

Biases in Science Diplomacy: Read the disclaimer first

As complex as it sounds, Science Diplomacy (SD) refers to the practices at the intersection of *science and technology* and *foreign affairs and international relations*; and is essentially driven (and defined) by practitioners who understand science but may not be diplomats and vice versa; and sometimes both or none. It is further complexed within its three overlapping pillars: “science in diplomacy”, “science for diplomacy” and “diplomacy for science” and are being used interchangeably by SD practitioners “as they deem fit”. Since these practitioners or diplomats are actual humans, it is ironically plagued by the cultural biases (from science side); and the universal value of science is somewhere lost in national interests (from diplomacy side).

The idealistic view: Starting with the first part, it should be noted that the majority of authors (or diplomats in this case) originate from scientific backgrounds and not from the world of diplomacy. Hence, SD is greatly influenced by the cultural biases of scientists playing the role of diplomats. Their thought process involve a centralistic approach that “scientific discoveries can improve the well-being”, and deriving from this further that, ideally, science can also improve relations between nations. And they further see through the prisms of cooperation and common interests and beyond those of competition and national interests.

The realistic view: Coming to the second part, science and its diplomacy is being seen as a driving force for international relations and foreign affairs. ‘Powerful’ science countries (USA and European counterparts) may further strengthen their soft power creating situations of hegemony and domination while ‘ambitious’ science countries (China, Brazil, Turkey, or India) may use SD for advancing their own scientific development. This achieving or advancing of national interests through framing of SD strategies is slowly replacing the core cooperation and collaboration aspects of SD with those of competition at the periphery. An example would be co-use of phrases such as “strengthen research and technology cooperation”, “create a solid base for stepping up the country’s competitiveness” and “attract talent and foreign investment” within one SD strategy document (the Spanish example).

The discourse and the way forward: The way forward from the idealistic-realistic conundrum is to follow GMP = good moral practices. You do what you want to do and I say what I want to say but we both must remain true to this and keep the system operational while acknowledging our biases; and maintaining positively that international scientific cooperation and sound scientific advice are central to policymaking.

The three points:

1. There are discrepancies between the discourse and the reality of science diplomacy.
2. Scientists will always be scientists and will see the world with optimism and hope.
3. Competition coexists with cooperation and collaboration.

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