisina Science & Diplomacy Initiative at the 2026 edition marks a significant step in institutionalising this engagement.

Parallel efforts in other parts of the world reinforce this trend. The European Union's recent move to establish a structured framework for science diplomacy reflects an intent to act more cohesively in international research and innovation engagement. Encouragingly, the Global South is increasingly shaping this evolving landscape. Recent developments illustrate this shift. In South Africa, sustained capacity-building initiatives, including science diplomacy training programmes, are nurturing a new generation of professionals equipped to operate at the science–policy–diplomacy nexus.

Similarly, countries like Malaysia are positioning themselves within regional and global science diplomacy frameworks, leveraging platforms such as ASEAN to strengthen cooperation in science and technology. In Sri Lanka, the launch of the book *Science Diplomacy: National, Regional and Global Approaches in a Changing World* marks a significant intellectual contribution to the field, reflecting a growing engagement of scholars and practitioners with science–policy interfaces. This diversification is vital for ensuring that science diplomacy reflects varied regional priorities and global realities.

This issue of the *Science Diplomacy* Digest brings together diverse perspectives that resonate with these global developments. The opening article by the Geneva Science and Diplomacy Anticipator (GESDA) team, following their engagement in New Delhi in March 2026, presents reflections from the Raisina Science and Diplomacy Initiative discussions. Prof. Tateo Arimoto, Senior Advisor to the President of the Japan Science and Technology Agency, underscores that science diplomacy is no longer a supplementary activity but a core capability for managing geopolitical uncertainty and governing technological change. Similarly, Clara Solé, Head, Internationalisation & Science Diplomacy, ICM-CSIC,

Barcelona, Spain, emphasises that while science diplomacy may not resolve geopolitical rivalries, it plays a critical role in shaping how interdependence is governed—making it a strategic imperative in an era of uncertainty.

This issue also features several insightful contributions that collectively highlight the expanding scope and growing significance of science diplomacy. As the global order continues to evolve, strengthening inclusive and resilient scientific cooperation will be essential to addressing shared challenges. We hope this issue offers valuable insights and stimulates further dialogue in this rapidly emerging field.

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