



## Current Threats to Global Academic Collaboration

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### Abstract

*The Russian invasion of Ukraine has shaken up the academic world. Universities in Ukraine have been bombed and academic staff and students have been killed and injured and many professors and students have fled the country. Institutions especially in Europe are trying to help the academic world in Ukraine and refugee professors and students are helped so that they can continue their studies and research. The consequences of this invasion cannot be foreseen. A cold war signs up with the splitting of the scientific and academic world into two or three large blocks depending on the position of China: "Russia-China and Europe/America". This will have major concerns for the future of science that is vitally needed by this world, such as climate change, COVID, Space and in many other domains. It is now an important theme that optimal solutions for the future are sought in order to optimize the sad situation. The question raised is what place the World Academy of Art and Science (WAAS) can take here.*

### 1. Armed Conflict is Always a Failure

The starting point for this reflection on academic collaboration is the war in Ukraine. Conflict between nations—whether openly in armed conflict or through political tensions or cyber-warfare—is indeed a context in which the mission of education and global academic collaboration must be able to continue, and the efforts of the international academic and scientific community need to adjust rapidly and creatively to progress to the overall benefit of humanity.

Like many leaders did with other conflicts, Pope Francis, reflecting on the invasion of Ukraine, reminds us that war is always “*cruel and senseless ... represents a defeat for everyone, for every one of us. We need to reject war, a place of death where fathers and mothers bury their children, where men kill their brothers and sisters without even having seen them, where the powerful decide and the poor die. [...] War should not be something that is inevitable. We should not accustom ourselves to war. Instead, we need to convert today’s indignation into tomorrow’s commitment, because if we will emerge from these events the way we were before, we will all be guilty in some way. Faced with the danger of self-destruction, may humanity understand that the moment has come to abolish war, to erase it from human history, before it erases humans from history.*”\*

\* Pope Francis, After the Angelus Prayer, Saint Peter’s Square Sunday, 27 March 2022. Retrieved on <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2022/documents/20220327-angelus.html> (as of May 27th, 2022).

Who would disagree with this?

War cuts off individuals from primary and fundamental needs—water, food, shelter, clothing, energy resources, electricity,—but above all a sense of security in one’s place of life, one’s school, one’s university, one’s place of work.

## **2. Keeping in Mind the Reality of Facts and Issues**

Faced with such a complicated situation, how do we proceed?

As well as the widespread humanitarian tragedy that affects the whole population, Universities themselves have been the target for bombing. Many of the refugees now fleeing Ukraine are academics and students—and those students are at a critical phase in their lives where support for their studies and personal development should be an absolute priority. Across Europe, universities and other higher education institutions are collaborating to accommodate Ukrainian students entering the country as refugees: to help students with exchange visas, temporary residence permits for degree studies, application deadlines, documentation of prior education, admission requirements, funding, language requirements and housing. Strong collaboration with and support from governments and other relevant agencies is required for this to be a success.

The disruption in education and further learning spans children, young adult students, parents and grandparents in their life-long learning journey and research, through no fault of their own. This undermines inter-personal cooperation, though at this inter-personal level, messages of concrete support come out of the silence, actions aiming at supporting families and their individual aspirations. The educational community has organized itself locally and with neighboring countries to welcome refugees.

In Europe and the UK, all formal education and research relations with Russian academics, universities and institutions have been fully suspended. However, there needs to be caution over the treatment of students and academics of Russian nationality who are now based outside Russia. Recent calls by several United States and European politicians to expel all Russian students and scholars currently in the United States and Europe are counterproductive. In very many cases, there has been great support given by Russian immigrants, in particular students and scholars, to the Ukrainian people, as well as protests against the actions of the Putin regime. There are also fall-out effects from the financial sanctions against Russia, as Russian students can lose access to their bank accounts and be without any economic means. This needs to be understood and mitigated.

Therefore, regardless of great principles in this field of Global Academic Cooperation, we must never lose sight of the people involved, and the impact on them of actions at individual, institutional and national level.

## **3. May 2022 Declaration of Berlin: “a call for safe havens for students and scholars”**

The Academic Exchange Organizations of the G7 states have presented a joint declaration

on international academic cooperation in times of crisis with partners from the European umbrella organization of internationalization agencies.

Against the background of the war in Ukraine, the signatories of the Berlin Declaration see themselves united “*in the belief that democratic states which cherish and share fundamental values such as freedom, including academic freedom, and the rule of law, should stand together, and that their higher education institutions need to continue to collaborate closely*”. They regard the mission of international academic cooperation as that of seeking and developing “*solutions to global challenges such as climate change, gender equality, healthcare and the peaceful resolution of conflicts*”. Moreover, it is reaffirmed that academic countries and higher education institutions should be “*safe havens for students and scholars that face persecution or were forced to flee their homeland due to armed conflict, irrespective of nationality*”<sup>\*</sup>.

Such an example of “*good science diplomacy*”, aimed to foster peace, sustainable development, and global progress, should not be allowed to be diluted or distorted. Much good has been accomplished in fields related to health, to technology in the service of human beings to improve their daily living conditions, and more generally to the deepening of knowledge in the most varied fields. This should be enhanced further and not abandoned. The fear and the unpredictable future generated by a conflict, far from separating and dividing scholars and students, must instead be directed into intensified collaboration, student training, and joint academic and corporate research. Nor can the scarcity of basic materials and supplies generated by wars have the effect of jeopardizing non-military research programs.

First and foremost, this kind of “*good science diplomacy*” involves the maintenance of personal scientific exchanges and collaborations between individuals who, regardless of the political circumstances affecting their countries, benefit from channels and freedom of expression to maintain and deepen their mutual esteem and trust, and expand their sense of the common good.

#### **4. Impacted, the Academic community on the side of the attacked and the side of the attackers**

“*Given the war in Ukraine and numerous crises worldwide, academic exchange is confronted with new geopolitical conditions.*”<sup>†</sup>

Before the invasion of Ukraine, concerns were being raised of research collaborations that could lead to misuse of technologies, for example in the development of communications hardware and software that can be repurposed for cyber-warfare. The reaction to the Ukraine

<sup>\*</sup> Michael Gardner, Berlin Declaration pledges support for threatened academics, 09 May 2022. *University World News: The Global Window on Higher Education*: “The academic exchange organizations of the G7 states have presented a joint declaration on international academic cooperation in times of crisis with partners from eight further countries and the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA), the European umbrella organization of internationalization agencies. The “Berlin Declaration on International Academic Cooperation amidst a World in Crisis” is the outcome of the Higher Education Summit 2022 held in Berlin in early May by the ‘G7 + Partners’, a group of international education agencies from the G7 countries and ACA, plus international education agencies from Spain, Poland, Norway, the Netherlands, Finland, the Czech Republic and Austria.” Retrieved on <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20220509134247646> (as of May 27th, 2022).

<sup>†</sup> Michael Gardner, “Berlin Declaration pledges support for threatened academics”, 09 May 2022, *op.cit.*

war from the academic community has mirrored that of the political and business communities in suspending all ongoing activity for the foreseeable future.

Even more, within days of the invasion of Ukraine, the Russian scientists' fears of being "*doomed to isolation*" were already being realized. Russian universities and scientists have begun to face difficulties in cooperating with their foreign partners, and in many cases—including some high-profile cases such as with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology—their cooperation agreements have been terminated. All international science conferences due to be held in Russia have been cancelled and Russian scientists have been withdrawn from participation in Conferences in the US and Europe. Russian scientists are also being denied publication of their papers in leading research journals.

In addition, the limits on free speech extend beyond universities. Criticism of "the war" faces punishment with imprisonment. Facebook and Twitter have been blocked: "*Liberal media, such as Echo of Moscow, Dozhd or Meduza are off-print and air*"\*.

Quite clearly, in Russia, guarantees of academic freedom for students and academics have always been tenuous at best. Being a university leader has always been a precarious position, with spurious allegations levelled that can lead to replacement or even imprisonment. In recent years, we have seen a rising number of colleagues arrested or deported from Russia because of academic exchanges with an "*undesirable organization*"†. State support for international collaboration was on and off, with the result that top global institutions could not commit to collaborative activity. For Universities in Russia, the fact that severe consequences can follow, from having supported an international initiative to improve quality, is absurd.

Statements from Rectors in support of the "special operation"‡ have, however, been released. These are meant for a domestic audience. Internationally, Russian universities are silent. The sound of silence is dreadful. If the communication lines with Russian universities are cut, it will become harrowing.

These events show how political pressure can undo universities, turning them into something else entirely. Russian universities, state-funded and state-regulated institutions, have never had a chance to become fully autonomous. As an academic community, we must do everything in our power to reflect how this can be prevented from happening to a higher education system again. Constitutional protection of university autonomy, internationalization, diversified funding can work in democratic states, but they are not enough to safeguard universities against totalitarianism. We must figure out if there is a solution.

Whilst a declaration of support for the war was published by the Russian Union of Rectors and Academies, there are also Russian-based academics who are protesting against the Putin regime. This happens often at great personal risk of being arrested or fired, and the need to keep communication channels open with these individuals to express the support of the international community is important. The Russian Union of Rectors stated that Putin had

\* Dara Melnyk, "Russian higher education: the dreadful sound of silence", March 9, 2022, *University World News: The Global Window on Higher Education*. Retrieved on: <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20220309175130783> (as of May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022).

† Dara Melnyk, *in ibidem*.

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“exhaustively explained the reasons for the difficult but forced decision to conduct a special military operation”, but did not overtly support it or repeat his justifications for the action. It said the present situation calls for the consolidation of the university community. “The most important thing is to maintain the unity of the university community and its culture of trust, the high quality and accessibility of higher education, and the atmosphere of mutual assistance and understanding among students and professors. We must support each other and those who need it most – our students”<sup>\*</sup>.

For the global community, we must strongly affirm that our academic partners in Ukraine should and will receive our full solidarity and support.

As a positive example, the European Commission (EC) has approved a special budget of 25 million euros to support displaced researchers from Ukraine, among other things. The MSCA4Ukraine initiative, which is part of the EC-Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA), provides researchers with resources to continue their work and to help them resettle in Ukraine whenever possible, with the aim of rebuilding the country’s research and innovation capacity. In addition, hundreds of Ukrainian scientists will benefit from an increase in the budget of EUR 1 million for the Human Frontiers Program for the “Scientists Help Scientists” initiative, as part of Horizon Europe’s program. A general provision has also been added to encourage all applicants to offer opportunities to researchers and innovators from Ukraine where possible.

## 5. Beyond the Belligerents: the case of Continental China

Worryingly, in this new geopolitical context at the gates of Europe and on the threshold of Asia, not only the combatants are concerned. The Russian example has thrown light onto practices in China.

Chinese Academies and universities have maintained excellent well-established collaborations with the Ukrainian academic and scientific world for many decades. The political links between Chinese and Russian presidencies have changed the situation, resulting in a forced break between the academic communities of both countries.

However, it must be observed that professors have been punished in the past for comments against government policies in China, and there are also incidents of students reporting professors and teachers to the authorities for politically “inappropriate” remarks in class<sup>†</sup>. Another example: “last month Peking University’s Institute of International and Strategic Studies published a report which concluded that China would suffer more than the US in ‘decoupling’ technology—the report was removed from the web shortly after publication.”<sup>‡</sup>

<sup>\*</sup> Brendan O’Malley, Russian Union of Rectors backs Putin’s action in Ukraine, 06 March 2022. *University World News: The Global Window on Higher Education*. Retrieved on: <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20220306120204111> (as of May 28th, 2022).

<sup>†</sup> Yojana Sharma, “Academic dissent emerges on war in Ukraine but is censored”, March 9, 2022. *University World News: The Global Window on Higher Education*. Retrieved on: <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20220309155414980> (as of May 28th, 2022).

<sup>‡</sup> Yojana Sharma, Academic dissent emerges..., op.cit.; Yojana Sharma, “US targets Chinese talent in drive to ‘decouple’ science” December 12, 2020. *University World News: The Global Window on Higher Education*. Retrieved on: <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20201211141413735>

Moreover, academics “*need permission*” to attend even virtual international conferences. Chinese universities hosting virtual conferences organized abroad are required to submit the agendas for advance approval together with details of all foreign participants. Chinese scholars, and those in the field of international relations, face some of the toughest restrictions, hampering communication with the outside world.

Within such a watchdog climate, China steers an ambiguous path on Ukraine—refusing to condemn Russian aggression yet supporting Ukraine’s right to exist—Chinese academic dissent is emerging against the official government line, albeit quickly censored. At the same time academics in China are scrambling to understand the fast-changing international landscape, with restrictions on international academic contacts still in place.

Moreover, Chinese professors have been restricted from airing their views and are reluctant to contradict the official Communist Party line on international relations and political events. However, a group of five prominent history professors from top Chinese universities was willing to go against the official narrative in a rare joint letter condemning the invasion of Ukraine.

The letter, signed by Nanjing University’s Sun Jiang, Peking University’s Wang Lixin, Hong Kong University’s Xu Guoqi, Tsinghua University’s Zhong Weimin, and Fudan University’s Chen Yan, described the Russian invasion as a “*war that began in the dark*”, and for an immediate end to the fighting. “*We emphatically call on the Russian government and President [Vladimir] Putin to stop the war and resolve any dispute through negotiations,*” it said, despite Beijing’s ban on airing views on Russia in Ukraine, outlined in instructions from the government in late February. However, the letter was immediately removed by censors when it appeared on 26 February on the Chinese social media platform WeChat, but not before it had been viewed and commented upon—including attacks on the professors on China’s social media with some calling them spies or traitors. Chinese social media has been dominated by nationalistic voices in the days since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. They follow the official line blaming the United States and its Western allies for the crisis. “*We empathize with the suffering of the Ukrainian people,*” they said, adding that “*We are concerned that Russian military action will lead to turmoil in Europe and the entire world, and trigger wider humanitarian disaster.*”<sup>†</sup>

Finally, it should be added that beyond this specific case, international events have moved at breakneck speed after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, there are indications that Chinese academics and think tanks are struggling to make sense of the changes. Some Western academics, particularly in Germany, noted that some Chinese academics had reached out unofficially to them in recent weeks to understand major changes under way in German foreign policy since the invasion of Ukraine.

Eventually, it is not clear whether China will side with Russia in this new Cold War or if either country will seek to cut itself off from global science. There has already been some

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\* Yojana Sharma, *Academic dissent emerges...*, op.cit.

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academic and scientific decoupling of China since the start of the global pandemic. Nor is it clear whether other partners will follow China's example.

## 6. In a new Cold War, academic engagement is still necessary

A new Cold War carries with it many threats and few opportunities. Therefore, should we, according to its statutory rules, unequivocally denounce the Russian attack on Ukraine and distance itself in all its actions from Russian science academies, universities and personal contacts? We may have to vest the words of Franklin D. Roosevelt in the "Four Freedom Speech": "*As a nation, we may take pride in the fact that we are softhearted; but we cannot afford to be soft-headed*"\*.

Perhaps, it may also be sufficient to refer to existing breach of international and humanitarian law and the condemnation of peacekeeping bodies such as the United Nations<sup>†</sup>.

Nonetheless, there are many reasons why continued engagement with universities and relevant research organizations is important in the long run. In that respect, it can be useful to reflect on academic relations during the Cold War between 1945 and the end of the Soviet Union in 1991 and learn from previous experience. During that period, even in times of significant political tension, academic and scientific relations continued throughout—although on a modest scale and with considerable government supervision on both sides.

What the future will bring for academic cooperation and exchange with Russia, and the position of China as well, cannot be foreseen but complete academic isolation will be counterproductive in the long run. A new Cold War of some form is quite likely to happen

\* Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Four Freedom Speech" State of the Union Address of January 6<sup>th</sup>, 1941. Retrieved from: <https://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/fdr-the-four-freedoms-speech-text/>; <https://www.fdrlibrary.org/four-freedoms> (as of May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022).

† The Russian invasion, reactions of the UN (as of May 22, 2022): "Russia launched a military offensive on Ukraine on the night of 23-24 February 2022. The UN considers this attack to be a violation of the integrity of the territory and sovereignty of Ukraine. It is contrary to the principles of the UN Charter."

On February 25, the UN Secretary General appointed Amin Awad as the UN Coordinator for the crisis in Ukraine.

The prosecutor of the International Criminal Court opened an investigation for war crimes and crimes against humanity on February 28.

On March 2, the General Assembly adopted a resolution deploring Russia's "aggression" against Ukraine (141 votes in favor, 5 against and 35 abstentions).

The UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on March 4 calling for the "rapid and verifiable" withdrawal of Russian troops and Russian-backed armed groups from the entire territory of Ukraine.

The Human Rights Council decides on March 5 to urgently establish an independent international commission of inquiry to investigate all alleged human rights violations in the context of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine.

The International Court of Justice ordered Russia on March 16 to immediately suspend its military operations in Ukraine.

On March 24, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on the humanitarian consequences of the war in Ukraine, in which it demanded an "immediate" cessation of hostilities by Russia against Ukraine (140 votes for, 5 against and 38 abstentions).

On March 30, the United Nations appointed three human rights experts to investigate possible violations of international law committed during the conflict in Ukraine.

The UN human rights chief said on Monday, April 4, that she was "horrified" by the images of bodies lying in the Ukrainian town of Boutcha, discovered after the withdrawal of Russian troops, referring to "possible war crimes and serious violations of international law."

On April 7, the General Assembly adopted a resolution suspending Russia from the Human Rights Council.

At the end of April, the UN Secretary General visited Russia and Ukraine.

The UN General Assembly adopted a new resolution on 26 April 2022 asking the five permanent members of the Security Council to justify their use of the veto.

The UN Security Council adopted a statement on May 6, 2022, expressing strong support for the Secretary-General's efforts to achieve a peaceful solution in Ukraine. The Secretary-General welcomed the fact that for the first time the Security Council speaks with one voice for peace in Ukraine.

The Human Rights Council approved a resolution on May 12 in a special session on Ukraine calling for an investigation into alleged atrocities by Russian occupation troops". Retrieved on <https://unric.org/fr/onu-et-la-guerre-en-ukraine-les-principales-informations/> (as of May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022).

as a result of the Ukraine war, with implications for universities and for research. But it will probably be quite different from the post-Second-World-War one: Russia has been integrated into global higher education for three decades; research and scholarship have become globalized.

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*“An important task for Academies is to develop models for fruitful future cooperation and strategies should be studied so that fundamentals of peace, dignity of every human being, and respect for property will be followed worldwide.”*

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Since the late 1980s and the end of the “Cold War” there has been a “golden age” of global academic collaboration. Joint research and teaching programs, academic exchanges, visiting Professorships, and student mobility have become embedded around the world, promoting University relations and scientific cooperation. Countries that had previously been distanced from international partnerships, including Russia and China, had seen unprecedented levels of interaction, with benefits to many areas of academic endeavor including medical advances. Besides, we must still consider the global challenges that face mankind: There is still international cooperation in, e.g., the space program. More than that, there is the global climate catastrophe. In this case, huge countries such as Russia and China are indispensable in developing and implementing solutions. Unravelling all this is a task that cuts across personal and national interests, and where the views of the younger generation need to be heard.

## 7. Practical steps now and later?

Even if the future global context of academic collaboration is largely uncharted, a wait-and-see position is not realistic.

Of course, the abrupt severing of ties will have major consequences, but it is to be hoped that contacts and collaborations can be re-established in the future, though this may not look the same as previously. And whilst many academic collaborations are built on personal contacts, the scenes from Ukraine and the deaths of respected university colleagues are increasing the resolve to send the strongest possible message to Russia and demonstrate support by the widest possible means to Ukraine.

In that regard, a Statement such as the one adopted by the International Association of Universities of the Third Age (AIUTA) could inspire WAAS. It firmly addresses the belligerents by recalling essential values swept away in any conflict and it keeps doors open to clear specific action in the short and long term\*.

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\* “Athens Declaration, cradle of democracy, against war: AIUTA - International Association of Third Age Universities - Repudiates war and all forms of prevarication and supports dialogue, mutual knowledge and cultural sharing and collective memories, founding values of our civilization”. The April 2022 International Association of Third Age Universities (AIUTA) Declaration of Athens: AIUTA NYC 108<sup>th</sup> Board Meeting, Athens, April 8<sup>th</sup> 2022. Retrieved on: <https://www.aiu3a.org/v2/news2/news233-en.html> (as of May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022).

Therefore, lines of action must be determined that probably combine the discreet strengthening of personal links and robust policy at the institutional level. In both cases, it must be clear that any firm action is temporary and strictly linked to the existence of a conflict between states.

## **8. Consequences of this inhuman act on the world academic scene**

The brutal inhuman invasion, bombing universities, killing colleagues professors, students and academic staff in Ukraine, supported by the Union of Russian University Rectors and Academies—reflecting the overall majority: various hundred thousand/millions of the Russian academic and scientific people—and disturbing the world academic network of contacts and collaboration, should have important consequences worldwide and should be heavily condemned with severe reactions from the democratic academic communities worldwide and consequently... ‘you can’t just let this go’!

In the current context, my philosophy is those which I supported in the reputed academies in Europe, US etc., and in recognized European and International institutes and organizations and which can be resumed as follows:

- All contacts with the academic and scientific institutions and staff in Russia should be officially suspended for the immediate future.\*
- One should withdraw all Russian colleagues from activities including membership of committees, participation in workshops or conferences, and publication in documents from our Academy.

It seems that some Russian scientists are indeed under pressure and are afraid to act. But the free democratic community must act. They should not form a group of exceptions to these consequences at this stage. All must feel that we mean it serious...including our former friends!

Contacts with other countries where academic freedom and expression is repressed should also be reviewed in light of recent events

- New mechanisms should be developed to enhance cooperation between democratic western countries.
- International science and academic collaboration should be built on a shared global philosophy of openness and collaboration, regardless of political agendas and rifts.

The war in Ukraine puts WAAS, as a global academy, in a difficult situation. Reflection on the limits to international collaboration need to be made and a new strategy needs to be developed in order to move on from the current circumstances.

An important task for Academies is to develop models for fruitful future cooperation and strategies should be studied so that fundamentals of peace, dignity of every human being, and respect for property will be followed worldwide.

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\* Editor's Note: The views of the author do not represent any expressed view of *Cadmus* or the WAAS Board of Trustees.

A war experience is harrowing. At an individual level, a generation of children, students and academics of all ages will see unprecedented disruption and misery. We hope that the resumption of future school or academic activities will take priority, once the better times return. But scholars and researchers, teachers and lecturers, will have, in such an uncharted new environment, to revisit their purposes, theories and view of the world of today, and be helped towards a greater, safer and happier common future.

Finally, clearly many resources will have to be directed towards reconstruction, which will also imply the use of available new technologies; and especially the restoration of academic and research programs to open up a reshaped Global Academic Collaboration.

An important task here for WAAS-WUC (World University Consortium) is the development of strategy and models for new global collaborations in academia, highlighting the criteria and conditions for participation. It should also highlight the great advantages of the disconnection of politics from academies for the welfare of all nation states.

Let us hope that the war will soon come to an end and that reparation of the damage done to the academic society in the world may take place. WAAS should consider what place it can occupy in that endeavor.

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