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Russia's Arctic Council threat requires lessons from cold war science diplomacy

By [Paul Arthur Berkman](#) 

Russia's threat to withdraw from the Arctic Council is a matter for global concern, with burning cold-war security issues becoming hot again. Since 1996, the council has been the high-level forum dealing with common Arctic issues through science and dialogue. But, as stipulated in its founding Ottawa Declaration, it "should not deal with matters related to military security".

This wisdom was abandoned nine days after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, when the seven other Arctic Council states issued a joint statement "pausing participation in all meetings of the Council and its subsidiary bodies". This pause in dialogue is becoming permanent, undermining open science along with climate and other research in the Arctic. But more than that, the continuing lack of dialogue among allies and adversaries alike is the beginning of conflict.

Lessons from after the Second World War should be heeded now. The third International Polar Year (IPY), which became the International Geophysical Year (IGY) 1957–58, led directly to cooperation between the United States and Soviet Union in Antarctica as well

as space throughout the cold war. The IGY facilitated the 1959 Antarctic Treaty, which became the first nuclear-arms agreement and template for the Arctic Council, with continuous cooperation among superpower adversaries. The fifth IPY, in 2032–33, offers a practical time horizon to reverse the deterioration of East–West relations, again with science diplomacy and common-interest building.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The author declares no competing interests.

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