

# International Conflict in Urology

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Urologic societies and associations with global reach are unavoidably drawn into conflict between different countries and regions, and even between different factions within one country. The stakeholders in these conflicts are represented in the membership of the corresponding societies, and the societies are therefore forced to address the potential political strife in their own committees, meetings, educational events, and research initiatives. The ongoing war in Ukraine is a particularly stark example of this phenomenon.

The European Association of Urology (EAU) and the Société Internationale d'Urologie (SIU) are two prominent organizations that are obviously affected by this war. I have no particular insight into how either organization is handling this conflict. Instead, I look upon it as an outside observer, much like the vast majority of readers of the *SIUJ*. My comments are my own and do not reflect the position of the SIU leadership.

The EAU and the SIU both made early statements, communicating to their members their dismay over the unfolding situation in Ukraine and their solidarity with the Ukrainian people. Many bodies have focused on assistance for the victims of the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine. The American College of Surgeons, for example, circulated a list of opportunities for its members to provide support. The European Cancer Organisation (ECO) and the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) have launched initiatives to support cancer patients affected by the war in Ukraine. The Canadian Institutes of Health Research have launched a “Special Response Fund for Trainees” to support graduate and post-graduate students from Ukraine who cannot continue their research because of the crisis in their home country. Some individuals have shown remarkable initiative, courage, and sacrifice, and have traveled to the border regions around Ukraine to care directly for the millions of Ukrainian refugees fleeing the war.

The unprovoked Russian invasion in Ukraine deserves the highest level of condemnation, but should that condemnation extend beyond the Russian leadership and the military and their supporters? Governments around the world have instituted harsh sanctions against the Russian state and individual oligarchs, but should we in organized urology be sanctioning our Russian urologic colleagues?

One of the first messages I received related to the potential impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24 was a plea from a reputable journal to exercise fairness in the peer review of articles submitted by Russian authors. Reviewers were asked to avoid prejudice related to the ongoing conflict. To some degree we all would like to protest against Russia by whatever means available to us, and it may seem tempting to use peer review as an opportunity to send a message of dissent. I do not believe that many in academic medicine would consider this type of academic sanction, but it is an example of how international conflict can play out in our professional spheres.

I also received a message from a subspecialty society in Ukraine asking one of the urologic societies to expel Russian and Belorussian members from its ranks and to block them from the society's activities and conferences. The implication of such a call for academic sanctions against urologists is that they are complicit in their government's actions simply by being Russian. While we would all like to see the Russian people speak out against their leadership, we should not conclude that the Russian population is complicit with the government simply because they are not protesting en masse in the streets of Russia. We have read of the misinformation disseminated by the Russian propaganda apparatus, and we have little concept of what the Russian people know about the conflict in Ukraine. Furthermore, we cannot expect widespread protests in an authoritarian state like Russia. It would therefore be extraordinarily unfair to punish Russian urologists and researchers because of the conflict in Ukraine.

Some organizations have taken action to limit scientific collaboration with Russia. The German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) stopped all funding to projects with Russian participation. This was intended to send a clear signal to the Russian leadership and was accompanied by a call to preserve the dialogue with Russians on a personal level and also an acknowledgement that many Russian scientists are distressed by their government's actions. In this vein, we may consider official Russian medical organizations as likely representing the state's interests, but we do not know the political leanings of any individual urologist and we should therefore refrain from condemning individuals. The EAU has suspended all joint activities with the national urological societies of Russia and Belarus.

We should denounce the actions of the Russian leadership and military and declare our solidarity with the people of Ukraine, but our condemnation should not extend to the Russian people, and especially not to our Russian colleagues. Let the governments do the politicking, and let us support the Ukrainian people in general, and our colleagues and urologic trainees in particular. As stated by the President of the SIU:

*As a global society, the SIU embraces peace and freedom for all, and opposes violence. We remain committed to our members and our mission: to elevate patient care through international co-operation in education and research — a peaceful environment is fundamental in achieving this. Our thoughts are with the victims, and it is our hope that peace will prevail quickly.*