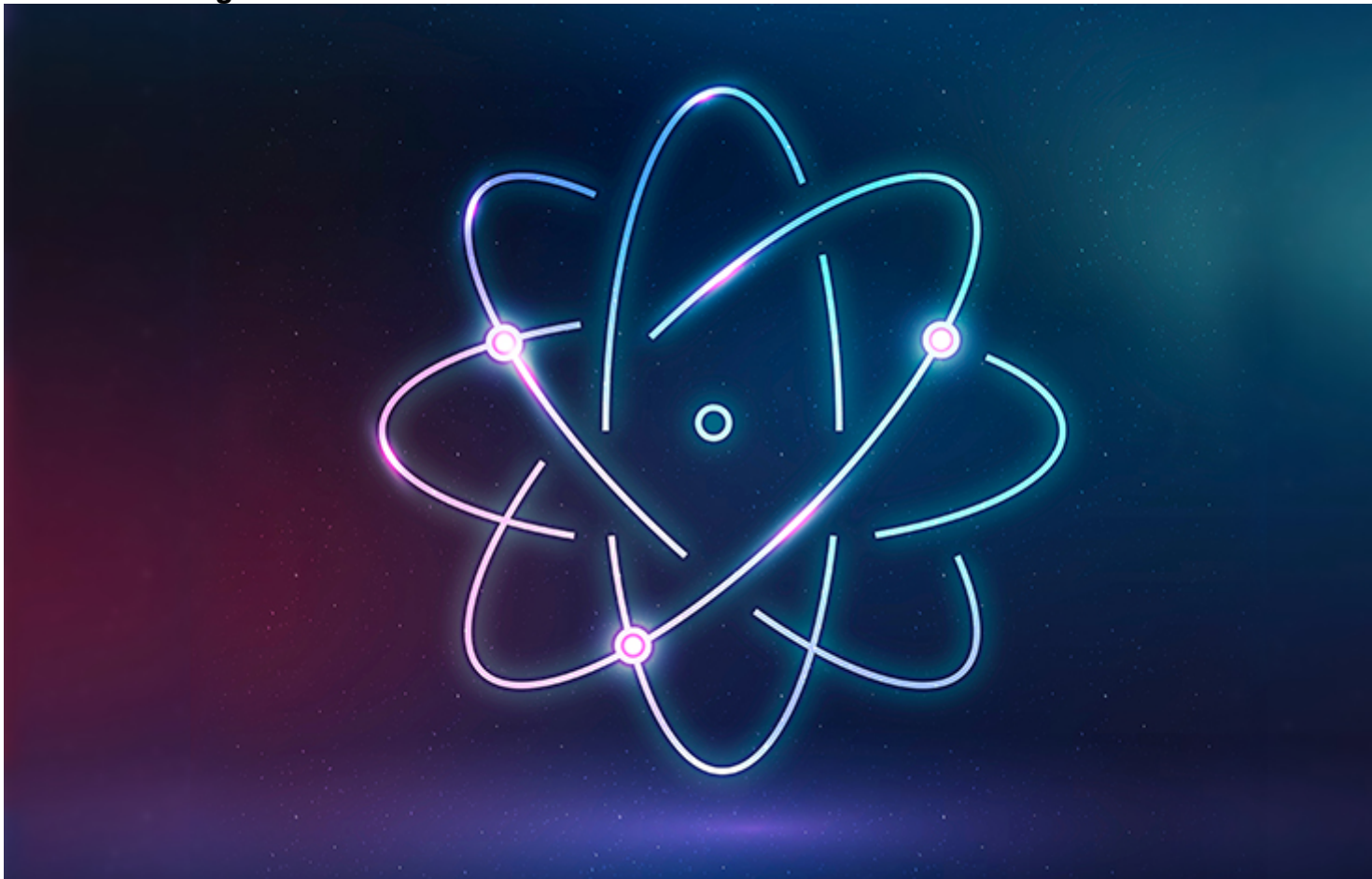


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Dec 02, 2022 by *Olga Krasnyak*

Russian Science Diplomacy and Global Nuclear Security in a Time of Conflict ^[1]

At a time of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, Russia's science diplomacy is struggling to stay afloat and to maintain international collaboration with the West. The imposed economic sanctions and overall anti-Russian political rhetoric has hugely strained scientific relationships whether on a personal or institutional level. In most cases, international collaboration between Russian scientists and their Western colleagues is stalled, and scientific projects are frozen indefinitely.

In the current global foreign policy situation, the politicization of the sciences is a given fact because nation-states, which are involved in the conflict directly or indirectly, justify their actions and arguments by bringing different ideologies, contrasting values and diverse visions for the future world order. For the sake of preserving global collective security and minimizing future serious ramifications, it is important to acknowledge that deepening disconnection across the world and a widening gap in relations with Russia are dangerous tendencies. This

is because problems of nuclear security, agriculture and food security, and energy security have already come to the fore, putting the world on the brink of a global cataclysm. The conflict in Ukraine has weakened robust nuclear deterrents and exposed food and energy vulnerability of such great powers as the European Union but also of developing countries in the Middle East and northern and sub-saharan Africa.

Promoting a science diplomacy agenda between competing counterparts is hard to expect at the moment. Yet, science diplomacy might be the only possible and efficient instrument to address global security. The nexus between science and diplomacy is a conjunction that allows international cooperation to promote national interests and to address global problems at the same time. Considering that the nature and rationale of national interests vary and a number of global problems change over time, science diplomacy appears to be a highly adaptable mechanism existing despite the changing circumstances of world politics because science is both the reason for many global problems as well as their solution. Thus, cutting off scientific ties is a short-sighted policy that risks global security. The science diplomacy mechanism is the most suitable to push the world away from the cataclysm of disconnection and to mitigate the current security threats in which nuclear security is the most urgent.

Scientific engagement through people-to-people interpersonal communication has the power to reduce global anxiety and reassure the world about upcoming conflict resolution.

Science diplomacy, as one of the effective instruments to keep the world from the catastrophe of mutual assured destruction, was successfully used during the Cold War. We should rely on the past, otherwise what else do we have? Finding historical parallels might be questioned because the world is different now. However, referring to Cold War history through positive examples of addressing nuclear security makes sense. Moreover, since the end of the Cold War, it has been largely believed and widely promoted that the world overcame the main existential threat that humanity faced: nuclear war was unlikely to be waged due to the principle of mutual assured destruction.

Rooted in the Cold War era, international treaties and agreements that limited and controlled nuclear (and other) weapons proliferation on the one hand, and the interconnectivity and interdependence of the world economy on the other, allowed the provision of global security to manage nuclear, foreign, security, military and other international policies. As a culmination of global governance efficiency, the proactive policies of the UN sustainable development goals policy helped to generate global and regional confidence for the future. Now however, no justification for apparently optimistic presumptions can be found, and the reality is bleak.

The nature of the current conflict is deep and related to the change in the global world order. Each major side that is involved brings its own arguments that differ at the core. For Russia, questions of physical and ontological security and self-positioning as a great power with its own view—toward not only internal development but the development of the future world order—are endogenous in nature and from its perspective outweigh the liberal world order rhetoric. For Western nations, the universalism of the liberal world order collides with the

distinctiveness of Russia's views. In other words, the conflict in Ukraine is existential for Russia, and there might not be a way in sight to expect that Moscow would turn away from achieving its strategic goals.

No matter the conflicting interests between Russia and the West, addressing global security is largely impossible without Russia's active involvement in the context of nuclear deterrents within a retaliation or preemptive strike strategy. Nuclear security can only be addressed by both Russia and the U.S., as these are two main holders of nuclear weapons arsenals. Diplomatic hotlines and backchannels for communication, continuous scientific support and expertise for negotiations are well known and reputable instruments used since the Cold War. Although the traditional diplomacy approach is rather secretive, we might expect dialogue at the diplomatic level to continue. However, the visible part of communication on global security, which traditionally happens through scientific engagement and maintaining people-to-people contacts, is of no less of importance. Scientific engagement through people-to-people interpersonal communication has the power to reduce global anxiety and reassure the world about upcoming conflict resolution. The power of interpersonal communications and trust for global security is immense and should not be overshadowed by regional hostilities.

Global security requires not only significant political will of the main global powers but resuming collaboration and contacts between scientists. If the former is hard to expect because the U.S. and Europe are trying to expel Russia from global foreign policymaking and economy, then the latter can be realistically achieved given Russia's openness to science diplomacy. On the highest institutional level, Russia is continuously pushing the science diplomacy agenda. The Russian Academy of Sciences, the Russian Foundation for Basic Research, Moscow's State Institute of International Relations (the leading university that trains future diplomats and foreign policymakers) and some major Russian think tanks such as the Russian International Affairs Council and the Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund push forward science diplomacy aiming to keep scientific collaboration alive for global security.

Perhaps, not many of us can realistically expect that the conflict in Ukraine will end soon, but we all need to think beyond politics when physical security is at stake. Science diplomacy and cooperative actions between Western and Russian scientists should resume—or, at the very least, should not be constrained—in order to prevent apocalyptic, irreparable consequences while it is not too late.
